

US destroys Houthi station in Yemen

By ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

U.S. forces launched strikes against a Houthi militant drone ground control station and 10 one-way attack drones in the latest action to cripple the Iranian-backed group's ability to fire on ships in the Red Sea.

At about 1:30 a.m. Thursday, U.S. forces attacked after identifying the ground control station and drones in Houthi-controlled territory in Yemen, a U.S. Central Command statement said Thursday. Military officials determined the base and its drones were "an imminent threat to merchant vessels and U.S. ships in the region," according to CENTCOM, which called the strikes a self-defense measure.

The strikes were carried out by F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jets, The Associated Press reported Thursday. The ground control station and drones were destroyed, CENTCOM said.

Hours earlier, a U.S. Navy destroyer shot down an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by

Houthi militants, CENTCOM said. USS Carney destroyed the missile at about 8:30 p.m. Wednesday and then shot down three Iranian-made aerial drones about 40 minutes later, a statement said.

Those actions were followed Thursday by militant attacks on a Liberian-flagged container ship in the Red Sea, AP reported.

The attack happened west of Hodeida, a port city in Yemen long held by the rebels, said the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, a British military group overseeing Mideast waterways. It said the crew and the vessel were safe and the blast came far off the vessel's starboard side.

The U.S. defense officials identified the targeted container ship as the Koi, a Bermuda-owned vessel. Its management could not be immediately reached for comment. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters. The Houthis did not claim responsibility for the assault.

Since Nov. 19, the militants have targeted more than 36 ships in the Red Sea.

The Houthi fighters have said they are at-

tacking commercial and military shipping in the Red Sea to support Gaza, where war between Israel and Hamas has raged since Oct. 7.

The narrow shipping lanes that pass near Yemen are some of the busiest in the world and Pentagon officials say many ships that have no apparent connection to Israel have been fired upon. On Wednesday, the Houthi militants added in a statement that all U.S. and British warships participating in "aggression" against Yemen are targets, Al Jazeera reported.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials said a Houthi missile targeting the destroyer USS Gravely in the Red Sea on Tuesday came within a mile of the ship, which is the closest a missile has come to a Navy vessel since the Houthis began their attacks, CNN reported Thursday.

The missile was shot down with the ship's close-in weapons system, a last line of defense, according to the CNN report.

Previously, Houthi missiles have been intercepted at a range of 8-to-10 miles.

Leaders urge lawmakers to improve pay for troops

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The military's top enlisted leaders called on lawmakers Wednesday to focus on improving pay and housing for service members, describing them as the most pressing quality-of-life concerns for troops.

Troops have received blanket pay raises for the last several years but Congress has not approved targeted raises for specific ranks since 2007. Poor housing conditions, particularly in barracks for the youngest service members, were the subject of a scathing government watchdog report last year.

"A couple of these problems are so big that if we don't start taking immediate action on them now, we're going to miss the curve in the future," said Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy James Honea. "We must start today."

Honea and the other leaders offered their testimony to the House Armed Services Committee's special quality-of-life panel as it finalizes efforts to provide service members with better pay and compensation, housing, child care, spouse support programs and access to health care.

The legislative proposals will be part of the drafting of the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act, an annual bill that sets policies for the Pentagon.

Military compensation and housing emerged as top issues across the service branches as the panel met with military families, military officials and advocates during the past year. Senior enlisted leaders acknowledged Wednesday that they damage troop morale and could hurt recruitment.

Lawmakers have indicated they will seek pay increases next year, specifically for junior enlisted personnel and troops with spe-

cialized skills. House Republicans advanced legislation last year that would have set a \$31,000 minimum salary for the lowest-ranking service members but it was scrapped amid an ongoing review of military compensation.

Housing is also under congressional scrutiny following a Government Accountability Office investigation that found junior enlisted troops living in barracks with mold, missing kitchenettes, sewage overflow, water-quality issues, rodent infestations, broken air conditioning and other unsafe conditions.

Rep. Nancy Mace, R-S.C., said she hears complaints about housing at the Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, S.C., almost every week.

Of the 1,140 units available to the 12,000-member military community, about 960 units are occupied and the rest are "in disrepair or completely unlivable," she said.

Account of deaths of 2 SEALs revised

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials are revising their preliminary findings on what happened to two Navy SEALs who died during a mission to board an unflagged ship that was carrying illicit Iranian-made weapons to Yemen.

Based on further review and interviews with personnel involved in the operations, U.S. officials said Wednesday that Navy Special Warfare Operator 1st Class Christopher Chambers was boarding the boat on Jan. 11

and slipped into the gap the high waves had created between the vessel and the SEALs' combatant craft. As Chambers fell, Navy Special Warfare Operator 2nd Class Nathan Gage Ingram jumped in to try to save him, according to U.S. officials familiar with what happened.

