

Biden announces Indo-Pacific alliance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden announced Wednesday that the United States is forming a new Indo-Pacific security alliance with Britain and Australia that will allow for greater sharing of defense capabilities — including helping equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. It's a move that could deepen a growing chasm in U.S.-China relations.

Biden made the announcement alongside British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who joined him by video to unveil the new alliance, which will be called AUKUS (pronounced AWK-us). The three announced they would quickly turn their attention to developing nuclear-powered submarines for Australia.

"We all recognize the imperative of ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific over the long term," said Biden, who said the new alliance reflects a broader trend of key European partners playing a role in the Indo-

Pacific. "We need to be able to address both the current strategic environment in the region and how it may evolve."

None of the leaders mentioned China in their remarks. But the new security alliance is likely to be seen as a provocative move by Beijing, which has repeatedly lashed out at Biden as he's sought to refocus U.S. foreign policy on the Pacific in the early going of his presidency.

Before the announcement, a senior administration official sought to play down the idea that the alliance was meant to serve as a deterrent against China in the region. The official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the announcement, said the alliance's creation was not aimed at any one country, and is about a larger effort to sustain engagement and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific by the three nations.

Johnson said the alliance would allow the three English-speaking maritime democracies to strengthen their bonds and sharpen their focus on an increasingly complicated part of the world.

The three countries have agreed to share information in areas including artificial intelligence, cyber and underwater defense capabilities.

Plans to support Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines are certain to catch Beijing's attention. To date, the only country that the U.S. has shared nuclear propulsion technology with is Britain. Morrison said Australia is not seeking to develop a nuclear weapons program and information sharing would be limited to helping it develop a sub fleet.

The Australian prime minister said plans for the nuclear-powered submarines would be developed over the next 18 months and the vessels would be built in Adelaide, Australia.

Australia announced in 2016 that French company DCNS had beat out bidders from Japan and Germany to build the next generation of submarines in Australia's largest-ever defense contract.

Top French officials made clear they were unhappy with the deal, which undercuts the DCNS deal.

CENTCOM opens 2 probes into drone strike in Kabul

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Central Command has launched a formal inquiry into the Aug. 29 drone strike in Kabul that military leaders said destroyed a car loaded with explosives and driven by an Islamic State terrorist, the Pentagon's top spokesman said Wednesday.

CENTCOM recently opened a high-level 15-6 command investigation and a civilian casualty assessment into that strike, said Pentagon spokesman John Kirby. The probes come amid allegations the strike in the waning days of U.S. involvement in the Afghanistan War actually killed a local worker for a U.S.-based aid company and up to 10 nearby civilians, according to *The New York Times*.

"They will take into account all the available intelligence reporting, they'll take into account video footage, subject matter expert analysis, interviews and, quite frankly, they'll also factor in subsequent media reporting," Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon.

He said it was unlikely investigators would

be able to travel to Kabul for the investigation.

The Reaper drone strike was the last known airstrike launched by American forces in Afghanistan before the final U.S. troops pulled out of Kabul just before midnight Aug. 31. Defense officials in announcing the strike Aug. 29 said it had disrupted an imminent suicide attack against Hamid Karzai International Airport. The U.S. military used the Kabul airfield to lead an about two-week effort to evacuate Americans and their allies, including Afghans, from the country after the Taliban takeover Aug. 15.

The drone strike came just days after a suicide bomber with ISIS-K — Afghanistan's ISIS affiliate — blew himself up just outside the airport, killing 13 American service members, wounding nearly two dozen more and killing and maiming hundreds of Afghans crowded around the airfield's gates. U.S. officials at that time were on high alert about the potential for another terrorist attack on the airport and warned publicly that such an assault was likely imminent.

A CENTCOM statement just after the strike claimed it caused secondary explosions, indicating explosives were inside. It later acknowledged as many as 10 civilians might have been accidentally killed in the attack and promised an investigation. Nonetheless, Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on Sept. 1 called the incident a "righteous strike" that prevented further attack.

But a *New York Times* investigation of the drone strike, which included video analysis and interviews with local Afghans near the strike site, cast doubt on the Pentagon assessment. The *Times* investigation published Friday said that talks with neighbors and relatives showed that the vehicle's driver was not an ISIS affiliate, but instead a 43-year-old man who had worked since 2006 for the California-based aid organization Nutrition and Education International.

Kirby said Monday that the Pentagon still believed the strike stopped a terrorist attack.

Milley defends calls to Chinese counterpart

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. military officer on Wednesday defended the phone calls he made to his Chinese counterpart in the turbulent final months of Donald Trump's presidency, saying the conversations were intended to convey "reassurance" to the Chinese military and were in line with his responsibilities as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Some in Congress accused Gen. Mark Milley of having overstepped his authority and urged President Joe Biden to fire him, but Biden indicated Wednesday he stands behind Milley.

"I have great confidence in Gen. Milley," Biden said when asked by a reporter whether Milley had done the right thing.

In a written statement, Milley's spokesman, Col. Dave Butler, said Milley acted within his authority as the most senior uniformed adviser to the president and to the secretary of defense.

