

Poor conditions in barracks cost billions

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The chronic neglect and underfunding uncovered in a recent investigation of substandard military barracks will take years to reverse and would cost the Army alone at least \$6.5 billion, officials told lawmakers Wednesday.

The Army in recent years has poured \$1 billion per year into improving housing, according to the service's deputy assistant secretary for housing, but that sum has not made a marked difference to the poor living conditions exposed last week by the Government Accountability Office. The watchdog's damning report found junior enlisted troops in all the service branches living in barracks with mold, missing kitchenettes, sewage overflow, water-quality issues, rodent infestations, broken air conditioning and other unsafe conditions.

"I was a base commander at Ramstein [Air Base] and at Offutt Air Force Base [in Nebraska]. If I would have had these conditions in any of our barracks, I would have gotten fired," said Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., a former Air Force officer and the chairman of a new House panel focused on military quality-of-life issues. "I don't recall the standards being this way when I got out in 2014. Something has happened. We need to put our finger on it and get it fixed."

Elizabeth Field, the director of the GAO's defense capabilities and management team, said the Defense Department has for decades failed to meaningfully address the deplorable housing conditions experienced by its youngest service members, many of them fresh out of high school.

Service members at 10 military installations told investigators that they dealt with persistent mold, had trouble sleeping due to a lack of working air conditioners, woke up itching from bed bugs and felt unsafe because doors did not work. The topic of mental health came up in every discussion group, Field said.

"These are just a few of the statements we heard: 'It's depressing to come home to a dark box after work. I feel cramped and like the walls are closing in, and that causes me anxiety and stress. The barracks feel like living in a rundown motel or in a prison,'" Field said.

The problems highlighted in the report are similar to ones observed in privatized family housing in recent years, but the Defense Department has felt less pressure to fix the barracks, she said. Congressional intervention might be necessary to force the services into the kind of noticeable action that led to family housing reforms several years ago, Field said.

One of the most troubling findings by the

GAO was the "hands-off approach" by the office of the defense secretary, which could not answer basic questions about how many barracks there were and whether they were complying with standards, she said.

Only two services, the Navy and Marine Corps, are bothering to even survey barracks residents about their satisfaction with housing, Field said. All the services are failing to routinely ask service members how barrack conditions are impacting their decision to reenlist — a violation of Defense Department requirements, she said.

"I think there has been a cultural perspective within the department that part of being in the military is toughing it out. And [that] this is just going get them ready for the military and, unfortunately, I think that has gotten us in part to where we are today," Field said.

Officials from the services said Wednesday that they were working to implement the report's recommendations and were committed to upgrading barracks.

"It's clear today we have significant work ahead in our unaccompanied housing to provide safe, clean, reliable, comfortable and dignified places for our sailors and Marines to call home," said Robert Thompson, the Navy's principal deputy assistant secretary for energy, installations and environment.

Legal review refutes claim on abortion care approval

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department did not need congressional approval to implement a trio of reproductive health care rules earlier this year, including one that allows service members to use federal funds to travel out of state for abortions, a government watchdog agency determined.

The regulations have led to a monthslong standoff with Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., who continues to block hundreds of senior military appointments and has cited the abortion provisions among his reasons.

Tuberville and his supporters have argued that the rules violate a ban on taxpayer-funded abortion and should have

been approved by Congress before coming into effect. However, a legal review by the Government Accountability Office published Tuesday said that because the policies deal with management and personnel, they are exempt from the Congressional Review Act, which requires government agencies to report major rules to Congress before they're enacted.

Tuberville requested the review in March, the report said.

"All three ... address matters that clearly and directly implicate agency personnel matters," the report said. "They concern communications between employees and managers, leave and benefits. Because all three of these are personnel issues, they fall

within the exception for rules relating to agency management and personnel."

Besides the policy that reimburses travel expenses for service members who must leave their duty stations to get an abortion, another provides up to three weeks of paid leave for an abortion or fertility treatment.

The third allows pregnant servicewomen up to 20 weeks to notify their commands about their situation, which would give them more privacy to get an abortion if they choose. The rules are meant to help the military retain female personnel and were a response to the Supreme Court's 2022 *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision, which reversed rulings that asserted a constitutional right to abortion.

Kim urges more nukes for ‘new Cold War’

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for an exponential increase in production of nuclear weapons and for his country to play a larger role in a coalition of nations confronting the United States in a “new Cold War,” state media said Thursday.

The Korean Central News Agency said Kim made the com-

ments during a two-day session of the country’s rubber-stamp parliament which amended the constitution to include his policy of expanding the country’s nuclear weapons program.

The Supreme People’s Assembly’s session on Tuesday and Wednesday came after Kim traveled to Russia’s Far East this month to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin and

visit military and technology sites.

The trip sparked Western concerns about a possible arms alliance in which North Korea would supply Putin with badly needed munitions to fuel his war on Ukraine in exchange for economic aid and advanced Russian technologies to enhance North Korea’s nuclear and missile systems.

