

US military struck Venezuelan drug boat

The Washington Post

A U.S. military strike on suspected drug smugglers in the Caribbean Sea killed 11 people Tuesday, according to President Donald Trump, who claimed that the “Narcoterrorists” targeted in the operation were affiliated with a criminal gang that acts at the direction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

The attack occurred “while the terrorists were at sea in International waters transporting illegal narcotics, heading to the United States,” Trump wrote on social media. “... Please let this serve as notice to anybody even thinking about bringing drugs into the United States of America. BEWARE!”

Overhead imagery that Trump posted along with his statement shows a modestly sized boat speeding through open water. Moments later an

explosion occurs and the vessel appears engulfed in flames.

Tuesday’s deadly strike is a dramatic escalation that coincides with the administration’s growing counternarcotics focus in Latin America and its intensifying feud with Maduro.

The Venezuelan government made no immediate comment on the strike.

In a news conference Monday, the Venezuelan leader denounced the U.S. military’s heightened presence in the Caribbean and called the recent deployment of eight warships there “an extravagant, unjustified, immoral and absolutely criminal” threat against Venezuela.

“In the face of this maximum military pressure,” he said, “we have declared maximum preparedness for the defense of Venezuela.”

Maduro directed most of his

comments against Trump’s secretary of state, Marco Rubio, who he said wants Trump “to stain his hands in blood” with “a terrible war against the people of South America and the Caribbean” and “a massacre of the Venezuelan people.”

Rubio told reporters in Miami that the president would continue to strike cartels as long as they’re active in the region.

“The president is going to be on offense,” he told reporters before boarding a flight to Mexico on a previously planned diplomatic trip. Trump, he added, “has been very clear that he’s going to use the full power of America, and the full might of the United States, to take on and eradicate these drug cartels no matter where they’re operating from or how long they’ve been able to act with impunity.”

Trump said in his social media post that U.S. forces had

“positively identified” the vessel’s crew as members of Tren de Aragua, or TdA, a group the administration has sought to connect to Maduro and violent crime and drug trafficking within the United States.

In a secret assessment in April, U.S. intelligence agencies said that Maduro’s government “probably does not have a policy of cooperating with TdA and is not directing TdA movement to and operations in the United States.” Rather, the assessment said, the Venezuelan regime, while sometimes tolerating the gang’s activities inside Venezuela, largely views it as a potential security threat.

The assessment contradicted Trump’s claim that Maduro controls the group, a rationale he used in invoking the Alien Enemies Act as justification to deport alleged gang members without due process.

Pentagon eyes JAGs to fill in for immigration court

The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has tasked the branches of the armed services with finding up to 600 military lawyers to serve as temporary immigration judges in response to a request for assistance from the Department of Homeland Security, two people familiar with the request told *The Washington Post*.

The Pentagon is looking to identify military lawyers, known as judge advocates general, or JAGs, across active-duty services, the National Guard and the reserves to step in as judges to support immigration or law enforcement court proceedings. The Trump administration’s crackdown on illegal

immigration is already filling some court dockets, and both the military and the Department of Homeland Security are looking for ways to support expanded operations in major American cities.

“At the request of the Department of Justice, the Department of Defense is identifying qualified Judge Advocates and civilian attorneys for details to serve as Temporary Immigration Judges. These DOD attorneys will augment existing resources to help further combat a backlog of cases by presiding over immigration hearings,” chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell said in a statement.

But the use of military lawyers has raised concern, another

person familiar with the planning said — speaking like the others on the condition of anonymity out of fear of retaliation — that those officers may not have experience with immigration court proceedings or may receive insufficient training for complicated and potentially life-altering deportation hearings.

Each service branch has military lawyers whose primary roles are to provide service members legal advice and to represent or prosecute service members alleged to have violated the Uniform Code of Military Justice. The cases can range from lesser infractions, such as disrespect toward a senior officer, to more serious crimes including desertion, assault and

espionage.

There are several thousand lawyers serving on a part-time basis in the military reserves. It was not immediately clear how many JAGs there are in the active-duty forces.

Since the earliest days of his second term, Trump has leaned on the military to carry out his immigration policies, including sending thousands of troops to secure and patrol militarized zones along the border, building temporary facilities on military bases to hold detained people, using military aircraft to fly deportees out of the United States, and deploying National Guard troops for immigration enforcement raids in Los Angeles and Washington.

Allies eye potential peace force for Ukraine

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — Any Western security guarantee for Ukraine must not come at the cost of weakening NATO's own military readiness, the alliance's top official said Wednesday ahead of high-level talks in Paris focused on what resources Europe could provide in the event of a peace deal.

"We have to prevent spreading our resources too thinly. And that means that you always have to look (at) what the impact will be on the NATO plans," NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said during a joint news conference at his Brussels headquarters with Estonian President Alar Karis.

Karis said his country was prepared to send troops to Ukraine as part of an international peacekeeping force aimed at de-

terrering Russian aggression in a postwar scenario.

