

Navy launches strikes against Houthis

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower and several Navy destroyers played a sizeable role Friday in U.S.-led strikes on sites in Yemen that Houthi militants have used repeatedly to launch attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea.

U.S. Central Command did not state which Navy ships were involved in strikes coordinated with the U.K. and supported by Australia, Bahrain, Canada and the Netherlands. But it did release video showing F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jets and E-2 Hawkeye command-and-control aircraft launching from Eisenhower.

CENTCOM also released one photo showing a Tomahawk missile launch from an unidentified destroyer. The missiles, which can strike targets more than 1,000 miles away, also were launched from at least one submarine in the Red Sea, The Associated Press reported Friday.

More than 100 precision-guided munitions were used against 60 targets at 16 Houthi militant sites, U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkewich said in a statement, also on Friday. Air Force planes also were used in the strikes.

Those targets included munitions depots, launching systems, production facilities and air defense radar systems used by the Iranian-backed group in its attacks on ships in the Red Sea, said Grynkewich, commander of U.S. Air Forces Central.

The Houthis say their attacks are in solidarity with Hamas in its war with Israel, though in multiple cases the ships being fired upon had indirect or no clear ties with Israeli citizens.

At least five people were killed and six wounded by the U.S.-led strikes, according to Houthi sources cited in an AP report.

There are at least six Navy surface ships in the Red Sea, including Eisenhower and its es-

corts the cruiser USS Philippine Sea and destroyers USS Gravelly and USS Mason. Two other destroyers, USS Carney and USS Laboon, also are in the region.

The guided-missile submarine USS Florida also is presumed to be in the Red Sea. The submarine and destroyers can carry 154 and 90 Tomahawk missiles, respectively.

That naval presence was initially part of a U.S. effort to keep the Israel-Hamas war from broadening across the region. But last month, the U.S. announced the formation of a multinational task force — Operation Prosperity Guardian — to address Houthi attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea.

U.S. officials on Friday were quick to distance the task force, which includes the British navy ship HMS Diamond, from the strikes. Open-source intelligence analysts on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, have identified two other British warships

as well as those from Greece, Denmark and India as part of the task force.

Nearly 7,000 U.S. sailors and Marines are serving in the region, including about 5,000 service members aboard Eisenhower. Four F/A-18 Super Hornet strike fighter squadrons, an E-2C Hawkeye early warning squadron and an EA-18G Growler electronic attack squadron are aboard the carrier as part of Carrier Air Wing 3, according to a Navy statement on Oct. 14, when the Eisenhower deployed.

The air wing also includes MH-60S Knighthawk and MH-60R Seahawk helicopter squadrons, according to the statement.

U.S. destroyers, which have been active in repelling Houthi-launched attack drones and missiles, are equipped with the Aegis weapons platform, which has a sophisticated radar system that can search for, track and guide missiles simultaneously. It can track up to 100 targets, according to the Navy.

GOP seeks to grill officials on Austin hospitalization

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Top Republicans on the Senate Armed Services Committee on Thursday pressed for a congressional hearing on Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's undisclosed hospitalization and praised the launch of a Pentagon inspector general investigation into the incident.

The lawmakers — Sens. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the committee's highest-ranking Republican, Deb Fischer of Ne-

braska and Rick Scott of Florida — stopped short of calling for Austin's resignation but said their stance could change as more information comes to light about the days that Austin spent in the hospital last week without the White House, Congress or the public knowing about it.

Austin remains at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., as he recovers from complications from prostate cancer surgery.

"The secretary is not going to resign," Wicker said. "I think

when we have a hearing, we may find out different facts that lead to a different conclusion but, at this point, I have not made that call."

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the chairman of the committee, has not announced a hearing on the matter, though he said there needs to be transparency and accountability from the Defense Department and another lack of disclosure "must never happen again."

The list of lawmakers calling for Austin's resignation was

limited to about a dozen Republicans until Rep. Chris Deluzio of Pennsylvania on Wednesday became the first Democrat to announce he has lost trust in Austin.

Republicans and Democrats in both chambers are demanding answers from the Pentagon about the breakdown in communication that kept Austin's medical condition hidden from top officials and the public.

Austin was diagnosed with prostate cancer last month and had surgery in late December.

Israel defends itself against claims of genocide in Gaza

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Accused of committing genocide against Palestinians, Israel insisted at the United Nations' highest court Friday that its war in Gaza was a legitimate defense of its people and that it was Hamas militants who were guilty of genocide.

Israel described the allegations leveled by South Africa as hypocritical and said one of the biggest cases ever to come before an international court reflected a world turned upside down. Israeli leaders defend their air and ground offensive in Gaza as a legitimate response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, when militants stormed through Israeli communities, killing some 1,200 people and taking around 250 hostages.

Israeli legal advisor Tal Becker told a packed auditorium at the ornate Palace of Peace in The Hague that the country is fighting a "war it did not start and did not want."