In the immediate aftermath, U.S. officials had indicated that Ingram had fallen in and that Chambers had jumped in after him. The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to dis-

cuss the ongoing review of the mission, said the change is based on new information that has been gathered.

Both Chambers and Ingram were lost at sea, as efforts to find and rescue them were unsuccessful.

In a statement, Naval Special Warfare Command said that an investigation is continuing to gather more information on what happened.

The U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet is conducting an investigation.

That probe is expected to examine whether the SEALs were properly equipped and trained for the mission, whether procedures were followed, and any decisions regarding the timing and approval of the raid, including the weather and the state of the seas.

Chambers, 37, of Maryland, enlisted in the Navy in 2012 and graduated from SEAL training in 2014. Ingram, 27, of Texas, enlisted in 2019 and graduated from SEAL training in 2021.

Austin takes the blame for undisclosed hospital stay

BY MATTHEW ADAMS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Thursday apologized for his failure to disclose his prostate cancer diagnosis, the surgery that followed, and complications that led to an extended hospital stay.

"I want to be crystal clear, we did not handle this right. I did not handle this right," he told reporters at the Pentagon. "I should have told the president about my cancer diagnosis. I should have

told my team and the American people, and I take full responsibility."

Austin returned to the Pentagon on Monday after being absent for nearly a month because of his cancer and complications from the surgery.

The secretary was released from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., on Jan. 15 after spending two weeks there following the surgery, which was conducted Dec. 22. Austin has come under scruti-

ny after he failed to notify President Joe Biden and other government officials about his illness and hospitalization.

During a regular health screening in early December, Austin's cancer was detected. He was admitted to the hospital about three weeks later for a prostatectomy, which involves surgery to remove part of the prostate gland. His doctors called it "a minimally invasive surgical procedure," though Austin was under general anesthesia during the surgery. He left

the hospital the following morning.

On Jan. 1, Austin returned to Walter Reed after experiencing pain in his abdomen, hip and leg, his doctors said. He was later found to have a urinary tract infection, and Austin spent days in the intensive care unit before he was moved to a private section of the hospital.

Austin returned to Walter Reed last Friday for a follow-up examination for his prostate cancer surgery.

1K Gaza deaths reported since court chided Israel

Associated Press

CAIRO — The toll from Israel's nearly 4-month offensive in Gaza surpassed 27,000 Palestinians killed and more than 66,000 wounded, the territory's Health Ministry said Thursday.

The number of deaths has grown by more than 1,100 since the International Court of Justice in the Hague a week ago ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent deaths, destruction and any acts of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

South Africa's foreign minister has accused Israel of ignoring

last week's ruling by the United Nations' top court, which ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent deaths in Gaza.

Israel denies the genocide accusations brought against it at the court by South Africa and says it is fighting to destroy Gaza's Hamas rulers after the militants' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. The case before the court is likely to take years before a final ruling.

The health ministry said 27,019 Palestinians have been killed and 66,139 wounded since Oct. 7. The ministry's count does

not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

Israel says it has killed thousands of Hamas militants in the war, without providing the basis for its count. The war was sparked when hundreds of Palestinian militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and taking about 250 people hostage.

Meanwhile, dozens of Israeli protesters have tried to block humanitarian aid from entering Gaza, despite an order barring them from approaching a border

crossing the trucks are using.

According to video released by an activist group behind the demonstrations, police, including mounted officers, scuffled with the protesters Wednesday.

The protesters have been gathering near the Kerem Shalom crossing for several days, saying aid should not be allowed into Gaza while hostages are still being held there. They say the aid could act as leverage to force Hamas to release the hostages.

The Israeli military this week sealed the area to prevent such protests from recurring.

Deal stalls on wartime aid, border security

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With time slipping to bolster Ukraine's defenses, Senate negotiators struggled Wednesday to finalize a bipartisan deal that would pair policy changes at the U.S. southern border with wartime aid for Kyiv as their carefully negotiated compromise ran into strong resistance from House Republicans and Donald Trump.

Senate negotiators have kept a close hold on the details of a bipartisan package on border enforcement and immigration policies that was supposed to unlock Republican support in Congress for aiding Ukraine. But conservatives view the tens of billions of dollars in proposed support with growing skepticism, unmoved by arguments

about the larger stakes for global security. NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg was making the case for the aid on Capitol Hill on Wednesday, including at The Heritage Foundation, a power center for Trump's allies in Washington.

President Joe Biden, who is pushing for a deal alongside Republican and Democratic leaders in the Senate, faces a daunting task in convincing Republicans to defy Trump's wishes and embrace the deal — especially in the midst of an election year.

Republican leaders, including House Speaker Mike Johnson, had looked to February as a potential deadline to approve another tranche of military aid for Ukraine. But the \$110 billion

national security package that congressional leaders say is essential to buttressing American allies around the globe, including Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan, has been swept up in the fight over border policies.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops are running short of weapons, including air defenses and artillery to defend against Russia's ongoing attack. The Pentagon reported last week it is out of money for Ukraine.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned in a morning floor speech that "the survival of Ukraine is on the line."

