

Ukraine coy about drone strikes in Russia

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Drones struck inside Russia's border with Ukraine on Tuesday in the second day of attacks exposing the vulnerability of some of Moscow's most important military sites, observers said.

Ukrainian officials did not formally confirm carrying out drone strikes inside Russia, and they have maintained ambiguity over previous high-profile attacks.

But Ukrainian presidential adviser Mikhail Podolyak taunted Moscow in comments on Twitter, and Britain's Defense Ministry said Russia was likely to consider the attacks on Russian bases more than 300 miles from the border with Ukraine as "some of the most strategically significant failures of force protection since its invasion of Ukraine."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian authorities will "take the necessary measures" to enhance protection of key facilities.

Russian bloggers who generally maintain contacts with offi-

cials in their country's military criticized the lack of defensive measures.

"If something is launched into other countries' airspace, sooner or later unknown flying objects will return to the point of departure," Podolyak taunted Moscow in comments on Twitter. "The earth is round."

A fire broke out at an airport in Russia's southern Kursk region that borders Ukraine after a drone hit the facility, the region's governor said Tuesday.

In a second incident, an industrial plant 50 miles from the Ukrainian border was also targeted by drones, which missed a fuel depot at the site, Russian independent media reported.

Moscow blamed Kyiv for unprecedented attacks on two air bases deep inside Russia on Monday.

The attacks on the Engels base in the Saratov region on the Volga River and the Dyagilevo base in the Ryazan region in western Russia were some of the most brazen inside Russia during the war.

In the aftermath, Russian troops carried out another wave of missile strikes on Ukrainian territory, struck homes and buildings, and killed civilians, compounding damage done to power and other infrastructure over weeks of missile attacks.

Approximately half of the households in the Kyiv region remain without electricity, the regional governor said Tuesday, while authorities in the southern Odesa said they have managed to restore power to hospitals and some vital services.

In a new display of defiance from Kyiv, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy traveled to an eastern city near the front line. Marking Ukraine's Armed Forces Day, Zelenskyy traveled to the eastern Donetsk region and vowed to push Russian forces out of all of Ukraine's territory.

"Everyone sees your strength and your skill. ... I'm grateful to your parents. They raised real heroes," Zelenskyy said Tuesday in a video address to Ukrainian forces from the city of Sloviansk,

a key Ukrainian stronghold in the east.

A Russian pro-war blogger posting on the Telegram channel "Milinfolive" on Monday lashed out at Russian military leadership, alleging that incompetence and lack of proper fortifications at the airbases made Ukrainian drone strikes possible.

Russia's Defense Ministry said three Russian servicemen were killed and four others wounded by debris, and that two aircraft were slightly damaged.

Pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markov said the strikes "have raised questions about security of Russian military air bases."

The Engels base hosts Tu-95 and Tu-160 nuclear-capable strategic bombers that have been involved in strikes on Ukraine. Dyagilevo houses tanker aircraft used for mid-air refueling.

In a daily intelligence update on the war in Ukraine, Britain's Defense Ministry said the bombers would likely be dispersed to other airfields.

Final NDAA expected to rescind DOD vaccine order

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The final version of the fiscal 2023 defense authorization bill is likely to rescind Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's August 2021 memo ordering COVID-19 vaccines for most troops, a source familiar with the matter said Monday.

Ending the requirement, under which service members who aren't fully vaccinated are subject to discharge, has been a top priority of House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., and other senior Republicans in both chambers. McCarthy raised the issue with President Joe Biden in a meeting last week and reiterated over the weekend that the mandate should be repealed as part of the National Defense Au-

thorization Act.

Republicans have argued the requirement has led to unfair discharges for about 3,400 service members, undermining morale and impairing recruitment and retention at a time when they are under stress. But top Pentagon and White House officials viewed the requirement as an important element of ensuring military readiness and troops' health.

"After careful consultation with medical experts and military leadership, and with the support of the President, I have determined that mandatory vaccination against coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is necessary to protect the Force and defend the American people," Austin wrote in his

memo last year.

Austin's directive ordered the military service secretaries to "immediately begin full vaccination of all members of the Armed Forces under DoD authority on active duty or in the Ready Reserve, including the National Guard, who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19."

A bipartisan agreement among House and Senate negotiators will repeal that directive. But the new NDAA will not dictate what course the Pentagon must take going forward, the source said.

Congressional leaders are aiming to introduce the final compromise NDAA version as soon as Tuesday, with House floor action possible later in the week.

Air Force's 1st hypersonic weapon clears key hurdle

BY DOUG G. WARE

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Air Force has cleared a key hurdle that will allow the military branch to test-fire its first hypersonic weapon — an air-to-ground missile that can travel more than five times the speed of sound.

The Defense Department has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into hypersonic research and development in recent years, and military officials have stressed the importance of being a world leader when it comes to hypersonic defense technologies, especially because Russia and China are also developing them.

"They are completely new to everybody," Iain Boyd, professor of aerospace engineering at the University of Colorado, said during a podcast in August about the new type of weapon. "And that's part of the problem they present. They are difficult to defend against."