While NATO is not directly involved in the planning, Rutte said he and the alliance's top military commander, U.S. Air Force Gen. Alexis Grynkeiwich, were "discreetly part of all the conversations."

On Thursday, French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will co-host a meeting of the "coalition of the willing" comprised mostly of European allies. The discussions are expected to involve what potential security guarantees for Ukraine could look like and what type of peacekeeping force might be required.

The idea is to establish a setup that would prevent Russia from relaunching attacks on Ukrainian territory if a peace deal or cease-fire is established be-

tween the two countries.

President Donald Trump has signaled that the United States could play some kind of role in the effort, although he has ruled out putting American forces in Ukraine. Rutte on Wednesday also said the expectation was that the U.S. would be involved in some form.

While Trump is not expected to join Thursday's meeting, the session is expected to give NATO a clearer picture of what's to come.

"I expect tomorrow, or soon after tomorrow, to have clarity on what collectively we can deliver," Rutte said. "That means that we can engage even more intensely, also with the American side, to see what they want to deliver in terms of their participation in security guarantees."

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commis-

sion, said Sunday in an interview with Financial Times that there was a "clear road map" for troop deployments to Ukraine should the war come to an end.

Still, there has been little progress when it comes to making a peace deal that would bring a Western peacekeeping force to fruition.

Discussions about potential security guarantees in Ukraine also coincide with an ongoing force posture review at the Pentagon that could determine how many American troops are deployed in Europe. While the U.S. has not confirmed that it intends to make reductions, some allies are anticipating a significant drawdown.

Karis said he intends to discuss the situation with Grynkeiwich, who also leads U.S. European Command, during a meeting next week.

US frowns on idea of making Sicily bridge a NATO asset

Bloomberg

The U.S. said it disapproves of any creative accounting by European allies to reach a new NATO spending target, putting Italy on the spot as the government weighs whether to count the construction of the world's longest suspension bridge as military expenditure.

Along with other members of NATO, Italy committed to raising defense spending to 5% of GDP, satisfying a demand by President Donald Trump at a June summit in The Hague. The pledge prompted questions over whether a debt-saddled and stagnant economy can pull it off. It also drew scrutiny to an idea that a \$15.7 billion project connecting the island of Sicily to Italy's mainland could be paid for by classifying it as defense-related.

Not so fast, the U.S. warns.

"I have had conversations even today with some countries that are taking a very expanded view of defense related spending," U.S. Ambassador to NATO Matthew Whitaker said in an interview at the Bled Strategic Forum in Slovenia on Tuesday.

It was "very important" that the 5% target referred specifically to defense and defense-related spending and that the commitment was taken "with a straight face," the envoy said.

A number of Italian officials and politicians have been mulling the possibility of classifying the bridge as a military asset that could therefore be counted within the NATO expenditure.

One argument was that Sicily hosts a number of key military bases, including ones used by NATO forces.

Lee's portrait back on display at West Point

Associated Press

A painting of Gen. Robert E. Lee dressed in his Confederate uniform is back on display in West Point's library, several years after the storied academy removed honors to the Civil War military leader.

There also are plans to restore a bust of Lee that had been removed from a plaza at the U.S. Military Academy, and a quote from Lee about honor that was removed from a separate plaza is now on display beneath the portrait, an Army spokesperson said on Tuesday.

The items were removed to comply with a Department of Defense directive in 2022 that ordered the academy to address racial injustice and do away with installations that "com-

memorate or memorialize the Confederacy."

The portrait had been hanging in the library since the 1950s before being placed in storage.

The actions at West Point come as the Trump administration restores Confederate names and monuments that had been removed in recent years.

President Donald Trump issued an executive order titled "Restoring Truth and Sanity to American History" decrying efforts to reinterpret U.S. history.

The Army then restored the names of bases that originally honored Confederate leaders, finding service members with the same surnames to honor.

Lee graduated second in his West Point class in 1829 and later served as superintendent.

Chicago, Baltimore brace for Guards

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he's ready to order federal authorities to mobilize and combat crime in Chicago and Baltimore, despite staunch opposition from elected leaders and many residents in both cities.

Asked by reporters in the Oval Office about sending National Guard troops to the nation's third-largest city, Trump said, "We're going in," but added, "I didn't say when."

"I have an obligation," the president said. "This isn't a political thing."

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, a potential 2028 Democratic presidential contender, scoffed at the notion of sending military troops and federal agents into Chicago, reiterating Tuesday that federal intervention was not required or wanted.

Local officials in Baltimore have joined Democratic Maryland Gov. Wes Moore in similarly opposing federal law enforcement intervention.

Trump has already sent National Guard troops into Los Angeles and Washington, where he's also federalized the police force.

He has said he plans similar moves in other Democrat-run cities even as a federal judge on Tuesday deemed the California deployment illegal.

The president praised Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser for working with federal forces but repeated his criticism of Pritzker and Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, a Democrat. Trump said he'd love to have Pritzker call and say, "Send in the troops" — even though the two-term governor has repeatedly said he won't be doing that.

He said if Pritzker would "call me up, I would love to do it," Trump said. "Now, we're going to do it anyway. We have the

right to do it. Because I have an obligation to protect this country and that includes Baltimore."

