

California cleans up as more storms loom

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Storm-ravaged California scrambled to clean up and repair widespread damage on Wednesday as the lashing rain eased in many areas, although thunderstorms led a new atmospheric river into the northern half of the state.

The plume of moisture lurking off the coast stretched all the way over the Pacific to Hawaii, making it “a true Pineapple Express,” the National Weather Service said.

Its rains were expected to impact only Northern California, giving the south a break until more wet weather arrives by the weekend.

At least 17 people have died in the storms battering the state. The figure is likely to rise, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Tuesday during a visit to the scenic town of Capitola on the Santa Cruz coast that was hard hit by high

surf and flooding creek waters last week.

A pickup truck driver and a motorcyclist were killed early Tuesday in the San Joaquin Valley when a tree that had been struck by lightning fell on them, authorities said.

More than half of California’s 58 counties were declared disaster areas, the governor said.

The previous storm that began Monday was one in a series that began late last month and repairing the damage may cost more than \$1 billion, said Adam Smith, a disaster expert with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Los Angeles Times reported.

Crews worked to reopen major highways that were closed by rockslides, swamped by flooding or smothered with mud while more than 10,000 people who were ordered out of seaside towns on the central coast were allowed to return home.

They included Montecito, a wealthy Santa Barbara County community that is home to Prince Harry and other celebrities where 23 people died and more than 100 homes were destroyed in a mudslide five years ago.

Yet thousands of people living near rain-swollen creeks and rivers remained under evacuation orders. In the San Joaquin Valley, raging waters from Bear Creek flooded parts of the city of Merced and neighboring Planada, a small agricultural community along a highway leading to Yosemite National Park.

All 4,000 residents of Planada were ordered to leave Tuesday morning. Neighborhoods were under water with cars submerged up to their roofs. Residents ordered to evacuate carried whatever they could salvage on their backs as they left in the rain.

Other evacuations were or-

dered because of levee breaches in parts of Monterey County.

Despite the rain, most of the state remained in extreme or severe drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

The storms may help locally “but will not resolve the long-term drought challenges,” said Rick Spinrad, administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Damage from the storm included washed-out roads and seaside businesses flooded by 20-foot surf that pounded Santa Cruz County.

Many areas saw unprecedented amounts of rain coupled with furious winds and even hail and lightning that knocked down trees and damaged electrical lines.

More than 75,000 homes and businesses around the state were without power as of late Tuesday night, according to the website Poweroutage.us.

Pentagon ends policy mandating COVID-19 vaccine

By Wyatt Olson

Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon on Tuesday announced the formal end of mandated vaccination of all members of the armed forces against COVID-19, a policy rollback required in the defense authorization bill passed last month.

The reversal, however, does nothing to change the status of the thousands of troops separated from service for refusing orders to take the vaccine.

“The Department will continue to promote and encourage COVID-19 vaccination for all Service members,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said in a Tuesday memo, referring to

the respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus.

“The Department has made COVID-19 vaccination as easy and convenient as possible, resulting in vaccines administered to over two million Service members and 96 percent of the Force — Active and Reserve — being fully vaccinated,” Austin said.

Austin mandated the vaccinations for active-duty service members on Aug. 24, 2021, and for National Guard and Ready Reserve three months later on Nov. 30.

Treatment for and vaccination against COVID-19 became highly politicized under President Donald Trump’s adminis-

tration in the months after the virus spread throughout the United States beginning in spring of 2020.

The Trump administration declined to mandate vaccination for U.S. troops, with many Republican lawmakers and some service members also against a mandate.

Upon taking office in early 2021, President Joe Biden took more aggressive steps in combating the spread of the coronavirus, including the mandate for armed forces later that year.

Republican opposition to the mandate remained, though, and negotiations between the GOP and Democrats last fall

led to language in the final version of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act requiring an end to required vaccinations within 30 days of its passage.

More than 8,000 service members were separated from the armed forces for refusing to be vaccinated, according to a Washington Post report last month.

In Tuesday’s memo, Austin said no service member currently serving “shall be separated solely on the basis of their refusal to receive the COVID-19 vaccination if they sought an accommodation on religious, administrative, or medical grounds.”

Ukraine: Mining town holds out against Russia

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — The fate of a devastated salt-mining town in eastern Ukraine hung in the balance Wednesday as Ukraine said its forces were holding out against a furious Russian onslaught in one of the fiercest and bloodiest recent ground battles of the nearly 11-month war.

Russian forces using jets, mortars and rockets bombarded Soledar in what a Ukrainian military officer said was an unrelenting assault.

The officer, near Soledad, told The Associated Press the pattern is that first the Russians send one or two waves of soldiers, many from the private Russian military contractor Wagner Group, who take heavy casualties as they probe the Ukrainian defenses.

When Ukrainian troops have taken casualties and are exhausted, the Russians send a fresh wave of highly-trained soldiers, paratroopers or special forces, said the Ukrainian officer, who insisted on anonymity for security reasons.

Soledar's fall, while unlikely to provide a turning point in the war, would be a prize for a Kremlin starved of good news from the battlefield in recent months.