As North Korea slowly ends its pandemic lockdown, Kim has been actively boosting his partnerships with Moscow and Beijing as he attempts to break out of diplomatic isolation and join a united front against Washington. He has described the world as entering a “new Cold War” and that North Korea should advance its nuclear capabilities in response.

US soldier’s release quick by N. Korean standards

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Maybe it never made sense for North Korea to hold on to Pvt. Travis King.

Just over two months after he sprinted into North Korea across the heavily fortified inter-Korean border, King was put on a plane back to America after the North released him into U.S. custody.

ANALYSIS

Several recent American detainees had been held for over a year — 17 months in the case of Otto Warmbier, an American college student who was arrested during a group tour. Warmbier was in a coma when he was deported, and later died.

King’s case was unique, not least because he was one of the 28,500 American troops stationed in South Korea to deter potential aggression from the nuclear-armed North.

There had been speculation that North Korea would try to maximize the propaganda value of an active-duty U.S. soldier who voluntarily crossed into its territory, report-

edly because he was disillusioned with racism in the military and American society.

The North has often been accused of using American detainees as bargaining chips, but Biden administration officials said they made no concessions to secure King’s release.

Pyongyang did not provide a detailed explanation when it announced the expulsion. In a brief report, the official Korean Central News Agency said King confessed to illegally entering the North because he harbored “ill feeling against inhuman maltreatment and racial discrimination” within the U.S. Army and was “disillusioned about the unequal U.S. society.”

It had attributed similar comments to King before, and verifying their authenticity is impossible. Some previous foreign detainees have said after their releases that declarations of guilt while in North Korean custody were made under coercion.

The North may have simply decided that King was more trouble than he was worth.

Analysts say the 23-year-old’s legal troubles could have limited his propaganda value. At the time he crossed the border, King was supposed to be heading to Fort Bliss, Texas, following his release from prison in South Korea on an assault conviction.

As a low-ranking serviceman, King was clearly not a meaningful source of U.S. military information. The North would have been unable to justify the costs of providing him food, accommodation, security guards and translators, especially when it was uncertain what it would get from the United States amid stalled diplomacy.

“North Korea is actually good at doing the math on these things,” said Moon Seong Mook, a retired South Korean brigadier general who participated in past military talks with the North.

“They concluded that the longer he stays, the more of a burden he becomes.”

Pyongyang probably also didn’t want to wait out a protracted negotiation with the U.S.

Taiwan launches first domestically made submarine

Associated Press

KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan — Taiwan’s president launched the island’s first domestically made submarine for testing Thursday at a port in Kaohsiung.

The submarine, if successful in its tests, will be a major breakthrough for Taiwan in shipbuilding and design.

“In the past, a domestic-made

submarine was considered impossible, but today a submarine designed and built by our countrymen is in front of you,” President Tsai Ing-wen said at the launch ceremony.

“Building a submarine is the concrete realization of our resolution to protect our country. Submarines are an important piece of equipment for the Tai-

wan navy to develop asymmetric combat power in terms of strategy and tactics,” she said.

The U.S. has been pushing Taiwan to develop asymmetric warfare strategies by investing in smaller and lighter weapons such as the reduced-size submarine.

The process was “torturous,” said Cheng Wen-lon, head of Tai-

wan’s CSBC Corp., which led the construction of the submarine.

After seven years of design and construction, the prototype will begin tests in the harbor before heading to the ocean.

China’s Defense Ministry said on Thursday that the submarine’s construction was Taiwan “heading down the path of its own destruction.”

House GOP bid cuts Austin's pay to \$1

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House Republicans on Wednesday agreed to slash Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's salary to no more than \$1 after berating the top civilian military leader for the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and the military's recruitment struggles.

The measure nearly eliminates Austin's annual \$221,000 salary and followed similar salary reductions for Defense Department positions involved in diversity programs. The pay cuts are likely doomed in the Democrat-led Senate but showed the hostility some Republicans have for military leaders appointed by President Joe Biden and the progressive social policies that they support.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., introduced the amendment targeting Austin, the nation's first Black defense secretary, during ongoing debate over the Pentagon's 2024 budget. It was approved in a voice vote and Democrats did not ask for a follow-up roll call vote that might have prevented adoption of the amendment.

"Secretary Austin has not fulfilled his job duties. As a matter of fact, he's destroying our military," Greene said. "Many Americans agree we do not want the United States military led by failure causing us to be weak."

Greene blasted Austin for recruitment numbers that are at "crisis levels," continued aid for the war in Ukraine that is "leading us undoubtedly to World War III" and the discharge of more than 8,000 service members for refusing to take the coronavirus vaccine.

Greene is a far-right conservative who earlier this year was expelled from the House Freedom Caucus, a group of other

hard-right Republicans, after insulting one of their members.

Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., offered his support for Greene's amendment, pointing to high suicide rates among service members and veterans and the death of 13 troops during the military's evacuation from Afghanistan in 2021.

"[Austin] is directly responsible for abandoning thousands of American citizens and our allies to terrorists in Afghanistan," said Van Orden, a former Navy SEAL who deployed to the country.

Democrats dismissed the attack on Austin as a political stunt. Rep. Betty McCollum, D-Minn., defended Austin's performance as defense secretary and said he has been instrumental to helping Ukraine fend off Russia's invasion and strengthening defense partnerships around the world.

"You may disagree with the administration's policies, as we all have done over our careers with different administrations, but Secretary Austin has done nothing to merit this amendment," McCollum said. "There's no need for us to make such a personal, drastic attack by eliminating his pay."

A spokesperson for the Pentagon said it would be inappropriate for the Defense Department to comment on pending legislation.

The House is expected to vote on the full defense appropriations bill later this week. The White House threatened to veto it earlier this month over controversial provisions that would overturn the Pentagon's abortion access policy for troops and restrict health care for transgender service members.

The House's adoption of the defense bill will not help stave off a shutdown set to begin Saturday.

DODEA schools outline shutdown scenario

BY SETH ROBSON
AND DAVE ORNAUER
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Sports and other extracurriculars will be suspended at Defense Department schools worldwide if Congress fails to reach a deal to fund the government past Sunday.

Department of Defense Education Activity, in a banner notice atop its website, said it is monitoring developments as the clock runs down toward the weekend. DODEA-Pacific regional director Lois Rapp spread the word to parents in a letter Thursday.

"Without enactment of an appropriation bill or a continuing resolution, all Federal agencies, including DODEA, will be required to execute contingency plans for a lapse in appropriations (commonly referred to as a 'shutdown') beginning Sunday," she wrote.

During a shutdown, DODEA schools will run as usual and

school-level employees will continue to work, but some administrative employees will be furloughed, according to DODEA's "What You Need to Know" webpage.

District and community offices will remain open but regional offices and DODEA headquarters will be minimally staffed. All leaves will be canceled, according to the site.

School sports, including practices, and other extracurricular activities will pause during a shutdown, Rapp wrote.

The pause would halt football, tennis, cross country and volleyball seasons at the halfway point.

"I'm hoping for a miracle," Yokota High School football coach Michael Woodworth told Stars and Stripes on Thursday at the school.

DODEA didn't immediately respond to emailed questions Thursday afternoon about further ramifications of a possible shutdown.

Oversight board backs limits on key US surveillance tool

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The FBI and other government agencies should be required to get court approval before reviewing the communications of U.S. citizens collected through a secretive foreign surveillance program, a sharply divided privacy oversight board recommended on Thursday.

The recommendation came in a report from a three-member Democratic majority of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Board, an independent agency within the executive branch, and was made despite the opposition of Biden administration officials who warn that such a requirement could snarl fast-moving terrorism and espionage investigations and weaken

national security as a result.

The report comes as a White House push to secure the reauthorization of the program known as Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act is encountering major bipartisan opposition in Congress and during a spate of revelations that FBI employees have periodically mishandled access to a repository of intelligence gathered under the law, violations that have spurred outrage from civil liberties advocates.

Section 702 permits allow spy agencies without a warrant to collect swaths of emails and other communications from foreigners located abroad, even when those foreigners are in touch with people in the United States.

No Trump, so more jockeying at 2nd debate

Los Angeles Times

Republican presidential candidates — with the notable exception of the front-runner, former President Donald Trump — held the second primary debate Wednesday night at the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, Calif.

Here's what happened when seven other GOP candidates faced off:

Trump took mild fire

Trump skipped the debate and is not likely to lose his commanding lead in Republican primary polls. He is averaging more than 50% of the vote.

Some of the candidates on stage took a few shots at Trump, mostly for not showing up. But voters who tuned in to watch the debate did not hear much about the former president's string of criminal indictments, his attempts to overturn the 2020 election or his threats to use the White House to punish his enemies were he re-elected.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris

Christie, as usual, went the hardest at Trump, criticizing his compliments for Russian President Vladimir Putin, his lack of progress on a border wall and his divisive brand of politics.

The response to Christie from entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy was more emblematic of how Trump's rivals have approached him.

"Trump was an excellent president," Ramaswamy said, "but the 'America first' agenda does not belong to one man."

Haley assertive again

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, once Trump's top rival, failed to stand out, showing only slightly more verve than he did in the initial debate last month.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, who won praise after the first debate, did the most to assert herself. She attacked Ramaswamy for embracing Chinese-owned TikTok — "Every time I hear you, I feel a little bit dumber from what you say" — went after DeSantis for supporting his

state's offshore drilling ban, and even took on her fellow South Carolinian, Sen. Tim Scott, over his service in Congress as the federal debt soared.

The end of optimism

The candidates spoke early and often of Ronald Reagan. But, with few exceptions, they didn't offer much of the Gipper's famous optimism.