He added, "Baltimore's a very unsafe place."

The state received its first contact about federal intervention on Saturday when the head of the Illinois State Police got a call from Gregory Bovino, chief of the Border Patrol's El Centro, Calif., sector, saying immigration agents would come to Chicago, according to Pritzker. The governor said no further details were offered.

Pritzker urged the public not to let the presence of federal agents spark tensions in the city but asked residents to look out for neighbors and to film interactions with federal agents and share them publicly.

"Authoritarians thrive on your silence," he said. "Be loud for America."

Trump's comments about Baltimore being included in his obligation to protect the country follows local officials in that city and Moore opposing federal law enforcement intervention.

Moore spokesman David Turner said, "While we try to decipher exactly what the President meant today, the Governor has been consistently clear: The use of the National Guard for municipal policing is theatrical and not sustainable."

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott listed some of the city's recent accomplishments in curbing gun violence. Scott has repeatedly accused the president of using racist rhetoric and targeting Black-led cities, like Baltimore and Chicago.

"Here's the reality in Baltimore," Scott wrote on X, noting that Baltimore homicides have reached historic lows amid sustained declines including the lowest number of homicides on record for the month of August.

8 killed, 50 hurt in Chicago over Labor Day weekend

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Eight people were killed and 50 others were wounded over the Labor Day weekend in dozens of shootings in Chicago, where President Donald Trump has seized on crime to try to justify a greater federal role on the city's streets.

The toll highlights Chicago's persistent struggle with gun violence and reveals a grim reality: spikes in shootings during summer holiday weekends, particularly on the South and West sides. The violence this time was deadlier than last Labor Day, when seven people were killed and more than 20 were wounded.

The violence has taken on a sharper national resonance this year, colliding with the politics of crime and immigration as the Trump administration plans to ramp up immigration enforcement in the city.

On Tuesday, Trump blasted the city and its leaders in a post on his social media platform,

calling it "the worst and most dangerous city in the World, by far."

Last year, the city had 573 homicides, or 21 per every 100,000 residents, according to the Rochester Institute of Technology. Other cities had a higher rate in 2024. Chicago's rate was down 25% compared to 2020.

Mayor Brandon Johnson and Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, both Democrats, have repeatedly said there's no reason to send the National Guard.

"We've got crime on the streets," Pritzker acknowledged last week. "Any person that gets killed or hurt is a victim of crime, is somebody that we ought to be addressing the challenges for. And we're doing that every day. But the way to do it is with police officers, not with troops."

Between Friday night and Monday night, 58 people were shot in 37 separate shootings in the nation's third-largest city, according to police.

DC mayor Bowser signals continued work with feds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a nod to continuing collaboration, the mayor of Washington, D.C., issued an order Tuesday to continue the work of an emergency operations center the city set up in response to the federal law enforcement surge ordered by President Donald Trump to battle what he insisted was out-of-control crime.

The order from Mayor Muriel Bowser, who is walking a tightrope between portions of her constituency and her relationship with Trump's White House, allows the center to continue managing the city's response and coordinate communications with federal law enforcement.

The order said the so-called "Safe and Beautiful Emergency Operations Center" will work with a number of federal agencies, including the FBI, the U.S. Park Police, the DEA, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Secret Service.

Speaking during a press conference last week, Bowser credited the surge of federal authorities with bringing down the level of crime in the city, including an 87% drop in carjackings.

But the mayor also said at that briefing, the presence of masked agents who were not always identifiable had led to a "break in trust between, police and community, especially with new federal partners."

Court rules against use of Alien Enemies Act

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal appeals court panel ruled Tuesday that President Donald Trump cannot use an 18th-century wartime law to speed the deportations of people his administration accuses of membership in a Venezuelan gang, blocking a signature administration push that is destined for a final showdown at the U.S. Supreme Court.

A three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, one of the most conservative federal appeals courts in the country, agreed with immigrant rights lawyers and lower court judges who argued that the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 was not intended to be used against

gangs like Tren de Aragua, the Venezuelan group that Trump targeted in his March invocation.

Lee Gelernt, who argued the case for the ACLU, said Tuesday: “The Trump administration’s use of a wartime statute during peacetime to regulate immigration was rightly shut down by the court. This is a critically important decision reining in the administration’s view that it can simply declare an emergency without any oversight by the courts.”

The Department of Homeland Security did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The administration deported people designated as Tren de

Aragua members to a notorious prison in El Salvador where, it argued, U.S. courts could not order them freed.

In a deal announced in July, more than 250 of the deported migrants returned to Venezuela.

The Alien Enemies Act was only used three times before in U.S. history, all during declared wars — in the War of 1812 and the two World Wars.

The Trump administration unsuccessfully argued that courts cannot second-guess the president’s determination that Tren de Aragua was connected to Venezuela’s government and represented a danger to the United States, meriting use of the act.

In a 2-1 ruling, the judges said they granted the preliminary injunction sought by the plaintiffs because they “found no invasion or predatory incursion” in this case.