"His calls with the Chinese and others in October and January were in keeping with these duties and responsibilities conveying reassurance in order to maintain strategic stability," Butler said. "All calls from the chairman to his counterparts, including those reported, are staffed, coordinated and communicated with the Department of Defense

and the interagency."

The Milley phone calls were described in excerpts from the forthcoming book "Peril" by Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Robert Costa. The book says Milley told Gen. Li Zuocheng of the People's Liberation Army that he would warn his counterpart in the event of a U.S. attack.

Milley was appointed chairman of the Joint Chiefs in 2019 by Trump and kept on by Biden. In that position Milley does not command any troops but rather is an adviser to the president and to the secretary of defense. John Kirby, spokesman for Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, said Austin has "complete and utter trust and confidence in Gen. Milley."

The book by Woodward and Costa reported that Milley, fearful of Trump's actions in his final weeks as president, twice called his Chinese counterpart to assure him that the United States was not going to attack China. One call took place on Oct. 30, 2020, four days before the election that Trump lost. The second call was on Jan. 8, 2021, less than two weeks before Biden's inauguration and just two days after the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol by supporters of Trump.

The Associated Press obtained a copy of the book. Details from the book, which is set to be released next week, were first reported by

The Washington Post on Tuesday.

"General Li, I want to assure you that the American government is stable and everything is going to be okay," Milley told him in the first call, according to the book. "We are not going to attack or conduct any kinetic operations against you.

"If we're going to attack, I'm going to call you ahead of time. It's not going to be a surprise," Milley reportedly said.

In his statement Wednesday, Milley's spokesman did not directly address this aspect of the call but said Milley regularly communicates with his counterparts across the globe, including in China and Russia, to reduce tensions, provide clarity and avoid "unintended consequences or conflict."

Milley spoke with a number of other military leaders around the world after the Jan. 6 riot, including from the United Kingdom, Russia and Pakistan. A readout of those calls in January referred to "several" other counterparts that he spoke to with similar messages of reassurance that the U.S. government was strong and in control.

The second call was meant to placate Chinese fears about the events of Jan. 6. But the book reports that Li wasn't as easily assuaged, even after Milley promised him: "We are 100 percent steady. Everything's fine. But democracy can be sloppy sometimes."

Senator threatens to block national security nominees

The Washington Post

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., has pledged to hold up all of President Joe Biden's nominations to the State Department and the Pentagon unless the top official at both departments resign in the wake of the chaotic U.S. exit from Afghanistan.

Hawley called on Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan to take responsibility for the administration's Afghanistan policy, which involved a disorderly evacuation from Kabul last month and the deaths of 13 American service members, including a Marine from Missouri.

"Instead of planning for the worst, they planned for the best," Hawley said Tuesday. "And now, there must be accountability."

Hawley's legislative threat to block the

nominations is mostly symbolic and comes as he attempts to position himself as a leading critic of the White House. Because Democrats control the Senate, Hawley can effectively only delay Biden's nominations, but his move will force Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., to go through procedural hurdles on the Senate floor, rather than move quickly with a pro forma vote that is more common for nominees to lower-profile posts.

Hawley's efforts "would undermine U.S. national security and its interests," Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told CNN.

"There is no chance that the threat will 'work' in forcing the secretaries" to resign, said Eric Schickler, a politics professor at the University of California, Berkeley. "But Republicans have [made] Democrats

choose between staffing the executive branch and spending time on legislation."

Hawley, who is seen as a potential contender for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination, has backed President Donald Trump's false claims of fraud in the 2020 election and objected against certifying Biden's win on Jan. 6 — the same day a pro-Trump mob stormed the Capitol. In a statement on Wednesday, he accused Democrats of playing politics.

A fellow Republican senator, Ted Cruz of Texas, has recently held up dozens of State Department nominations.

In June, Hawley unsuccessfully attempted to block the confirmation of Kiran Ahuja to lead the federal personnel agency, citing her past emphasis on the concept of systemic racism known as "critical race theory" that has become a lightning rod for conservatives.

As mandates rise, religious exemptions grow

Associated Press

An estimated 2,600 Los Angeles Police Department employees are citing religious objections to try to get out of the required COVID-19 vaccination. In Washington state, thousands of state workers are seeking similar exemptions.

And in Arkansas, a hospital has been swamped with so many such requests from employees that it is apparently calling their bluff.

Religious objections, once used sparingly around the country to get exempted from various required vaccines, are becoming a much more widely used loophole against the COVID-19 shot.

And it is only likely to grow following President Joe Biden's sweeping new vaccine mandates covering more than 100 million Americans, including executive

branch employees and workers at businesses with more than 100 people on the payroll.

The administration acknowledges that a small minority of Americans will use — and some may seek to exploit — religious exemptions. But it said it believes even marginal improvements in vaccination rates will save lives.

It is not clear how many federal employees have asked for a religious exemption, though union officials say there will be many requests. The Labor Department has said an accommodation can be denied if it causes an undue burden on the employer.

In the states, mask and vaccine requirements vary, but most offer exemptions for certain medical conditions or religious or philosophical objections. The use of such exemptions, particularly by parents on behalf of their school-

children, has been growing over the past decade.

The allowance was enshrined in the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, which says employers must make reasonable accommodations for employees who object to work requirements because of “sincerely held” religious beliefs.