It would also offer Russian troops a springboard to conquer other areas of Donetsk province that remain under Ukrainian control, such as the nearby strategic city of Bakhmut.

Donetsk and neighboring Luhansk province, which together make up the Donbas

region bordering Russia, were Moscow's main stated territorial targets in invading Ukraine, but the fighting has stood mostly at a stalemate.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar and the spokesman for Ukraine's Eastern Group of Forces, Serhiy Cherevaty, denied Russian claims that Soledar had fallen, but Malyar acknowledged heavy fighting.

Late Tuesday, Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Wagner Group's owner, claimed on his Russian social media platform that his soldiers had seized control of Soledar, though he also said fighting continued in a "cauldron" in the city's center.

The AP was unable to verify that claim.

Russian forces had achieved "positive dynamics in advancing" in Soledar, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday, stopping short of declaring its capture.

"Let's not rush, and wait for official statements," he said.

Soledar, known for salt mining and processing, has little intrinsic value but it lies at a strategic point six miles north of the city of Bakhmut, which Russian forces want to surround.

Taking Bakhmut would disrupt Ukraine's supply lines and open a route for Russian President Vladimir Putin's forces to press toward Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, key Ukrainian strongholds in the Donetsk province.

Soledar's fall would make "holding Bakhmut much more precarious for Ukraine,"

Michael Kofman, the director of Russia Studies at the CAN nonprofit research organization in Arlington, Va., noted Wednesday.

The war of attrition, with heavy casualties, may make a Russian victory as deadly as a defeat.

"I don't think the outcome at Bakhmut is that significant compared to what it costs Russia to achieve it," Kofman said in a tweet.

The Wagner Group, which now reportedly includes a large contingent of convicts recruited in Russian prisons, has spearheaded the attack on Soledar and Bakhmut.

Western intelligence has estimated that the Wagner Group constitutes up to a quarter of all Russian combatants in Ukraine.

A success in Soledar and Bakhmut would help Prigozhin, who has openly criticized Russia's military leadership, increase his clout at the Kremlin.

In an apparent recognition of flaws in the top chain of command, Russia's Defense Ministry announced what appeared to be a demotion for the head of Russian forces in Ukraine after only three months in the job. The chief of the military's General Staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, was named to that role, replacing Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who was named his deputy, along with two other generals.

Surovikin was credited with strengthening coordination and reinforcing control, but his demotion signaled that Putin wasn't fully satisfied with his performance.

China renews threats against Taiwan amid military drills

Associated Press

BEIJING — China renewed its threats Wednesday to attack Taiwan and warned that foreign politicians who interact with the self-governing island are "playing with fire."

A spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office said the country was recommitted in the new year to "safeguarding sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "smashing plots for Taiwan independence" on the self-governing democracy that separated from mainland China in 1949.

"The malicious support for Taiwan independence among anti-China elements in a

few foreign countries are a deliberate provocation," Ma Xiaoguang said at a biweekly news conference.

China views Taiwan as a Chinese territory that must be brought under Beijing's control, by force if necessary.

A string of visits in recent months by foreign politicians to Taiwan, including by then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and numerous politicians from the European Union, spurred displays of military might from both sides.

This week, Taiwan's military is staging drills intended to reassure the public of its ability to counter China's threats ahead of

this month's Lunar New Year holiday.

"The most important thing is to maintain the safety of our airspace and national security," air force Lt. Col. Wu Bong-yeng told reporters at Hsinchu Air Base just south of the capital, Taipei.

The drills coincide with a visit from German and Lithuanian lawmakers—the latter Baltic state being a particular target of Chinese ire for upgrading its ties with Taiwan.

"We call on the relevant countries to ... cease sending the wrong signals to Taiwan independence separatist forces and cease playing with fire on the question of Taiwan," Ma said.

Biden ‘surprised’ records found at his former office

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said he was surprised when informed that government records were found by his attorneys at his former office space in Washington. He was asked about the issue after the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee requested that the U.S. intelligence community conduct a “damage assessment” of potentially classified documents.

Speaking to reporters in Mexico City on Tuesday, Biden said his attorneys “did what they should have done” when they immediately called the National Archives about the discovery at the offices of the Penn Biden Center. He kept an office there after he left the vice presidency in 2017 until shortly before he launched his Democratic presidential campaign in 2019.

The White House confirmed that the Department of Justice was reviewing “a small number of documents with classified markings” found at the office.

“I was briefed about this discovery and surprised to learn that there are any government records that were taken there to that office,” Biden said in his first comments since news of the document discovery emerged Monday. He added that “I don’t know what’s in the documents” and that his lawyers had suggested he not ask.

Earlier Tuesday, Rep. Mike Turner sent the request to Director of National Intelli-

gence Avril Haines, saying that Biden’s retention of the documents put him in “potential violation of laws protecting national security, including the Espionage Act and Presidential Records Act.”