"The only way we'll rise to the occasion is if both sides are serious about finding a bipartisan compromise," he said, adding,

"We have not concluded negotiations so we will keep going to get this done."

Even if the Senate is able to finish the deal and pass it, resistance is strong in the House, where Trump, the likely Republican presidential nominee, holds significant sway over lawmakers. His opposition has left Republican leaders increasingly questioning whether the border legislation should be jettisoned from the package in a last-ditch effort to get the Ukraine funding through Congress.

"It's time for us to move something, hopefully including a border agreement, but we need to get help to Israel and to Ukraine quickly," said Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell.

Social media CEOs testify on child exploitation issues

Associated Press

Sexual predators. Addictive features. Suicide and eating disorders. Unrealistic beauty standards. Bullying. These are just some of the issues young people are dealing with on social media — and children's advocates and lawmakers say companies are not doing enough to protect them.

On Wednesday, the CEOs of Meta, TikTok, X and other social media companies went before the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify at a time when lawmakers and parents are growing increasingly concerned about the effects of social media on young people's lives.

The hearing began with recorded testimony from kids and parents who said they or their children were exploited on social media.

"They're responsible for many of the dangers our children face online," Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, who chairs the committee, said of the social media companies. "Their design choices,

their failures to adequately invest in trust and safety, their constant pursuit of engagement and profit over basic safety have all put our kids and grandkids at risk."

In a heated question and answer session with Mark Zuckerberg, Republican Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley asked the Meta CEO if he has personally compensated any of the victims and their families for what they have been through.

"I don't think so," Zuckerberg replied.

"There's families of victims here," Hawley said. "Would you like to apologize to them?"

Zuckerberg stood, turned away from his microphone and the senators, and directly addressed the parents in the gallery.

"I'm sorry for everything you have all been through. No one should go through the things that your families have suffered," he said, adding that Meta continues to invest and work on "industry-wide efforts" to protect children.

CDC says Camp Lejeune water contamination tied to cancers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Military personnel stationed at Camp Lejeune from 1975 to 1985 had at least a 20% higher risk for a number of cancers than those stationed elsewhere, federal health officials said Wednesday in a long-awaited study about the North Carolina base's contaminated drinking water.

Federal health officials called the research effort one of the largest ever done in the United States to assess cancer risk by comparing a group who live and worked in a polluted environment to a similar group that did not.

The study found military personnel stationed at U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune were at higher risk for some types of leukemia and lymphoma and cancers of the lung, breast, throat, esophagus and thyroid. Civilians at the base also were at a higher risk for a shorter list of cancers.

The study is "quite impressive," but cannot count as final proof that the tainted drinking water caused the cancers, said

David Savitz, a Brown University disease researcher who is consulting for plaintiffs' attorneys in Camp Lejeune-related litigation.

But he said the new research will add weight to arguments made on behalf of people who got sick after living and working at the base.

Camp Lejeune was built in a sandy pine forest along the North Carolina coast in the early 1940s. Its drinking water was contaminated with industrial solvents from the early 1950s to 1985.

The contamination — detected in the early 1980s — was blamed on a poorly maintained fuel depot and indiscriminate dumping on the base, as well as from an off-base dry cleaner.

In the paper, the ATSDR investigated cancer in about 211,000 people who were stationed at or worked at Camp Lejeune between 1975 and 1985 and compared them to about 224,000 people at California's Camp Pendleton — which was not known to have polluted groundwater — during the same time period.

Swift, Kelce latest conspiracy targets

Associated Press

The budding love story featuring music superstar Taylor Swift and Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce took an unexpected turn into the world of political conspiracy theories this week after the team advanced to the Super Bowl.

Myriad baseless rumors emerged on social media — everything from claims that Swift has played a part in Pentagon psychological operations to the idea that she and her two-time Super Bowl champion boyfriend are key assets in a secret plot to help President Joe Biden get reelected in 2024. Another variant: That the Chiefs' success was rigged as part of the plan for the game on Feb. 11 in Las Vegas.

Political and media figures on the right have amplified the allegations.

The claims are ludicrous and may well reflect the fear on the right that someone as famous as Swift, whose landmark Eras Tour is the first tour to cross the billion-dollar mark, could indeed influence the presidential race should she urge her legion of fans in one direction.

The potency of the impact is less clear. In Swift's case, there is some proof that she can at

minimum generate more voter registration.

In September, Swift posted a short message on her Instagram account encouraging her 272 million followers to register to vote. The post led to more than 35,000 registrations on the nonpartisan nonprofit Vote.org.