"I come before you today as a candidate for president because I think this country's in a lot of trouble," said former Vice President Mike Pence, who has cast himself as an heir to Reagan's policies and political style.

"You hear the fire on the stage tonight, you hear the fire and all of our voices, and it's because Joe Biden has weakened this country at home and abroad."

Right turn on immigration

No one defended President Reagan when the moderators showed video of him supporting a 1986 amnesty for nearly 3 million people who had entered the U.S.

illegally.

On the contrary, DeSantis and Haley both called for use of U.S. military force in Mexico, which would probably be viewed as a violation of Mexican sovereignty. "It's how we deal with our terrorists," Haley said, explaining her plan to use special operations forces to break up drug cartels.

"Our own country is being invaded," DeSantis said.

Divided on UAW strike

The Republican Party has embraced a right-wing form of populism in the Trump era, but that has not translated into support for labor unions. No candidate sided with the United Auto Workers strike against the Big Three automakers, but the rhetoric of some candidates showed the GOP is wary of offending the workers.

Trump seems to understand the stakes. As his opponents debated in California on Wednesday night, he was in Michigan, warning that the auto industry was "being assassinated" by electric vehicles.

Power company still gathering Maui fire info, lawmakers told

Associated Press

Lawmakers probing the cause of last month's deadly Maui wildfire did not get many answers during Thursday's congressional hearing on the role the electrical grid played in the disaster.

Still, the president of Hawaiian Electric — Maui's sole electricity provider — promised to gather and provide more details about exactly what happened on Aug. 8, including when the power stopped flowing through downed power lines in Lahaina and exactly when the decision was made to trigger a procedure designed to make sure that broken lines were not re-energized.

Shelley Kimura also said the utility doesn't have the right or responsibility to clear dry brush or other vegetation on private prop-

erty — even if it is in the right-of-way, directly underneath power lines — unless the plants or trees are tall enough to potentially contact the lines.

The fire in the historic town of Lahaina killed at least 97 people and destroyed more than 2,000 buildings, mostly homes.

It first erupted at 6:30 a.m. when strong winds appeared to cause a Hawaiian Electric power line to fall, igniting dry brush and grass near a large subdivision.

During the U.S. House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing, lawmakers questioned Kimura and other utility officials about how the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century began — and whether the electrical grid in Lahaina was safe and properly maintained.

McConnell: Trump is at fault for delay in arming Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Former President Donald Trump is to blame for growing Republican opposition to arming Ukraine, according to the top Senate Republican, who also said Americans are being misled about the nature of Russia's war.

Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Senate minority leader, said Wednesday that in supporting Ukraine, the U.S. is lining up against all its chief adversaries, reinvigorating its industrial base and preventing an expansionist Russia from moving into NATO territory.

"I think it's an easy call (to support Ukraine)," McConnell said during a forum hosted by the Center for European Policy Analysis.

But as the war in Ukraine drags on, an influential segment of the Republican Party has become increasingly vocal about ending American aid to Kyiv.

"The reason Republican support is declining is the opposition of the former president," McConnell said. "That's the bad news. ... I think the American people are being to some extent misled. I don't think they understand the facts."

Still, McConnell said the good news is that leadership in key congressional panels remains staunchly behind Ukraine.

While critics of U.S. policy toward Ukraine have characterized American aid as something of a blank check, McConnell said the support adds up to a fraction of U.S. gross domestic product.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Judge: Former lawmaker can stay out of prison

TN NASHVILLE — A former Tennessee state senator can stay out of prison as he challenges his 21-month sentence for violating federal campaign finance laws, a federal judge ruled.

Brian Kelsey, a Republican, was supposed to report to federal prison in October, but U.S. District Judge Waverly Crenshaw agreed Tuesday to let him remain free while his legal team appeals the prison term to the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Kelsey received his sentence last month in a case centering on his attempts to funnel campaign money from his legislative seat toward his failed 2016 congressional bid.

His attorney, Alex Little, has argued that federal prosecutors violated Kelsey's plea agreement when they pushed for a harsher sentence after he attempted to withdraw his guilty plea.

Crenshaw said Kelsey's attorneys have raised "a substantial question" over whether prosecutors crossed a line surrounding the plea agreement.

2 arrested for selling nitrous oxide at concert

GA ATHENS — A Georgia police officer has arrested two people for selling nitrous oxide, or laughing gas.

An Athens-Clarke County officer made the arrests Thursday, the Athens Banner-Herald reported, after spotting people milling around with balloons following a concert in downtown Athens. The officer ob-

served that the people were holding the balloons closed with their hands, instead of tying them with string.

The officer found a man and a woman in a nearby parking garage selling the balloons after filling them with a gas. The officer said the man initially told the officer that the gas was helium, but he later admitted it was laughing gas.

Nitrous oxide is used medically as an anesthetic and pain reliever. But people also use the drug to get high. Heavy use can cause damage to brain and nerve tissue.