Regardless of a federal review, the revelation that Biden potentially mishandled classified or presidential records could prove to be a political headache for the president, who called former President Donald Trump’s decision to keep hundreds of such records at his private club in Florida “irresponsible.”

“Those entrusted with access to classified information have a duty and an obligation to protect it,” said Turner in a letter to Haines. “This issue demands a full and thorough review.”

On Tuesday, Rep. James Comer, the new GOP chairman of the House Oversight Committee, sent the White House Counsel’s office a letter requesting copies of the documents found at the Biden office, communications about the discovery, and a list of those who may have had access to the office where they were found.

Haines agreed in September to conduct a “risk assessment” rather than a “damage assessment” of the Trump case.

There are significant differences between the Trump and Biden situations, including the gravity of an ongoing grand jury investigation into the Mar-a-Lago matter.

New House GOP launch probes into FBI, China

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans moved Tuesday to swiftly establish the marquee investigations of their new majority, voting to create panels focused on China and what they have asserted is rampant abuse of power in the federal government.

Newly empowered, GOP lawmakers are vowing to bring accountability to the Biden administration, pledging to investigate federal law enforcement agencies, including those that are conducting probes into former President Donald Trump.

Republicans also established a committee, with broad bipartisan support, to investigate “strategic competition” between the United States and China, in line with the party’s push for a more hardline approach to the Asian nation.

The creation of the committees is the first of many investigative steps Republicans plan to take as they settle into their slim majority and attempt to serve as a check against President Joe Biden and his agenda on Capitol Hill.

It amounts to a massive reshuffling away from the oversight priorities of Democrats, who used their majority to form a select committee to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol. That committee is no more, and Republicans have no plans to revive it, vowing instead to take a closer look at the actions of law enforcement. Republicans officially labeled one of the committees as reviewing “the Weaponization of the Federal Government,” a name that from the outset suggests the panel’s investigations may be one-sided. The probe will be conducted under the jurisdiction of the Judiciary Committee, which is headed by Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio.

The committee is being given a broad mandate, told to investigate “the expansive role” of the executive branch to “collect information on or otherwise investigate citizens of the United States, including ongoing criminal investigations.” Notably, the panel will have access to classified information, a privilege usually reserved for the intelligence committees.

Jordan, who is expected to lead the investigation, said the committee is modeled after the bipartisan “Church Committee,” a 1970s congressional investigation that sought to investigate allegations that the U.S. government spied on its own citizens.

Military pilot’s lawyer says US extradition attempt is ‘political’

Associated Press

SYDNEY — The United States has accused a former military pilot of illegally training Chinese military pilots, and is trying to extradite him from Australia.

But the pilot’s lawyer says his client has been unfairly singled out because of the current geopolitical struggle between the U.S. and China.

Pilot Daniel Duggan, 54, has been held in an Australian jail since his October arrest. Duggan’s lawyer, Dennis Miralis, said outside of a Sydney courtroom Tuesday that Duggan has denied the allegations and that he will continue to fight the extradition

process at every step.

Australia’s Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus last month approved the U.S. extradition request. But before the extradition can proceed, a judge must first determine whether Duggan is eligible for extradition under Australian law.

Miralis said the U.S. Department of Defense had acknowledged there were other people helping foreign militaries, but that the U.S. and Australia had singled out Duggan for extradition.

“We are concerned that this does highlight the political nature of what’s occurring here,” Miralis told reporters.

US air travel disrupted by computer outage

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The world's largest aircraft fleet was grounded for hours by a cascading outage in a government system that delayed or canceled thousands of flights across the U.S. on Wednesday.

The White House initially said that there was no evidence of a cyberattack behind the outage that ruined travel plans for millions of passengers. President Joe Biden said Wednesday morning that he's directed the Department of Transportation to investigate.

Whatever the cause, the outage revealed how dependent the world's largest economy is on air travel, and how dependent air travel is on an antiquated computer system called the Notice to Air Missions, or NOTAM.

Before commencing a flight, pilots are required to consult NOTAMs, which list potential ad-

verse impacts on flights, from runway construction to the potential for icing. The system used to be telephone-based, with pilots calling dedicated flight service stations for the information, but has moved online.

The NOTAM system broke down late Tuesday, leading to more than 1,000 flight cancellations and 7,000 were delayed flights by midday Wednesday, according to the flight tracking website FlightAware.

The chaos is expected to grow as backups compound. More than 21,000 flights were scheduled to take off in the U.S. today, mostly domestic trips, and about 1,840 international flights expected to fly to the U.S., according to aviation data firm Cirium.

"We are going to see the ripple effects from that, this morning's delays through the system during the day," said Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg in an in-

terview on CNN. "Now we have to understand how this could have happened in the first place. Why the usual redundancies that would stop it from being that disruptive did not stop it from being disruptive this time."

Longtime aviation insiders could not recall an outage of such magnitude caused by a technology breakdown. Some compared it to the nationwide shutdown of airspace after the terror attacks of September 2001.

"Periodically there have been local issues here or there, but this is pretty significant historically," said Tim Campbell, a former senior vice president of air operations at American Airlines and now a consultant in Minneapolis.

