

## ISIS leader dead after raid by US forces

*Associated Press*

ATMEH, Syria—The leader of the violent Islamic State was killed Thursday, blowing himself up along with members of his family during an overnight raid carried out by U.S. special operations forces in northwestern Syria, President Joe Biden said.

The raid targeted Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, who took over as head of the militant group on Oct. 31, 2019, just days after leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi died during a U.S. raid in the same area. Biden said al-Qurayshi died as al-Baghdadi did, by exploding a bomb that killed himself and members of his family, including women and children, as U.S. forces approached.

The operation came as ISIS has been trying for a resurgence, with a series of attacks in the region, including an assault late last month to seize a prison in northeast Syria holding at least 3,000 ISIS detainees, its boldest operation in years.

“Thanks to the bravery of our troops, this horrible terrorist leader is no more,” Biden said. He said al-Qurayshi had been responsible for the prison strike, as well as genocide against the Yazidi people in Iraq in 2014.

About 50 U.S. special operations forces landed in helicopters and attacked a house in a rebel-held corner of Syria, clashing for two hours with gunmen, witnesses said.

Residents described continuous gunfire and explosions that jolted the town of Atmeh near the Turkish border, an area dotted with camps for internally displaced people from Syria’s civil war.

Biden said he ordered U.S. forces to “take every precaution available to minimize civilian casualties,” the reason they did not conduct an airstrike on the home.

First responders reported that 13 people had been killed, including six children and four women.

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said U.S. forces were able to evacuate 10 people from the building: a man, a woman and four children from the first floor and four children from the second floor. He said when al-Qurayshi detonated the bomb, he also killed his wife and two children. Kirby said U.S. officials were conducting an assessment to determine whether American action resulted in any civilian deaths.

U.S. forces took fingerprints and DNA, which confirmed al-Qurayshi’s death, officials said.

Biden, along with Vice President Kamala Harris and senior national security aides, monitored a live feed of the operation from the White House Situation Room according to an official. The president was kept abreast of the commandos’ long flight out of Syria by national security adviser Jake Sullivan

overnight.

The operation marked a military success for the United States at an important time after setbacks elsewhere — including the chaotic Afghanistan withdrawal — had led allies and opponents to conclude U.S. power globally was weakening.

The house, surrounded by olive trees in fields outside Atmeh, was left with its top floor shattered and blood spattered inside. A journalist on assignment for The Associated Press, along with several residents, said they saw body parts scattered near the site. Most residents spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

“The mission was successful,” Kirby said in a brief statement. “There were no U.S. casualties.”

Idlib is largely controlled by Turkish-backed fighters but is also an al-Qaida stronghold and home to several of its top operatives. Other militants, including extremists from the rival ISIS, have also found refuge in the region.

Ever since he took over leadership of ISIS, al-Qurayshi had kept an extremely low profile. He had not appeared in public and rarely released any audio recordings. His influence and day-to-day involvement in the group’s operations was not known and it is difficult to gauge how his death will affect the group.

## NATO: Russian buildup in Belarus biggest in 30 years

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS—NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg expressed concern Thursday that Russia is continuing its military buildup around Ukraine, and that it has now deployed more troops and military equipment to Belarus than at any time in 30 years.

Meanwhile, more high-level diplomacy took place in Kyiv amid deep uncertainty about Russia’s intentions. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy held a three-hour meeting with

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Ukrainian capital. French President Emmanuel Macron was due to hold phone talks with Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia now has more than 100,000 troops stationed near Ukraine’s northern and eastern borders, raising concern that Moscow might invade again, as it did in 2014, and destabilize the Ukrainian economy. Russian officials deny that an invasion is planned.

“Over the last days, we have

seen a significant movement of Russian military forces into Belarus. This is the biggest Russian deployment there since the Cold War,” Stoltenberg told reporters at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

He said Russian troop numbers in Belarus are likely to climb to 30,000, with the backing of special forces, advanced fighter jets, Iskander short-range ballistic missiles and S-400 ground-to-air missile defense systems.

“So we speak about a wide range of modern military capa-

bilities. All this will be combined with Russia’s annual nuclear forces exercise, expected to take place this month,” Stoltenberg said.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu was in Minsk to check on preparations for major Russia-Belarus war games scheduled for Feb. 10 to Feb. 20. Shoigu met with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. Speaking about the drills, Lukashenko said the goal was “to reinforce the border with Ukraine.”

# Russia ships watch US carrier group operate

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

ABOARD THE USS HARRY S. TRUMAN — U.S. and NATO officials said the Russian military was shadowing U.S. ships participating in a multinational exercise in the Adriatic Sea, adding that “outside observance” wasn’t unusual and not necessarily related to rising tensions over Ukraine.

The comments Wednesday came as the United States announced that it will send 3,000 more troops to Europe to bolster NATO allies amid concerns that more than 100,000 Russian troops positioned along Ukraine’s borders will invade the country.

The Guardian newspaper and other media outlets also reported that six amphibious Russian warships from the Baltic Sea sailed into the Mediterranean Sea last week.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the ships will take part in naval maneuvers, according to The Drive, an online news site.

Meanwhile, the destroyer

USS Ross joined France’s Charles de Gaulle carrier strike group for its deployment to the eastern Mediterranean this week, the U.S. Navy announced Saturday. The carrier strike group set sail on Tuesday.

