

Putin offers West more talks on Ukraine

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Tuesday that the U.S. and its allies have ignored Russia's top security demands but added that Moscow is still open for more talks with the West on easing soaring tensions over Ukraine.

Putin argued that it's possible to negotiate an end to the standoff if interests of all parties, including Russia's security concerns, are taken into account.

He deplored the Western refusal to consider the Kremlin's demands for guarantees that NATO won't expand to Ukraine, won't deploy weapons near the Russian border and will roll back its forces from Eastern Europe.

The demands, rejected by NATO and the U.S. as nonstarters, come amid fears that Russia might invade Ukraine, fueled by the buildup of an estimated

100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine's borders. Talks between Russia and the West have so far failed to yield any progress.

The Russian leader charged that the Western allies' refusal to heed the Russian demands violates their obligations on integrity of security for all nations and insisted that a solution could be found through more talks.

He warned that Ukraine's accession to NATO could lead to a situation where Ukrainian authorities launch a military action to reclaim control over Crimea or areas controlled by Russia-backed separatists in the country's east.

"Imagine that Ukraine becomes a NATO member and launches those military operations," Putin said. "Should we fight NATO then? Has anyone thought about it?"

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014 following

the ouster of the country's Moscow-friendly president and later threw its weight behind rebels in Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland, triggering a conflict that has killed over 14,000.

Speaking after talks with Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orban in the Kremlin, Putin emphasized that it's still possible to find a settlement that would take every party's concerns into account.

He said that French President Emmanuel Macron may soon visit Moscow as part of renewed diplomatic efforts following their call on Monday.

Orban, who has forged close ties with Putin, putting NATO member Hungary in a unique position, stressed that no European leader wants a war in the region and voiced hope for a settlement.

In a bid to exert pressure on the West, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has sent letters to the U.S. and other Western coun-

terparts to seek their explanations about past obligations signed by all members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a top trans-Atlantic security grouping.

Lavrov charged Tuesday that the U.S. and its allies have ignored the principle that the security of one nation should not be strengthened at the expense of others, while insisting on every nation's right to choose alliances, noting that he again raised the issue in a phone call Tuesday with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Blinken, meanwhile, emphasized "the U.S. willingness, bilaterally and together with Allies and partners, to continue a substantive exchange with Russia on mutual security concerns."

State Department spokesman Ned Price noted that Blinken also "further reiterated the U.S. commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

US launches Patriot interceptors to aid, protect UAE

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. military launched interceptor missiles during an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels that targeted the United Arab Emirates during a visit by Israel's president, the second-such time American troops have opened fire, officials said.

The acknowledgement by the White House and Pentagon late Monday represent a widening American involvement in Yemen's yearslong war, a conflict that President Joe Biden declared nearly a year ago "has to end."

While the United States has ended offensive support to the Saudi-led coalition fighting on behalf of Yemen's exiled govern-

ment, their involvement in defending the UAE comes as the rebel Houthis have declared Al-Dhafra Air Base in Abu Dhabi a target. Al-Dhafra hosts some 2,000 American troops and has served as a major base of operations for everything from armed drones to F-35 stealth fighters.

Speaking from the White House, press secretary Jen Psaki said the U.S. military "responded to an inbound missile threat on the UAE."

"This involved the employment of Patriot interceptors to ... (support) efforts by the armed forces of the UAE," Psaki said. "I would say we are working quite closely with them."

At the Pentagon, press secretary John Kirby said that "U.S. Pa-

triot interceptors were fired, but it was the Emirati surface-to-air missiles that actually engaged the targets."

Asked if that would include targets outside of Al-Dhafra, Kirby said: "If we can help defend our Emirati partners, we're going to do that."

Biden also mentioned the attack on the UAE at the White House during a visit by Qatar's ruling emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, saying that "America will have the backs of our friends in the region."

The Emirati military, as with a similar attack last week, did not acknowledge that the American military opened fire. The autocratic UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms on the Arabian Pen-

insula, has threatened criminal charges against anyone filming either an attack or outgoing interceptor fire.

The UAE's state-run WAM news agency reported Monday's interception, saying "the attack did not result in any losses, as the remnants of the ballistic missile fell outside the populated areas." It wasn't immediately clear where the remnants fell, though American Patriot missiles are thought only to be deployed at Al-Dhafra. The attack came just before Israeli President Isaac Herzog's visit to Dubai Expo 2020.

A Jan. 17 attack on Abu Dhabi by the Houthis killed three people and wounded six at an Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. fuel depot near Al-Dhafra.

US military to appeal HI fuel tank order

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The Defense Department intends to appeal in federal and state courts an emergency order by Hawaii requiring the Navy drain all fuel from a huge underground storage facility responsible for contaminating groundwater in Honolulu.

The Defense Department expects to file an appeal of the Hawaii Department of Health's final order before the Wednesday deadline, Kathleen Hicks, deputy secretary of defense, said in a statement Monday.

Thousands of residents of military housing communities on and around Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam were forced to temporarily relocate to hotels in early December after

their tap water became tainted with petroleum.