Data: Fewer students are chronically absent

MS JACKSON — After the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted schools nationwide and led to more children missing classes, the number of students who were chronically absent in Mississippi declined during the most recent school year, according to data released Tuesday by the state's education department.

The data, compiled from public schools, shows the chronic absenteeism rate in Mississippi declined from 28% during the 2021-22 school year to 23.9% in 2022-23. During the latest school year, 108,310 Mississippi public school students were chronically absent compared to 128,275 students the year before. The state education department defines chronic absenteeism as missing 10%, or 18 days, of the school year for any reason.

The Mississippi Department of Education said it began reporting data on chronic absences in 2016. The rate fell to a low of 13% in 2019 before rocketing

up to 28% in 2022, a trend the department links to fallout from the pandemic.

Safe Haven Baby Box used for 1st time in state

NM HOBBS — It's called the Save Haven Baby Box, and city officials in Hobbs credit it with saving the life of a newborn boy.

An anonymous woman surrendered her baby at a Hobbs' fire station Saturday afternoon, with the box used for the first time in New Mexico.

The climate-controlled incubator sent out an alert that the box had been opened. Fire Station 1 officials said the baby was immediately taken to a hospital and was deemed healthy. The child now is in the custody of New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families Department.

The baby box in Hobbs was dedicated in May, about 1½ years after a teenager in the city made national news for throwing her newborn into a trash bin. She was later sentenced to 16 years in prison.

So far, the only other Safe Haven Baby Box in the state is at an Espanola Fire Station. But legislators said the next box will be dedicated in Belen next month with Carlsbad, Roswell and Portales being considered for future sites.

Lawmakers OK election monitor after incident

CT HARTFORD — Connecticut lawmakers voted Tuesday to approve \$150,000 in funding for a special election monitor for Bridgeport, as the state's largest city is enveloped in controversy after sur-

veillance cameras recorded a woman stuffing pieces of paper into an absentee ballot drop box a week before the mayoral primary.

Under the new legislation, the monitor will conduct inspections and investigations for the 2023 municipal election and the 2024 state election in Bridgeport. The possible electoral fraud incident is already the subject of a state elections investigation and a civil lawsuit filed by the candidate who lost the primary.

The measure overwhelmingly cleared the House of Representatives and Senate during a special legislative session.

Public to weigh in on wild horses in national park

ND BISMARCK — The National Park Service has turned to the public to help decide whether the famous wild horses in North Dakota's Theodore Roosevelt National Park should stay or go.

The federal agency launched a 30-day public comment period Monday. It also released a draft environmental assessment of the wild horse herd that said removal of the horses would benefit native wildlife and vegetation, but may lessen the experience of visitors who come to the park to see the horses or cattle, the Bismarck Tribune reported.

Removal would entail capturing horses and giving some of them first to tribes, and later auctioning the animals or giving them to other entities. Another approach would include techniques to prevent future reproduction and would allow those horses to live out the rest of their lives in the park.

— From wire reports

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Baseball set to bid farewell to Cabrera

Associated Press

Miguel Cabrera sat in a gray chair beside his two stalls in the Detroit Tigers' clubhouse early in the final week of his career, sorting through stuff to get shipped.

Major League Baseball's only Triple Crown winner since 1967 stuffed dozens of barely used cleats and a bunch of batting gloves in a cardboard box at his feet. Cabrera then put a slew of balls he had signed, each in a zip lock bag, in a tote.

The bottle of wine, in bubble wrap, that the Oakland Athletics gave him last week along with his personal belongings are being sent to his home in Miami.

Where's he going to put it all?

"I don't know," the 40-year-old Cabrera said with a shrug and a grin.

For Cabrera — and baseball fans — there's a lot to unpack from the career of one of the best hitters ever.

Cabrera's career will end Sunday afternoon against Cleveland at Comerica Park, where a sold-out crowd will include a few thousand fans paying for standing-room only tickets to cheer him on one more time.

The 12-time All-Star leaves the game with an impressive legacy. The popular player has also provided a desperately needed jolt of joy in his native Venezuela during a crisis that has pushed millions into poverty and compelled 7.3 million people to migrate.

Cabrera, who made his major league debut at 20 with the Florida Marlins, has put himself in the conversation with all-time greats at the plate.

"Hitting a baseball is one of the hardest things to do in sports, and he and Albert Pujols are the two best that I've seen do it my 60 years in baseball," Jim Leyland, who managed Cabrera in Detroit, said in a telephone interview this week. "It's on paper, and in the books."

When Cabrera led the majors with a .330 batting average, 44 homers and 139 RBIs in 2012, he was the first to win a Triple Crown since Carl Yastrzemski did it in 1967 with Boston.

Last year, he joined Hank Aaron and Albert Pujols as the three players in baseball history with 3,000 hits, 500 homers and 600 doubles.