"In these circumstances, there can hardly be a charge more false and more malevolent than the allegation against Israel of genocide," he added, not-

ing that the horrible suffering of civilians in war was not enough to level that charge.

South African lawyers asked the court Thursday to order an immediate halt to Israeli military operations in the besieged coastal territory that is home to 2.3 million Palestinians. A decision on that request will probably take weeks, and the full case is likely to last years — and it's unclear if Israel would follow any court orders.

On Friday, Israel focused on the brutality of the Oct. 7 attacks, presenting chilling video and audio to a hushed audience.

"They tortured children in front of parents and parents in front of children, burned people, including infants alive, and systematically raped and mutilated scores of women, men and children," Becker said.

South Africa's request for an immediate halt to the Gaza fighting, he said, amounts to an attempt to prevent Israel from defending itself against that assault.

Even when acting in self-defense, countries are required by international law to follow the rules of war, and judges must

decide if Israel has.

As two days of hearings ended Friday, International Court of Justice President Joan E. Donoghue said the court would rule on the request for urgent measures "as soon as possible."

Israel often boycotts international tribunals and U.N. investigations, saying they are unfair and biased. But this time, Israeli leaders took the rare step of sending a high-level legal team — a sign of how seriously they regard the case and likely their fear that any court order to halt operations would be a major blow to the country's international standing.

Still, Becker dismissed the accusations as crude and attention-seeking.

"We live at a time when words are cheap in an age of social media and identity politics. The temptation to reach for the most outrageous term to vilify and demonize has become, for many, irresistible," he said.

He said the charges Israel is facing should be leveled at Hamas, which seeks Israel's destruction and which the U.S. and Western allies consider a terrorist group.

British PM in Ukraine to give aid, reassurance

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak unveiled new military funding for Ukraine on Friday during a visit to Kyiv aimed at reassuring the country that the West is still providing support nearly two years after Russia's invasion.

The package, worth \$3.2 billion over the next fiscal year, is the largest the U.K. has given to Ukraine since the war began, surpassing previous annual commitments by \$233 million, the British government said.

"I am here today with one message: The U.K. will ... not falter," Sunak said. "We will stand with Ukraine, in their darkest hours and in the better times to come."

The package will pay for long-range missiles, thousands of drones, air defense, artillery ammunition and maritime security, according to Sunak's office. It comes at a time when other financial aid from the U.S. and Europe is tied up by political wrangling.

"We are not walking away," Sunak said at a news conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Ukrainian officials welcomed the U.K. announcement, pointing to it as evidence that Western support for its fight against its bigger neighbor is not waning, as some have feared.

"This is a signal to the world: Ukraine is not alone," Zelenskyy said.

Sunak and Zelenskyy signed a bilateral security agreement for the next 10 years. It will remain in effect until Ukraine acquires its hoped-for NATO membership, Zelenskyy said. Details of the agreement are to be released later, officials said.

Navy helo crew survives crash into bay

Associated Press

CORONADO, Calif. — A U.S. Navy helicopter crashed into a Southern California bay during a training exercise Thursday night, a spokesperson said. All six crewmembers survived.

The MH-60R Seahawk crashed in the waters of San Diego Bay shortly after 6:30 p.m., said a statement from Cmdr. Beth Teach of the Naval

Air Force Pacific Fleet.

"Due to the nature of the training, a safety boat was on location," the statement said, adding that the crew members were taken ashore for medical evaluations. There was no immediate word on their conditions but Navy officials weren't aware of any critical or life-threatening injuries.

The crash site was in Corona-

do, across an inlet from San Diego. The local Fire Department and the U.S. Coast Guard responded to the scene.

The aircraft was from Helicopter Maritime Strike squadron 41. The fleet replacement squadron is based at Naval Air Station North Island on the Coronado peninsula. It trains air crews on the MH-60R Seahawk, according to its website.

Taiwan vote to test US-China relations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Washington's relationship with Beijing will face its biggest test since the leaders of the two countries met in November, as the United States seeks to keep the Taiwan Straits calm after Taiwanese voters select a new president this weekend.

At stake is the peace and stability of the 110-mile-wide strip of water between the Chinese mainland and the self-governed island. Any armed conflict could put Washington head-to-head against Beijing and disrupt the global economy.

China fears that a victory in Saturday's election by the front-runner would be a step toward

independence and has suggested to Taiwan's voters that they could be choosing between peace and war.

Washington is prepared to work with both Taipei and Beijing to avoid miscalculations and an escalation in tensions, regardless of which presidential candidate wins, officials and observers say.

A senior White House official said the U.S. will keep channels of communication open with China and will stay in close contact with Taiwan to "reinforce both our support for Taiwan's democratic processes and also our strong commitment to peace, stability and the status quo." The official spoke to re-

porters on Thursday on the condition of anonymity to discuss the plans.