The Navy traced the contaminated water to the Red Hill well, one of the three the service uses to feed its water distribution system that supplies more than two dozen communities.

The well is near the Red Hill Fuel Storage Facility, a massive underground tank system built during World War II, which sits roughly 100 feet above Oahu's primary aquifer.

The Navy has confirmed the well was contaminated from jet fuel from the facility, which currently holds about 150 million gallons of fuel.

The Hawaii Department of Health issued its final order last month, ordering the tanks be emptied.

Hicks in the statement said that the Navy will "continue to take actions consistent with the near-term provisions" of the emergency order.

"This includes, but is not limited to, suspending operations of fuel transfers at Red Hill, implementing a thorough series of best-in-class testing and sampling protocols, and installing new equipment to treat and protect Oahu's water resources," Hicks said.

The Navy will also provide the Department of Health by Wednesday "a work plan and implementation schedule for a qualified, independent third-party commercial firm to assess the facility operations and system integrity necessary to safely operate and/or defuel Red Hill," she said.

Public responds to call to help fund dog's trip home

BY KELLY AGEE
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Hundreds of people donated over the weekend to help an Air Force couple fly their Great Dane, Henry, back to the United States from Japan after reading an article by Stars and Stripes on Friday.

Senior Airman Avaunte Frizzell, 22, and his spouse, Josie Hayward, 21, were so overwhelmed they had to turn away eager donors after the fundraising campaign exceeded its \$10,000 goal by \$4,131, Frizzell told Stars and Stripes at the couple's home at Yokota.

The couple, natives of Lake George, Mich., started a GoFundMe campaign Jan. 15 to raise \$10,000 toward the \$15,000 they

need to ship Henry to their next duty station — Cannon Fir Force Base in Clovis, N.M. — later this month.

Henry had rocketed to minor social media celebrity status when one conspicuous donor took his story to a higher plane.

Greta Van Susteren, a lawyer and journalist well known from her stints as program anchor on CNN, Fox News and MSNBC, tweeted Henry's story to her 1.1 million followers. A dog lover herself, Van Susteren posted links to the article and the GoFundMe page on Sunday.

Hayward and Frizzell easily reached their \$10,000 goal by Sunday.

"Right after the article went public, we immediately started getting messages and donations," Frizzell said Monday.

Donations came in \$10 and \$20 increments, but some gave more substantial amounts. A woman coming to the air base on a permanent change of station gave three figures.

"There is a lady coming to Yokota, she is PCSing with two dogs, and she actually donated \$300," Hayward said. "She said that she would hope someone would help her out if she was in this situation."

People worldwide donated to their cause, Frizzell said.

"The Yokota community, the Air Force community, the military community in general, retirees and even people at our new base we are going to were donating," he said.

Even after the couple reached their goal, people still wanted to donate, Hayward said.

Report: US should counter Russian ambitions in Libya

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa should start wargaming to counter Moscow's influence in oil-rich Libya, where a foothold by a Russian paramilitary group is likely to grow, according to an Air Force-commissioned study.

The study, released this week, examined Russia's efforts to raise its military and economic profile across Africa.

"The primary insight that emerged from this analysis is the unique importance of Li-

bya in the emerging U.S.-Russian relationship in Africa," the research institution Rand Corp. said in its report, "Russia's Growing Presence in Africa."

When compared with the United States and China, the two main outside powers operating in Africa, Russian influence remains small and limited in focus, the report said.

But Moscow is involved in some areas and chief among them is Libya, which has been in political disarray since NATO's 2011 intervention and the fall of the Moammar Gadhafi regime.

Some security analysts have warned that Russia's long-term aim in Libya may be to set up air defense systems that could challenge U.S.-allied access in a crisis.

USAFE-AF should "elevate the priority accorded to Libya" to "guard against the effects of greater Russian influence in that centrally important country," the Rand report stated.

Early steps the Air Force should take include "wargaming and anticipatory planning" so that the U.S. is seen as the primary partner of a post-war Libyan air force.

Aide: Biden won't game system on court pick

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden will meet with Senate Judiciary Committee leaders Tuesday to discuss the upcoming U.S. Supreme Court vacancy and the president's promise to nominate a Black woman to the high court. Aides said Biden's list of potential candidates is longer than three.

The White House also pushed back Monday on the idea that the president would be open to "gaming the system" by choosing a nominee solely based on her likelihood of garnering bipartisan support.

Judiciary Chairman Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and ranking minority member Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, will meet with Biden at the White House to go over potential nominees to replace Justice Stephen Breyer, who announced his

retirement last week.

Biden himself served as head of the Judiciary Committee when he was a senator and presided over the confirmations of six high court picks, including Breyer.

"He's steeped in this process," White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said Monday, "and looks forward to advice from members of both parties on the Hill as well as top legal experts and scholars across the country."

Biden has said since his campaign that he would nominate a Black woman to the nation's highest court, and he personally interviewed a few of the nominees when they were under consideration for appointment to the federal bench.