Campbell said there has long been concern about the Federal Aviation Administration's technology, and not just the NOTAM system.

"So much of their systems are

old mainframe systems that are generally reliable but they are out of date," he said.

According to FAA advisories, the NOTAM system failed at 8:28 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday preventing new or amended notices from being distributed to pilots. The FAA resorted to a telephone hotline to keep departures flying overnight, but as daytime traffic picked up it overwhelmed the telephone backup system.

The FAA ordered all departing flights grounded early Wednesday morning, affecting all passenger and shipping flights.

Some medical flights could get clearance and the outage did not impact any military operations or mobility.

Flights for the U.S. military's Air Mobility Command were not affected.

European flights into the U.S. appeared to be largely unaffected.

NY GOP: Santos disgraced House, should step down

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Republican leaders in New York on Wednesday called for the immediate resignation of their new GOP congressman George Santos, who is facing multiple investigations by prosecutors over his personal and campaign finances and lies about his résumé and family heritage.

"His lies were not mere fibs. He disgraced the House of Representatives," Joseph Cairo Jr., chair of the Nassau County Republican Committee, said at a news conference. "He's not welcome here at Republican headquarters."

Santos, swarmed by reporters at the Capitol on Wednesday, flatly rejected the call to resign, saying, "I will not."

The call was an extraordinary rebuke of the freshman congressman whose election months ago flipped a Democratic House seat

and was initially one of the GOP's highlights of the November election. The denunciation by local Republicans also amps up the pressure on Republicans in Congress to rebuke or sideline Santos.

Cairo and other Republicans said Santos deceived voters and the Nassau County GOP and they were particularly incensed by his lies about having Jewish ancestry.

Earlier this week, the nonpartisan Campaign Legal Center lodged a complaint with the Federal Election Commission and urged regulators to investigate Santos. The "mountain of lies" Santos propagated during the campaign about his life story and qualifications, the center said, should prompt the commission to "thoroughly investigate what appear to be equally brazen lies about how his campaign raised and spent money."

Boston Marathon bomber's lawyer seeks new sentence

Associated Press

BOSTON — Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's attorney urged a federal appeals court Tuesday to throw out the 29-year-old's death sentence because of juror misconduct claims just months after it was revived by the nation's highest court.

Tsarnaev is making a renewed push to avoid execution after the Supreme Court last year reinstated the death sentence imposed on him for his role in the bombing that killed three people and injured hundreds near the finish line of the marathon in 2013.

His lawyers are now challenging issues that weren't considered by the Supreme Court, including whether the trial judge wrongly denied his challenge of two jurors who defense attorneys say lied during jury selection questioning.

One juror said she had not com-

mented about the case online but had retweeted a post calling Tsarnaev a "piece of garbage." As a result, Tsarnaev's lawyers raised concerns during jury selection, but the judge chose not to look into them further, they say.

"This case was tried in Boston on a promise ... that despite the extraordinary impact of the marathon bombing on this community," a through questioning of potential jurors would remove anyone unqualified, Tsarnaev attorney Daniel Habib told the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals judges. "That promise was not kept."

The Justice Department has continued to push to uphold Tsarnaev's sentence even after Attorney General Merrick Garland in 2021 imposed a moratorium on federal executions while the department conducts a review of its policies and procedures.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

TSA: 'Emotional support' snake barred from flight

FL TAMPA — The Transportation and Security Administration shared a cheeky public service announcement Friday night on Instagram after agents found a 4-foot boa constrictor hidden inside a woman's luggage. They made the alarming discovery on Dec. 15 at Tampa International Airport in Florida, the agency's spokeswoman, Lisa Farbstein, told CNN.

The traveler told security that the snake, named Bartholomew, was actually her "emotional support animal" and requested that he be allowed to fly with her. In the end, the airline ultimately barred Bartholomew from boarding, Farbstein said in a tweet.

The snake was not injured in the incident and was returned home, officials said.

Louisville animal shelter loses its no-kill status

KY LOUISVILLE — Louisville's animal shelter has lost its no-kill status due to overcrowding, prompting the first euthanizations in more than five years.

Staffers recently euthanized two dogs "because we are out of room, time and space" at the shelter, Louisville Metro Animal Services spokeswoman Teeya Barnes said. They were the first at the shelter since 2017, The Courier Journal reported.

The facility was either at or over maximum capacity for the majority of 2022, Barnes said. More than 7,000 animals entered the shelter in 2021, and officials took in nearly 6,300 cats and dogs in the first 10 months of the year,

according to a city report.

District cancels class for 33K due to cyberattack

IA DES MOINES — Iowa's largest school district canceled classes for Tuesday after determining there was a cyberattack on its technology network.

Des Moines Public Schools announced Monday that classes would be canceled for its 33,000 students after being "alerted to a cybersecurity incident on its technology network."

The district said in a news release that it took its internet and network services offline while it assessed the situation. It didn't describe the nature of the attack or say whether sensitive information might have been stolen.