Air Force officials said the first step on the road to deploying its AGM-183A hypersonic system — validating the loading and unloading process — was cleared recently at Barksdale Air Force Base in northwestern Louisiana, which is home to the service's 2nd Bomb Wing.

The weapon — called the Air-Launched Rapid Response Weapon, or ARRW — is an air-to-ground missile powered by a rocket motor that can travel as fast as Mach 8, or eight times the speed of sound. It's built to be carried by the B-52 Strato-

fortress.

"It demonstrates the far-reaching capabilities of the B-52 and now it projects its combat capabilities even further with the ARRW system," Master Sgt. Caleb Nolen, armament systems manager of Barksdale's Air Force Global Strike Command, said of the test.

"The ARRW is the Air Force's first air-launched hypersonic weapon that gives combatant commanders the ability to hit time-sensitive targets faster than they were ever able to before," Air Force Global Strike Command said in a statement.

Development of the ARRW began in earnest in 2018 when the Pentagon gave Lockheed Martin a contract worth almost \$500 million to produce it. A preliminary test for the weapon was done a year later.

After making the first step, the Air Force is now clear to move on to the next hurdle in the process — live-fire testing, which is expected to begin sometime before the end of 2022. The Air Force said the ARRW should be operational within a year.

The United States has yet to deploy a modern hypersonic weapon, and the Pentagon has been aggressive in taking a leadership role in the advanced warfare technology. Russia and China have also spent billions to create hypersonic weapons. In fact, Russia claims it has already used its Kinzhal hypersonic missile during the war in Ukraine. That claim has not been publicly confirmed by the U.S. military.

Military branches pick officers to lead legal offices

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

Each of the military services has selected an officer to lead a new branch legal office to determine which felony cases to send to a court-martial for crimes such as sexual assault, murder and child abuse — a decision previously left to a service member's commander.

The four nominees' names were sent to Congress on Nov. 14, and all but the Navy's selection have been confirmed by the Senate.

The Army selected Col. Warren Wells, who is now the chief of personnel, plans and training for the Office of the Judge Advocate General at the Pentagon. He will oversee the Office of Special Trial Counsel, according to the Army.

The new legal offices will reduce a commander's influence on crimes that do not affect good order and discipline within units — an effort that some members of Congress have advocated to enact for more than a decade because the military has failed to reduce the number of sexual assaults within its ranks.

The Navy selected Capt. Jonathan Stephens to serve as lead special trial counsel for the Navy's Office of Special Trial Counsel, according to the Defense Department.

The Marine Corps confirmed it selected Col. Kevin Woodard to be first lead special trial counsel of the Marine Corps.

Col. Christopher Brown was selected for promotion to lead the Air Force Office of the Special Trial, said Laurel Falls, a service spokeswoman.

Marines name 1st female force-level sergeant major

BY JOSEPH DITZLER

Stars and Stripes

The next chief enlisted adviser to the commander of III Marine Expeditionary Force on Okinawa will write a page in Marine Corps history.

Sgt. Maj. Joy Kitashima will become the first female Marine to fill the senior enlisted role in a Marine expeditionary force when she takes up her new responsibilities next year at Camp Courtney, according to a spokesman for III MEF.

"She will be the first ever female force-level sergeant major in the Marine Corps," Capt. Brett Dornhege-Lazaroff told Stars and Stripes by phone Tuesday.

Kitashima, a native of Bloomington, Ill., is scheduled to succeed Sgt. Maj. Eric Cook at III MEF in July 2023, according to a Marine Corps message Nov. 22 from Commandant Gen. David Berger.

Lt. Gen. James Bierman Jr. has commanded III MEF since Nov. 9, 2021.

III MEF is a huge organization, a "force in

readiness" in the Western Pacific, prepared for crisis response or combat operations, according to its website.

Kitashima, who joined the Corps in 1996 and trained as a military police officer at Fort McClellan, Ala., previously served as sergeant major for Marine Corps Installations Pacific, also headquartered on Okinawa at Camp Foster, according to her Marine Corps biography. She is currently sergeant major of the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, N.C.

Justices spar on gay, religious rights case

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court's conservative majority sounded sympathetic Monday to a Christian graphic artist who objects to designing wedding websites for gay couples, the latest collision of religion and gay rights to land at the high court.

The designer and her supporters have said ruling against her would force artists — from painters and photographers to writers and musicians — to do work that is against their beliefs. Her opponents, meanwhile, have said if she wins, a range of businesses will be able to discriminate, refusing to serve Black, Jewish or Muslim customers,

interracial or interfaith couples or immigrants.

Over more than two hours of spirited arguments, the justices repeatedly tested out what ruling for the designer could mean, using detailed and sometimes colorful hypothetical scenarios. Those included a Black Santa asked to take a picture with a child dressed in a Ku Klux Klan outfit, a photographer asked to take pictures for the marital infidelity website Ashley Madison and an invented food business called "Grandma Helen's Protestant Provisions."