U.S. Navy ships and aircraft routinely operate in the vicinity of Russian military units in the Mediterranean and other areas, said Lt. Cmdr. Karl Schonberg, a spokesman for U.S. 6th Fleet. The interactions are especially common in constrained waterways, such as the Black, Mediterranean and Adriatic seas, he said.

Schonberg did not directly comment about recent encounters, but characterized the majority of interactions as safe, professional and compliant with international law. The Navy, however, has in recent years released video of Russian aircraft flying very closely to U.S. ships and planes in maneuvers that service officials deemed dangerous.

U.S. and NATO officials aboard the USS Harry S. Tru-

man wouldn’t say where the carrier strike group would be sent after the Neptune Strike 2022 exercise ends Friday. NATO officials described Neptune as a “vigilance activity” that “reflects routine deterrence activities aimed at ensuring peace and stability.”

The exercise, which included the U.S. 6th Fleet flagship USS Mount Whitney, was more about allies and partners and not about Russia, said U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Curt Renshaw, commander of Carrier Strike Group 8.

“We planned to be able to operate wherever we are needed most, so we’re needed here most right now (operating with NATO),” Renshaw said.

While emphasizing NATO’s strength, Renshaw said his job was to ensure that the strike group could “provide that capability to dominate a maritime environment, to provide security” should officials decide it is needed.

Renshaw also pointed out the strike group’s ability to coordinate with counterparts as far

away as the Netherlands and Poland.

“What we bring to strategic decision-makers is that we are able to execute absolutely to perfection and integrate (with) partners, so that on a tactical level, we are on our game,” he said.

Recent Russian actions were not a determining factor in Truman’s participation in the event, said Rear Adm. Marco Papi, deputy chief of staff of operations for Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO.

Integrating the carrier was the culmination of years of work to refine the relationship between the U.S. fleet and the NATO strike force, Papi said.

U.S. officials announced Truman’s addition to the exercise last month, lauding it as the first time a carrier strike group would be under NATO control since the Cold War.

The carrier strike group was thought to have been assigned to U.S. 5th Fleet, which operates more in the Middle East, but was changed to 6th Fleet in mid-December, Renshaw said.

## Ex-Navy captain latest to plead guilty in ‘Fat Leonard’ scandal

*The San Diego Union-Tribune*

SAN DIEGO — The fourth of nine Navy officers who were headed to trial in the “Fat Leonard” bribery scandal pleaded guilty on Wednesday.

Former Capt. Donald Hornbeck, 61, pleaded guilty in San Diego federal court to one count of bribery of a public official, one month ahead of the expected trial start date. The plea has been in the works for a while — his lawyer implied a guilty plea was imminent back in November, and a previously scheduled change of plea hearing was canceled last month due to COVID-19.

In the plea agreement, Hornbeck admitted to using his position to steer Navy business to Singapore-based contractor Leonard Glenn Francis, nicknamed for his girth. In return, Hornbeck was bribed with extravagant dinners, luxury hotel stays and

hedonistic parties with prostitutes, at a value of at least \$67,000, according to court records.

Hornbeck exercised his influence over contracts first as an assistant chief of staff for operations aboard the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk from 2005 to 2007, and later as the deputy chief of staff for operations for the entire 7th Fleet, the Navy’s largest.

On several occasions, Hornbeck was one of Francis’ top go-to advocates inside the Navy. Emails show Francis asking Hornbeck to divert Navy ships to Southeast Asian ports Francis controlled — including what ended up being a \$1.85 million visit by the Kitty Hawk to Port Klang, Malaysia, in 2007.

In later emails, Francis leaned on Hornbeck to resolve billing disputes between the Navy and Francis’ company, Glenn Defense

Marine Asia. It was later determined that Francis’ company had fleeced the Navy out of at least \$35 million over the years. Hornbeck also repeatedly hit up Francis for a job.

Hornbeck has agreed to pay the government restitution — possibly \$67,830 — as well as a \$37,500 fine.

Hornbeck is the 29th person to plead guilty in the San Diego-based prosecution, including Francis. There are five remaining officers with whom he was indicted alongside who are preparing for trial, which would be the first in the case.

It is unknown if Hornbeck and some of the other officers who’ve recently pleaded guilty will testify. Francis is expected to, however, and prosecutors this week indicated sex workers may also be taking the witness stand, under pseudonyms if allowed.

# Feds appeal Hawaii's order on Navy fuel tank

By **WYATT OLSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

**FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii** — The Department of Justice has appealed an emergency order issued last month by Hawaii requiring the Navy to drain all fuel from a huge underground storage facility, arguing that state law does not authorize such a sweeping edict.

The 82-page appeal, filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court, District of Hawaii, largely reiterates arguments the Navy made last month in response to the final order subsequently issued by the Hawaii Department of Health.

The appeal contends the Health Department overstepped its authority under state law in ordering the roughly 150 million gallons of fuel to be removed.

The World War II-era underground fuel facility, which is near Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, is the source of jet fuel that has contaminated one of three wells the Navy uses for its water distribution system.

Thousands of residents at two dozen military housing areas near Pearl Harbor have been displaced from their homes after complaints surfaced over Thanksgiving weekend of foul-smelling water with an oily sheen.