"One of the things that made

Miggy really special is the way he could drive the ball to all fields," said Philadelphia Phillies team president Dave Dombrowski, who ran the Marlins when they signed Cabrera as a teenager and later acquired him in a blockbuster trade. "He could hit to right field as if he was a left-handed pull hitter.

"Miggy also had so much grit, playing at times when he was hurt badly, and always had a smile on his face because he loves the game so much."

Cabrera is from the Venezuelan city of Maracay, which is known for producing bullfighters and ballplayers, including Houston Astros star Jose Altuve. He grew up following fellow countrymen Davey Concepcion, Omar Vizquel and Andres Galarraga.

"I wanted to follow them to make it to the big leagues," Cabrera said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I say to people from Venezuela, 'I think our baseball is safe with Ronald Acuña.'"

The 25-year-old Acuña, an Atlanta Braves outfielder, became the first player in major league history on Wednesday night to

have 40 homers and 70 stolen bases in the same season.

The Marlins gave Cabrera \$1.8 million to sign when he was 16, and after three seasons in the minors, they called him up. He provided a glimpse of what was to come in his debut, hitting a walk-off, 11th-inning homer.

Cabrera cleared the fences three times as a rookie in the NL Championship Series and hit an opposite-field homer off Roger Clemens to help Florida win the 2003 World Series.

He was an All-Star in each of his four full seasons in Florida. The financially strapped franchise traded him to the Tigers in December of 2007, and he flourished even more.

He won consecutive AL MVP awards in 2012 and 2013. Cabrera won five of his seven Silver Slugger awards and all four batting titles in Detroit, including becoming the first right-handed batter to win three straight batting titles since Rogers Hornsby did in the early 1920s.

Cabrera cashed in on his talent, signing a \$152.3 million, eight-year contract in 2008 and a record-setting \$292 million, 10-year contract in 2014.

Francona set to end career marked by class, touch

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — After the Guardians secured a 4-3 win over the Cincinnati Reds in their last home game of the season, manager Terry Francona traversed the underground concrete concourses of Progressive Field and left the ballpark he's called home the past 11 seasons for the final time.

His ride is nearly over.

Although he hasn't made it official — and true to form, Francona was adamant about not pulling the spotlight away from the Guardians during their playoff push that has now ended — the 64-year-old manager has indicated he'll step down after

this season, perhaps the most challenging of his run with Cleveland.

Slowed by major health issues in recent years, the personable, popular Francona may be stepping away, but not before leaving a lasting imprint as a manager and one of the game's most beloved figures.

Adored by players. Respected by peers. Cherished by fans.

Born into baseball, he's been a lifer. As a kid, he grew up in Pennsylvania hoping to follow his father Tito's footsteps into the big leagues, and not only did so but also managed in Cleveland, where his dad had his best years.

A jokester, storyteller and throwback. A player's manager. A manager's manager. Francona is everyone's manager.

Francona has poured his heart and soul into the game, first as an outfielder who battled through injuries and banged around for 10 seasons with the Expos, Cubs, Reds, Indians and Brewers, and then 23 more as a manager, over 3,600 games.

Quite a journey.

In Birmingham, Ala., he managed Michael Jordan during his bold swing at a second sport. In Philadelphia, the relentless boos from the city's fervent fans made Francona question his career choice.

In Boston, Francona ended a decades-long curse by winning a pair of World Series titles to guarantee him fabled status from Fenway Park to Faneuil Hall and beyond.

And, finally in Cleveland, he kept teams competitive despite financial limitations and nearly quenched a championship drought in 2016 on the way to becoming the winningest manager in the club's 123-year history.

He's 13th on the career wins list (1,948), fittingly sandwiched between Leo Durocher and Casey Stengel, two of baseball's most colorful, larger-than-life managers with whom Francona shares so many traits.

Blazers trade Lillard to Bucks in 3-team deal

Associated Press

Damian Lillard was once asked to pick a player he'd want as a teammate, and Giannis Antetokounmpo was his answer.

It's about to happen.

Lillard was traded by Portland to play alongside Antetokounmpo in Milwaukee on Wednesday, a deal that ends his 11-year run with the Trail Blazers and a three-month saga surrounding his wish to be moved elsewhere in hopes of winning an NBA title.

The seven-time All-Star — a player so elite he was selected to the NBA's 75th anniversary team — goes from the Trail Blazers to the Bucks in a three-team deal that sends Jrue Hol-

day from the Bucks to Portland, Deandre Ayton from Phoenix to Portland and Jusuf Nurkic from the Blazers to the Suns. The trade was finalized Wednesday night.

"The casuals won't be addressed but the trailblazers fans and city of Portland that I love truly will be ... and they will be addressed truthfully. Stay tuned," Lillard wrote on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter. "Excited for my next chapter!"

It became known July 1 that Lillard asked the Trail Blazers for a trade, which he was long speculated to be considering given his desire to play for a contender and Portland not seeming to have much of a

chance with its current roster.