The decision bars deportations from Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi.

In the majority were U.S. Circuit Judges Leslie Southwick, a George W. Bush appointee, and Irma Carrillo Ramirez, a Joe Biden appointee.

Andrew Oldham, a Trump appointee, dissented.

The majority opinion said Trump’s allegations about Tren de Aragua do not meet the historical levels of national conflict that Congress intended for the act.

Trump addresses speculation about his health

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Sometimes it feels like barely an hour can go by without hearing from President Donald Trump. So when he didn’t appear for one day, then two, then three, speculation started to swirl online about his health.

Not even a few glimpses of the president visiting his golf course over the weekend were enough to stanch the social media rumor mill fueled by po-

litical opponents. Trump was asked directly about it Tuesday at his first public event in a week.

“How did you find out over the weekend that you were dead?” asked Fox News’ Peter Doocy. “Did you see that?”

The president said he wasn’t aware that people were wondering if he had died, but he had heard there were concerns about his health.

Recently, Trump has been

seen with bruising on the back of his right hand, sometimes poorly concealed with makeup, and swelling around his ankles.

The White House has said Trump was diagnosed with chronic venous insufficiency, which means veins in the legs can’t properly carry blood back to the heart, causing it to pool in the lower legs. It’s a fairly common condition for older adults.

Press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the bruising was

from “frequent handshaking and the use of aspirin,” which Trump takes regularly to reduce the risk of heart attack.

In the past, Trump has been less than transparent about his health. In 2020, the White House withheld some details about Trump’s hospitalization with COVID-19, such as a concerning drop in his blood oxygen levels. It was later revealed that the president was much sicker than he let on.

House committee releases some files in Epstein case

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Oversight Committee on Tuesday publicly posted the files it has received from the Justice Department on the sex trafficking investigations into Jeffrey Epstein and his former girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell, responding to mounting pressure in Congress to force more disclosure in the case.

Still, the files mostly contain information that was already

publicly known or available.

The folders — posted online as a Google Drive — contained hundreds of image files of years-old court filings related to Epstein, who died in a New York jail cell in 2019 as he faced charges for sexually abusing teenage girls, and Maxwell, who is serving a lengthy prison sentence for assisting him.

The files also included video appearing to be body cam footage from police searches as well

as recordings and summaries of law enforcement interviews with victims detailing the abuse they said they suffered.

The committee’s release of the files showed how lawmakers are eager to act on the issue as they return to Washington after a monthlong break.

They quickly revived a political clash that has flummoxed House Republican leadership and roiled President Donald Trump’s administration.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., is trying to quell an effort by Democrats and some Republicans to force a floor vote on a bill that would require the Justice Department to release all of the information in the so-called Epstein files, except for the names of the victims and their other personal information.

Most, if not all, of the text documents posted Tuesday had already been public.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Soldier to help others, give away donated \$50K

CO COLORADO SPRINGS — After donors gave more than \$50,000 to Fort Carson Sgt. 1st Class David Hong to cover the cost of a new cancer treatment, the soldier now expects to give it all away to other cancer patients.

Hong, a religious affairs specialist diagnosed in July 2022, wants to see the money help other veterans and soldiers with cancer after his insurance provider, Tricare, changed its position and paid for the treatment, called histotripsy, to remove tumors from his liver.

Hong has been through numerous treatments for the stage 4 colon cancer that spread to other areas of his body. He believes his cancer was caused by his service in Afghanistan.

In mid-August, Hong got the histotripsy procedure that relies on ultrasound to liquefy tumors and places far less strain on the body than surgery. The dead tumor cells leave the body naturally.

A week after the procedure, Hong said he hoped to start working out again and he was aiming to participate in the Department of Defense's Warrior Games next year as he did this summer.

He is also medically retiring from the Army. After enlisting at 36, he is now 52.

Man arrested in 'ding dong ditch' shooting

TX DALLAS — A man was arrested on Tuesday for shooting and killing an 11-year-old Texas boy who was playing a "ding dong ditch" game with his friends in Hous-

ton, according to a news release from Houston police.

Gonzalo Leon Jr., 42, was booked into the Harris County jail and is facing a murder charge, the release said.

On Saturday night, officers responded to a shooting in the 9700 block of Racine Street and learned a boy was shot, the release said.

Julian Guzman, 11, was taken to a local hospital, where he died the next day, officials said.

"Officers were told that Guzman was ringing doorbells of homes in the area and running away," the release said.

A witness told police that the juvenile victim was running from a house after ringing the doorbell right before he was shot.

'Communal' python nesting site discovered

FL MIAMI — The pursuit of invasive Burmese pythons in South Florida led to the alarming discovery when four females were captured at a "communal nesting" site on an island, according to video shared on YouTube.

"Four giant pythons" and more than 40 eggs were collected within minutes, the video posted Aug. 7 shows.

Mike Kimmel, known as the Python Cowboy on social media, called the find "ground breaking" in multiple ways, including evidence that the females were returning to the same spot to build new nests atop older nests.

The site was littered with broken eggs from python broods that had hatched in previous years, he said.