The case comes at a time when the court is dominated 6-3 by conservatives and follows a series of cases in which the jus-

tices have sided with religious plaintiffs. Across the street from the court, meanwhile, lawmakers in Congress are finalizing what would be a landmark bill protecting same-sex marriage, legislation prompted by a different high court case from earlier this year.

During arguments Monday, the court's three liberal justices expressed concerns about ruling for website designer and graphic artist Lorie Smith while conservatives suggested support for her.

Justice Neil Gorsuch, one of three high court appointees of former President Donald Trump, described Smith as "an individual who says she will sell

and does sell to everyone, all manner of websites, (but) that she won't sell a website that requires her to express a view about marriage that she finds offensive."

Smith, who is based in Colorado, doesn't currently create wedding websites. She wants to but says her Christian faith prevents her from creating websites celebrating same-sex marriages.

Colorado, like most other states, has what's called a public accommodation law that says if Smith offers wedding websites to the public, she must provide them to all customers. Businesses that violate the law can be fined, among other things.

Officers honored for defending US Capitol

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Law enforcement officers who defended the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, were honored Tuesday with Congressional Gold Medals nearly two years after they fought supporters of then-President Donald Trump in a brutal and bloody attack.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi praised the "heroes" as she opened the ceremony in the the stately Capitol Rotunda, which was overrun that day when Trump supporters roamed the halls trying to stop Congress from certifying Joe Biden's election.

In bestowing Congress' highest honor, Pelosi praised the heroes for "courageously answering the call to defend our democracy in one of the nation's darkest hours."

To recognize the hundreds of officers who were at the Capitol on Jan. 6, the medals will be placed in four locations — at U.S. Capitol Police

headquarters, the Metropolitan Police Department, the Capitol and the Smithsonian Institution. President Joe Biden said when he signed the legislation last year that a medal will be placed at the Smithsonian museum "so all visitors can understand what happened that day."

The ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda comes as Democrats, just weeks away from losing their House majority, race to finish a nearly 18-month investigation of the insurrection. Democrats and two Republicans conducting the probe have vowed to uncover the details of the attack, which came as Trump tried to overturn his election defeat and encouraged his supporters to "fight like hell" in a rally just before the congressional certification.

The Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor Congress can bestow, has been handed out by the legislative branch since 1776.

Arizona certifies election despite GOP complaints

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Arizona's top officials certified the midterm election results Monday, formalizing victories for Democrats over Republicans who falsely claimed the 2020 election was rigged.

The certification opens a five-day window for formal election challenges. Republican Kari Lake, who lost the race for governor, is expected to file a lawsuit in the coming days after she spent weeks criticizing the administration of the election.

Election results have largely been certified without issue around the country, but Arizona was an exception. Several Republican-controlled counties delayed their certification despite no evidence of problems with the vote count. Cochise County in southeastern Arizona blew past the deadline last week, forcing a judge to intervene on Thursday and order the county supervisors to certify the election by the end of the day.

"Arizona had a successful election," Secretary of State Katie Hobbs, a Democrat who beat

Lake in the race for governor, said before signing the certification. "But too often throughout the process, powerful voices proliferated misinformation that threatened to disenfranchise voters."

The statewide certification, known as a canvass, was signed by Hobbs, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, Republican Attorney General Mark Brnovich and Chief Justice Robert Brutinel, a Ducey appointee.

When the same group certified the 2020 election, Ducey silenced a call from then-President Donald Trump, who was at the time in a frenetic push to persuade Republican allies to go along with his attempts to overturn the election he lost.

"This is a responsibility I do not take lightly," Ducey said. "It's one that recognizes the votes cast by the citizens of our great state."

Republicans have complained for weeks about Hobbs' role in certifying her own victory, though it is typical for election officials to maintain their position while running for higher office.

China reiterates nuclear policy amid US report

Associated Press

BEIJING — China strictly adheres to its policy of no first use of nuclear weapons “at any time and under any circumstances,” its Defense Ministry said Tuesday in a scathing response to a U.S. report alleging a major buildup in Beijing’s nuclear capabilities.

The Pentagon last week released an annual China security report that warned Beijing would likely have 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035, and that it has provided no clarity on how it plans to use them.

That report “distorts China’s national defense policy and military strategy, makes groundless speculation about China’s military development and grossly interferes in China’s internal affairs on the issue of Taiwan,” ministry spokesperson Tan Kefei said in a statement.

Tan accused the U.S. of being the “biggest troublemaker and destroyer of world peace and stability,” and repeated that Beijing has never renounced the use of force to conquer self-governing Taiwan, a U.S. ally that China considers part of its territory.

Tan did not directly address the report’s allegations about a Chinese nuclear buildup, but blamed the U.S. for raising nuclear tensions, particularly with its plan to help

Australia build a fleet of submarines powered by U.S. nuclear technology, which the French president has described as a “confrontation with China.”

Australia has said it will not seek to arm the submarines with nuclear weapons. Tan also accused the U.S. of having the world’s largest nuclear arsenal, although that title is actually held by Russia, a close Chinese military, economic and diplomatic partner.

As of 2022, Russia possesses a total of 5,977 nuclear warheads compared to 5,428 in the U.S. inventory, according to the Federation of American Scientists. China currently has 350 nuclear warheads, according to the federation.