Semiautomatic weapons ban becomes law in state

IL SPRINGFIELD — Illinois banned the sale or possession of semiautomatic weapons Tuesday when Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed legislation driven largely by the killing of seven people at a Fourth of July parade last year in the Chicago suburb of Highland Park.

Pritzker acted without hesitation after the House voted 68-41 to make Illinois the ninth state, as well as Washington, D.C., to prohibit the sale or possession of semiautomatic weapons. The vote concurred with a plan the Senate OK'd Monday night, hours after Pritzker was sworn into his second term.

The legislation would ban the manufacture or possession of dozens of brands and types of rapid-fire rifles and pistols, .50-caliber guns and attachments

that enhance a weapon's firepower. Those who currently own such guns would not be required to surrender them but would have to register them with the Illinois State Police.

Critics have warned the governor's signature will trigger court challenges, which will ultimately overturn the law as a violation of the Second Amendment.

First round of legal marijuana sales begin

CT MONTVILLE — Connecticut's first round of retail cannabis sales for adults 21 and older kicked off Tuesday at seven existing medical marijuana establishments across the state, less than two years after Gov. Ned Lamont signed legislation making Connecticut the latest state to legalize recreational sales.

By the end of the day, state regulators reported more than \$250,000 in sales generated during the first seven hours.

As many as 40 dispensaries, along with dozens of other cannabis-related businesses, are expected to eventually open in Connecticut by the end of 2023.

Twenty-one states have legalized recreational marijuana for adults over the past decade, even though it remains illegal under federal law.

Nygren sworn in as new Navajo Nation president

AZ FORT DEFIANCE — Buu Nygren was sworn in Tuesday as the next president of the vast Navajo Nation, a job that will test his ability to make good on promises to deliver water, electricity and broadband to tens of thousands who

don't have it.

Nygren beat out incumbent President Jonathan Nez in the tribe's general election by about 3,500 votes.

The office heavily intersects with the federal government, as do other tribes that receive federal funding for services like housing, health care, education and public safety. The Navajo Nation also owns property in D.C.

Nygren, 36, will be the youngest to hold the tribal presidency and has never held political office, though he was a vice presidential candidate in 2018.

Gates looks to state to expand nuclear energy

WV GLASGOW — Bill Gates is looking to West Virginia as he plans for the next phase of his effort to reboot U.S. nuclear energy technology: powering the east coast.

Microsoft co-founder Gates, who visited a closed down coal-fired plant in Glasgow on Monday, said he needs to see how his Natrium nuclear reactor demonstration in Wyoming performs before making any announcements about new sites.

Still, during a visit to the American Electric Power plant, which closed in 2015, Gates called the West Virginia Legislature's decision last year to repeal the state's ban on nuclear power facilities "quite impressive" and said he's looking for sites to expand his efforts to the east coast.

West Virginia's new law has opened the door to discussions with American Electric Power during the last six months, said Gates, who founded TerraPower, the company behind the \$4 billion project in Wyoming.

— From wire reports

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Twins finalize Correa's six-year deal

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — This time, Carlos Correa's deal is done.

Correa passed his physical exam Wednesday and signed a \$200 million, six-year contract to return to the Minnesota Twins, who re-entered the most convoluted free-agent negotiations in baseball history after deals with the San Francisco Giants and New York Mets fell through.

Correa agreed Tuesday to a contract that could be worth \$270 million over 10 seasons if the All-Star shortstop stays healthy, a uniquely structured deal the Twins assembled to jump back in contention after it appeared they'd been outspent — twice — by bigger-market franchises.

The agreements with the Giants and Mets dissolved over concerns by those clubs about the long-term viability of his lower right leg. Correa broke a bone near his ankle sliding into third base as a minor leaguer in 2014, and he had a metal plate inserted for extra support in the surgical repair.

Correa agreed Dec. 13 to a \$350 million, 13-year contract with the Giants, who scheduled a news conference a week later to announce the deal. That was called off hours before it was set to begin.

Correa agreed that night to a \$315 million, 12-year deal with the Mets, and high-spending owner Steve Cohen even publicly confirmed the pending agreement. But the Mets also raised concerns about the ankle after a Dec. 22 physical, and they held off finalizing the contract while attempting to negotiate protections over the next two weeks. Correa's agent, Scott Boras, maintained last month that Correa's tibia surgery should not have been an issue.

The Twins had more advanced insight on Correa's health, having signed him prior to last season in a deal that Correa opted out of to hit the market again after making \$35.1 million in 2022. Correa only missed time to an injured finger after being hit by a pitch and a bout with COVID-19. He played in 136 games, batting .291 with 22

homers and 64 RBIs and leading all major league shortstops with an .834 OPS.

The Mets issued a 13-word statement after the Twins announced the surprise signing of Correa for a second straight offseason: "We were unable to reach an agreement. We wish Carlos all the best."

The deal with the Twins gives Correa an \$8 million signing bonus, salaries of \$32 million in each of the first two seasons, \$36 million in 2025, \$31.5 million in 2026, \$30.5 million in 2027 and \$30 million in 2028.