"This hunt was next level. ... What we thought was just one

nesting python turned into something we've never seen before: Four big pythons, 3 active nests, and a female still full of eggs," Kimmel wrote on YouTube.

All the snakes were wrestled from their nests to be euthanized in accordance with state law. The clusters of eggs were also collected and frozen to prevent them from hatching.

Construction lift stolen, abandoned in Madison

WI MADISON — No arrests have been made after a construction lift was stolen and abandoned in downtown Madison on Sunday, Madison police reported.

At about 12:25 p.m., officers were sent to the 500 block of West Main Street after a caller reported seeing four males driving a crane down the street, spokesperson officer Anthony Vogel said in a statement.

Police found the crane abandoned in the middle of the street with the keys still in it, and they made arrangements to have the crane towed to a safe location.

Holiday gas prices high, but still lowest in years

CO COLORADO SPRINGS — Labor Day is over, and with it, the unofficial end to summer — and the summer driving season. Gas prices largely avoided the traditional summer-time hike this year, with costs remaining steady for the most part since Memorial Day Weekend. On Tuesday, the national average price for regular gas is \$3.186 per gallon.

Tuesday's pricing slightly decreased from Labor Day, when gas was \$3.19 per gallon. This

was higher than the projected \$3.15 for the national average this weekend and more expensive than Aug. 26, when the average price for a gallon of regular gas was \$3.161. It was also more costly than a month ago, when gas was \$3.152, according to AAA. Nevertheless, even with the unexpected slight surge in gas prices, it was the lowest national average cost for gas since 2020.

"It's been the cheapest summer to hit the road since the pandemic, a trend that will likely continue with the potential for the national average to fall below \$3 per gallon this fall," Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, said in a statement.

Assault suspect found dead after standoff

PA WILKES-BARRE — A man who took his own life during a several-hour standoff with law enforcement in South Wilkes-Barre on Sunday was wanted on allegations that he sexually and physically assaulted a woman.

Court records identified Don-tise Ahmond Rondel Oliver, 38, who barricaded himself inside his apartment at Barney and Richard streets, which resulted in a standoff with Wilkes-Barre police and Pennsylvania State Police troopers with the Special Emergency Response Team.

When city police went to the apartment with a warrant, Oliver opened fire on the officers, who were not injured in the shooting, according to a news release.

Oliver was later found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound inside his apartment.

— From wire reports

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Chiefs' new OL gets tested right away

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs will be starting a new left guard and tackle, the latter coming off a major knee injury, when they travel nearly 12 hours to play their season opener on foreign soil against one of the NFL's best defenses.

If that sounds like a nightmare for Kansas City quarterback Patrick Mahomes, how would you describe last season?

The Chiefs pondered a half-dozen options back then in trying to protect his blind side, ultimately giving up on second-round pick Kingsley Suamataia and second-year pro Wanya Morris. The result was predictable. Mahomes was sacked 36 times, eight more than any other season in his eight-year NFL career. His sack rate was a career-worst 5.83% of drop-backs, and that translated into a net yards-per-attempt of fewer than 6 for the first time in his career.

The whole mess culminated at the Super Bowl, when the Philadelphia Eagles not only

sacked Mahomes six times but hit him on 11 occasions in a 40-22 loss that never seemed as close as the final score might suggest.

"We knew we had to get better," Kansas City general manager Brett Veach acknowledged.

Whether they did will be revealed on Friday night in Sao Paulo, Brazil, where the Chiefs open the season against the Los Angeles Chargers. They will be starting first-round pick Josh Simmons at left tackle against a defense that features pass rushers Khalil Mack and Tuli Tuipulotu, while Suamataia — now converted to guard — will be lining up next to him on the left side.

The duo solidified starting roles early in training camp along an offensive line that includes All-Pro center Creed Humphrey, right guard Trey Smith — who just signed a four-year, \$94 million extension — and veteran right tackle Jawaan Taylor.

"I think every step of the way so far, they've done a great job of getting better and better, and kind of checking those boxes," Mahomes said. "This will be a great test for them. This is a prolific D-line with Khalil Mack and really all throughout. They have great depth at edge, at D-tackles, and they were one of the best defenses in the league this past year.

"It'll be another test for these guys," Mahomes said, "and I'm excited for them to go out there and accept the challenge."

What other choice do they have?

Simmons has been a revelation in the preseason, perhaps even surpassing what Kansas City expected of him when it selected him No. 32 overall in the April draft.

The biggest reason he slid so far in the first round was that he tore his patellar tendon last season at Ohio State.

Simmons wound up attending every optional workout, mandatory minicamp and training

camp practice, and he excelled when he got an opportunity in preseason games. Never once did it look as if his knee was causing him any problems.

"I took preseason with a grain of salt," Simmons said. "It's kind of backups here, maybe a guy who doesn't play this position here, so I just kind of took it with a grain of salt. How was my technique? Did I take the right footsteps? Etcetera."

He certainly made a believer of his most important critic: Andy Reid.

The Chiefs coach was predictably understated in his assessment.