China has long adhered to what it calls a purely defensive national security strategy, including a claim that it will never be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict.

“What needs to be emphasized is that China firmly pursues the nuclear strategy of self-defense and defense, always adheres to the policy of no first use of nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstances, and maintains its nuclear force at the minimum level required for national security,” Tan said in the statement, which was posted on the ministry’s website.

Energy crews work to restore power in NC

AP/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. — Power should be restored by Thursday morning to thousands of homes in a central North Carolina county that have been without electricity for several days after an attack on the electric grid, Gov. Roy Cooper said Tuesday.

“I hope it’s earlier. I mean, people are really hurting,” Cooper told reporters.

Duke Energy said crews were making progress on restoring power to Moore County, where authorities said one or more people shot up two substations, but the repairs won’t be complete until later in the week. Officials have said the damage requires sophisticated repairs and delivery of equipment from outside of the area.

Nearly 36,000 customers were without power in the county Tuesday, down from a peak of about 45,000, according to poweroutage.us.

The governor called for a thorough assessment of the state’s critical infrastructure Tuesday morning at a Council of State meeting — a collective body of elected officials comprising the executive branch.

In the short term, the state has sent generators to Moore County and is helping feed residents. Law enforcement in surrounding counties has been more vigilant about monitoring nearby substations, he said.

“This seemed to be too easy,” Cooper said after the meeting. “People knew what they were doing to disable the substation, and for that much damage to be caused — causing so much problem, economic loss, safety challenges to so many people for so long — I think we have to look at what we might need to do to harden that infrastructure.”

Mike Causey, the North Carolina insurance commissioner and state fire marshal, called the attack “a wake-up call to provide better security at our power substations.”

Echoing the governor’s remarks, Duke Energy said in a message to customers posted on its website that it is on track to restore power throughout the county by Thursday morning, in line with previous estimates.

“Our technicians continue to work in 24-hour shifts and remain on schedule to bring service back on by early Thursday,” the statement said.

Police have not released a motive or said what kind of firearm was used.

‘Torso Killer’ takes responsibility for 5 women’s deaths in ’60s, ’70s

Associated Press

MINEOLA, N.Y. — A serial slayer known as the “Torso Killer” already convicted of 11 homicides admitted on Monday that he also killed five women on Long Island in the late ’60s and early ’70s.

Richard Cottingham was sentenced Monday to 25 years to life for the slaying of 23-year-old Diane Cusick, who was killed in February 1968 after buying shoes at the Green Acres Mall in Nassau County.

As part of a plea deal, Cottingham received immunity from prosecution for the four other killings.

The 76-year-old prisoner attended the hearing via a video feed from a New Jersey prison.

“Today is one of the most emotional days we’ve ever had in the Nassau County dis-

trict attorney’s office,” District Attorney Anne Donnelly said at a news conference where she was joined by several family members of Cottingham’s victims.

“In the case of Diane Cusick, her family has waited nearly 55 years for someone to be held accountable for her death.”

Donnelly said Cottingham, believed to be one of the United States’ most prolific serial killers, “has caused irreparable harm to so many people and so many families, there’s almost nothing I can say to give comfort to anyone.”

Cottingham has claimed he was responsible for up to 100 homicides.

He is known as the “Torso Killer” because he allegedly cut off the heads and limbs of some of his victims, authorities have said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman attacks 6 deputies at airport

LA NEW ORLEANS — Officials said a woman bit, kicked and spat on six sheriff's deputies while refusing to exit a plane at an airport in Louisiana early Thanksgiving Day, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported.

Authorities said the 25-year-old woman attacked Jefferson Parish sheriff's deputies at Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport, according to local news reports.

Deputies were responding to Spirit airline workers' requests to remove the woman, who had reportedly grown irate and asked nearby passengers who she assumed to be Latino whether they were smuggling cocaine.

Police charged the woman with six counts of battery on a police officer, three counts of disturbing the peace, one count of resisting arrest by force and another count of remaining after forbidden, according to reports.

Jacket still hot from dryer sparks blaze

NC BURLINGTON — A jacket hot from a dryer sparked a fire that damaged a North Carolina home, a fire official said.

Firefighters responded to a home on Herman Blue Court in Burlington and found light smoke, the Burlington Fire Department said in a news release.

The fire was found to be accidental and caused by "excessively hot" laundry taken from the dryer to the bedroom, where

clothes and furniture caught fire, officials said.

Fire department spokesperson Daniel Shoffner said the resident pulled laundry from the dryer and put it in the bedroom before leaving for work, WFMY-TV reported. The pile included a jacket made from synthetic material with tags suggesting hang drying instead of using the dryer, Shoffner said. The jacket smoldered and eventually the clothes combust- ed, he said.

Shoffner said he had never heard of this happening before.

Treasures from 1857 ship up for auction

NV RENO — Since the recovery of sunken treasure began decades ago from an 1857 shipwreck off the coast of South Carolina, tens of millions of dollars worth of gold has been sold.