Swift's massive fan base gives her a powerful voice. An SSRS poll conducted in October found that about 6 in 10 U.S. adults called themselves at least casual fans of the singer, with 8% saying they're big fans. The poll also found that 8 in 10 U.S. adults said they had heard of her relationship with Kelce and the majority of those familiar with it considered it a real relationship, rather than a publicity stunt.

But the false claims about Swift are of such an extreme nature that they will test the limits of how potent a conspiracy theory can be. Penney sees the recent deluge of posts aimed at Swift as an attempt to preemptively blunt her impact by discrediting her.

Penney said Swift's influence could prove a difficult force to contend with, especially if she publicly supports Biden, as she did in the 2020 race.

Arab American anger casts pall over Biden's Mich. trip

Associated Press

DETROIT — President Joe Biden planned to celebrate his recent endorsement by the United Auto Workers union by visiting Michigan on Thursday, but his time in this critical battleground state with the nation's highest density of Arab Americans threatens to be overshadowed by growing anger over U.S. support for Israel's war in Gaza.

Biden's meeting with UAW workers in the Detroit area will come just days after union President Shawn Fain announced the group's endorsement. Fain underscored Biden's ties to the working class in advance of the president's visit, saying in a statement: "The UAW knows where we stand, and who stands with us — Joe Biden."

However, the Democratic president's Michigan schedule does not include any meetings with Arab Americans, adding to increasing frustration within a key voting bloc over his full-throated support of Israel in its war with Hamas.

"Why not have a meaningful conversation for how you change course with a community that has first-hand accounts of what it's like to live in the countries where your decision-making is unfolding?" said Abdullah Hammoud, the mayor of Dearborn, one of the largest

Arab American communities in the nation.

Michigan has shifted increasingly Democratic in recent years, with the party controlling all levels of state government for the first time in four decades. Biden is looking to build on that power as he seeks reelection and the state's critical 15 electoral votes.

His visit to Michigan comes ahead of the state's Feb. 27 primary. The president faces no serious challenge in the primary, but his campaign is trying to build energy for the far tougher fight to come in the fall. Michigan was part of the so-called blue wall of three states — with Wisconsin and Pennsylvania — that Biden returned to the Democratic column when he won the White House in 2020.

Now, there are concerns within the party over rising tension between Biden and Arab Americans in the state, even as he seeks to capitalize on his support among union members.

The early endorsement by the UAW was a clear win for Biden, who came to Michigan to stand alongside striking autoworkers last year. His latest meeting with union members comes on the heels of Donald Trump's visit with another one of the U.S. most influential unions, the Teamsters, in Washington on Wednesday.

Trump meets with Teamsters in hopes of endorsement

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump met with leaders of the Teamsters Union in Washington Wednesday as he tried to chip away at President Joe Biden's organized labor support heading into a likely general election rematch.

Trump participated in a roundtable with the union's executive board, its president and

members as he works to win over the blue-collar workers who helped fuel his 2016 victory and who are expected to play a major role in November, particularly in critical Midwestern swing states like Wisconsin and Michigan.

Speaking to reporters after what he called "a very productive meeting," Trump acknowledged the union typically backs Democrats, but said of a possi-

ble endorsement, "Stranger things have happened."

"Usually a Republican wouldn't get that endorsement," he said. "But in my case it's different because I've employed thousands of Teamsters and I thought we should come over and pay our respects."

"As you know, a big part of the voting bloc votes for me."

Union members tend to vote Democratic, with 56% of mem-

bers and households backing Biden in 2020, according to AP VoteCast. And Biden has already received significant organized labor backing with early endorsements from the AFL-CIO and others. But Trump is hoping to cut into that support as he casts himself as pro-worker and tries to exacerbate divisions between union leaders and some rank-and-file members.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man gets 30 months for stealing camp tuition

MA BOSTON — A Florida man convicted of stealing tuition in 2019 from hundreds of families who planned to send their children to sports camps and spending the money on plastic surgery, vacations and gambling was sentenced Tuesday to two and a half years in prison.

Mehdi Belhassan, 53, of Tampa, was found guilty on two counts of wire fraud in October 2023. He was also sentenced Tuesday to two years of supervised release and ordered to pay restitution of \$575,427 and forfeiture of \$443,346.

Beginning in the fall of 2018, Belhassan falsely claimed that he would operate his annual MB Sports Camps at a Boston-area college, prosecutors said. Despite the fact that the city told Belhassan he could not have his camp anywhere in Boston because he lacked the appropriate permits, he continued to promote it and collect funds from more than 300 families across the U.S., investigators said.

He used the funds to fly to Las Vegas, where he gambled and spent the money on entertainment and hotels, prosecutors said.

Pagan idol statue smash brings hate crime charge

IA DES MOINES — A Mississippi man accused of destroying a statue of a pagan idol at Iowa's state Capitol is now being charged with a hate crime.