A religious belief does not have to be recognized by an organized religion, and it can be new, unusual or “seem illogical or unreasonable to others,” according to rules laid out by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. But it can't be founded solely on political or social ideas.

That puts employers in the position of determining what is a legitimate religious belief and what is a dodge.

Many major religious denominations have no objections to the

COVID-19 vaccines. But the rollout has prompted heated debates because of the longtime role that cell lines derived from fetal tissue have played, directly or indirectly, in the research and development of various vaccines and medicines.

Roman Catholic leaders in New Orleans and St. Louis went so far as to call Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 shot “morally compromised.” J&J has stressed that there is no fetal tissue in its vaccine.

Moreover, the Vatican's doctrine office has said it is “morally acceptable” for Catholics to receive COVID-19 vaccines that are based on research that used cells derived from aborted fetuses. Pope Francis himself has said it would be “suicide” not to get the shot, and he has been fully vaccinated with the Pfizer formula.

US unemployment claims go up from pandemic low

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits moved up last week to 332,000 from a pandemic low, a sign that worsening COVID infections may have slightly increased layoffs.

Applications for jobless aid rose from 312,000 the week before, the Labor Department said Thursday. Jobless claims, which generally track the pace of layoffs, have fallen steadily for two months as many employers, struggling to fill jobs, have held onto their employees. Two weeks ago, jobless claims reached their lowest level since March 2020.

Jobless claims rose 4,000 in Louisiana, evidence that Hurricane Ida has led to widespread job losses in that state. Ida will likely nick the economy's growth in the current July-September quarter, though repairs and rebuilding efforts are expected to regain those losses in the coming

months.

Still, Ida shut down oil refineries in Louisiana and Mississippi about two weeks ago and left more than 1 million homes and businesses without electricity. But Ida's impact was limited: Applications for jobless aid fell slightly in Mississippi.

The job market and the broader economy have been slowed in recent weeks by the delta variant, which has discouraged many Americans from traveling, staying in hotels and eating out. Earlier this month, the government reported that employers added just 235,000 jobs in August after having added roughly a million people in both June and July.

Hiring in August plummeted in industries that require face-to-face contact with the public, notably restaurants, hotels and retailers. Still, some jobs were added in other areas, and the unemployment rate actually dropped to 5.2% from 5.4%.

House panel: F-35 may fall behind China, Russia

Bloomberg

Lockheed Martin's F-35, the world's costliest weapons system, may fail to keep pace with Chinese and Russian air defense improvements given its “extraordinary costs” so far, the U.S. House defense policy committee has warned.

The House Armed Services Committee supported the F-35's \$398 billion acquisition program in the report accompanying its version of the fiscal 2022 defense policy bill. It said the sophisticated fighter “can be used against advanced integrated air defense systems operating against the United States or its foreign partners and allies during high-end, very contested contingencies” once it finally receives key software upgrades.

But the committee called into question “overly aggressive development and production schedules” that for more than 20 years have resulted “in longer sched-

ules and much higher costs than planned to realize less than full warfighting capabilities required by the Department of Defense.”

With adversaries that pose “near-peer” challenges advancing more rapidly than expected, the panel said it's “uncertain as to whether or not the F-35 aircraft can sufficiently evolve to meet the future expected threat in certain geographical areas of operations in which combat operations could occur.”

The panel's view reflects that the F-35 still hasn't demonstrated its capabilities in a simulation against the most challenging Russian and Chinese air defense systems. The exercise to be run by the Navy was most recently supposed to have been completed in December, though it was originally planned for 2017. In April, Bloomberg News reported that the Defense Department's F-35 program office projected the target date as August 2022.

Nicholas hovers over La., dumps rain in Fla.

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Tropical Depression Nicholas hovered over Louisiana on Wednesday, raining on a region struggling to recover from Hurricane Ida and deluging coastal Mississippi, Alabama and northwest Florida.

Flash flood warnings were in effect Wednesday evening in parts of south Alabama and northwest Florida. And the National Weather Service said heavy rains were likely to last until Nicholas was to dissipate over Louisiana some time Friday. In Louisiana, the rainfall complicated an already difficult recovery at homes ripped open

by Ida on Aug. 29. Thousands remain without power in Texas and Louisiana.

“I’m not sure at this point what it looks like,” said Edith Anthony, whose home in LaPlace, a New Orleans suburb between Lake Pontchartrain and the Mississippi River, suffered roof damage while getting about 2 to 3 feet of floodwater two weeks ago.

They still don’t have electricity, and couldn’t arrange for a tarp to cover the roof before Nicholas blew in. She and her husband were staying in a Mobile, Ala., hotel, preparing to return this weekend to take a look at

what’s left of their home.

Nicholas was centered Wednesday afternoon about 75 miles south of Alexandria, La., creeping eastward at 2 mph. It was forecast to dump as much as 6 inches of rain from southeast Louisiana into the Florida Panhandle through Friday, with 10 inches possible in isolated areas.

“Life-threatening flash flooding impacts, especially in urban areas, remain a possibility in these areas,” forecasters said. The weather service reported that as much as 5 inches had fallen in Alabama’s Baldwin County and in northwest Florida as of Wednesday afternoon. News

outlets reported flooded roads in Baldwin County and around Pensacola, Fla.