But scientists, historians and collectors said the real fortunes will begin to hit the auction block on Saturday. For the first time, hundreds of Gold Rush-era artifacts entombed in the wreckage of the S.S. Central America will go on public sale.

Known as the "Ship of Gold," the steamship sank on Sept. 12, 1857, in a hurricane on its way from Panama to New York City.

Bob Evans, the chief scientist for every underwater recovery mission, said that the items might seem ordinary, but they offer an extraordinary glimpse into the daily life of the passengers and crew, from gold-field workers to high-society San Franciscans.

A few pieces described as priceless rarities could fetch as much as \$1 million at Saturday's

public auction in Reno, like the lid from the oldest known Wells Fargo treasure shipment box or heavy duty miner's work pants from the Gold Rush-era — perhaps one of the first of their kind ever made for or by Levi Strauss.

18 people arrested as retail theft ring busted

CA LOS ANGELES — Eighteen people were arrested when Los Angeles police busted an organized crime ring that targeted clothing and shoe stores, authorities said.

The suspects ranged in age from 15 to 20 and were linked to retail thefts where about \$23,000 worth of goods were stolen, according to the Los Angeles Police Department.

They were likely involved in at least 14 earlier incidents, with stolen goods valued at \$90,000, police said.

The stolen merchandise was recovered and returned to the retailers, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Man charged after ad has candidate number

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire man is accused of posting a fake Craigslist ad for a free trailer with a legislative candidate's number on the day of the election, later telling investigators he meant it to be a joke after a flood of unwanted calls and texts jammed up the candidate's cellphone.

Michael Drouin, 30, of Merrimack, was indicted on a felony charge of interference with election communications, the

state attorney general's office said. The charge is related to an April 2021 special election in Merrimack to replace Republican New Hampshire House Speaker Dick Hinch, who died of COVID-19 in December 2020.

The candidate, Bill Boyd, a Republican who went on to win, turned off his phone after receiving more than 37 phone calls or text messages in 45 minutes on the morning of the election, prosecutors said.

A complaint was filed by the executive director for the New Hampshire Republican Party.

"It was a joke, I meant no harm," he told investigators in October 2021, according to a police affidavit. He said he wasn't sure why he had chosen the date of the election, saying it was bad timing.

Dog injured while saving sheep from coyotes

GA DECATUR — A Georgia sheepdog is recovering at home after killing a pack of coyotes that attacked his owner's flock of sheep, farmer John Wierwiller said.

Casper, a 20-month old Great Pyrenees from Decatur, fought off a pack of coyotes who were threatening Wierwiller's sheep farm, he said. The fight lasted longer than half an hour, left eight coyotes dead and bloodied Casper, with skin and part of his tail torn off, Wierwiller told Atlanta's WAGA-TV.

He scampered off but returned injured two days later after Wierwiller put out a call on social media.

LifeLine Animal Project has raised more than \$15,000 for the sheepdog's hospital bills.

— From wire reports

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Verlander, Turner get mulityear deals

Associated Press

SANDIEGO — Justin Verlander is going to the New York Mets. Trea Turner has agreed to a blockbuster deal with the Philadelphia Phillies. There are three more high-profile shortstops in free agency, along with ace pitcher Carlos Rodón.

And one big slugger looms above the whole market.

Baseball's first winter meetings since 2019 kicked into high gear Monday when Verlander agreed to an \$86.7 million, two-year deal with New York, and Turner joined Philadelphia for a \$300 million, 11-year contract. Clayton Kershaw also returned to the Los Angeles Dodgers on a \$20 million, one-year deal.

The biggest outstanding question at the end of an eventful day at a downtown San Diego hotel centered on the status of AL MVP Aaron Judge, who was all the way across the country at the NFL's "Monday Night Football" game at Tampa Bay — right across the street from the Yankees' spring training complex.

Judge is a free agent after setting an American League record with 62 homers, powering the Yankees to the AL East title. He also tied for the major league lead with 131 RBIs and just missed a Triple Crown with a .311 batting average.

Yankees general manager Brian Cashman, fresh off getting a new four-year contract,

said he spoke with one of Judge's agents on Monday.

"We are in active conversations," Cashman said. "Certainly we'd love to land the plane favorably here in New York in the Bronx. But we're not flying the plane. And so we'll wait, we'll wait for this process to play out."

Judge, a Northern California native, also visited with the San Francisco Giants last month, and there likely are more teams monitoring the market for the 6-foot-7 outfielder who turns 31 in April.

"I feel good about what we've done but some of it is out of our control. I think we've put ourselves in position," said Farhan Zaidi, the president of baseball operations for the Giants.

Judge was drafted by New York in 2013 and spent his first seven big league seasons with the Yankees. But Cashman said he hasn't received any indication from Judge's camp that the team will have any last chance to match any offers to the slugger.

Verlander made his decision Monday, agreeing to a contract with the Mets that is worth \$43,333,333 per year and includes a vesting player option for 2025 at \$35 million, according to a person familiar with the negotiations who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because there was no

immediate announcement.