Some Republicans have already voiced support for U.S. District Court Judge J. Michelle Childs, who is a favorite of key

Democratic ally South Carolina Rep. Jim Clyburn.

But the White House pushed back on the idea of choosing a candidate just to get bipartisan support, saying Biden would choose the best woman for the job, period.

"The president is going to select a woman, a Black woman, who is qualified, who is prepared, who has impeccable experience to serve on the court. He's going to do that based on her credentials, of course having a discussion with her and not through gaming out the system," Psaki said.

The White House has yet to designate an official to shepherd the process. But officials expect top lawyers in the White House Counsel's office plus White House chief of staff Ron Klain, who has decades of experience working on nominees, to help in

the selection process.

Biden has pledged a pick by the end of February.

On Monday, Durbin said he wanted a speedy confirmation, but did not want to arbitrarily rush the process. He said he does not want to put his "thumb on the scale" in talks with Biden, but having a nominee who is a sitting judge "makes the argument more credible" as he is reaching out to Republicans.

Durbin, who is serving his fifth term in the Senate, has been having conversations with GOP senators who he thinks could potentially vote for a Biden nominee.

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., reiterated that "the Senate will have a fair process that moves quickly so we can confirm President Biden's nominee to fill Justice Breyer's seat as soon as possible."

Judge rejects plea deal for Ga. man who killed Arbery

Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. — A federal judge rejected a plea agreement Monday that would have averted a hate crimes trial for the white man convicted of murder for fatally shooting Ahmaud Arbery, whose parents angrily objected to the deal as unfair and unjust.

The decision by U.S. District Court Judge Lisa Godbey Wood came just hours after prosecutors gave notice that son and father Travis and Greg McMichael had agreed to plead guilty to hate crime charges that they chased, threatened and killed 25-year-old Arbery because he was Black.

But Travis McMichael's sentencing hearing Monday turned emotional and contentious as federal prosecutors urged the judge to approve the deal even after Arbery's parents pleaded passionately for her to deny it.

Travis McMichael would have received 30 years in federal prison to be served alongside the pen-

alty of life in prison without parole imposed by a state court judge for the murder conviction. By pleading guilty, he would have given up the chance to appeal his federal sentence. But Arbery's family objected to a provision that sought to transfer Travis McMichael immediately to federal custody from state prison. Arbery's parents argued that conditions in federal prison wouldn't be as tough for the McMichaels.

Wood said she was rejecting the deal because its terms would have locked her into a specific sentence. She said the Arbery family should have a say at sentencing in whatever punishment is ultimately given.

Now the question is whether Travis McMichael will withdraw the guilty plea he entered Monday, and whether Greg McMichael, who had been offered the same deal, will still plead guilty as planned. The judge gave them until Friday to give their answer.

Qatar named major non-NATO ally with energy crisis looming

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Monday designated Qatar a major non-NATO ally, a largely symbolic honor but one that was meant to convey his administration's gratitude for the tiny Persian Gulf nation's assistance with evacuations from Afghanistan and in ending last year's Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

Biden announced the designation during a meeting with the ruling leader of Qatar at the White House. It comes as he looks for the gas-rich nation to step up again to help the West as it faces the prospect of a European energy crunch if Russia invades Ukraine.

The move could be helpful in Qatar's bid to get U.S. approval for a more than \$500 million sale of MQ-9 Reaper drones. The request has been languishing since 2020, when Donald Trump was still in office.

A senior administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the deci-

sion, said the non-NATO ally designation was not tied to Biden's hopes for Qatar to help European allies with an energy contingency plan should Russia invade Ukraine. The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly, said the designation was for Qatar's help in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

Qatar played a central role in aiding last summer's U.S. military evacuations of Afghans who helped the U.S. war effort along with American citizens.

Qatar also hosts the biggest U.S. air base in the Middle East and served as a go-between with the Taliban for the last three administrations as they tried to wind down America's longest war.

Qatar is the 18th country to receive this designation, the last being Brazil in 2019. The designation provides benefits in defense trade and security cooperation, including eligibility for loan programs and priority delivery for certain military sales.

Officials warn of fire's 'explosion potential'

Associated Press

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — An uncontrolled fire at a fertilizer plant in North Carolina forced thousands of people to evacuate as firefighters stood back Tuesday because of the danger of a large explosion.

Authorities drove through neighborhoods and knocked on doors asking residents to leave within a one-mile radius of the Winston Weaver Co. fertilizer plant on the north side of Winston-Salem, where the fire started Monday night. Overnight, bright orange flames and thick plumes of smoke could be seen shooting into the sky. No injuries were reported.

The city's fire chief said the fire had been "relatively static" overnight, but with 600 tons of combustible ammonium nitrate

stored at the site, the risk of an explosion would remain through Wednesday.

"We've got about a 36-hour window where that explosion potential exists" Winston-Salem Fire Chief Trey Mayo told reporters.

Wake Forest University, most of which lies just outside the evacuation zone, canceled classes and urged students living in dormitories to stay indoors and keep windows closed.