Nicholas dumped as much as 10 inches of rain on parts of Texas — and the weather service was checking reports of nearly 14 inches of rain in Galveston — after making landfall as a Category 1 hurricane, the 14th named storm of the 2021 Atlantic hurricane season. Houston reported more than 6 inches. Parts of Louisiana received more than 10 inches of rain from the storm.

In Louisiana, the flash flood danger was expected to end Thursday, but the rain is forecast to linger for days.

SpaceX launches 4 amateurs on private Earth-circling trip

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX’s first private flight streaked into orbit Wednesday night with two contest winners, a health care worker and their rich sponsor, the most ambitious leap yet in space tourism.

It was the first time a spacecraft circled Earth with an all-amateur crew and no professional astronauts.

“Punch it, SpaceX!” the flight’s billionaire leader, Jared Isaacman, urged moments before liftoff.

The Dragon capsule’s two men and two women are looking to spend three days going round and round the planet from an unusually high orbit — 100 miles higher than the International Space Station — before splashing down off the Florida coast this weekend.

It’s SpaceX founder Elon Musk’s first entry in the competition for space tourism dollars.

Isaacman is the third billionaire to launch this summer, following the brief space-skimming flights by Virgin Galactic’s Richard Branson and Blue Origin’s Jeff Bezos in July. Only 38, Isaacman made his fortune

from a payment-processing company he started in his teens.

Joining Isaacman on the trip dubbed Inspiration4 is Hayley Arceneaux, 29, a childhood bone cancer survivor who works as a physician assistant where she was treated — St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Isaacman has pledged \$100 million out of his own pocket to the hospital and is seeking another \$100 million in donations.

Arceneaux became the youngest American in space and the first person in space with a prosthesis, a titanium rod in her left leg.

Also along for the ride: sweepstakes winners Chris Sembroski, 42, a data engineer in Everett, Wash., and Sian Proctor, 51, a community college educator in Tempe, Ariz.

Once opposed to space tourism, NASA is now a supporter. “Low-Earth orbit is now more accessible for more people to experience the wonders of space,” tweeted NASA Administrator Bill Nelson, a congressman when he hitched a ride on a space shuttle decades ago.

With eye on Iran, Israel navy boosts presence in Red Sea

Associated Press

ATLIT, Israel — Israel’s navy has stepped up its activities in the Red Sea “exponentially” in the face of growing Iranian threats to Israeli shipping, the country’s just-retired navy commander said in an interview.

Vice Adm. Eli Sharvit stopped short of confirming a series of attacks and mishaps on Iranian ships that have been attributed to Israel. But he described Iranian activities on the high seas as a top Israeli concern and said the navy is able to strike wherever necessary to protect the country’s economic and security interests.

“The state of Israel will protect its freedom of navigation across the globe,” Sharvit told The Associated Press, days after completing his five-year term. “That’s not related to distance from the country.”

Sharvit was a busy man during his tenure — overseeing a small but well-equipped force responsible for safeguarding Israel’s Mediterranean coast as well as the Red Sea, a vital gateway for imports from Asia.

While the Israeli navy has an overwhelming advantage over its enemies in the region, it nonetheless

faces an array of threats.

They include the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which possesses an arsenal of guided surface-to-sea missiles, and Gaza’s Hamas militant group, which has developed a small squad of naval commandos, as well as the challenges posed by Iran’s military activity across the region.

One of the navy’s most important responsibilities is protecting Israel’s natural gas platforms in the Mediterranean Sea, which now provide some 75% of the country’s electricity. To the north, Hezbollah has made no secret of its intentions to target those platforms if war breaks out.

The Iranian-backed militant group successfully struck an Israeli naval vessel during a 2006 war, killing four soldiers, and is believed to have vastly upgraded its missile stockpile since then.

Israel has said that Iran continues to try to smuggle sophisticated weapons to Hezbollah.

Sharvit confirmed that Israel has intercepted many arms shipments to Hezbollah.

With Lebanon’s economy in disarray, however, he said Israel has “no interest” in stopping fuel deliveries meant for civilian use.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Human jawbone, maybe 'ancient,' found in lake

MI HART — A human jawbone with more than a dozen teeth has been discovered in Silver Lake in Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula.

"It looks very old, maybe even ancient," Oceana County Sheriff Craig Mast told MLive.com.

The jawbone was found Sunday when someone stepped on it while removing a dock from the lake. It has been sent to anthropologists at Michigan State University for analysis.

New nonstop toll plaza opens with 6 lanes

ME YORK — Maine is home to a new high-speed toll plaza near its southern border.

The Maine Turnpike plaza in York opened early Wednesday, just as the old one located to its south was deactivated. The new plaza has six high-speed toll lanes that don't require drivers to stop, WMTW-TV reported.

The demolition of the old plaza is expected to take a little more than a year. State officials have said drivers will continue to pass through the old toll booth lanes during the dismantling. The speed limit will be 10 mph.

Town OKs \$5.4M bond to fix historic armory

VT ST. JOHNSBURY — Voters in St. Johnsbury have approved a proposal to borrow \$5.4 million to turn a long-shuttered armory into the community's new public safety building.