Verlander departs Houston to step in for Jacob deGrom, who left New York after nine seasons when he agreed to a \$185 million, five-year contract with Texas last week. It also puts Verlander on the same team as Max Scherzer after they played together with the Detroit Tigers from 2010-14.

Mets general manager Billy Eppler declined to confirm the Verlander move, but he said the team was working on its pitching plans.

Turner's deal includes a no-trade clause, according to another person familiar with the negotiations who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because there was no immediate announcement.

Turner joins a Philadelphia team that made it to the World Series this year before losing to Verlander and the Astros. He also reunites with slugger Bryce Harper after the two played together with the Washington Nationals from 2015-18.

Phillies President Dave Dombrowski declined to confirm the move, but acknowledged the importance of adding a shortstop.

Turner rejected a \$19.65 million qualifying offer from the Dodgers in November, joining a stellar group of free-agent shortstops that also included Carlos Correa, Xander Bogaerts and Dansby Swanson.

Four quarterbacks selected as Heisman Trophy finalists

Associated Press

Quarterbacks Stetson Bennett of Georgia, Max Duggan of TCU, C.J. Stroud of Ohio State and Caleb Williams of Southern California were announced as finalists for the Heisman Trophy on Monday night.

The award given to the outstanding player in college football, determined by a vote of more than 900 sports journalists and past winners, will be presented Saturday at the Lincoln Center in New York.

Bennett had been a bit under the radar as a Heisman candidate and perhaps a mild surprise to be one of the top four vote-getters for no reason other than that his statistics don't jump off the page.

Bennett, a sixth-year player from Blackshear, Ga., does know how to win, though. He has quarterbacked the defending national champion Bulldogs to a second straight spot in the College Football Playoff and is 24-1 as a starter since last season.

Duggan willed TCU to its first CFP ap-

pearance with an inspiring performance in the Big 12 championship game against Kansas State.

Duggan, who had heart surgery two years ago, was at the center of one of the signature sequences of the season. It happened late in the fourth quarter when he broke loose for 40 yards and then, visibly out of breath, ran for an 8-yard TD and completed his two-point pass to bring the Frogs back from an 11-point, fourth-quarter deficit. Duggan came up just short of the goal line on a run in overtime, and the Frogs lost for the first time this season, 31-28.

Stroud, in his third season out of Inland Empire, Calif., is a Heisman finalist for the second year in a row. He was fourth in voting last year. He came into this season regarded as the front-runner and remained the favorite as Ohio State piled up impressive numbers through the first eight games.

But he struggled against Northwestern, the worst team in the Big Ten, and he

couldn't rally the Buckeyes in the second half of their most recent game, a 45-23 home loss to Michigan.

Still, Stroud has the nation's highest passer rating and is tied for the lead with 37 touchdown passes.

Williams transferred to USC from Oklahoma in February, two months after Lincoln Riley was hired away from the Sooners.

The second-year player from Washington is responsible for a nation-leading 21.7 points per game. He turned in a gutty performance in the Pac-12 championship game Friday, injuring his left hamstring on a 59-yard run in the first quarter but staying in the game and finishing with 363 yards passing and three touchdowns in the 47-24 loss to Utah.

Williams has thrown for 37 touchdowns against just four interceptions and has amassed a school-record 4,447 total yards. Including his 10 rushing touchdowns, he has accounted for a school-record 47.

Brady, Buccaneers edge Saints with late TDs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — A relieved Tom Brady stepped to the podium with a big smile.

“Just like we drew it up,” the seven-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback said after throwing two touchdown passes in the final three minutes Monday night to help the Tampa Bay Buccaneers rally from a 13-point deficit and beat the New Orleans Saints 17-16.

Clearly frustrated and on the verge of being held without a TD pass at home by the Saints for the third straight season, Brady led scoring drives of 91 and 63 yards and the Bucs (6-6) back to .500, tightening the team’s grip on first place in the weak NFC South.

“We’ve had a lot of games come down to the end,” Brady said. “Some we’ve won, some we’ve lost, which is why we’re 6-6. It’s not where we want to be, but we’ll keep fighting.”

Brady, 45, tossed a 1-yard TD pass to rookie Cade Otton, pulling within 16-10 with exactly three minutes remaining. He got the ball back with 2:29 to go, then won it with a 6-yard throw

to another rookie, Rachaad White, with three seconds left.

“They played hard, they showed grit. It was a complete team effort, obviously,” Bucs coach Todd Bowles said. “Defense got the ball back, the offense cashed it in. Got it back one more time, cashed it in one more time.”

The Saints (4-9) swept the season series between the division rivals each of the past two seasons, holding Brady without a TD pass in a 38-3 rout in 2020 and in a 9-0 road victory in 2021.

Tampa ended a seven-game, regular-season losing streak in the series with a 20-10 victory in Week 2, sacking Jameis Winston six times and forcing five turnovers.

Andy Dalton, who didn’t play in the earlier meetings, threw for 225 yards and a touchdown without an interception for New Orleans. The Saints, however, ultimately paid for having to settle for three field goals by Wil Lutz on drives deep into Bucs territory.

The Bucs rebounded from an overtime loss to Cleveland to extend their division lead over the

Atlanta Falcons to 1½ games.