Navy officials have said the well contamination likely came from fuel spills in May and November last year. The service is in the process of flushing out the contaminated well, distribution system and pipes in every home affected.

The statute that the Health De-

partment based its order upon “was not written to address long-term issues, which are the subject of other Hawaii statutes,” the appeal said. “And the swift and truncated nature of the hearing [the Health Department] provided for review of the Emergency Order was inadequate to evaluate the entire Red Hill facility.”

The appeal argues that the appropriate means for debating and deciding the fate of the facility is in the permitting process.

“Whether the entire facility is built and operated in a manner that protects human health and the environment is the subject of ongoing permitting proceedings following [the Health Department’s] proposal to issue a permit for the underground storage tanks in June 2021,” the appeal states.

The Department of Defense’s announcement Monday that it would appeal the emergency order outraged many Hawaiians.

Members of the Oahu Water Protectors hosted a news conference Wednesday outside the gate leading to Pacific Fleet headquarters. Some held up signs reading “No trust Navy,” “Our water, our land” and “Navy lies.”

“Despite numerous public statements to the contrary, the US Navy never had any intention of defueling the Red Hill tanks ...” the group said in a Wednesday news release.

Appealing the emergency order is “a grave and unforced error that undermines public trust,” U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz said in an email to his Hawaii constituents Wednesday.

## Retired Army officer claims retaliation by Trump allies

*Associated Press*

**WASHINGTON** — A retired Army lieutenant colonel who was a pivotal witness in the first impeachment case against Donald Trump has sued the oldest son of the former president and other Trump allies, accusing them of participating in an “intentional, concerted campaign of unlawful intimidation and retaliation” over his decision to testify.

The lawsuit from Alexander Vindman, who testified during 2019 impeachment proceedings about a phone call in which Trump pressed his Ukraine counterpart to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden and his son, Hunter, was filed Wednesday in federal court in Washington. Trump was impeached by the House but acquitted by the Senate in February 2020.

The suit names as defendants Donald Trump Jr.; Rudy Giuliani, a longtime Trump adviser who has served as Trump’s lawyer; and former White House commu-

nications officials Dan Scavino and Julia Hahn.

It alleges that after Vindman was summoned by House lawmakers to testify, the defendants and others coordinated and advanced “false narratives” about him, including that he was a spy for Ukraine and had spoken pejoratively about the United States to foreign officials, leaked classified information about him, falsely accused him of lying under oath and worked to derail his expected promotion to colonel.

“The actions taken by Defendants against Lt. Col. Vindman sent a message to other potential witnesses as well: cooperate at your own peril,” the suit states.

Lawyers for Trump Jr., Scavino and Giuliani did not immediately return messages seeking comment. Hahn also did not return an email seeking comment.

Vindman testified that he twice raised concerns over the Trump administration’s push to have Ukraine investigate the Bidens.

## Taliban reopen universities for women in 6 Afghan areas

*Associated Press*

**ISLAMABAD** — The Taliban on Wednesday said they have reopened public universities for female students in six of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces, a move marking a major concession to international demands by the country’s new rulers.

Since they swept into power in mid-August, the international community has watched to see whether the Taliban will impose the same harsh measures as during their 1990s rule of Afghanistan, including banning girls from education and women from the workplace and public life.

The Taliban have imposed several restrictions, many of them on women, since their takeover — women have been banned from many jobs outside the health and teaching sector, and girls have not been able to go to school after grade six. The Taliban demand women wear headscarves but have stopped short of imposing the burqa, the head-to-toe covering that was

compulsory under their previous rule.

The Taliban-run culture and information ministry said Wednesday that public universities in the provinces of Nangarhar and Kandahar were now open for women in what it described as a staggered process expected to see all students — men and women — eventually return to university.

Later in the day, the Taliban spokesman for the ministry of higher education, Ahmad Taqqi, said public universities also reopened Wednesday for women in four more provinces — Helmand, Farah, Nimroz, and Laghman.

The six provinces have warmer climates than the rest of Afghanistan where the winters are bitterly cold, which the Taliban said is the reason they are the first to reopen. Men will attend classes in the morning and women in the afternoon, aligning with a gender-segregated system under the Taliban.

# Ice a concern as storm moves across US

Associated Press

CHICAGO — A major winter storm with millions of Americans in its path spread rain, freezing rain and heavy snow further across the country on Thursday, knocking out power to more than 100,000 homes and businesses and disrupting flights at the busy Dallas Fort Worth International Airport.

A long stretch of states from New Mexico to Maine remained under winter storm warnings and watches, and the path of the storm stretched further from the central United States into more of the South and Northeast. Heavy snow was expected from the southern Rockies to northern New England, while forecasters said heavy ice buildup was likely from Texas to Pennsylvania.

“We have a lot of real estate covered by winter weather impacts this morning,” Andrew Orrison, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in College Park, Md., said

early Thursday. “We do have an expansive area of heavy snow, sleet and freezing rain occurring.”

Parts of Ohio, New York and northern New England were expected to see heavy snowfall as the storm moves to the east with 12 to 18 inches of snow possible in some places through Friday, Orrison said.