The evacuation area included about 6,500 people in 2,500 homes, the Winston-Salem Fire Department said.

At least 90 firefighters fought the fire for about 90 minutes after it was discovered at a loading dock around 7 p.m. Monday, but the risk of an explosion forced them to retreat, Mayo said. The

fire quickly consumed the entire building and caused it to collapse. An unmanned fire truck was left behind to continue pumping water onto part of the site.

Drones and a helicopter monitored the fire from above, and teams of firefighters were on standby, but they had to let the fire burn for now, the chief said.

Mayo told reporters Tuesday morning that an estimated 500 tons of ammonium nitrate were housed at the plant and another 100 tons of the fertilizer ingredient were in an adjacent rail car. He said that is more of the chemical than was present at a deadly blast at a 2013 Texas fertilizer plant blast that killed 15 people, most of them emergency personnel.

"So if that doesn't convey the gravity of the situation and how

serious folks need to take it, I don't know how else to verbalize that," he said.

Mayo said the chemical generally needs to be in a confined space to explode, so the risk will depend on whether the material is stacked deep enough for the top layers to put enough pressure on the bottom layers.

Authorities warned of smoke and poor air quality in the city of about 250,000. Matthew Smith, a hazardous material expert with a regional state task force, said the gases released by the blaze are considered more of an irritant than something that could seriously harm someone, unless they have an underlying lung condition.

Winston-Salem officials said a shelter has been set up at the Winston-Salem Fairgrounds.

FDA gives full approval to Moderna COVID-19 vaccine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. health regulators on Monday granted full approval to Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine, a shot that's already been given to tens of millions of Americans since its emergency authorization over a year ago.

The action by the Food and Drug Administration means the agency has completed the same rigorous, time-consuming review of Moderna's shot as dozens of other long-established vaccines.

The decision was bolstered by real-world evidence from the more than 200 million doses administered in the United States since the FDA cleared the shot in December 2020. The FDA granted full approval of Pfizer's vaccine last August.

Public health advocates initially hoped the regulatory distinction would boost public confidence in the shots. But there was no discernable bump in vaccinations after the Pfizer approval, which was heavily promoted by President Joe Biden and other federal officials.

Still, regulators said Monday they hoped the extra endorsement would encourage more people to get vaccinated.

More than 211 million Americans, or 63% of the total population, are fully vaccinated. About 86 million people have gotten a booster dose. Vaccinations peaked last spring at more than 3 million per day, and now average less than 750,000 per day. The pace of vaccinations briefly spiked following news of the omicron variant in December, but has

since slowed again.

The FDA reviewed months of additional follow-up data submitted by Moderna to confirm the vaccine's effectiveness against COVID-19. The FDA also analyzed and kept watch for serious side effects that have proved to be very rare. The vaccine includes a warning about a rare type of heart inflammation that mostly occurs in young men following the second dose. Most cases are mild and resolve quickly.

Additionally, the FDA reviewed the company's manufacturing process and facilities.

"The public can be assured that this vaccine was approved in keeping with the FDA's rigorous scientific standards," said Dr. Peter Marks, FDA's top vaccine regulator, in a statement.

Pregnant journalist in Afghanistan can return home to NZ

Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — A pregnant New Zealand journalist who was stranded in Afghanistan by her home country's COVID-19 border policy said Tuesday that she will return home after her govern-

ment offered her a pathway back.

The government offer amounted to a backdown by New Zealand after officials had earlier insisted that Charlotte Bellis needed to reapply for a spot in the country's bottle-

necked quarantine hotels. Deputy Prime Minister Grant Robertson said Bellis had been offered a voucher for a room.

Her case had quickly becoming an embarrassment to New Zealand, which has thousands of citizens waiting abroad for

space in the military-run border quarantine hotels.

Bellis said she wanted to thank fellow New Zealanders for their support and would continue to challenge the government to find a solution to its border controls.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Live vulture removed from vehicle's grill

GA TYBEE ISLAND — A police department in Georgia got an unusual request for help.

Police on Tybee Island outside Savannah said a woman came to the station with a live vulture in the grill of her vehicle.

She told police she struck it on a rural road in South Carolina. When she stopped to check for damage, the bird was still there. She couldn't remove it herself and couldn't find anyone to help on the way to Tybee Island.

So she came to the police department, Tybee Island police said on its Facebook page. Officers removed the bird and sought veterinary care.

Young humpback whale freed from mooring line

HI HONOLULU — Federal officials said a yearling humpback whale off Hawaii has been freed from a life-threatening entanglement in mooring gear.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said a rescue team cut off about 140 feet of line and a plastic trawling buoy when they freed the whale off Maui.

The whale's tail and fins were wrapped in small-gauge line with the plastic buoy floating behind, the agency said in a statement.

Officials said the whale was in good condition but that the line wrapped around its tail had begun to cut into the animal's flesh. The gear was of "considerable weight," the agency said.

Trained responders cut off the gear with a blade attached to

a pole after getting close on an inflatable boat. It is a federal crime to approach a humpback whale and the team was working under federal permit.