The last-place Saints missed out on an opportunity to pull into a tie for second with the Falcons. None of the four teams in the NFC South has a winning record.

“I’ve got to go into a bye week knowing that we should have beat this team,” Saints defensive end Cameron Jordan said. “The first time we should have beat this team. This time we should have. ... We should have beat a lot of other teams. We didn’t.”

Brady, who before the game exchanged greetings with the biggest prize on this winter’s baseball free-agent market, AL MVP Aaron Judge, finished 36-for-54 for 281 yards and two touchdowns.

The Bucs quarterback led a long field-goal drive on the opening possession of the game, but only had sporadic success after that until finally getting the Bucs in the end zone with help from a 44-yard pass interference penalty on Saints cornerback Paulson Adebo.

Ottom scored on the next play. “Tom Brady is Tom Brady.

He was meticulous in staying to the plan of his dink and dunk,” Jordan said. “He had the one prayer that he sent out there and got bailed out with the flag.”

A week after being shut out for the first time in 332 games, the Saints built a 10-3 halftime lead on Dalton’s 30-yard TD pass to Taysom Hill and a 38-yard field goal set up by just the third interception Brady has thrown all season.

Demario Davis’ pick was also only the eighth takeaway by New Orleans’ defense — by far a league-low — in 13 games. Defensive end Cameron Jordan later forced a fumble that the Saints turned into a 12-play, 7-minute, 20-second drive that Lutz finished with a 21-yard field goal, making it 13-3 late in the third quarter.

“We didn’t make the plays when they were there at the end of the game and they did. That’s what it came down to,” Dalton said. “We had opportunities for that game to be very different than what it was, and I feel like I’m a broken record saying the same thing. We just missed opportunities.”

Timme, No. 18 Gonzaga close fast, rally past Kent State

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Drew Timme scored 29 points and grabbed 17 rebounds, and No. 18 Gonzaga closed the game on an 11-0 run to rally past Kent State 73-66 on Monday night.

The nation’s longest home winning streak was extended to 69 games, but not without a major scare by the Golden Flashes. Kent State led 66-62 with 3:38 left after Miryne Thomas’ three-pointer, but the Bulldogs tightened on the defensive end and got a handful of big plays offensively to hold off the Flashes.

Julian Strawther added 14 points, including a three-pointer with 3:19 left that started Gonzaga’s decisive run. Timme’s spinning basket in the lane with 2:29 left gave Gonzaga (6-3) the lead, and he added a key defensive play blocking Sincere Carry’s layup attempt at the other end.

Timme was fouled and split free throws

with 1:55 left, but Malachi Smith grabbed the offensive rebound and his three-point play gave the Bulldogs a 71-66 lead. It was Smith’s first basket of the game.

“(Timme) was heroic. He wasn’t really looking for the ball much early and wasn’t demanding it ... he was splitting the defense and scoring in a variety of ways like he does,” Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. “To end up with 17 boards is monster, and we needed every one of them.”

Nolan Hickman added 10 points and seven rebounds for the Bulldogs, who held a 43-30 advantage on the boards. It was just the second home game inside the McCarthy Athletic Center for Gonzaga and first since Nov. 7 against North Florida.

Thomas led Kent State (6-3) with 16 points, including four three-pointers. Malique Jacobs added 11 points and Carry, who was averaging 18.5 points per game, was

held to 10.

“I think in the second half we moved the ball well, we got some turnovers, got some easy shots and was able to give us a lead playing a great team and great program. ... Unfortunately we couldn’t finish it off. Give them a lot of credit for that,” Kent State head coach Rob Senderoff said.

No. 22 San Diego State 60, Troy 55: Matt Bradley scored 19 points and the host Aztecs beat the Trojans.

Darrion Trammell made a layup in traffic, converted two free throws and forced a key steal in the final three minutes to seal the win for San Diego State (7-2).

Aamer Muhammad scored 21 points for the Trojans (6-4).

Both teams had been averaging about 80 points per game. Troy relied on a pesky defense to limit the Aztecs to 4-for-22 shooting on three-pointers.

Clippers top Hornets late in Leonard's return

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kawhi Leonard couldn't have drawn up a better return.

The five-time All-Star had 16 points, including an 18-foot jumper with 1.4 seconds left to lift the Los Angeles Clippers to a 119-117 victory over the Charlotte Hornets on Monday night in his return from a right ankle sprain.

"I don't think anybody loves playing this game more than me," Leonard said. "It gives me joy when I'm able to play. And it was great that I was able to make that shot."

Paul George also came back from a strained hamstring to score 19 points along with seven assists, helping the Clippers snap a two-game losing streak. Reggie Jackson and Nic Batum each had 13 points, and John Wall added 12 points and 12 assists.

Luke Kennard added nine points off the bench in his first game back from an injury as well.

Charlotte's Kelly Oubre scored 28 points and P.J. Wash-

ington added 26 after going 0-for-13 on Saturday night. Washington missed a fadeaway jumper as time expired that would have tied the game.