The statue was brought to the Capitol by the Satanic Temple of Iowa under state rules allowing religious displays in the

building during the holidays. The move drew strong criticism from state and national leaders. On Dec. 14, the figure depicting the horned deity Baphomet was "destroyed beyond repair," according to the group.

Michael Cassidy, a former congressional and legislative candidate from Mississippi, was charged the next day with fourth-degree criminal mischief, a misdemeanor.

Now, Polk County prosecutors have charged Cassidy with a more serious offense, the Des Moines Register reported. A document made public Tuesday charged him with felony third-degree criminal mischief. It alleges the act was committed "in violation of individual rights" under Iowa's hate crime statute.

Woman saved from truck after fall into dumpster

NH MANCHESTER — A woman fell into a dumpster while throwing out her garbage and was later rescued from a trash truck that had compacted the contents while she was inside, fire department officials in New Hampshire said.

Luckily, neighbors heard her screams and the trash compartment was equipped with a camera. The driver spotted the woman stuck inside and called 911. By then, the driver "had reportedly compacted the garbage up to four times," the Manchester Fire Department said in a news release.

Rescuers used a basket ladder to reach the top of the truck and lift her out. By then, she was "standing/talking/yelling, but was not alert enough to answer questions," the news release said.

The woman was taken to a hospital after Monday's misadventure.

Casino to be demolished to build MLB stadium

NV LAS VEGAS — When the Tropicana Las Vegas opened in 1957, Nevada's lieutenant governor unlocked the door to what would become a Sin City landmark for more than a half-century. Then he threw away the key.

"This was to signify that the Tropicana would always stay open," said historian Michael Green.

Six decades later, the storied hotel-casino that once had ties to the mob and was nicknamed the "Tiffany of the Strip," is set to shut its doors for good to make room for a \$1.5 billion Major League Baseball stadium that will be home to the relocating Oakland Athletics.

Tropicana owner Bally's Corp. made the announcement Monday, saying the closure on April 2 — days before the 67th anniversary of the resort's opening — marks the beginning of preparations for demolition.

The famed hotel-casino debuted its long-running topless show "Folies Bergere," which was featured in the 1964 Elvis Presley film "Viva Las Vegas," in 1959. Magicians Siegfried Fischbacher and Roy Horn got their start in the show.

State wants teachers to return mistaken bonuses

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — With four young children and a fifth on the way, Kristina Stadelman was ecstatic after qualifying for a \$50,000 bonus for taking a hard-to-fill job as a special education teach-

er in Oklahoma. She used the money to finish home improvements and buy a new car for her growing family.

Then a letter arrived from the Oklahoma State Department of Education: It told her she received the money in error and must repay it, quickly.

"I don't obviously have the money to pay it back by the end of February," Stadelman said. "I came home the day I found out and just cried for two days straight."

State Superintendent Ryan Walters said Wednesday his agency is working to see if the teachers can keep the bonuses, which were awarded under an Oklahoma program to help recruit new teachers for the most difficult jobs to fill. In the wake of the mishap, Oklahoma legislators are looking to overhaul the program to prevent paying the bonuses in a lump sum and implement a more rigorous screening process.

85-year-old man dies after dogs attack him

IN INDIANAPOLIS — An 85-year-old Indianapolis man died Tuesday after being attacked by two dogs, police said.

Willie Mundine died at a hospital hours after the attack on the city's far east side, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department said.

Officers found the man with multiple dog bites and transported him to a hospital in critical condition, police said.

One officer shot one of the dogs, which was struck once in its back but survived and was impounded by the city's animal control shelter, police said.

— From wire reports

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Clark moves to 2nd place on NCAA scoring list

Associated Press

EVANSTON, Ill. — Caitlin Clark cruised right by Jackie Stiles and Kelsey Mitchell. Next up is Kelsey Plum.

That's the only name above Clark on the NCAA women's basketball scoring list.

Clark collected 35 points, 10 assists and six rebounds in front of a sellout crowd at Welsh-Ryan Arena, leading No. 3 Iowa to a 110-74 victory over Northwestern on Wednesday night.

Three weeks after passing Brittney Griner, Clark took down two more big names in women's hoops. She passed Stiles for third on the NCAA list when she made a 3-pointer with 2:04 left in the first quarter. She moved ahead of Ohio State's Mitchell when she converted a layup with 4:58 left in the first half, making her the career scoring leader for the Big Ten.

Clark finished the night with

3,424 points, departing to a big ovation with 4:23 remaining. Plum, who starred at Washington from 2013-17, tops the women's Division I scoring list with 3,527 points.

"I think the coolest thing is just the names that I get to be around," Clark said. "Those are people that I grew up watching, especially Kelsey Plum, Brittney Griner, Kelsey Mitchell. Those are really, really great players."

Cheered on by a crowd of 7,039 filled with Iowa colors and dotted with Clark shirts, the senior guard went 11-for-22 from the field and 10-for-10 at the free-throw line. It was her 13th game this season with at least 30 points.