"I'll probably be saying this every week through the season, but it's his first year, so there are going to be certain things that he hasn't seen before," Reid said, "and he's got to fight through that. But he's a talented kid and he's willing. He wants to do well and he's worked very hard. He's worked very hard to get himself into this position right here to be the starter."

With chaos around them, Nittany Lions cruise along

Associated Press

While a heart-pounding weekend of college football unfolded in the South and neighboring Ohio and more chaos is likely to come, all was tranquil and should continue to be in central Pennsylvania for the next three weeks.

Penn State won its opener against Nevada by five touchdowns and is favored to beat Florida International by six TDs on Saturday and FCS team Villanova by at least that many the following week.

The nonconference schedule is so soft it makes the Nittany Lions' hold on No. 2 in The Associated Press Top 25 tenuous even if they win by the expected large margins. Until Oregon shows up to play Sept. 27, Penn State figures

to be mostly out of sight and out of mind of the voters, barring the unthinkable.

Ohio State jumped over the Lions into the top spot in poll on Tuesday after a 14-7 win over preseason No. 1 Texas.

Only two first-place votes and five points separated Penn State and Texas entering the season. The Buckeyes now have a firm hold on No. 1 with 55 of the 66 first-place votes. Penn State received seven, 16 fewer than it had in the preseason poll.

No. 3 LSU rode the momentum of its 17-10 win at then-No. 4 Clemson to move up six spots and sits just 44 points behind the Nittany Lions. The Tigers could pull ahead of Penn State if they beat Louisiana Tech this week and No. 13 Florida the next.

No. 4 Georgia and No. 5 Miami also could move past Penn State before long. Georgia is at No. 22 Tennessee the same day the Nittany Lions play pat-a-cake with Villanova, and Miami hosts ascending South Florida and No. 13 Florida back-to-back weeks.

No. 6 Oregon could be ahead of Penn State, too, by the time the teams meet in the Nittany Lions' first real test.

The Ducks' next three games are at home against Oklahoma State, at Northwestern and at home against Oregon State.

Of course, the Nittany Lions' AP ranking won't matter if they win the Big Ten or finish in the top three or four.

It's all about College Football Playoff ranking, and it would be a surprise if Penn State isn't in

the 12-team field given that James Franklin has assembled perhaps his best roster in his 15 seasons. The CFP's initial rankings aren't announced until the first week of November.

So for now, Franklin should have no worries. He can do his highly visible job and then go home like a regular guy and catch some games. That's what he did this past weekend, after briefly chatting with friends and family in the kitchen.

"I tell everybody I'm going down to the basement," he said. "Not trying to be anti-social, but I want to go down in the basement and watch games. If they want to come down, great. But they know not to come down and start peppering me with questions."

Alcaraz, Djokovic, Pegula in US Open semis

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Carlos Alcaraz finger-wagged the crowd, beat Jiri Lehecka to the net and cruised into the semifinals at the U.S. Open.

The second-seeded Spaniard beat Lehecka 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 in the quarterfinals Tuesday, making some highlight-reel shots and putting his hand to his ear afterward to encourage more cheers from fans at Arthur Ashe Stadium. It's his first hard-court semifinal appearance at a major since winning his first Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open in 2023.

"I kind of met the Grand Slam version of Carlos," Lehecka said. "He just showed that he is one of the contenders, for sure. Everyone knew that, and he proved that."

Alcaraz is just 22 years old and is in the semifinals at a major for the ninth time. Only Rafael Nadal with 10 has more before turning 23.

Next up for Alcaraz is Novak Djokovic, the 24-time Grand Slam champion who knocked him out of the Australian Open quarterfinals in January and beat him for the gold medal at the Paris Olympics last year.

Djokovic got past Taylor Fritz

6-3, 7-5, 3-6, 6-4 at night. He marked the occasion by blowing kisses to those in Tuesday night's crowd pulling for the last American man in the field.

That was just a taste of the back-and-forth between Djokovic and some of the folks in the Arthur Ashe Stadium seats backing his opponent.

There were those applauding and cheering faults by Djokovic, considered a no-no in tennis.

It reached a head in the third set, when the fault celebrations grew more raucous as the clock passed 10:30 p.m. Djokovic asked chair umpire Damian Dumusois, "What are you going to do?" and then mockingly repeated the words the official kept saying in an unsuccessful attempt to settle the interruptions, "Thank you. Please. Thank you. Please."

Djokovic improved to 11-0 against 2024 runner-up Fritz and reached a record-extending 53rd Grand Slam semifinal, a total that includes a record-tying 14 at Flushing Meadows.

On the women's side, Jessica Pegula broke through her quarterfinal wall again, defeating Barbora Krejckova 6-3, 6-3 to get to the semifinals at a Grand Slam tournament for just the

second time in her career.

Pegula failed to advance into the semis in her first 22 main draw appearances at a major before reaching the final at Flushing Meadows a year ago, when she lost to Aryna Sabalenka. They'll meet again in the semifinals on Thursday after Sabalenka advanced in a walkover when Marketa Vondrousova withdrew because of injury.