Along the warmer side of the storm, strong thunderstorms capable of damaging wind gusts and tornadoes were possible Thursday in parts of Mississippi and Alabama, the Storm Prediction Center said.

More than 20 inches of snow was reported in the southern Rockies, while more than a foot of snow fell in areas of Illinois, Indiana and Michigan.

Sleet and freezing rain were occurring early Thursday in the Dallas-Fort Worth area and in parts of Oklahoma and Arkansas. More than 100,000 homes and businesses were

without power, mostly in Texas, Tennessee and Arkansas, according to the website poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

“Unfortunately we are looking at enough ice accumulations that we will be looking at significant travel impacts,” Orrison said.

Ice began accumulating Thursday in parts of West Tennessee including Memphis, causing power outages and dangerous road conditions during the morning commute. Trees sagged under the weight of ice, resulting in fallen tree limbs and branches. Parked cars had a layer of ice on them and authorities in several communities around Memphis warned of some cars sliding off slick roadways.

Texas had about 70,000 power outages Thursday morning, far from the more than 4 million outages that paralyzed the state during the February 2021 freeze in one of the worst blackouts in U.S. history.

## Jobless claims in US fall for a second straight week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After three consecutive weeks of unemployment claims that appeared to rise in tandem with omicron, fewer Americans applied for unemployment benefits for the second week in a row.

Jobless claims fell by 23,000 to 238,000 last week, from 261,000 the previous week, the Labor Department reported Thursday.

The four-week average for claims, which compensates for weekly volatility, rose by nearly 8,000 to 255,000. It was the fifth straight week of increases for the average, mirroring a surge in COVID-19 cases in parts of the country.

A winter spike in infections fueled by the omicron variant stymied what had been a strong comeback from last year’s short but devastating coronavirus recession. Jobless claims, a proxy for layoffs, had fallen mostly steadily for about a year, and late last year dipped below the pre-pandemic average of around 220,000 a week. Economists expect claims to return to those lower levels as the virus fades, which is already happening in areas first hit with omicron.

On Tuesday, the government reported that the number of posted jobs rose 1.4% to 10.9 million on the last day of December, compared with the previous month. That is

far higher than pre-pandemic levels, though just below the record number of 11.1 million that was reached in July. The data suggests companies were still desperate to hire workers last month yet had trouble finding enough people to fill their open jobs.

On Friday, the Labor Department will release its monthly jobs report. Analysts are forecasting that the economy added about 175,000 jobs. In December, the unemployment rate fell to 3.9%, a long steady decline from heights of nearly 15% in the spring of 2020 when the pandemic devastated the global economy.

## Biden agenda at risk with Sen. Luján out for 4 weeks

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Democrats’ fragile hold on the Senate majority became vividly apparent Wednesday with the sudden illness of New Mexico Sen. Ben Ray Luján, who won’t be back to work for at least four weeks, throwing President Joe Biden’s Supreme Court pick and lagging legislative agenda in doubt.

The 49-year-old Democrat remained hospitalized after suffering a stroke and is expected to make a full recovery. But Senate colleagues were blindsided by the news — even top-ranking leaders were reportedly

unaware that Luján fell ill last Thursday, a stunning oversight. Barring any complications, he is expected to be back at work in four to six weeks, according to a senior aide granted anonymity to discuss the situation.

Without Luján’s presence, the party no longer has full day-to-day control of what has been an evenly split Senate, leaving Biden’s potential Supreme Court nomination, big priorities and even routine business at risk in the face of Republican objections.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who went to the White House later Wednesday to discuss the court nominee with Bi-

den, spoke of the “awful, frightening” situation, but remained hopeful that Luján, one of the chamber’s youngest members, would be “back to his old self” before too long and the Senate would carry on with its business.

“All of us are rooting for him every step of the way — between now and the day he makes his return to the Senate,” Schumer said Wednesday.

The uncertainty shows just how precarious the Democrats’ hold on power in Washington really is and the limits of Biden’s ability to usher what’s left of a once-bold agenda through Congress.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### 2 accused of robbing students at bus stops

**AZ** EL MIRAGE — An 18-year-old man and a teenage boy have been arrested in robberies of students at bus stops in the Dysart Unified School District, according to El Mirage police.

They said two armed robberies occurred less than a mile apart Monday morning.

No students were injured in either robbery and police said it's unclear how much money was taken from the students.

Police said they located the suspects in a vehicle that had been reported stolen.

The two suspects are facing at least two counts each of aggravated assault and armed robbery, according to authorities.

### Child, 4, finds gun in car, accidentally kills himself

**LA** WESTWEGO — A 4-year-old boy in Louisiana, sitting in the back of a car with two younger siblings, fatally shot himself in the forehead with a gun he found while his mother and another adult smoked marijuana in the front seat, authorities said.

An autopsy Monday found that Jarion Walker's gunshot wound was self-inflicted, Jefferson Parish Sheriff Joseph Lopinto said Monday, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported.

The shooting happened about 10:45 p.m. Saturday in Westwego, a suburb of New Orleans. Jarion was sitting in the back seat with two siblings age 22 months and about 1, authorities said.

The adults, who admitted to smoking marijuana at the time, said they heard the shot, Lopinto

said. The little boy was rushed to a hospital, where he died of his injuries, the sheriff said.