Getting Leonard, George and Kennard back should provide a huge boost for the Clippers (14-11). Leonard has been out since Nov. 21, George since Nov. 19 and Kennard since Nov. 15 with a calf strain.

George said it's "super important" getting everyone healthy again, and that it felt like the start of a new season.

"This is really a great opportunity to kind of get back on track," George said. "We were playing well when we were healthy, and now we can start building toward the team we were trying to be."

Rockets 132, 76ers 123 (2OT): Jalen Green scored 27 points and Kevin Porter Jr. added 24 to lead host Houston over Philadelphia as James Harden struggled through his return from injury.

Harden had 21 points but shot 4-for-19 from the field in his first

game since Nov. 2. Coach Doc Rivers said Harden would be on a minutes restriction in his return. But Harden didn't seem to be limited much, and played 39 minutes.

Joel Embiid had 39 points before fouling out late in the first overtime and Tobias Harris added 27 as the Sixers dropped their third straight.

Celtics 116, Raptors 110: Jayson Tatum had 31 points and 12 rebounds, Jaylen Brown scored 22 points and visiting Boston won for the seventh time in eight games, beating Toronto.

Defensive Player of the Year Marcus Smart scored 18 points for Boston after sitting out Sunday's win at Brooklyn because of a bruised left hip.

Blake Griffin scored 13 points and Luke Kornet had 11 for the Celtics, who own the NBA's best record at 20-5. Boston is 16-2 since starting the season 4-3.

Mavericks 130, Suns 111: Luka Doncic scored 33 points, Spencer Dinwiddie added 21 and host Dallas preserved a big lead

against Phoenix this time.

The Mavericks remained in control after a 28-8 run covering most of the last 10 minutes of the first quarter while ending a 10-game regular-season losing streak against the Western Conference-leading Suns.

Pacers 112, Warriors 104: Rookie Andrew Nembhard scored a season-high 31 points and added 13 assists and eight rebounds to lead undermanned Indiana over host Golden State.

Bucks 109, Magic 102: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored five of his 34 points in the final two minutes to help visiting Milwaukee hold off a late Orlando rally.

Grizzlies 101, Heat 93: Tyus Jones had a career-high 28 points and 10 assists to lead short-handed host Memphis over Miami.

Thunder 121, Hawks 114: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points, Josh Giddey had 12 of his 17 points in the final period, and visiting Oklahoma City overcame a 14-point deficit in the third quarter to beat Atlanta.

Vegas ends Bruins' home winning streak at 14 in SO

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Vegas Golden Knights made former Boston coach Bruce Cassidy's return a success on Reilly Smith's score in the fifth round of the shootout, beating the Bruins 4-3 to end their NHL-record for home victories to open a season at 14 games on Monday night.

The 57-year-old Cassidy was fired by Boston following 5½ seasons in June after the Bruins were eliminated by Carolina in the opening round of the playoffs. Eight days after he was let go, he was hired by Vegas.

In a matchup of two of the league's top three teams, Western conference-leading Vegas opened a 3-0 lead early in the second period on two goals by Paul Cotter and the other by Jonathan Marchessault.

The Bruins then started their comeback when Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak scored just over six minutes apart late in the period. They tied it on Taylor Hall's power-play goal 3:08 into the third when he spun in front and slipped a shot from the slot past

goalie Logan Thompson.

Smith had the only score in the shootout, slipping a forehand shot past goalie Jeremy Swayman.

Rangers 6, Blues 4: K'Andre Miller, Alexis Lafrenière and Chris Kreider scored in the third period to rally host New York past St. Louis.

Vincent Trochek had a goal and an assist, and Braden Schneider and Adam Fox also scored for the Rangers, who won for the second time in seven games (2-4-1) and snapped a four-game skid (0-3-1) at home. Artemi Panarin had two assists, Lafrenière added one and Igor Shesterkin made 25 saves.

Flyers 5, Avalanche 3: Tony DeAngelo and Owen Tippett scored power-play goals, and host Philadelphia held on to beat Colorado.

Tanner Laczynski, Travis Sanheim and Travis Konecny also scored for the Flyers, who won for just the second time in 14 games (2-9-3). Carter Hart finished with 29 saves.

Capitals 3, Oilers 2: Nic Dowd scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period and visiting Washington snapped a two-game skid.

Lars Eller and T.J. Oshie also scored for the Capitals, who are 2-5-3 in their last 10 road games. Charlie Lindgren made 28 saves.

Flames 3, Coyotes 2: Nazem Kadri scored the tiebreaking goal with 4:18 left in the third period and added two assists to lead host Calgary past Arizona.

Dillon Dube and Elias Lindholm also scored for Calgary, and Jonathan Huberdeau had two assists. Dan Vladar, starting for the fifth time in seven games, had 18 saves.

Canucks 7, Canadiens 6 (OT): Elias Pettersson scored 13 seconds into overtime and host Vancouver rallied to beat Montreal.

Ilya Mikheyev scored two goals, Andrei Kuzmenko had a goal and an assist, and Connor Garland, Bo Horvat and Jack Studnicka also scored for the Canucks. Pettersson also had two assists.