Voters approved the proposal Tuesday by a vote of 255-170.

The project is now moving forward, but town officials say there is still no guarantee it will happen without more outside grant funding.

The Caledonian-Record reported the town wants to renovate the contaminated but historic structure into a new police station and dispatch center. The EPA grant is to help clean up the environmental contamination at the site which includes PCBs, heavy metals and other contaminants.

Teen high, speeding in car crash that killed 4

FL PALM BEACH GARDENS — A Florida teenage driver was high on an illegal form of cannabis when he sped through a red light at more than 100 mph and caused a crash that killed four people, sheriff's officials said.

Christopher Garrett, 17, of West Palm Beach, is being charged as an adult in four counts of vehicular homicide and DUI manslaughter, the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office said in an arrest report. He remained in the Palm Beach County Jail on Wednesday. A judge set bond at \$510,000.

Garrett was driving a Nissan Rogue SUV that had been reported stolen when he ran a red light going more than 100 mph and collided with a vehicle that was turning left, the sheriff's office said.

Killed in the July 30 collision were Garrett's passengers, Jay'Oni Leonard, 14, and Alexia Simpson, 17, and the other driver, Elizabeth Anderson, 62, and her passenger, George Nienhouse, 65.

An arrest report said toxicology results from blood drawn at the hospital found Garrett was under

the influence of Delta 9 THC, a psychoactive form of cannabinoid that is banned in Florida.

Confederate statue to exit courthouse grounds

MD EASTON — A Confederate monument is set to be moved from a courthouse lawn on Maryland's Eastern Shore after local officials voted Tuesday night to relocate it to a Virginia battleground.

The Talbot County Council voted 3-2 to approve a resolution to move the "Talbot Boys" statue that commemorates more than 80 soldiers who fought for the Confederacy, news outlets reported.

For years, local activists have fought for the removal of the Jim Crow-era statue on the lawn adjacent to a former slave market site in Easton. In May, civil rights advocates sued the county seeking the court-ordered removal of the statue depicting a soldier with a Confederate flag draped over one shoulder, calling it a racist symbol of oppression and claiming it is unconstitutional and illegal.

Private funds will cover the cost of relocating the statue to the private Cross Keys Battlefield in Harrisonburg, Va.

Town settles case with ex-firefighter for \$11M

MA BROOKLINE — A former Massachusetts firefighter engaged in a yearslong legal fight with the Boston suburb of Brookline over what he said was a racist work environment has reached an \$11 million settlement with the town, officials said.

The settlement with Gerald Alston, who is Black, was announced Tuesday by Brookline's

Select Board. It is contingent upon approval at a special town meeting scheduled for Oct. 5.

The dispute dates to 2010 when Alston's superior mistakenly left a voicemail for Alston in which he referred to a motorist who had cut off his son with a racial epithet. The supervisor apologized but was subsequently promoted.

Alston refused to return to the job and stopped communicating with the department, which he said was due to his fear of working in a racially hostile environment.

Alston, a firefighter since 2002, was placed on leave in 2013 and fired in 2016.

State reprimands judge over online postings

CA LOS ANGELES — A state watchdog agency reprimanded a Los Angeles County judge on Tuesday for making online postings that appeared to support positions on gun control, Black Lives Matter and the recall of the county's top prosecutor.

Superior Court Judge Michael O'Gara's comments on Facebook and Twitter "gave the appearance of bias," the Commission on Judicial Performance said.

In its public admonishment, the commission said O'Gara "posted undignified, indecorous remarks in response to public figures, and appeared to espouse partisan and controversial viewpoints," according to the San Francisco Chronicle.

O'Gara spent nearly 20 years as an Los Angeles County prosecutor before he was elected to the Superior Court in 2008. He was reelected last year to a six-year term. The state reprimand doesn't affect his term in office.

— From wire reports

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Chiefs' Reid humble as history approaches

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Good luck getting Kansas City Chiefs coach Andy Reid to ruminate on the fact that he's nearing NFL history, just one win away from becoming the first to reach 100 with two different franchises.

The answer you'll get is pretty standard whenever such topics arise.

"I've been around a lot of good people. I'm very fortunate that way," Reid said this week, as the Chiefs turned their attention to a Sunday night showdown in Baltimore. "I've been with two great organizations but, most of all, good people, whether coaches or players. I'm very fortunate that way"

The thing about that? It's not entirely true.

Sure, the affable coach affectionately known as "Big Red" has had good players over the years, and no fewer than 11 assistants have gone on to become head coaches. But just two of his players in more than two decades as a head coach have reac-

hed the Hall of Fame, and only Eagles safety Brian Dawkins did it playing mostly for Reid.

Otherwise, he's managed to make the most of what he was given.

Reid turned Donovan McNabb from an athletic quarterback coming out of Syracuse into a Pro Bowl regular, even though he'll likely fall short of Canton. He turned Alex Smith from a first-round flop with San Francisco into a fan favorite in Kansas City who helped to establish the foundation of the Chiefs' burgeoning dynasty.

Working with sometimes marginal talent, Reid has managed to pile up wins at a Hall of Fame pace.