No one has been arrested, though detectives will complete the investigation and turn the results over to the Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Office, Lopinto said.

### Man charged with hate crimes for graffiti

**IL** CHICAGO — A man was charged Tuesday with hate crimes for vandalism and antisemitic graffiti, including swastikas, at a synagogue and affiliated Jewish school in Chicago.

Shahid Hussain, 39, of suburban Niles, faces a total of eight felony counts — two each of a hate crime against a church or synagogue, a hate crime against a school, defacing a school and criminal damage of a school.

The vandalism occurred Sunday at the FREE Synagogue and Hanna Sacks Bais Yaakov High School.

### 7 indicted in catalytic converter theft ring

**MO** SPRINGFIELD — A federal grand jury has indicted seven southwest Missouri residents who allegedly stole thousands of catalytic converters and sold them to an Arkansas company for millions of dollars, federal prosecutors announced Thursday.

Five people from Springfield and two from Rogersville were indicted this week on charges of conspiracy to transport stolen property across state lines and interstate transportation of stolen property. The operation ran from from Dec. 12, 2019, to Oct. 15, 2021, prosecutors said.

Prosecutors said some of those indicted stole the catalytic converters while others bought them and sold them to a business in Mountain Home, Ark.

### City tweaks its law to address peacock problem

**FL** MIAMI — Peacocks could be on the outs in some South Florida neighborhoods after the Miami-Dade commission agreed to loosen a law protecting the birds.

While the 20-year-old law still protects peacocks from harm, commissioners agreed Tuesday to allow cities to opt out if they present appropriate plans to humanely remove the birds from areas where they're not wanted, the Miami Herald reported.

"Mating season is when we get the most complaints. They get very aggressive," said sponsor Raquel Regalado, whose district includes neighborhoods in Coral Gables and Miami where peacocks roam freely. "They lay their eggs, they build their nests, they peck the cars."

Some neighbors love the colorful birds while others complain of droppings, noise and the damage they cause by roosting on cars or houses.

### Man who led luxury goods fraud ring gets 4 years

**CA** LOS ANGELES — The head of a credit card fraud ring that bought more than a half-million dollars in bags, shoes, jewelry and other goods from luxury stores in Southern California has been sentenced to four years in federal prison.

Trace Jones, 33, of Los Angeles, was sentenced Monday. He pleaded guilty in 2020 to conspiracy to commit bank fraud

and aggravated identity theft, the U.S. attorney's office said in a statement. Prosecutors said that from 2016 to 2018, Jones and others used stolen identification information from American Express cardholders and ordered replacement cards that they used to buy goods at luxury stores in Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and Costa Mesa.

Jones was also ordered to pay \$521,128 in restitution to American Express.

### Bus driver sentenced in hit-and-run death

**MN** MINNEAPOLIS — A school bus driver convicted of striking and killing a pedestrian in a Minneapolis suburb and then fleeing the scene was sentenced Monday to 41 months in prison.

Jason Rynders, 35, of Maple Grove, pleaded guilty in November to criminal vehicular homicide in the March 2020 death of Devon Lizbeth Doherty, 45, of Brooklyn Park.

Prosecutors said a man who was driving to work that day saw a school bus parked on the right side of the road and then felt his car hit something. He got out and saw that he had hit a woman. Rynders was outside of the bus and the man yelled at him to call 911. Instead, Rynders got back on the bus and drove away.

A video camera on the bus confirmed that Rynders had hit the victim, prosecutors said. Rynders had said he was not aware of the collision or the driver's pleas to call 911.

The bus was headed toward Friendship Academy, a Minneapolis charter elementary school. No children aboard were hurt.

— From wire reports

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# Decker hurt in US women's hockey win

Associated Press

BEIJING — Difficult as it was hearing Brianna Decker crying out in pain while laying prone on the ice, Kendall Coyne Schofield understood the U.S. women's hockey team still had a game to finish.

After the Americans wrapped up their 5-2 win over Finland to open the Beijing Games, Schofield could verbalize what she felt when encountering Decker standing on crutches next to the bench.

"I just told her, 'We got this,'" Schofield said. "No matter what she's a big part of this group. ... You saw that in our response after she went down, how much we picked up the game and took control."

The Americans certainly had their veteran teammate's back after Decker was hurt while being tripped from behind by Ronja Savolainen 9:32 into the first period.

The sight of the team's assistant captain and 11-year veteran unable to put weight on her left leg before being stretchered off provided a motivating spark to the defending Olympic gold medalists.

Amanda Kessel and Alex Carpenter scored twice over the next 3½ minutes in

the Group A match. Schofield then put the win away with two goals in 64 seconds in the second.

"There's no replacing Brianna Decker," said Schofield, the team's captain. "But in that situation, everyone stepped up to the plate in the way they were asked to. And I think that's how we were successful tonight."

Now it's a matter of the Americans continuing to forge ahead — while more than likely missing their top center — in their bid to become the first U.S. squad to win consecutive titles.

"It was sickening," Kessel said of the yelps of pain coming from Decker after she and Savolainen were tangled up to the left of the U.S. net.

"She's one of the toughest players that I've ever played with or against, so you know she's not staying down on the ice or crying when it's not bad. So it's definitely a gut punch," Kessel added. "We want to win for her."