He wanted to go to Miami and made that clear. Portland decided not to accommodate that request, and instead, it's the Bucks who now have an incredibly strong 1-2 punch of Lillard and Antetokounmpo heading into the new season.

"Damian Lillard is an elite player in our league and someone we've long been fans of," Bucks general manager Jon Horst said. "These opportunities are rare and hard to measure and execute."

Also included in the deal: Nassir Little, Keon Johnson and Grayson Allen are headed to Phoenix, and Toumani Camara goes to Portland. Portland receives a 2029 first-round pick

and the right to swap first-round picks in 2028 and 2030 from Milwaukee, and trading Ayton means Devin Booker is now the lone player from the Phoenix team that played Milwaukee in the 2021 NBA Finals still on the Suns' roster.

The trade continues the Bucks' dramatic offseason makeover in response to their surprising first-round playoff loss to Miami.

They followed that by firing coach Mike Budenholzer and replacing him with Adrian Griffin, who spent the last five seasons as a Toronto Raptors assistant. Now they've traded away the two-time All-Star Holiday to acquire Lillard, a seven-time All-NBA selection.

Elliott focuses on Patriots before Dallas homecoming

Associated Press

FRISCO, Texas — Ezekiel Elliott knows it will be weird to return so soon as a New England running back to the place where he starred alongside quarterback Dak Prescott for seven seasons with the Dallas Cowboys.

The two-time rushing champion also knows he has always had a handle on his emotions, a trait that will be tested assuming there's a massive roar from more than 90,000 fans who used to howl "Zeeeeeeeeeeke," as their beloved back turned his hand in front of his mouth in a "feed me" gesture after first-down runs.

Elliott returns to the home of the Cowboys on Sunday, confident he can keep the focus on football but knowing he hasn't stepped into such a scene before.

"There are emotions," Elliott said Wednesday in a conference call with reporters who cover the Cowboys. "I may do a good job of hiding them, but there will be some emotions. But I've got to go out there and help my team win that football game."

Elliott wasn't much interested in rehashing his offseason release in a cost-cutting move by the Cowboys. "Business is business," he said.

A slow start with the Patriots after a short training camp is turning around. Elliott rushed for a season-high 80 yards in a 15-10 win against the Jets. And the Cow-

boys just gave up 222 yards on the ground.

The former Ohio State star has his college No. 15 again after picking No. 21 with the Cowboys, who drafted him fourth overall in 2016.

Elliott will ride a team bus to the visiting locker room on the other side of AT&T Stadium. After the game, he won't be waiting for reporters on the home side, which was the routine for his 52 games there.

"I don't know what I'm necessarily expecting," Elliott said. "It's definitely going to be weird, just being in a different uniform, being in the visiting locker room. But I think it will be a good experience just kind of seeing the fans again."

Elliott won rushing titles twice in his first three seasons with the Cowboys, and was an All-Pro as a rookie while Prescott edged him for AP NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year honors.

The 28-year-old is third on Dallas' career rushing list with 8,262 yards, behind a pair of Pro Football Hall of Famers in NFL career rushing leader Emmitt Smith and Tony Dorsett.

By the time Mike McCarthy became coach in 2020, Elliott's most productive days in Dallas were behind him. He was still the go-to back on the goal line, though, scoring 28 touchdowns in those three seasons, including 12 in 2022.

McCarthy remembers his first impres-

sion, when he was Green Bay's coach and Elliott ran by him during his rookie season.

"I've always been so impressed with him. He was just such a big, physical runner," McCarthy said.

The Cowboys (2-1) have converted touchdowns on just three of 11 trips inside the 20-yard line the past two weeks, so the question of missing Elliott will be one of the topics against the Patriots (1-2).

For his part, Elliott believes he has something left after signing a one-year contract worth at least \$3 million with incentives that could double the value.

"I've got plenty left in the tank," Elliott said. "I think I'm a very good back."

Tony Pollard replaced Elliott as the lead back after four seasons as his understudy. He leads the NFL in carries and touches through three weeks.

Elliott's days of bearing the heavy workload were mostly gone by the time Pollard arrived, but Pollard watched Elliott maintain the lead role even as his own production started surpassing that of his mentor's.

"He's had a great influence on me playing this game, just watching him, just watching how he does things, how he approaches things, his preparation throughout the week," Pollard said. "Just trying to pick his brain, growing with him over time."

McIlroy now grasps Ryder excitement

Associated Press

GUIDONIA MONTECELIO, Italy — Rory McIlroy was willing to read his words about the Ryder Cup before happily eating them.

He qualified for his first team in 2010, when he was a 21-year-old known as “Boy Wonder” with curly locks that spilled out from under his cap and already painted as Europe’s rising star. He referred to the Ryder Cup as an exhibition, nothing for him to get excited about.

McIlroy sat down to read comments from 2009 for a post on social media, and he couldn’t get through it without laughing, mainly at himself.