Then it gets more complicated, part of the design to protect the Twins once Correa turns 34. The team has options for \$25 million in 2029, \$20 million in 2030, \$15 million in 2031 and \$10 million in 2032, and those salaries would become guaranteed if Correa has 575 plate appearances in 2028, 550 in 2029, 525 in 2030 and 502 in 2031. The contract could be worth \$225 million over seven seasons, \$245 million over eight years and \$260 million over nine seasons.

Correa's options also could be

triggered by a top-five finish in MVP voting, a Silver Slugger award or World Series or League Championship Series MVP. He gets a no-trade provision.

Correa won the 2015 AL Rookie of the Year award with Houston, a Gold Glove and Platinum Glove award winner in 2021 and twice made the All-Star team with the Astros, who drafted him first overall in 2012.

The Twins raved about Correa's leadership during their first season together, and the native of Puerto Rico praised them right back — remarking often about how much he enjoyed the community, the ballpark and the organization. He insisted all along the Twins were in the mix to keep him, even with the bigger spenders pursuing him in a particularly lucrative offseason for shortstops.

Correa's \$33.3 million average annual salary is the 11th-highest among current players, just behind Mets shortstop Francisco Lindor's \$34.1 million.

Dolphins QB Tagovailoa ruled out for game vs. Bills

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa has not been cleared to return to football activities and has been ruled out for Sunday's playoff game against the Buffalo Bills as he remains in the NFL's concussion protocol, coach Mike McDaniel said Wednesday.

The Dolphins are preparing for rookie Skylar Thompson to be their starter when they face the Bills for the third time this season. Backup Teddy Bridgewater is working his way back to full strength after dislocating his pinky finger.

McDaniel said he doesn't know if Tagovailoa will be able

to travel with the team this weekend, and although he hasn't had any setbacks in the healing process, there are "compounding variables" at play that will keep him off the field indefinitely.

Tagovailoa was diagnosed with his second concussion of the season after a Week 16 loss to Green Bay and missed the Dolphins' final two games of the regular season.

Hamlin released from Buffalo hospital

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Bills safety Damar Hamlin was released from a Buffalo hospital on Wednesday, more than a

week after he went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated during a game at Cincinnati, after his doctors said they completed a series of tests.

A news release from the Bills quoted Dr. Jamie Nadler as saying: "We have completed a series of tests and evaluation and in consultation with the team physicians, we are confident that Damar can be safely discharged." Nadler said Hamlin will continue his rehabilitation with the Bills.

Hamlin is going home after spending two days undergoing tests at Buffalo General Medical Center. He was transferred to Buffalo after spending last week at the University of Cin-

cinnati Medical Center, where the 24-year-old from the Pittsburgh area experienced what doctors called "a remarkable recovery."

Hamlin collapsed on the field after being struck in the chest by Bengals receiver Tee Higgins while making what appeared to be a routine tackle during the first quarter of Buffalo's since-canceled game at Cincinnati on Jan. 2.

He spent the first two days in hospital under sedation. He was awakened and able to grip people's hands at his bedside, and eventually taken off a ventilator and able to address his teammates on Friday.

Bridges and Suns spoil Curry's return

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Mikal Bridges had 26 points, nine rebounds and five assists and the undermanned Suns dominated in Stephen Curry's return from injury as Phoenix beat the Golden State Warriors for a third time this season, 125-113 on Tuesday night to snap a season-worst six-game skid.

Former Warriors guard Damian Lee received his championship ring in a pregame ceremony from brother-in-law Curry, then scored 22 points and grabbed seven rebounds against his former team. He converted six free throws over the final 1:13 and went 14-for-14 from the line overall.

"I just thought it was a special night all the way around," Suns coach Monty Williams said, noting of the ring ceremony, Lee's performance and the win. "That's a trifecta if I ever heard of one."

Duane Washington Jr. scored 21 points, Dario Saric contribut-

ed 19 points, nine rebounds and seven assists and Torrey Craig had 12 points and 14 rebounds for a deep Phoenix team missing four of five starters and six of eight rotation regulars.

Curry came back from an 11-game absence with a partially dislocated left shoulder to score 24 points on 8-for-22 shooting. Klay Thompson had 29 points with six three-pointers — four threes and 14 points in the first quarter alone. Jordan Poole's three with 1:28 remaining cut it to 117-111, and he scored 27 points.

Heat 112, Thunder 111: Jimmy Butler's three-point play with 12.9 seconds left capped an NBA-record performance by host Miami in a victory over Oklahoma City.

Butler's free throw made the Heat 40-for-40 from the foul line, breaking the 39-for-39 mark by Utah against Portland on Dec. 7, 1982.

Butler was 23-for-23 from the line, tying the second-most

makes without a miss in NBA history.

Butler had 35 points for Miami, which had used only eight players and was down to seven when Dewayne Dedmon was ejected in the second quarter.

Jazz 116, Cavaliers 114: Donovan Mitchell had 46 points in his return to Utah, but the Jazz rallied late behind Jordan Clarkson to beat Cleveland.