But it was her passing that really stood out. She made a nice pass ahead to Hannah Stuelke for a fast-break layup in the second quarter, and she found Syd-

ney Affolter for a backdoor layup in the third.

"This was one that was definitely circled on my calendar, just because I know the amount of Iowa fans in the Chicago area," Clark said. "So I was super excited to come here. I love this gym."

Stuelke had 17 points and nine rebounds for Iowa (20-2, 9-1 Big Ten), which earned its second straight win since a 100-92 overtime loss at Ohio State on Jan. 21. Kate Martin added 16 points, and Gabbie Marshall finished with 12 on 4-for-5 shooting from 3.

Northwestern (7-14, 2-8) lost its fifth straight game. Melannie Daley scored 19 points for the Wildcats, and Hailey Weaver finished with 13.

"I thought it was going to be a much better game than what it was," said Paige Mott, who finished with 10 points. "We didn't show up to play for 40 minutes."

Looking back

Clark has been limited to single digits just once in her collegiate career, when she scored eight points in a 77-67 loss at Northwestern on Jan. 9, 2021.

Big picture

Iowa: Led by Clark, the Hawkeyes had 28 assists against just five turnovers. They also enjoyed a 42-30 rebounding advantage.

"I think we did a better job of rebounding in the second half," coach Lisa Bluder said. "I love 28 assists on five turnovers. Really good numbers there."

Northwestern: Daley was 8-for-17 from the field in almost 24½ minutes, and coach Joe McKeown said she should be in the mix for the Big Ten's Sixth Player of the Year award.

"We really like Mel's pop coming off the bench," he said.

NCAA leaves itself defenseless against legal threats

Associated Press

Years of fighting losing battles have left the NCAA almost helpless to defend itself.

The legal pile-on against the largest governing body for college sports in the United States continued Wednesday when attorneys general from Tennessee and Virginia filed an antitrust lawsuit that seeks to throw out the few rules the NCAA has to regulate how athletes can be compensated for name, image and likeness.

That pushes the number of antitrust lawsuits the NCAA is actively defending to at least five.

Denial and previous court losses — most notably a unanimous decision against the NCAA from the Supreme Court in 2021 — have flung the doors open to legal scrutiny the NCAA and so-called collegiate sports model cannot withstand.

"The NCAA and (schools) that make up the NCAA have continuously been completely stubborn," Florida-based sports attorney Darren Heitner said. "They have resisted change. They understand that there's been an absolute misclassification of athletes as, quote unquote, student-athletes as opposed to employees, and they've continuously

placed very, very stringent restrictions on the capacity for athletes to capitalize and earn money."

Three of the current lawsuits seek employment status for college athletes or are trying to direct more of the billions of dollars from big-time college football and basketball to the ones who play those sports.

Amy Perko, CEO of the Knight Commission on Intercollegiate Sports, said the NCAA's insistence of trying to govern major college football while it has no jurisdiction over its postseason and no say in how the billions in revenue it generates are spent is the root of most of the association's problems.

"Big revenue football operates in many ways independently from the NCAA, and the NCAA serves as its legal shield," Perko said.

The latest threats to the NCAA have originated from inside the house.

The move Wednesday by the state AGs echoed what has played out in the past two months with a multistate challenge to NCAA transfer rules.

Overall, the response from Tennessee has become typical from schools that either end up in the NCAA's enforcement crosshairs or do not receive the result they want when

dealing with the beleaguered association: Attack the NCAA's credibility. Blame it for creating an unmanageable situation. And maybe sue.

Among the biggest reasons the university presidents who sit at the top of the NCAA's org chart hired former Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker to be its president was his political savvy.

The NCAA's initial ask of Congress under former President Mark Emmert was for help regulating NIL. Now, that's almost a side issue. What the NCAA needs is an antitrust exemption that will actually allow it to govern college sports without risk of being sued into oblivion.

Lawmakers have not been in a rush to help. Baker is trying to be proactive, pushing NCAA membership to make radical changes — some that could steer the big-time revenue generating sports closer to professionalism.

"Of course, we need some help from Congress to make this work," Baker said this month at the NCAA convention in Phoenix. "The answer is: Yes, I know that, but I also believe that it's important for us to give Congress some idea about what something might look like if they were to choose to support us."

Commanders hiring Quinn from Dallas

Associated Press

The Washington Commanders have an agreement with Dallas Cowboys defensive coordinator Dan Quinn to hire him as coach, according to two people with knowledge of the decision.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity Thursday because the team had not yet announced the move.

Quinn, 53, spent the past three seasons running the defense for the NFC East-rival Cowboys after five-plus seasons coaching the Atlanta Falcons. Quinn coached the Falcons to a Super Bowl appearance in 2016 before being fired after an 0-5 start in 2020.