“It’s not that important an event for me. It’s an exhibition at the end of the day,” McIlroy said, reading from the script. “Obviously, I’ll try my best for the team. But I’m not going to go running around and fist-pumping.”

And then he added after he stopped laughing, “Who said that?”

It didn’t take long for him to realize the Ryder Cup meant so much more — a pivotal halve he earned against Stewart Cink in Wales in 2010, his fist-pumping, decibel-raising shouts against Patrick Reed at Hazeltine in 2016, the tears during the loss at Whistling Straits in 2021.

He went 1-3 for the week in an American rout and felt responsible. In a live interview with NBC when he won his singles match, McIlroy called his Ryder Cup appearances “the greatest experiences of my career.”

“I’ve never really cried or gotten emotional over what I’ve done as an individual. I couldn’t give a s—” McIlroy said, by then a player who had been No. 1 and had three legs of the Grand Slam.

Yes, he said that.

It’s far different now. McIlroy is the heart of a European team that tries to protect its home turf at Marco Simone, for no other reason than he has played in more Ryder Cups than any player on either team.

“In 2009, I was just so focused on myself and trying to get my career off the ground that I felt like I had bigger and better things to achieve for my individual goals,” McIlroy said Wednesday.

“I’m still very, very proud and probably proudest of the things I’ve done as an individual,” he said. “But nothing — nothing — beats this week. It’s an amazing experience and I want to be a part of it for as long as I can.”

Wednesday brought another toasty day outside Rome, nine-hole practice rounds before the course was taken over by a celebrity match that included Novak Djokovic, Wales soccer star Gareth Bale and former New York Giants receiver Victor Cruz.

Pairings for the first session of matches are announced during the opening ceremony Thursday afternoon. The Ryder Cup is relentless action once a ball is in the air Friday morning.

It just feels like forever to get

to that point.

“I’m just ready for Friday to get here,” Scottie Scheffler said.

European captain Luke Donald seems to be striking the right tone for a European team that is eager to erase memories from a 19-9 loss — the biggest loss for a European team — at Whistling Straits two years ago.

Justin Rose is the oldest player at age 43 and thrilled to be back after being left off the last team. Jon Rahm has the Spanish passion for the Ryder Cup and has been Europe’s top player over the last two years.

But there’s something about McIlroy that led Rose to refer to him as “a leader of the team.”

“He’s been one of the players that’s kept the momentum going that was started a generation or two before us and before him,” Rose said. “And I think he has a really good appreciation of history and the guys that have come before him.”

“I think that he will have a huge role in this team for the next decade plus.”

Utah, Notre Dame ready for tough Top 25 matchups

Associated Press

Utah has quietly emerged as a top-10 team with convalescing quarterback Cam Rising still yet to play a down and a defense that so far has put up better numbers than the 2019 unit that is regarded as the Utes’ best ever.

To be determined is whether the Utes can keep doing what they’ve been doing as they move along in a stretch in which five of seven opponents are ranked.

The offense has been limited without Rising, who hasn’t played since he tore his ACL in the Rose Bowl. The defense has allowed just one touchdown to each of its first four opponents, but such dominance is unlikely to continue with Southern Cali-

fornia, Oregon and Washington — all national top-three offenses — on the horizon.

The immediate concern is Saturday’s game at No. 19 Oregon State, which is coming off a loss at Washington State and needs a win to avoid dropping off in the Pac-12 race.

There are three other games matching Top 25 teams: No. 24 Kansas at No. 3 Texas, No. 13 LSU at No. 20 Mississippi and No. 11 Notre Dame at No. 17 Duke.

Kansas has played the 84th-toughest schedule so far and lost 18 in a row against top-10 opponents. The Jayhawks haven’t beaten a top-10 team in a true road game since 1995. Texas’ most recent 5-0 start was in 2009.

LSU needs to be careful. All four of its losses to Ole Miss since 2009 have come in Oxford.

Another game sure to draw huge viewership is No. 8 Southern California at Colorado, where Deion Sanders and his Buffaloes try to rebound from their humbling 42-6 loss at Oregon.

Best game

The Fighting Irish are in bounce-back mode after their devastating, last-second home loss to Ohio State. Sam Hartman should be motivated to get another crack at Duke. As Wake Forest’s quarterback last year, he threw for 347 yards and three touchdowns but was intercepted on his last pass in a 34-31 loss to the Blue Devils.

Duke has won four straight by 20-plus points to open a season for the first time in program history. The last three of those have come against undistinguished opponents, and that Labor Day win over then-No. 9 Clemson has lost some of its luster with the Tigers struggling.

Heisman watch

LSU QB Jayden Daniels overcame a slow start to throw for four touchdowns against Arkansas last week. He also became the sixth FBS player in history to throw for 10,000 yards and rush for 2,000 in a career. Now come back-to-back road games against ranked opponents — this week at No. 20 Mississippi and next week at No. 23 Missouri.