Clarkson scored 32 points, including five three-pointers, and had nine straight down the stretch in a decisive 13-0 run.

Mitchell, who spent his first five seasons with Utah, also had six assists and three steals. Darius Garland added 21 points and six assists for Cleveland.

76ers 147, Pistons 116: Joel Embiid rocked braids and had 36 points and 11 rebounds, James Harden added a second straight triple-double and host Philadelphia routed Detroit.

Harden finished with 16 points, 15 assists and 12 rebounds.

Clippers 113, Mavericks 101: Kawhi Leonard scored a season-high 33 points, Norman Powell added 27 and host Los Angeles snapped a six-game losing streak, overcoming Luka Doncic's 43-point night for Dallas.

Leonard tied a season high in rebounds with nine.

Magic 109, Trail Blazers 106: Franz Wagner scored 29 points, Wendell Carter Jr. added 20 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Orlando beat Portland.

Paulo Banchemo added 19 points for the Magic.

Damian Lillard had 30 points for Portland.

Raptors 132, Hornets 120: Pascal Siakam scored 28 points, Gary Trent Jr. had 24 and host Toronto beat Charlotte for its second straight victory.

O.G. Anunoby had 22 points, matching his career high with six three-pointers. The Raptors made a season-high 20 three-pointers in 44 attempts.

Kansas extends home win streak vs. Sooners to 22

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — KJ Adams scored a career-high 22 points and No. 2 Kansas closed the game on an 18-4 run to beat Oklahoma 79-75 on Tuesday night.

It wasn't easy, but in what Kansas coach Bill Self calls "a monster league," a win is a win.

"Give OU credit," Self said. "They did everything you're supposed to do to win a game on the road. They controlled tempo. They played smart. For the most part, they took care of the ball. They did a lot of good things. What else could they have done?"

"We're so happy that we won, but that's about as poor as we've played in a long time."

Kansas (14-1, 3-0 Big 12) got 17 points from Jalen Wilson, 11 from Dajuan Harris and 10 from Zach Clemence. The Jayhawks have won 22 straight games against Oklahoma in Allen Fieldhouse.

"We've been battle tested so much this year, especially with close games, we al-

ways find a way to stay composed," Wilson said. "We just continued to play our ball. There's no 10-point play, so there's no point in rushing the shots.

"There wasn't a time when I thought the game was over, because I know we're always going to find a way to win."

Grant Sherfield scored a season-high 25 points for Oklahoma (10-5, 1-2 Big 12).

No. 5 Tennessee 77, Vanderbilt 68: Santiago Vescovi and Julian Phillips each scored 15 points as the host Vols recovered from a halftime deficit to pull out a win over the Commodores.

Vescovi scored 12 of his points in the second half to lead the recovery for Tennessee (14-2, 4-0 Southeastern Conference).

No. 11 Kansas State 65, Oklahoma State 57: Markquis Nowell scored 20 points and found Keyontae Johnson for an alley-oop dunk with 38 seconds left as the host Wildcats held off the Cowboys.

Johnson added 12 points and Desi Sills had 11 for Kansas State (15-1, 4-0 Big 12).

No. 13 Virginia 65, North Carolina 58: Ben Vander Plas had 17 points and eight rebounds and the host Cavaliers used a 17-2 second-half run to beat the Tar Heels, who lost leading scorer and rebounder Armando Bacot to a left ankle injury.

No. 14 Iowa State 84, Texas Tech 50: Gabe Kalscheur scored a season-high 25 points to help host Iowa State roll past Texas Tech.

Michigan State 69, No. 18 Wisconsin 65: A.J. Hoggard made a tiebreaking layup with 41 seconds left and the visiting Spartans rallied for their seventh consecutive victory in a game that had 14 lead changes.

No. 21 Auburn 82, Ole Miss 73: Wendell Green Jr. scored 23 points, including 18 in the second half, and the visiting Tigers dominated after halftime to beat the Rebels.

No. 23 San Diego State 74, Nevada 65: Matt Bradley scored 17 points and Lamont Butler added 15 and host San Diego State took sole possession of first place in the Mountain West Conference.

Mercer scores twice as Devils top Hurricanes

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Dawson Mercer's first two-goal game in the NHL came at an ideal time for the New Jersey Devils.

His offense helped the Devils overcome allowing two short-handed goals and gave them a 5-3 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night.

"I'm an offensive player, but I like playing defense and playing that two-way game," said Mercer, a first-round draft pick in 2020. "To help contribute out there and get this big win is a huge thing for me, and I want to make sure I can keep it going."

Mercer gave New Jersey its first lead of the game at 8:53 of the third period on his 10th goal of the season. Mercer, playing in his 123rd NHL game, also had an assist.

The Devils began a five-game trip by winning for the third time in four games. They also closed the gap on the first-place Hurricanes in a game marking the midway mark of the season for the top two teams in the Metropolitan Division.

"We played one of our best third periods of the year," New Jersey coach Lindy Ruff said.

Jonas Siegenthaler, Jesper

Boqvist and Nico Hischier also scored for New Jersey, with Hischier's empty-netter coming with 55 seconds left. Michael McLeod had two assists.