Without going into detail, coach Joel Johnson said Decker's injury was still being evaluated. Johnson also said he wasn't

going to dispute the official's decision not to penalize Savolainen, who appeared to slow-foot Decker from behind, leading to both players falling to the ice.

"They saw it as just people getting tangled up," Johnson said. "I'm biased, and so I saw it a little differently. But I don't think it was a missed call by any means."

Savolainen said she wasn't sure what happened, and called it "an unlucky situation" while sharing what she told Decker following the game.

"I just ask how she's feeling, and then I said, 'Sorry.' Like, I didn't want to hurt her," she said.

Decker's injury was the second to a key player during the tournament's opening day. Canadian forward Melodie Daoust did not return after being checked hard into the boards by Sarah Foster in Canada's 12-1 rout of Switzerland.

Carpenter scored twice for the U.S., and Maddie Rooney stopped 10 shots.

The Americans improved to 9-0 against Finland in Olympic play. The U.S. has Friday off before facing Russia on Saturday.

## Fisher, Texas A&M secure top-rated recruiting class

Associated Press

After Texas A&M added yet another blue-chip prospect to the highest-rated recruiting class in college football Wednesday, coach Jimbo Fisher went off about rumors that booster-funded endorsement deals were fueling the Aggies' success.

"There is no \$30 million fund. There is no \$10 million, there is no \$5 million. This is garbage," Fisher said. "It pisses me off."

College football's traditional signing period opened with most of the heavy lifting having already been done in mid-December. Texas A&M came into the day with the top-rated class in the country, according to 247 Sports' composite rankings. Southeastern Conference rivals and title game participants Alabama and Georgia were Nos. 2 and 3, respectively.

Then Shemar Stewart, one of the most highly regarded players in Florida, picked the Aggies over Miami to give Texas A&M's class the best score the website has ever handed out. Stewart is the seventh five-star prospect in Texas

A&M's 2022 class.

The Aggies are coming off a disappointing 8-4 season, though they did upset Alabama. In four years under Fisher, A&M is 34-14 but this is its fourth straight top-10 recruiting class.

### New guys

For newly hired coaches such as USC's Lincoln Riley, Oklahoma's Brent Venables, Miami's Mario Cristobal, Florida's Bill Napier and LSU's Brian Kelly, pulling together that first recruiting class can be like trying to rally in the fourth quarter.

Riley walked into maybe the toughest situation after the Trojans fired Clay Helton early last season. USC had few players committed when Riley arrived, so he leaned heavily on the transfer portal.

USC signed only eight high school players, among them cornerback Domani Jackson, a five-star from California. Riley has signed 13 transfers so far. Most notably, former Oklahoma quarterback Caleb Williams announced he would be joining his former Sooners coach at USC.

Venables and Oklahoma actually ended up with a top-10 class.

"That was a race," Venables said. "It's been a sprint for the past couple of months."

LSU and Florida both ended up in the top 20 under their new coaches.

Kelly had a big win on Wednesday, landing five-star Harold Perkins from Texas, a player who had been committed to Texas A&M. Miami also made a strong late push to crack the top 20, beating LSU for four-star running back TreVonte' Ciztizen from Louisiana.

### Dance off

Twice since getting to LSU from Notre Dame, Kelly has been part of a viral video of him dancing with — or maybe more accurately near — a recruit during a visit to his new school.

Kelly is 1-for-2 on landing those recruits. Tight end Danny Lewis, who was in the latest video, signed with Alabama on Wednesday.

"I like to dance, too," Crimson Tide coach Nick Saban said.

# Dinwiddie's triple-double lifts Wizards

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Spencer Dinwiddie scored the go-ahead bucket with 1:30 left and had a triple-double to lead the Washington Wizards to a 106-103 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Wednesday night.

Dinwiddie had 14 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists. Kyle Kuzma scored 24 points to help the Wizards snap a six-game losing streak.

"The points just came because I shot a lot," Dinwiddie said. "I didn't shoot well."

Kuzma joked Dinwiddie — who was just 4-for-16 — had a quadruple-double thanks to "missed shots."

"The No. 1 way to get out of a funk is just ball out," Kuzma said.

Montrezl Harrell hit a 16-footer for 102-98 lead and blew kisses to the Philly crowd headed into a timeout. Washington won with Bradley Beal sidelined at least a week with an injured left wrist.

Joel Embiid had 27 points and 14 rebounds for the 76ers.

**Lakers 99, Trail Blazers 94:** Anthony Davis scored 30 points, Carmelo Anthony added 24 and host Los Angeles rallied in the fourth quarter to beat Portland.

Davis had 19 points and seven of his 15 rebounds in the final 12 minutes as the Lakers returned home with a win after going 2-4 on their Eastern road trip.

Norman Powell led the Trail Blazers with 30 points and tied a season high with five

three-pointers. Anfernee Simons added 19 points, and Jusuf Nurkic had a double-double with 16 points and 13 rebounds.

**Grizzlies 120, Knicks 108:** Jaren Jackson Jr. had 26 points and 10 rebounds, Ja Morant added 23 points and nine assists and Memphis won at New York.

Morant had some of his usual high-flying highlight plays, but shot just 9-for-27 from the field, missing all six three-point attempts.