He became Washington's choice after Lions offensive coordinator Ben Johnson, considered a top candidate, told teams Tuesday he was staying with Detroit and the Seahawks hired Baltimore defensive coordinator

Mike Macdonald.

Controlling owner Josh Harris, new general manager and head of football operations Adam Peters and Quinn give the organization a much-desired new approach after four years of Ron Rivera in charge turned out to be a disappointment. Harris was committed to splitting the personnel and coaching duties this time around.

Much like Peters with the ability to hire a new coach, Quinn now gets the chance to fill out his own staff in his second stint as an NFL head coach. It remains to be seen if Eric Bieniemy returns as offensive coordinator, though that's not expected, and that position on defense is vacant after Rivera fired Jack Del Rio midway through this past season.

Quinn's defense ranked fifth in the league in yards and points allowed, helping Dallas win the NFC East before losing in the first round of the playoffs. He

inherits the Commanders after they went 4-13, including two blowout losses to the Cowboys.

Washington does have the second pick in the draft, more than \$80 million in salary cap space and the opportunity for Peters and Quinn to handpick the next quarterback for a franchise that has not had any consistency at the position in decades.

After Johnson pulled himself out of consideration, Washington brass had to pivot to other candidates. Macdonald going to Seattle made Quinn the front-runner, and he got the job over the likes of Detroit defensive coordinator Aaron Glenn and Baltimore assistant Anthony Weaver.

Quinn had also been linked to the Seahawks, for whom he worked under Pete Carroll as defensive coordinator in 2013 and 2014 before getting his first chance to run a team with Atlanta.

A New Jersey native, Quinn broke into coaching by running the defensive line for William & Mary in 1994 before one year at Virginia Military Institute and five at Hofstra. He worked on staff for San Francisco, the New York Jets and Seattle from 2001-10, returned to college at Florida and went back to the Seahawks, helping them win the Super Bowl in the 2013 season.

Quinn joins an organization that hasn't won a championship since 1992 and owns only two playoff victories over the past three decades.

Quarterback — as usual in Washington — is the biggest question, and Peters and Quinn now have a major decision to make at the most important position in football, after Sam Howell petered out in 17 games as the starter. The No. 2 pick could be an opportunity to take North Carolina's Drake Maye, or they could decide to explore options by trade or through free agency.

Seahawks hire Ravens coordinator Macdonald

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — It was a defensive-centric head coach that brought the Seattle Seahawks their only Super Bowl title.

The Seahawks are hoping a newer — albeit much younger — version can return them to the elite of the NFL after hiring Baltimore Ravens defensive coordinator Mike Macdonald as their new head coach on Wednesday.

Macdonald, 36, arrives in Seattle as the youngest head coach in the league and half the age of the man he's replacing — Pete Carroll who was let go after 14 seasons in charge during the most successful run in franchise history.

Macdonald spent the past two years running Baltimore's defense, including this past sea-

son when the Ravens finished with the best regular-season record and reached the AFC championship game before losing to Kansas City.

This will be the first head coaching position at any level for Macdonald. But he's been surrounded by successful coaches as he moved up the ranks, starting with an extended run on the staff of John Harbaugh in Baltimore before spending a season on now-Chargers' coach Jim Harbaugh's staff in college at Michigan.

Seattle made it clear that Macdonald was one of its top candidates when it didn't move forward on a hire prior to the conference championship games. Dallas defensive coordinator Dan Quinn seemed a clear front-runner because of

his past connections to Seattle. But the longer the Seahawks went without moving ahead with Quinn, the more it became obvious there were other options being considered.

Macdonald and Detroit offensive coordinator Ben Johnson were the last two interviewed by the Seahawks before the final decision was made.

"We're going to have a lot of fun, we're going to work our tails off, and it's going to be an incredible ride," Macdonald told the team's website.

One of the unknowns will be how Macdonald meshes with an organization that was shaped around Carroll's philosophy for more than a decade. Seattle general manager John Schneider said one of the mandates from owner/chair Jody Allen was to keep a level of Carroll's

culture in place. How Macdonald manages that will be one of the questions.

Macdonald, a Georgia graduate who began his coaching career there from 2011-13, broke into the NFL with the Ravens as a coaching intern in 2014. He moved up to defensive assistant, defensive backs coach and linebackers coach through 2020 before going to Michigan to run Jim Harbaugh's defense.

After returning to Baltimore, Macdonald had one of the top scoring defenses in the league over the past two seasons. This past season, the Ravens ranked sixth in total defense playing an aggressive style that should please Seahawks' fans who grew frustrated by Seattle's defensive regression from the prime seasons when Carroll was in charge.

Kraken's Daccord becomes rising star

Associated Press

SEATTLE — At seemingly every stop of his hockey journey, goalie Joey Daccord ended up being overlooked.

Until now.

He was originally a seventh-round draft pick — No. 199 overall — of the Ottawa Senators. His only offer of a full college scholarship came from a fledgling program at Arizona State that was just getting started as an NCAA Division I member when he arrived in the desert.