Owner of food truck vandalized taco stand

CA WHITTIER—A food truck vendor was arrested after he was caught on video vandalizing a sidewalk taco stand in a possible beef over territory near Los Angeles, authorities said.

Video aired by ABC7 showed a man using a fire extinguisher to put out the cooking fire of Tacos la Guera in Whittier.

Taco stand employee Armando Martinez said he was afraid the man with the fire extinguisher might punch him.

"Maybe he's going to want to hurt me. So I kept my distance and stayed back," Martinez told the news station.

Tacos la Guera owner Rocio Gascón told ABC7 he had been scouting the area for a week and didn't see any other vendors at the location. Neighbors said the food truck had set up there in the past.

Hunter with severe hypothermia rescued

AL UNION SPRINGS — An Alabama state trooper is being credited with saving the life of a missing hunter.

Trooper Charles May found the man on Jan. 22 suffering from severe hypothermia, gave the man his clothes and then carried him about 100 yards out of the woods, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency said on Facebook.

Paramedics later determined the man might not have survived another hour in the cold conditions.

May, with the Opelika Highway Patrol, had received a request for help from the Bullock County Sheriff's Office. The hunter was swept away when a beaver dam broke and had been missing since the previous day.

May was searching in the woods when he heard a faint cry for help. The man was on the ground and said he could not feel his legs, according to the Facebook post. May replaced the man's wet clothes with his clothes.

Trash truck did \$200K of damage to Capitol

NE LINCOLN — State officials said a Lincoln trash truck caused more than \$200,000 damage to a limestone wall at the Nebraska State Capitol.

The Lincoln Journal Star reported the state filed a lawsuit against Uribe Refuse Services over the damage to the building.

Assistant Nebraska Attorney General Erik Fern said in the lawsuit that a truck owned by Uribe rolled down a loading ramp and collided with the wall of the capitol. Fern said the trash company was negligent because the driver didn't maintain control of the truck and brake properly.

Uribe hasn't yet responded to the lawsuit.

Ex-deputy accused of prescription drug theft

MO HILLSBORO — A former deputy in suburban St. Louis is accused of

using his position to steal prescription drugs.

The Jefferson County Sheriff's Department said its former deputy, Michael Filsinger, 35, of Arnold, faces four counts of felony stealing, one count of misdemeanor stealing and one count of misuse of official information by a public servant.

The sheriff's office said Filsinger accessed the department's report management system to identify reports involving prescription drugs. While on and off duty, he allegedly went to people named in those reports falsely claiming to be a detective following up on previous investigations.

Officials said he then stole some of those medications.

Old liner Queen Mary to receive 'critical repairs'

CA LONG BEACH — The historic ocean liner Queen Mary, which has been a Southern California tourist attraction and hotel for decades, is being prepared for "critical repairs," the city of Long Beach said.

The ship will remain closed, except for film location work, until the \$5 million worth of repairs are completed, a city statement said.

"One of the most critical repairs identified in the engineering reports was the removal of deteriorated lifeboats. The lifeboats exert stress on the side shell of the ship which has created severe cracks in the support system," the city said.

Launched in 1934, the Queen Mary arrived in Long Beach harbor at the end of its final voyage in 1967.

— From wire reports



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Brady retires after 7 rings, 22 seasons

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Tom Brady, the most successful quarterback in NFL history, has retired after winning seven Super Bowls and setting numerous passing records in an unprecedented 22-year career.

“This is difficult for me to write, but here it goes: I am not going to make that competitive commitment anymore,” Brady wrote in a lengthy post on Instagram. “I have loved my NFL career, and now it is time to focus my time and energy on other things that require my attention.”

Brady has long stated his desire to spend more time with his wife, supermodel Gisele Bündchen, and three children despite still playing at the top of his game.

The 44-year-old Brady goes out after leading the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to a Super Bowl title last season and NFC South championship this season.

News of Brady’s pending retirement leaked Saturday. His family and the Buccaneers denied that he had made a final decision, and he said Monday night on his SiriusXM podcast

he wasn’t ready to finalize his plans.

That came Tuesday morning. “I’ve done a lot of reflecting the past week and have asked myself difficult questions,” Brady said in his post. “And I am so proud of what we have achieved. My teammates, coaches, fellow competitors, and fans deserve 100% of me, but right now, it’s best I leave the field of play to the next generation of dedicated and committed athletes.”

Brady thanked the Buccaneers organization, his teammates, ownership, general manager Jason Licht, coach Bruce Arians, his trainer Alex Guerrero, agents Don Yee and Steve Dubin and his family in his nine-page post. He didn’t mention the New England Patriots, where he spent his first 20 seasons and won six Super Bowls. Of course, Brady thanked the Patriots and coach Bill Belichick after he left the team to sign with Tampa Bay in March 2020.

“To the Glazer family, thank you for taking a chance on me and supporting me,” Brady said of the Bucs’ owners. “I know I

was demanding at times, but you provided everything we needed to win, and your ownership was everything a player could ask for.”