After winning 140 games with the Eagles, he is now at 99 with the Chiefs after beating the Browns on Sunday in a rematch of their divisional-round playoff game. Reid also has 222 wins in the regular season, and five more would send him past Curly Lambeau for fifth-most in NFL history.

Throw in playoff success and Reid has 239 wins overall, which trails only Tom Landry, Bill Belichick, George Halas and Don Shula. All of them but Belichick are in the Hall of Fame, and the only reason he's not is — just like Reid in Kansas City — the longtime Patriots coach is still roaming the sideline.

"Coach Reid just does an outstanding job over there," Browns coach Kevin Stefanski said. "They always have some wrinkles, some gadget plays, some core plays that they do. They really make you work."

Perhaps most impressive is the way Reid has reinvented himself in Kansas City.

Remember, he was fired by Philadelphia after winning just four games in his 14th season in charge, and he was in danger of wearing the moniker "best coach never to win a championship."

But with a change of scenery came a change in fortunes. The Chiefs began winning the moment Reid arrived, and the success only grew as the roster im-

proved. And when Patrick Mahomes began running Reid's artistic offense, the coach finally won that championship in 2020 and reached a second consecutive Super Bowl this past February.

"Coach Reid, every single time I think I'm at that point, he keeps giving me a little bit more information that I can learn," Mahomes said. "It keeps me on my toes and keeps me going and getting better every single day."

It keeps the Chiefs getting better, too.

Now, all that stuff Reid spouted off about his success being tied to good people around him? It probably has never been more true than right now. Mahomes is already a lock for the Hall of Fame someday, and tight end Travis Kelce and wide receiver Tyreek Hill are putting together resumes that will likely land them in Canton, too.

"I'm very fortunate," Reid said. "It doesn't always happen that way with people but I've been very lucky."

Stafford ready to build on strong debut with Rams

Associated Press

Matthew Stafford's debut with the Los Angeles Rams was so sharp that it could have left the quarterback and his head coach struggling to find areas for improvement in Week 2.

But Stafford and Sean McVay have both been in the NFL long enough to know no performance is perfect — and even if it was close, there's no point in admitting it.

They're moving forward to their road opener at Indianapolis this Sunday looking for even more production than Stafford provided in a momentous start that resulted in his first NFC Offensive Player of the Week award since way back in 2009 — his rookie season with the Detroit Lions.

Stafford said Wednesday that it's "kind of hard to articulate" what he needs to do better than he did while throwing for 321 yards and three touchdowns without an interception in the Rams' season-opening 34-14 victory over the Bears.

"There were just some plays in the game that I wish I was a little bit better on," Staf-

ford said. "Wish I was a little bit more calmer in the pocket on a few where I could have just kept progressing and got it to a different guy, and just find the completion. I think there were a couple that didn't get completed that I think I could have."

Sure, it wasn't perfect: Stafford went 20-for-26, and one of his incompletions could have been a touchdown pass to Robert Woods if he had finessed it a bit more.

But overall, Stafford produced arguably the best debut by a veteran quarterback in recent years. He is the first quarterback in NFL history to win his debut with a new team while passing for at least 300 yards and three touchdowns with no interceptions.

His 156.1 passer rating was close to perfect, and Los Angeles scored on six of his seven significant drives against a solid Chicago defense.

McVay also seemed rejuvenated as a play-caller in his first game since Jared Goff's departure, but the coach still came up with a list of areas for improvement by the

Rams' offense, which didn't play together in any preseason games.

McVay cited the team's performance on third down as an issue, although he blamed it partly on his own play-calling. Los Angeles was 0-for-4 on third down in the first half, but still finished 6-for-11 and converted its only fourth down attempt.

As for Stafford's play, McVay struggled to find a flaw, citing only nebulous thoughts about body positioning and passing form. McVay is clearly thrilled by Stafford's deep-ball throws, including a 67-yard TD pass to Van Jefferson and a 56-yard TD pass to Cooper Kupp.

"It was definitely a good, clean start," McVay said. "But I think he'd be the first to tell you that, 'Hey, did a lot of really good things, which was definitely represented in some of the success we had all offensively, but can do some things better as well.'"

Stafford's next assignment is to attack an Indianapolis defense that gave up four touchdown passes by Russell Wilson in its 28-16 loss to Seattle.

Nebraska-OU gave stage to Black players

Associated Press

NORMAN, Okla. — Half a century ago, the Nebraska-Oklahoma rivalry games offered a grand stage for the best Black college football players while the South dragged its feet on integration.

With Nebraska's Johnny Rodgers, Rich Glover and Willie Harper and Oklahoma's Greg Pruitt, Joe Washington, Rod Shoate and brothers Lee Roy, Lucious and Dewey Selmon leading the way, the programs dominated with stars most schools in the South wouldn't even recruit.

After Texas became the last all-white team to win a national title in 1969, Nebraska and Oklahoma won two Associated Press national titles each between 1970 and 1975, with Black athletes playing critical roles. Each won their annual November showdown against each other on the way to those championships.

Rodgers, Pruitt and Glover were among the biggest stars in the "Game of the Century"

— No. 1 Nebraska's 35-31 win over No. 2 Oklahoma in 1971. They placed 1-2-3 in the 1972 Heisman race (Rodgers, Pruitt, Glover) — the first time that happened for Black players.