Even after becoming a star in college, Daccord couldn't consistently get on the ice with Ottawa. When he was nabbed by the expansion Seattle Kraken, he was the third of three options on the depth chart.

That background makes Daccord grateful and perhaps a little humbled by what's happened over the last two months where he's become entrenched as the starting goalie in Seattle and been one of the top goalten-

ders in the entire league.

"I think like any goalie will tell you that they just want a chance to prove themselves," Daccord said. "And I feel like I've really gotten that opportunity in the last month, month and a half here just to play a lot of games and get in a rhythm and feel really comfortable at the NHL level."

As the All-Star break arrives, the third-year Kraken find themselves in the middle of a crowded field for a playoff spot in the Western Conference. Seattle stumbled in its final game before the break Tuesday night with a 2-0 loss in San Jose. Despite the setback, Seattle is one of six teams headed into Wednesday night separated by five points for the two wild-card playoff spots out West.

The Kraken wouldn't be in this position if not for what Daccord has provided.

He's played more games at the NHL level in the past seven weeks than the previous four

seasons combined during brief snippets with Ottawa and Seattle, and his numbers are reinforcing the eye test of how well he's played.

In 16 of his past 20 games, Daccord's allowed two goals or less. He posted the first two shutouts of his career, including the Winter Classic. His save percentage during that span is .937. Seattle is 12-5-3 during that stretch.

His advanced metrics are just as impressive. Per Natural Stat Trick, Daccord is third in the league in goals saved above average at 16.76, trailing only Connor Hellebuyck and Thatcher Demko.

"I mean, he's just very steady for us, which is awesome," forward Tomas Tatar said. "He's given us a lot of confidence."

Aside from his performance in goal, Daccord has brought a fresh personality to the ice. While the Kraken have done well to carve out a portion of the sports landscape in their home-

town — an unexpected playoff run last season helped — their roster is not filled with big personalities.

But that's who Daccord is. He's fun. He's energetic. He loved the chance to soak in all the "Joey, Joey," chants after shutting out Vegas before 47,000-plus fans on New Year's Day. A few nights later after another stellar performance against Ottawa, Daccord tackled the team mascot in a bear hug at center ice following the win.

"I think hockey kind of has a code where you're supposed to keep to yourself and put your head down and work hard and be humble. I agree with all those things," Daccord said. "But at the same time, I am a very passionate person and I like to show my passion and I like to be energetic and I like to celebrate when we score and fire up the crowd. I like all those things and I think that's one of the fun parts of playing hockey."

Michigan, Michigan State going in opposite directions

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Tom Izzo, celebrating win No. 700 of his Hall of Fame career at Michigan State, delivered a message to fans in the stands on Tuesday night.

"We got a lot of work to do," Izzo said after the Spartans routed rival Michigan 81-62. "But we ain't dead yet."

The Wolverines, meanwhile, are struggling mightily under embattled coach Juwan Howard.

Michigan (7-14, 2-8 Big Ten) has lost four straight and nine of 10, plummeting to last place in the conference.

The season has gone so poorly that athletic director Warde Manuel was asked last week about Howard's future, and simply said he's in full support of the former member of the Fab Five and will evaluate the season after it is over.

Howard missed the start of the season while recovering from heart surgery. His former strength and conditioning coach,

Jon Sanderson, has been away from the team for about two months since an unspecified incident occurred with Howard.

"Based on a thorough internal review, nothing was found to warrant disciplinary action for anyone involved," Manuel said Dec. 15 in a statement.

Howard has had another off-the-court issue to deal with, playing without Dug McDaniel for nearly a month when the Wolverines are on the road because the starting point guard is working toward academic goals.

"While I am disappointed, this is not something we take lightly," Howard said Jan. 10 in a statement.

The setbacks have led to Michigan falling short of modest expectations after averaging nearly 20 wins over Howard's first four seasons, reaching an NCAA regional final in his first year and the Sweet 16 in his second season.

Among Michigan's many problems, defense has been the biggest.

"I take full blame," Howard said.

While the Wolverines have had some encouraging stretches of play within games, they have often failed to sustain success and have allowed teams to go on big runs to take control.

The Spartans (13-8, 5-5) are starting to show signs of promise after starting the season ranked No. 4 in the AP Top 25 before plummeting out of the poll with five losses in their first 10 games.

Michigan State started to bounce back with a 24-point win over then-No. 6 Baylor on Dec. 16 in Detroit, the first of nine victories in a 12-game stretch that has put the program in a position to earn a 26th consecutive bid to the NCAA Tournament.

The Spartans trailed Michigan by two at halftime in their first of two meetings before putting it together on both ends of the court to outscore Howard's team 48-27 in the second half.

"I should be more excited, but I'm not because I have bigger goals," Izzo said.