But the Grizzlies go well beyond their first-time All-Star. Rookie Ziaire Williams scored a season-high 21 points on 9-for-11 shooting, while Jackson, Desmond Bane and De'Anthony Melton all hit four three-pointers.

**Kings 112, Nets 101:** Tyrese Haliburton scored seven of his 12 points in the fourth quarter and host Sacramento handed Brooklyn its sixth consecutive loss.

Harrison Barnes scored 19 points and Haliburton had 11 assists to help the Kings stop a seven-game skid. Buddy Hield and Davion Mitchell scored 18 apiece.

Nic Claxton had a career-high 23 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for the Nets. James Harden, who has been nursing a sore right hand and a hamstring injury, was held to four points, his fewest since scoring five against Chicago on May 15, 2021.

**Jazz 108, Nuggets 104:** Trent Forrest had career highs of 18 points and eight assists to lead host Utah past Denver.

Mike Conley added 17 points, and Rudy

Gay, Royce O'Neale and Bojan Bogdanovic had 15 points apiece.

The Jazz won for just the third time in 14 games and swept the season series 4-0.

**Celtics 113, Hornets 107:** Josh Richardson made six three-pointers and scored 23 points, Jayson Tatum hit two key free throws and finished with 19 points and Boston held off visiting Charlotte.

Marcus Smart scored 22 points, and Jaylen Brown added 15 to help the Celtics win their third straight.

LaMelo Ball had a career-best 38 points for Charlotte.

**Thunder 120, Mavericks 114 (OT):** Lu Dort scored 30 points, including 14 straight for Oklahoma City in overtime, and rookie Tre Mann had a career-best 29 in a win at Dallas.

The Thunder won their second consecutive game for their first winning streak since taking three straight Dec. 18-22.

**Magic 119, Pacers 118:** Gary Harris scored 22 points and Wendell Carter Jr. had 19 points and 18 rebounds to help Orlando rally to a win at Indiana.

Harris scored 10 points in the fourth quarter, including two key three-pointers.

**Rockets 115, Cavaliers 104:** Christian Wood and rookie Jalen Green each scored 21 points and Houston beat Cleveland to snap an 11-game home skid.

Cavaliers rookie Evan Mobley had a career-high 29 points and added 12 rebounds.

# Ivey scores 21 as No. 4 Purdue wins at Minnesota

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Jaden Ivey scored 21 points and Zach Edey added 14 points and 12 rebounds, leading No. 4 Purdue to an 88-73 win over Minnesota on Wednesday night.

Senior guard Eric Hunter Jr. added a career-high 20 points and the Boilermakers got double-figure scoring from four players.

Purdue (19-3, 8-3 Big Ten) has won four straight.

Payton Willis scored 24 points and Jamsion Battle added 21 for the Golden Gophers (11-8, 2-8), who lost their third in a row.

**No. 5 Kentucky 77, Vanderbilt 70:** Davion Mintz scored 21 points off the bench, hitting a

three-pointer during a pivotal 11-2 run, and the host Wildcats won their third consecutive game.

Kentucky (18-4, 7-2 Southeastern Conference) twice led by 10 in the second half, but the Commodores closed to 56-53 with 9:28 remaining.

**No. 6 Houston 73, Tulane 62:** Fabian White Jr. scored 16 of his career high-tying 21 points in the first half and the host Cougars won their 11th straight.

White, a fifth-year graduate senior, also surpassed 1,000 points in his career at Houston (19-2, 8-0 American) and finished with eight rebounds.

**No. 18 Illinois 80, No. 11 Wisconsin 67:** Kofi Cockburn had 37

points and 12 rebounds to lead the host Illini.

Cockburn had 20 first-half points on 10-for-12 shooting, including two rim-rattling dunks. He finished 16-for-19, making his last five shots for Illinois (16-5, 9-2 Big Ten).

**No. 24 Marquette 83, No. 12 Villanova 73:** Justin Lewis had 19 points and nine rebounds, and the host Golden Eagles never trailed.

Marquette (16-7, 8-4 Big East) won for the eighth time in nine games and completed its first regular-season sweep of the Wildcats (16-6, 9-3) since 2011-12.

**No. 21 Xavier 68, Butler 66:** Zach Freemantle scored 23 points and the host Musketeers

overcame a miserable three-point shooting night to beat the Bulldogs.

**Lehigh 63, Navy 62:** Evan Taylor scored 13 points and his layup with 10 seconds left carried the host Mountain Hawks to a win.

Sean Yoder missed a three-pointer as time expired for the Midshipmen (14-8, 7-4). Greg Summers led Navy with 16.

**Loyola (Md.) 61, Army 57:** Cam Spencer had 19 points and nine rebounds to lead the host Greyhounds to a win.

Jaylin Andrews had 16 points for Loyola (13-9, 7-4 Patriot League). Jalen Rucker had 22 points for the Black Knights (13-10, 7-4).

# Kraken post franchise's first shutout

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jared McCann had a goal and an assist, and Philipp Grubauer stopped 19 shots for the first shutout in franchise history as the expansion Seattle Kraken beat the New York Islanders 3-0 Wednesday night.

Mason Appleton had a goal and an assist and Vince Dunn also scored to help Seattle to its third win in seven games. Grubauer got his 19th career shutout and first since May 12 against Los Angeles in the season finale while playing for Colorado.