"I think that our play and our success on those football teams opened the door for a lot of Black kids that followed us," Pruitt recalled amid preparations for Nebraska's game at Oklahoma this weekend, 50 years after their famous showdown.

The honors and recognition streamed in for Black athletes at Nebraska and Oklahoma in those days. Glover won the Outland and Lombardi Trophies in 1972 and Lee Roy Selmon won both in 1975. Washington, an electrifying running back known for his silver shoes, finished third in the Heisman voting in 1974.

It goes back to the coaches who decided to prioritize recruiting Black athletes — Chuck Fairbanks and Barry Switzer at Oklahoma and Bob Devaney and Tom Osborne at

Nebraska.

Switzer grew up in the 1940s and '50s near tiny Crossett, Ark., and said his father, Frank, was a bootlegger. Frank had Black bootleggers working for him, and his son often tagged along when it was time to collect. Through that, Switzer saw the kids on the other side of the tracks and learned they had much in common. He said his father often helped Black people, and he committed to do the same through recruiting when he became Oklahoma's head coach in 1973.

"It was the right thing to do," Switzer said. "So when I became head coach, I said, 'You need to understand that this is the way it's going to be.' I told my staff that's the way we're going to approach it, and you're coaching for the wrong staff if you don't want to do it my way."

The coaches were smart to fall in line — Oklahoma had the highest winning percentage of teams that played Division I-A

football throughout the 1970s and won national titles in 1974 and 1975. Nebraska was fourth and won national championships in 1970 and 1971.

Switzer established Oklahoma as a place to go for Black players in Texas, including Oklahoma's 1978 Heisman winner, Billy Sims.

The foundations for that early 1970s dominance were set much earlier.

Prentice Gautt became Oklahoma's first Black athlete in 1956. He was a two-time all-conference selection and the 1959 Orange Bowl MVP. Receiver Eddie Hinton was a third-team AP All-American for the Sooners in 1968.

Nebraska's first Black All-American was offensive lineman/linebacker Bob Brown in 1963, and the Huskers fielded the "Magnificent Eight" — eight Black players on the two-deep depth chart — in 1964. Nebraska's 1971 national championship team featured seven Black players with prominent roles.

SEC tightening up defenses so far this season

Associated Press

Southeastern Conference defenses are stealing the show for some of the top contenders after a season when the league championship game featured stratospheric offensive stats.

The SEC's seven ranked teams all have formidable — or at least improved — defenses.

League competition ended last season with Mac Jones and Alabama outlasting Florida's Kyle Trask 52-46 in a championship game shootout.

Defenses have shown early this season that they can carry the burden when needed.

No. 2 Georgia and No. 7 Texas A&M — which both had strong defenses last season as well — have stymied opposing offenses in 10-3 and 10-7 wins, respectively.

It's a vast difference from the title game in Atlanta, which included two 400-yard passing efforts, three 100-yard receivers and more than 1,000 total yards.

With eight SEC offensive players taken in the first round of the NFL Draft, most of whom played in the championship game, it's not surprising defenses have had to carry the day at times for the SEC's top contenders.

The Bulldogs pulled off the league's biggest win during the first two weekends, 10-3 over Clemson in a top-five clash where the only touchdown was on an interception return by Christopher Smith. The Aggies escaped against Colorado despite being kept out of the end zone for the first 57 minutes and won 10-7.

"We like to look at ourselves as one of the top defenses in the country," Texas A&M defensive back Antonio Johnson said. "So in order to do that, you have to be able to go into hostile environments and be able to play great defense even when offense isn't going as well."

"There's going to be some games where the offense is going to have to lean on us and

there's going to be some games where we're going to have to lean on them," he continued. "It's a family. We've got each other's backs."

The Aggies are without Kellen Mond's successor at quarterback, with Haynes King out indefinitely with a broken leg.

Georgia and No. 22 Auburn are tied for the national lead in scoring defense, giving up 10 points through two games. The Tigers have faced the weakest competition to date leading up to Saturday's visit to No. 10 Penn State.

No. 1 Alabama has allowed only three total points in the first half of games against No. 24 Miami and Mercer. The Crimson Tide have had a few second-half lapses.

"When we're playing altogether and we're doing the right things, canceling out all the mental errors and just playing together as a defense, we can be good," said defensive lineman Phidarian Mathis, who has a pair of sacks. "But once we get sidetracked and worry about the wrong things, everybody not focused, we can have a little struggle."

Ray, Bichette lift Blue Jays past Rays

Associated Press

TORONTO — Bo Bichette homered and drove in five runs, Robbie Ray fanned 13 over seven innings to claim the major league strikeout lead and the Toronto Blue Jays beat the Tampa Bay Rays 6-3 Wednesday.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. doubled twice and scored twice, and Teoscar Hernández added an RBI single.

The Blue Jays improved to 13-2 in September and are in a virtual tie with Boston and the New York Yankees for the two AL wild-card spots.

The Rays lost for the fifth time in seven games. The AL East leaders are 6-8 in September after going 21-6 in August. Mike Zunino hit his 30th homer and Brett Phillips also connected.