Brady led the NFL in yards passing (5,316), touchdowns (43), completions (485) and attempts (719) in 2021, but Tampa Bay lost at home to the Los Angeles Rams in the divisional round.

Brady leaves the game as the career leader in yards passing (84,520) and TDs (624). He’s the only player to win more than five Super Bowls and was MVP of the game five times.

Widely considered the greatest quarterback to play the game, Brady has won three NFL MVP awards, was a first-team All-Pro three times and was selected to the Pro Bowl 15 times. He is 243-73 in his career in the regular season and 35-12 in the playoffs.

Overlooked by every team coming out of Michigan, Brady was eventually selected by the Patriots in the sixth round of the 2000 NFL Draft. He replaced an injured Drew Bledsoe as the starter in 2001 and led New England to a Super Bowl victory

over the heavily favored Rams that season.

Brady went on to lead the Patriots to consecutive Super Bowl titles following the 2003-04 seasons. No team has since repeated as champions.

But New England didn’t win another one for a decade, twice losing to the New York Giants in the Super Bowl, including a 17-14 defeat on Feb. 3, 2008, that prevented the Patriots from completing a perfect season.

Brady earned his fourth ring after the 2014 season. Two years later, in the biggest Super Bowl comeback, he led New England out of a 28-3 deficit in the third quarter against Atlanta to win in overtime for No. 5. Brady got his sixth championship when the Patriots beat the Rams following the 2018 season.

He joined the Buccaneers in 2020 amid a pandemic, instantly transforming a franchise that hadn’t won a playoff game in 18 years. His buddy Rob Gronkowski came out of retirement to join him and they helped the Buccaneers become the first team to play in a Super Bowl in its stadium.

New Raiders coach hopes for success in second stint

Associated Press

When Josh McDaniels was hired for his first head coaching job in Denver as a precocious 32-year-old, he flamed out almost immediately because he realizes now that he didn’t really know what the job entailed.

The experience with the Broncos that ended with his firing before the end of his second season humbled McDaniels, who then went back and spent another decade as a coordinator.

Now 13 years later, he’s ready for his next shot as a head coach with the Las Vegas Raiders and hopes the lessons he learned back then lead to more

success his second time around.

“When I went to Denver, I knew a little bit of football,” McDaniels said Monday after being introduced as Raiders coach. “I didn’t really know people and how important that aspect of this process and maintaining the culture and building the team was. I failed, and I didn’t succeed at it. Looking at that experience has been one of the best things in my life in terms of my overall growth as a person, as a coach.”

After backing out of a deal in 2018 to coach Indianapolis after it had already been announced, McDaniels jumped at the op-

portunity to coach Las Vegas, where he will be teamed with a general manager he has known for decades.

McDaniels and new GM Dave Ziegler were teammates in college at John Carroll University, worked together in Denver and then again the past nine years with the Patriots.

That trust was a factor for both McDaniels and Ziegler for taking the job and for owner Mark Davis, who set out during the process to replace coach Jon Gruden and GM Mike Mayo to find a coach-GM combo that could work well together.

While McDaniels comes in with the higher profile, Ziegler

said he will have final say on personnel.

“Obviously Josh and I are tied in many ways in our vision of how to build a team and our vision of what we want in terms of the players that we bring into the building is very connected,” Ziegler said. “But at the end of the day when it’s time to make decisions on personnel, while we’re work together, those final decisions will be made by me.”

McDaniels is viewed as one of the brighter offensive minds in the game with his many years working with Tom Brady on the Patriots and his work this season helping to develop rookie Mac Jones.

Matthews has hat trick, Leafs soar past Devils

Associated Press

TORONTO — Auston Matthews had three goals and an assist, and the Toronto Maple Leafs scored four times in the third period to rally to a 6-4 win over the New Jersey Devils on Monday night.

Mitch Marner had a goal and two assists, Ilya Mikheyev had a goal and an assist, and Jason Spezza also scored to help the Maple Leafs win their fourth straight. Jack Campbell started and gave up three goals on nine shots before he was pulled midway through the first period. Petr Mrazek had 19 saves the rest of the way.

“Jack hasn’t played to the same level he established for himself,” Toronto coach Sheldon Keefe said. “But neither has the team in front of him. That’s on us. That’s not nearly enough. We’ve got a guy who battled for us and has been the backbone of this team.”

Campbell’s play earned him a trip to the NHL All-Star Game in Las Vegas this weekend. But he has given up 16 goals in his last nine-plus periods.

“Our start wasn’t very good,” said Matthews, who now has 28 goals in 38 games. “We weren’t ready from the start. ... Soup (Campbell) didn’t play bad. We just gave them some Grade-A chances.”

Jesper Boquist had a goal and an assist for New Jersey, and Pavel Zacha, Andreas Johnsson and Nathan Bastian also scored. Akira Schmid had 27 saves as the Devils lost

their fifth straight.

New Jersey had three two-goal leads and was up 4-2 after two periods.