"My biggest accomplishment last year was just getting past the quarterfinals," Pegula said. "Now I can say I've done it twice."

Pegula, who was eliminated in the fourth round at the Australian Open, the third round at the French Open and the first round at Wimbledon, is the first woman to make back-to-back U.S. Open semifinals without losing a set since Serena Williams from 2011-14.

"I've been able to kind of go into those matches and really take care of business," Pegula said. "I've played good players but (gotten) convincing wins over those players."

Pegula, 31, is seeded fourth and aiming for her first Grand Slam championship. She and No. 8 Amanda Anisimova are the on-

ly Americans left in the women's singles field.

Krejckova knocked out one of them, Taylor Townsend, who failed to convert eight match points when they met in the quarterfinals Sunday. Pegula was not perfect, but she played well enough to stay in control at all times and broke Krejckova one final time to end the match in under 90 minutes — on her first match point attempt.

"She had a couple really good returns when I was serving at 4-1," Pegula said. "We all saw what she did against Taylor, so I was happy that we're done."

Venus Williams' first Grand Slam tournament in two years ended Tuesday when she and Leylah Fernandez lost in the women's doubles quarterfinals to the top-seeded duo of Townsend and Katerina Siniakova 6-1, 6-2.

When the match finished after 56 minutes in Louis Armstrong Stadium, Williams smiled as she walked to the net to shake hands with Siniakova, then hug Townsend. Thousands of spectators rose to give Williams a standing ovation; Townsend and Siniakova then joined in, applauding for Williams.

Tickets for World Cup starting between \$60-6,730

Associated Press

MIAMI — Ticket prices for next year's World Cup will range initially from \$60 for group-stage matches to \$6,730 for the final, but could change as soccer's top event adopts dynamic pricing for the first time.

The prices are up from a range of \$25 to \$475 for the 1994 tournament in the United States and for the U.S. dollar equivalent \$69 to \$1,607 when ticket details were announced for the 2022 tournament in Qatar.

"I think the message is 'Get your tickets early,' especially if you know where you will be, because you live in that city, or you're a fan of the three hosting nations, and then you know already when and where they will play," said Heimo Schirgi, the World Cup's chief operating officer. "So that's the message: 'Get your tickets early,' because any-

thing could happen."

Next year's tournament runs from June 11 to July 19 and will be played at 11 sites in the U.S., three in Mexico and two in Canada. The tournament grew from 32 nations to 48 and from 64 games to 104.

The initial draw period will be limited to Visa card holders and will run from 11 a.m. EDT on the opening day through 11 a.m. EDT on Sept. 19. Those picked to buy tickets will be notified starting Sept. 29 and will be given a timeslot to purchase starting Oct. 1. While tickets for all 104 matches are being put on sale, receiving a timeslot does not guarantee tickets will be available.

Sales will be capped at four tickets per person per match, with no person being able to purchase more than 40 for the totality of the tournament.

FIFA did not respond to questions about additional details on prices.

A second phase, called an early ticket draw, will likely run from Oct. 27-31 with purchase timeslots from mid-November to early December.

A third phase, termed a random selection draw, will start after the final draw of teams Dec. 5 determines the World Cup schedule. FIFA said tickets will be available closer to the tournament "on a first-come, first-served basis."

FIFA also said it will start an official resale platform.

Hospitality packages have been sold since May. For the eight matches at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J., including the final July 19, prices range from \$3,500 to \$73,200 per person.

Alonso homers twice, Mets rout Tigers

Associated Press

DETROIT — Pete Alonso homered twice, Juan Soto went deep again and rookie Nolan McLean pitched six solid innings as the New York Mets beat the Detroit Tigers 12-5 on Tuesday night.

McLean (4-0) recovered from a rocky start to set down his final 14 batters. He gave up two runs on three hits and three walks while striking out seven, becoming the first Mets pitcher to earn a win in each of his first four major league appearances.

Luis Torrens launched a three-run homer for New York, which won the series opener 10-8 on Monday. It moved five games ahead of Cincinnati for the final National League wild-card spot.

The AL Central-leading Tigers have lost seven of nine.

Alonso's first homer was a 435-foot drive in the first inning that landed between the first and second row of shrubs behind the center-field wall. Soto and Alonso hit back-to-back solo shots in a six-run seventh that gave the Mets a 12-2 cushion.

Soto has 37 home runs in his first season with New York — five in the past five games. Alonso's second homer was his 33rd of the year.

Jeff McNeil drove in three runs and finished with three of the Mets' 17 hits.

Brandon Nimmo and Brett Baty also had three hits for New York.

Yankees 7, Astros 1: Trent Grisham hit his second grand slam in five days and Jazz Chisholm Jr. homered twice to lead visiting New York to a win over Houston.

The Yankees stayed 2½ games behind the first-place Blue Jays in the AL East.

Giancarlo Stanton struck out before Grisham's soaring shot to the seats in left field made it 6-0.

New York took an early lead with a two-run homer by Jazz Chisholm in the second. His solo

shot in the eighth made it 7-1 and gave him a fourth multi-homer game this season.