Ray (12-5) allowed one run and four hits to win his fourth straight decision. The left-hander is 4-0 with a 1.80 ERA and 91 strikeouts since his last loss, July 21 against Boston. Jordan Romano pitched the ninth for his 18th save.

Padres 9, Giants 6: Fernando Tatis Jr. matched his career high with four hits, Jurickson Profar homered and visiting San Diego snapped a five-game skid and ended San Francisco's nine-game winning streak.

Adam Frazier got four hits and Manny Machado doubled twice for the Padres, who trail St. Louis by one game for the second NL wild-card spot.

Red Sox 9, Mariners 4 (10): Kyle

Schwarber and Christian Vazquez drove in two runs apiece in the 10th inning, and Boston won at Seattle to keep pace in the AL wild-card race.

Designated runner Jack Lopez scored on Tom Murphy's passed ball to start the scoring in the six-run 10th to break open a 3-3 game. J.D. Martinez, Schwarber and Vazquez added run-scoring hits as the Red Sox beat the Mariners for the second day in a row.

Rockies 3, Braves 2 (10): Raimel Tapia hit a tiebreaking single off A.J. Minter in the 10th inning, scoring Colton Welker from third base and lifting Colorado to a win at Atlanta.

The Braves' NL East lead was trimmed to 3½ games over Philadelphia as Atlanta attempts to win the division for the fourth straight year.

Tigers 4, Brewers 1: Dustin Garneau homered and drove in two runs, rookie Matt Manning combined with the bullpen on a three-hitter and host Detroit beat Milwaukee to complete a two-game sweep.

Yankees 4, Orioles 3: Brett Gardner blooped a two-run single in the ninth inning that was set up by a double steal, and New York won at Baltimore for its third straight victory.

Pirates 5, Reds 4: Wilmer Difo scored on a groundout from Colin Moran with one out in the ninth inning, and host Pittsburgh handed Cincinnati its seventh loss in nine games.

Cardinals 11, Mets 4: Paul Goldschmidt and Nolan Arenado each hit one of St. Louis' four homers in a win at New York.

Athletics 12, Royals 10: Matt Olson hit a two-run homer, Josh Harrison drove in three runs and Elvis Andrus had four hits as Oakland held on through a nervy ninth inning to win at Kansas City.

Phillies 6, Cubs 5: Andrew Knapp scored on a passed ball in the ninth inning to bolster host Philadelphia's tenuous playoff push with a win over Chicago.

Indians 12, Twins 3: Cal Quantrill turned in a strong start, and Oscar Mercado, Bobby Bradley and Franmil Reyes homered to help Cleveland roll to a win at Minnesota.

Astros 7, Rangers 2: Jake Meyers and Marwin Gonzalez hit consecutive homers in a three-run second inning, Kyle Tucker homered, and Jose Urquidy allowed one run and two hits in six innings as Houston won at Texas.

Angels 3, White Sox 2: Brandon Marsh hit a tiebreaking solo homer off Michael Kopech in the eighth inning, and Los Angeles won at Chicago.

Marlins 8, Nationals 6: Jesus Sanchez's second two-run homer of the day capped a four-run ninth inning and Miami rallied to a win at Washington.

Dodgers 6, Diamondbacks 0: Julio Urías earned his major league-leading 18th victory, Gavin Lux singled in the go-ahead run in the fourth, and Los Angeles completed a 6-0 homestand with a win over Arizona.

Biles: FBI ignored gymnasts' reports of abuse

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Olympic gold medalist Simone Biles told Congress in forceful testimony Wednesday that federal law enforcement and gymnastics officials turned a "blind eye" to USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar's sexual abuse of her and hundreds of other women.

Biles told the Senate Judiciary Committee that "enough is enough" as she and three other U.S. gymnasts spoke in stark emotional terms about the lasting toll Nassar's crimes have taken on their lives. In response, FBI Director Christopher Wray said he was "deeply and profoundly

sorry" for delays in Nassar's prosecution and the pain it caused.

The four-time Olympic gold medalist and five-time world champion — widely considered to be the greatest gymnast of all time — said she "can imagine no place that I would be less comfortable right now than sitting here in front of you." She declared herself a survivor of sexual abuse.

"I blame Larry Nassar and I also blame an entire system that enabled and perpetrated his abuse," Biles said through tears. In addition to failures of the FBI, she said USA Gymnastics and the United

States Olympic and Paralympic Committee "knew that I was abused by their official team doctor long before I was ever made aware of their knowledge."

Biles said a message needs to be sent: "If you allow a predator to harm children, the consequences will be swift and severe. Enough is enough."

The hearing is part of a congressional effort to hold the FBI accountable after multiple missteps in investigating the case, including the delays that allowed the now-imprisoned Nassar to abuse other young gymnasts. All four witnesses said they knew girls or women who were molest-

ed by Nassar after the FBI had been made aware of allegations against him in 2015.

An internal investigation by the Justice Department released in July said the FBI made fundamental errors in the probe and did not treat the case with the "utmost seriousness" after USA Gymnastics first reported the allegations to the FBI's field office in Indianapolis in 2015. The FBI has acknowledged its own conduct was inexcusable.

A supervisory FBI agent who had failed to properly investigate the Nassar case, and later lied about it, has been fired by the agency, Wray said.