Goalie Vitek Vanecek made 25 saves for his fourth win in a row.

"We never quit," Siegenthaler said. "It's not always easy to make a comeback."

Rangers 4, Wild 3 (SO): Artemi Panarin scored the deciding goal in a shootout and host New York beat Minnesota.

K'Andre Miller and Adam Fox each had a goal and an assist, and Filip Chytil also scored for New York. Igor Shesterkin finished with 28 saves as the Rangers moved to 4-0-2 since a 4-0 loss to Washington on Dec. 27.

Kaapo Kakko scored for the Rangers and Zuccarello for the Wild in the first round of the tiebreaker. Panarin then lifted the puck over a sprawled Fleury on the Rangers' third attempt and Shesterkin denied Frederick Gaudreau to preserve the win.

Lightning 6, Blue Jackets 3: Nikita Kucherov had two goals and two assists, and host Tampa Bay won its eighth consecutive home game by defeating

Columbus.

The Lightning also got goals from Nick Paul, Vladislav Namestnikov, Brayden Point and Ross Colton. Andrei Vasilevski made 20 saves.

Penguins 5, Canucks 4: Evgeni Malkin scored twice and added two assists as host Pittsburgh roared back from an early deficit against Vancouver.

Malkin's 28th career fourth-point game — fourth-most among active players — helped spark the Penguins after they spotted the Canucks a three-goal lead. Malkin started the comeback with Pittsburgh's first power-play goal in nearly two weeks and gave the Penguins the lead after executing a pretty give-and-go with Jason Zucker.

Stars 2, Islanders 1 (SO): Jason Robertson scored in regulation and converted the only goal in the shootout to give visiting Dallas a victory over New York.

Robertson wired a wrist shot over Ilya Sorokin's glove in the shootout. Dallas' Jake Oettinger made 26 saves and stopped Mathew Barzal, Anthony Beauvillier and Brock Nelson in the tiebreaker.

Panthers 5, Avalanche 4:

Matthew Tkachuk scored his second goal of the game with 3:30 remaining and visiting Florida beat Colorado after blowing a three-goal lead in the third period.

Tkachuk kept swiping at the puck down low on a power play until defenseman Cale Makar finally pushed it toward the side. But the puck went in off the skate of Avalanche forward Evan Rodrigues.

Kraken 4, Sabres 3: Matty Beniers, Justin Schultz and Jordan Eberle each had a goal and an assist as visiting Seattle rallied past Buffalo for its sixth consecutive win.

Red Wings 7, Jets 5: Moritz Seider had four assists, tying the Red Wings' record for a defenseman, and host Detroit topped Winnipeg to snap a three-game skid.

Blues 4, Flames 3 (OT): Robert Thomas' goal 28 seconds into overtime capped host St. Louis' comeback against Calgary.

Sharks 4, Coyotes 2: Matt Nieto scored the tiebreaking goal nine seconds into the third period and visiting San Jose handed Arizona its sixth straight defeat.

Skiing record on hold as ill Shiffrin places 2nd

Associated Press

FLACHAU, Austria — Mikaela Shiffrin will have to wait a bit longer to celebrate a record-breaking win No. 83 on the women's World Cup circuit.

Her biggest rival and an illness spoiled Shiffrin's hopes of a big party at a floodlit night slalom Tuesday as the American standout skier finished second behind Olympic champion Petra Vlhova after feeling ill during the race and throwing up afterward.

"I don't feel very well, but that is not surprising at the end of a long stretch of races. And no matter what, Petra skied amazing tonight and she deserves the victory," Shiffrin told Austrian TV before feeling even worse and going into a tent adjacent to the finish area to vomit.

She then did not speak to other reporters.

"Ideally, there is not a story about how I'm feeling. I earned the second place and she earned the victory tonight, and that was quite an amazing show," Shiffrin said in the brief TV interview. "It was a little bit difficult this evening to perform top-top, but even then, I felt some turns that I loved to feel."

Shiffrin matched Lindsey Vonn's women's record of 82 race victories by winning a giant slalom in Kranjska Gora, Slovenia, on Sunday, but wasn't able to produce another win in her best discipline, slalom, to move past her former teammate.

Her head coach, Mike Day, said Shiffrin was "not feeling tip-top" even before the race.

"It was good skiing, for sure not her best, but it was good skiing," Day said.

Vlhova had the fastest time in the first run

and then extended her lead over Shiffrin for her first win this season. The Slovakian skier finished 0.43 seconds ahead of Shiffrin, while Lena Duerr of Germany finished 0.85 back in third.

"To be honest, I loved watching (Vlhova) ski this run. I think it was the perfect combination of aggressive and also smart," Shiffrin said.

The American still leads the discipline standings after winning four of the seven slaloms so far this season, and holds a big lead of 399 points over Vlhova in the overall standings.

Shiffrin's next chance to break the record will come in a super-G in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, in 10 days. She plans to sit out speed races at another Austrian venue, St. Anton, this weekend.