Panthers 8, Blue Jackets 4: Sam Reinhart had his fifth career hat trick to lead visiting Florida to its fourth straight win.

Mason Marchment had two goals and four assists for a career-high six points to help the Panthers secure the top spot in the NHL standings heading into the All-Star break. Aleksander Barkov, Owen Tippett and MacKenzie Weegar also scored against Columbus, and Reinhart added an assist.

Red Wings 2, Ducks 1 (OT): Jordan Oesterle scored 2:11 into overtime to lift host Detroit.

Dylan Larkin had a goal and an assist to help the Red Wings win for the second time in six games. Alex Nedeljkovic, starting for the 10th time in 11 games, had 14 saves.

Canucks 3, Blackhawks 1: Jaroslav Halak made 20 saves, Brock Boeser scored, and Vancouver won at Chicago.

Alex Chiasson and Luke Schenn also scored for the Canucks, who had dropped four of five.

Senators 3, Oilers 2 (OT): Tim Stutzle scored at 4:22 of overtime to lead host Ottawa.

Thomas Chabot and Nick Paul scored in regulation for the Senators, and Matt Murray stopped 37 shots.

Connor McDavid and Darnell Nurse scored for Edmonton. Mikko Koskinen finished with 28 saves.

No. 8 Baylor rallies to beat West Virginia

Associated Press

WACO, Texas — James Akinjo scored 25 points and Matthew Mayer came up big with all nine of his points late for eighth-ranked Baylor in an 81-77 win over West Virginia on Monday. The Mountaineers had to get through the final minutes without standout guard Taz Sherman.

Mayer didn’t score until his tiebreaking lay-up with 3:27 left put the Bears ahead to stay. That came soon after Sherman, who had a career-high 29 points with six three-pointers, left the game woozy.

“We competed like crazy today. I mean, we competed,” West Virginia coach Bob Huggins said. “We hung in there with our best player, and one of our best players, if not the best player in the league, laying in the locker room with a concussion.”

Sherman, who had tied the game at 66 with his jumper on the Mountaineers’ previous possession, appeared to take a shot to the face and side of the head from the arm of Jeremy Sochan when trying to make a move around the defender. Play continued with Sherman still on the floor, and he was still down during a timeout after Sochan was called for a charging foul when out of control going the other way.

“Clearly something happened,” Huggins said, adding he was being careful not to say too much. “He’s laying on the floor. He may have been unconscious at the beginning, I’m not sure, and they continue to play on and we played 5-on-4. Didn’t stop the game, didn’t stop the game to go look at it, didn’t stop the game at all.”

No. 9 Duke 57, Notre Dame 43: Freshman Paolo Banchemo scored 21 points, fellow classmate A.J. Griffin added 13 and each had a team-high nine rebounds as the Blue Devils handed the Fighting Irish their first home loss of the season.

Duke (18-3, 8-2 ACC) pulled into a first-place tie with idle Miami with its fourth straight victory for coach Mike Krzyzewski, who is retiring at the conclusion of the season and was making his final appearance at the sold out Purcell Pavilion against his former protégé, Mike Brey. Notre Dame (14-7, 7-3), which entered the game 9-0 at home this season with victories over Kentucky and North Carolina, saw its four-game winning streak end. Grad transfer Paul Atkinson Jr. was the only Irish player in double figures with 14 points; he also had nine rebounds.

US sledder tests positive for COVID

Associated Press

World Cup champion Elana Meyers Taylor’s quest to add to her Olympic medal total at the Beijing Games is in jeopardy after the veteran U.S. women’s bobsled pilot revealed Tuesday she has tested positive for COVID-19.

Officials at USA Bobsled and Skeleton said they remain hopeful that Meyers Taylor will be able to compete at the Beijing Games, especially since bobsled doesn’t begin until about a week into the Olympics. Women’s monobob official training begins Feb. 10, with competition beginning Feb. 13. Training for the two-woman event starts Feb. 15, with competition beginning Feb. 18.

“After arriving to Beijing on January 27, on January 29 I tested positive for Covid-19,”

Meyers Taylor wrote on her social media platforms. “I am asymptomatic and currently at an isolation hotel — and yes I am completely isolated.”

She revealed on Jan. 27 that she passed an initial test after arriving in Beijing. Meyers Taylor was planning to stay in a hotel and not the Olympic Village, since she is traveling with her young son.

“This is just the latest obstacle that my family and I have faced on this journey, so I’m remaining optimistic that I’ll be able to recover quickly and still have the opportunity to compete,” Meyers Taylor wrote.

She is the only woman to win three Olympic bobsled medals for the U.S., with two silvers and a bronze already in her collection.

Curry paces Warriors past Rockets

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Stephen Curry scored 21 of his 40 points in the fourth quarter to lead the Golden State Warriors to a 122-108 win Monday over Houston.

It was the sixth consecutive win for the Warriors, while Houston extended its skid at home to 11 straight games.

Curry made seven three-pointers, four in the fourth quarter, and had nine assists and five rebounds. His 21 fourth-quarter points were the most of his career.