The Kraken go into the All-Star break last in the Pacific Division at 15-27-4.

Semyon Varlamov had 28 saves and lost his third straight start for New York, falling to 3-9-1 this season. The Islanders have lost four of six and remain 17 points out of the second wild card in the Eastern Conference.

**Oilers 5, Capitals 3:** Ryan Nugent-Hopkins broke a tie

with a short-handed goal with 4:03 remaining as visiting Edmonton beat Washington.

Nugent-Hopkins added an empty-net goal to wrap up the Oilers' fifth victory in six games.

The Capitals played without Alex Ovechkin, who entered the NHL's COVID-19 protocols Wednesday. He'll also miss the All-Star Game.

Leon Draisaitl, Evander Kane and Connor McDavid scored in the first 5:07 to give the Oilers a 3-0 lead. Mikko Koskinen stopped 24 shots.

Lars Eller, Conor Sheary and Evgeny Kuznetsov scored for Washington.

After allowing three goals and stopping just one shot, Ilya Samsonov was replaced by Pheonix Copley, who stopped 22 shots.

**Kings 5, Red Wings 3:** Philip Danault scored twice, including the go-ahead goal in the third period, and visiting Los Angeles beat Detroit.

Arthur Kaliyev, Victor Ar-

vidsson and Adrian Kempe also scored for the Kings, who went 4-0-2 on their road swing. Jonathan Quick made 22 saves. Trevor Moore and rookie Austin Strand had two assists apiece. Strand assisted on one goal in his previous 16 career games.

Michael Rasmussen, Tyler Bertuzzi and Joe Veleno scored for Detroit. Alex Nedeljkovic made 40 saves.

**Flames 4, Coyotes 2:** Christopher Tanev scored the go-ahead goal and had three assists, Blake Coleman scored twice and visiting Calgary beat Arizona for its fifth win in six games.

Elias Lindholm also scored, and Jacob Markstrom had 24 saves for the Flames, who had 50 shots on goal.

Clayton Keller and Alex Galchenyuk scored for the Coyotes, Arizona and goaltender Karel Vejmelka made 46 saves, including a franchise-record 24 in the first period while facing a franchise-re-

cord 26 shots.

Keller, Arizona's All-Star, added an assist and extended his points streak to six games, tying a career high. He has three goals and five assists during the streak.

**Wild 5, Blackhawks 0:** Cam Talbot made 30 saves for his first shutout of the season and the 25th of his career, and visiting Minnesota beat Chicago to extended its points streak to 10 games.

Mats Zuccarello, Kevin Fiala and Frederick Gaudreau each had a goal and an assist for the surging Wild. The Wild head into the NHL's All-Star break on a 9-0-1 roll.

Fiala extended his career-high points streak to 12 games, matching Mikael Granlund's Wild record set in 2017.

Kirill Kaprizov scored his team-leading 19th goal to stretch his career-best points streak to eight games. Nico Sturm also connected to help Minnesota improve to 3-0-0 against fading Chicago.

## Americans blank Honduras on frigid night in Minnesota

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — The U.S. strategically picked frigid Minnesota for this match to minimize travel time, maintain consistency of conditions and, of course, gain an edge over an opponent from a tropical country.

The Americans sure didn't need the advantage against winless Honduras.

They have a commanding, complete and confidence-boosting performance to build on, once they thaw out.

Weston McKennie and Walker Zimmerman had first-half goals to give the U.S. an early spark on a frigid night and a fresh Christian Pulisic scored after entering in the second half, leading the Americans past Honduras 3-0 in a World

Cup qualifier on Wednesday night.

"Right from the opening whistle," coach Gregg Berhalter said, "I knew that we were in good control."

Goalkeeper Matt Turner didn't have to make a single save for the Americans, who emerged from the pandemic-altered schedule — forcing games in January and February — in second place with three matches to go. The U.S. outshot Honduras 16-2 and had 71.8% possession.

"Once you get in that game mode, you just are out there competing, and that's all that really matters," Zimmerman said.

The kickoff temperature was 3 degrees with a minus-14 wind

chill at Allianz Field, selected by the U.S. Soccer Federation along with Columbus, Ohio, to bracket a road game against Canada.

The Americans beat El Salvador 1-0 on Thursday, when it was 29 in Ohio. They lost 2-0 to Canada in Hamilton, Ontario, when it was 22. The weather in Minnesota was a whole different level of chill, the coldest in U.S. team history and in violation of USSF guidelines for safe outdoor play. The game ended with a 1-degree temperature.

"It was freezing out here. I'm looking forward to getting into the locker room," Pulisic said.

Still, the match was a sellout — an announced crowd of 19,202 — with red-white-and-blue-clad fans clutching their

complimentary hand warmers and however many layers they could find in their closets. Players wore skin-tight thermal tops and black gloves, but most of them had bare skin exposed on their knees as they jogged and jumped around on the grass at the 3-year-old stadium that's supported by subsurface heating coils.

"It's easy on a night like tonight to just stay home and sit in front of the TV and stay warm in your living room, but these fans came out and came out with energy," said Berhalter, who seized an opportunity during a second-half break to oblige some fans behind the bench by posing for a photo.

Honduras didn't have as much fun.