Pirates 9, Dodgers 7: Tommy Pham and Jared Triolo each drove in two runs, and host Pittsburgh spoiled Shohei Ohtani's 100th home run with Los Angeles to beat the Dodgers.

After Ohtani's solo shot, Teoscar Hernández hit a two-out RBI single and Andy Pages led off the next inning with his 24th homer, tying it 4-all.

Henry Davis put the Pirates ahead on an RBI single off Edgardo Henriquez (0-1) in the sixth. Triolo added a two-out, two-run double.

Blue Jays 12, Reds 9: George Springer went 3 for 4 with two home runs and three RBIs, Bo Bichette hit a three-run homer and visiting Toronto held on for a victory over Cincinnati.

The Blue Jays have 23 blown saves this season including Monday's 5-4 loss in the series opener, but Jeff Hoffman allowed one hit in the ninth for his 30th save.

Louis Varland (4-3) allowed one hit in 1⅓ innings of relief.

Angels 5, Royals 1: Mitch Farris pitched five effective innings to win his major league debut and Jo Adell hit a two-run homer that helped visiting Los Angeles defeat Kansas City.

Adell finished with three hits and Oswald Peraza had an RBI double for the Angels.

The Royals remained 2½ games behind the Mariners for the last American League wild-card spot.

Rays 6, Mariners 5: Junior Caminero hit his 40th homer and later drove in his 100th run as host Tampa Bay held on to beat Seattle.

Raleigh hit his 51st homer, extending his major league record for home runs by a catcher, but he popped out with two men on base to end the game against Garrett Cleavinger, who earned his second save.

Caminero went deep in the sixth inning against Bryan Woo

to tie the game at 3-all, and he reached 100 RBIs with a two-run double in the seventh off Gabe Speier (2-2) that made it 6-4.

Diamondbacks 5, Rangers 3: Ketel Marte hit a three-run homer that snapped a seventh-inning tie and host Arizona ended Texas' six-game win streak.

Jorge Barrosa and Jordan Lawlar singled off Hoby Milner (2-4) to begin the seventh. Marte sent a 414-foot drive to left-center for his 25th homer this season and a 5-2 lead.

The Rangers (72-68) remained 1½ games back of the Mariners for the final American League wild-card spot.

Nationals 5, Marlins 2: James Wood hit a two-run home run, rookie Daylen Lile drove in a run and scored another, and host Washington beat Miami.

Adams scored on an opposite-field single from Jacob Young. Adams knocked the ball out of the glove of Marlins third baseman Connor Norby on a tag attempt to reach third base on the prior play.

Jose A. Ferrer earned his sixth save of the season with a 1-2-3 ninth inning to secure the series win.

Giants 7, Rockies 4: Rafael Devers hit his 30th home run and Colorado starter Kyle Freeland took issue with Devers' celebration, leading to the ejections of Freeland, Willy Adames and Matt Chapman in the first inning of San Francisco's road win.

Devers admired his high-arching two-run shot. Freeland (3-14) exchanged words with Devers on his way to first, leading to a fracas and subsequent ejections.

Cubs 4, Braves 3: Kyle Tucker hit a three-run homer and added a single, Shota Imanaga pitched six solid innings and host Chicago beat Atlanta.

Imanaga (9-6) allowed three runs on five hits in six innings for the win.

Orioles 6, Padres 2: Emma-

nuel Rivera tied his career high with four RBIs on a pair of two-out singles and Tyler Wells won his season debut for visiting Baltimore, which beat San Diego to keep the Padres from gaining on the NL West-leading Los Angeles Dodgers.

Jeremiah Johnson homered for the second straight night for the Orioles and drove in two runs.

Baltimore, last in the AL East, won two straight against San Diego and went for a sweep Wednesday. The Padres remained 2½ games behind Los Angeles, which lost 9-7 at Pittsburgh.

Red Sox 11, Guardians 7: Alex Bregman legged out a hard chopper down the third-base line for an infield single with two outs in the eighth inning to drive in the go-ahead run, and host Boston beat Cleveland for its third straight victory.

Jarren Duran and Trevor Story followed with RBI doubles off Cade Smith (6-6) for the Red Sox's second four-run inning of the game. Justin Slaten (2-4) earned the win with a perfect eighth inning.

Cardinals 2, Athletics 1: Iván Herrera hit a go-ahead two-run home run, and Miles Mikolas pitched six solid innings to help host St. Louis beat the Athletics.

Mikolas (7-10) gave up a run on five hits in six innings. He didn't have a strikeout and walked one. Matt Svanson followed with two scoreless innings and JoJo Romero pitched a 1-2-3 ninth for his sixth save.

White Sox 12, Twins 3: Andrew Benintendi went 4 for 5 with two homers and five RBIs as visiting Chicago beat Minnesota.

Kyle Teel and Lenyn Sosa also homered and Brooks Baldwin had three hits for the White Sox, who have won three in a row.

Davis Martin (6-9) won his third straight decision, giving up three runs on six hits in six innings.