Andrew Wiggins added 23 points for Golden State and Klay Thompson had 14.

The Rockets, who lost their fourth straight game overall, were led by Christian Wood's 24 points and 13 rebounds.

76ers 122, Grizzlies 119: Tyrese Maxey scored 33 points, including a driving lay-up with 26.4 seconds left in overtime that put host Philadelphia ahead for good, and the 76ers beat Memphis without Joel Embiid.

Tobias Harris added 31 points and Andre Drummond had 16 points and 23 rebounds for Philadelphia, which won its fifth game in a row and 15th in the last 18. The 76ers improved to 4-8 without Embiid, who was rested.

Ja Morant scored 37 points and Desmond Bane had a career-high 34 for the Grizzlies. Morant reached 30 points for the seventh straight game.

Thunder 98, Trail Blazers 81: Lu Dort scored 18 points and host Oklahoma City defeated Portland to snap a seven-game losing streak.

Josh Giddey added 14 points and 12 rebounds for the short-handed Thunder. Oklahoma City's scoring leader, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, is out until after the All-Star break with a sprained right ankle sustained last Friday against Indiana.

Knicks 116, Kings 96: Alec Burks had 21 points off the bench, Evan Fournier also scored 21 and host New York routed skidding Sacramento to stop a three-game slide.

Julius Randle added 17 points and nine rebounds for the Knicks, who won for the second time in eight games.

Celtics 122, Heat 92: Jaylen Brown scored 29 points, Jayson Tatum had 20 points and 12 rebounds, and host Boston rolled past Miami.

Marcus Smart added 16 points and seven assists as the Celtics won for the fourth time in five games.

Cavaliers 93, Pelicans 90: Reserve

guard Brandon Goodwin matched his career high with 21 points, Jarrett Allen added 16 and host Cleveland shook off an ugly road loss by rallying to beat New Orleans.

The Cavaliers, who played poorly in a 10-point defeat at Detroit the day before, were without starting point guard Darius Garland due to a sore lower back. Kevin Love added 15 points and 11 rebounds, and Cedi Osman had a career-best 12 assists for Cleveland, which trailed by nine in the fourth quarter.

Pacers 122, Clippers 116: Rookie forward Isaiah Jackson had 26 points and 10 rebounds for his first career double-double, leading host Indiana past Los Angeles.

Both totals were season highs for Jackson, a first-round draft pick out of Kentucky. Duane Washington Jr. added 16 points and made all four of his three-pointers in the fourth quarter.

Raptors 106, Hawks 100: Gary Trent Jr. scored 31 points, Pascal Siakam added 23 and visiting Toronto ended Atlanta's seven-game winning streak.

Trent, who has scored at least 30 points in four straight games, hit three three-pointers in the closing minutes of the third quarter.

College football signing day affecting transfer destinations

Associated Press

The transfer portal remains packed as college football's second signing period arrives, a glut that has the sport's leaders pondering ways to clean up a roster management mess.

According to Rivals.com, about 48% of the more than 1,250 scholarship players from Division I's Bowl Subdivision who have entered the portal since August had not announced new schools as of last week.

With the traditional signing period beginning Wednesday, the number of players exiting the portal should continue to rise. But all of those players looking for scholarship offers combined with the seemingly constant movement of athletes—and coaches—is seen as a problem.

"I'd also suggest we're still pretty early into this," Mid-

American Conference Commissioner Jon Steinbrecher said. "You've got other factors involved that are causing additional churn. I still don't know that we have a clear sense of what this will settle out as. But I understand the angst involved."

Most schools now lock up the bulk of their high school recruits during the early signing period in December. While there are still some undecided blue-chippers—the most notable free agent, former Oklahoma quarterback Caleb Williams, remains publicly uncommitted—January has become transfer season in college football.

"I don't think people really say it this way, but let's not make a mistake: We have free agency in college football," Mississippi coach Lane Kiffin said in December before pulling in one of the

best transfer portal hauls in the country.

A confluence of recent NCAA rules changes and short-term tweaks made in response to the pandemic have caused an unprecedented traffic jam.

Last year, the NCAA changed its rules to allow athletes in all sports the ability to transfer one time without sitting out a season at their new school. The newfound freedom, along with the lifting of the NCAA's longtime restrictions on athletes earning money for use of their names, images and likenesses, has incentivized players to explore their options.

On top of that, hundreds of players have an extra year of eligibility at their disposal after the NCAA provided a giveback for athletes who were in college during the pandemic-altered 2020

season.

Arizona coach Jedd Fisch called bringing in college players with three or more years of eligibility remaining "dream portal" opportunities.

Schools can only have 85 scholarship players at the start of the season, and NCAA rules limit signings to only 25 per season. To help teams compensate for portal losses, the NCAA is allowing them to sign as many as seven additional players this year only—for now. Expect coaches to push for it to become a permanent part of college football.

Another possible alteration to the transfer rules being discussed by athletic administrators at the NCAA committee level is creating windows in the calendar when players could access their one-time, restriction-free transfer.