President Joe Biden plans to send an unofficial delegation of former senior officials to the island shortly after the election. The U.S. has no formal ties with Taiwan and sending an official delegation would enrage Beijing, which considers the island Chinese territory.

Anticipating a "period of higher tensions" ahead, the official said the U.S. is preparing for different reactions from Beijing, depending on the election results, that may range from no response to military actions.

On Saturday, the island of 23

million people will choose a new president to replace Tsai Ing-wen, who has served the limit of two terms. The election has drawn high attention because Beijing is opposed to front-runner Lai Ching-te, the candidate from the governing Democratic Progressive Party, which is known for its pro-independence leanings. This has raised concerns that a Lai win could trigger a military response from the mainland.

Beijing has vowed to unify with Taiwan, by force if necessary. Any military action could draw in the United States, which provides Taiwan with military hardware and technology under a security pact.

Hunter Biden enters plea of not guilty to tax charges

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — President Joe Biden's son pleaded not guilty Thursday to federal tax charges filed after the collapse of a plea deal that could have spared him the spectacle of a criminal trial during the 2024 campaign.

Hunter Biden has been accused of nine felony and misdemeanor tax offenses. The charges stem from what federal prosecutors say was a four-year scheme to skip out on paying the \$1.4 million he owed to the IRS and instead use the money to fund an extravagant lifestyle that by his own admission included drugs and alcohol.

"We're here today because you've been accused by the United States of a criminal offense," Judge Mark Scarsi said to Biden, who entered the not guilty plea himself. The judge set a tentative trial date of June 20 during the hearing.

Hunter Biden has also been charged in Delaware with lying in October 2018 on a federal form for gun purchasers when

he swore he wasn't using or addicted to illegal drugs. He was addicted to crack cocaine at the time. He's also accused of possessing the gun illegally and has pleaded not guilty in that case.

The accusations all come from a yearslong federal investigation into Hunter Biden's tax and business dealings that had been expected to wind down over the summer with a plea deal in which he would have gotten two years probation after pleading guilty to misdemeanor tax charges. He also would have avoided prosecution on the gun charge if he stayed out of trouble.

The deal unraveled when a federal judge who had been expected to approve the deal instead began to question it. Now, the tax and gun cases are moving ahead as part of an unprecedented confluence of political and legal drama: As the 2024 election draws closer, the Justice Department is actively prosecuting both the president's son and Donald Trump, the Republican front-runner.

Lawsuit accuses Harvard of violating civil rights of Jewish students at school

Associated Press

BOSTON — Several Jewish students have filed a lawsuit against Harvard University, accusing it of becoming "a bastion of rampant anti-Jewish hatred and harassment."

The lawsuit filed Wednesday mirrors others filed since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel, including against The Art Institute of Chicago, New York University and the University of Pennsylvania.

In the Harvard lawsuit, the plaintiffs include members of the Students Against Antisemitism, Inc. They accuse Harvard of violating Jewish students' civil rights and allege that the university tolerated Jewish students being harassed, assaulted and intimidated—behavior that has intensified since the attack.

"Mobs of pro-Hamas students and faculty have marched by the hundreds through Harvard's campus, shouting vile antisemitic slogans and calling for death to Jews and Israel," ac-

cording to the lawsuit. "Those mobs have occupied buildings, classrooms, libraries, student lounges, plazas, and study halls, often for days or weeks at a time, promoting violence against Jews."

It was unclear what the reference to mobs in the lawsuit refers to, but Harvard has been rattled by protests since the Oct. 7 attack. At one point, pro-Palestinian students occupied a campus building for 24 hours.

Marc Kasowitz, a partner at the law firm that brought the lawsuit, Kasowitz Benson Torres, said in a statement that the litigation was necessary because Harvard would not "correct its deep-seated antisemitism problem voluntarily."

"Harvard must be forced to protect its Jewish students and stop applying a double standard when it comes to anti-Jewish bigotry," he added.

A spokesman for Harvard said the school doesn't comment on pending litigation.

A frigid spell hits the US Northwest

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Tyrone McDougald wore a long-eared, leopard-style hat as he sorted through racks of warm clothes at a homeless service center in Portland, Ore. He was already wearing multiple layers, but with no roof of his own, he grabbed two more coats to help him face a bitter cold snap arriving in the Northwest.

“I’m hoping that I can get in a shelter,” he said. “That would relieve a lot of the burden.”

An approaching storm was expected to deliver snow to

Portland, a city more accustomed to winter rain, by Saturday. It’s one of a number of sprawling storms bringing everything from what the National Weather Service called “life-threatening wind chills” in South Dakota to the possibility of tornadoes in the South.

The wide-ranging winter storm hammered the Midwest on Friday. Republican candidates campaigning ahead of Monday’s Iowa caucuses were contending with a blizzard warning covering most of the state. Nikki Haley’s campaign

canceled three Friday events and said it would be hosting “telephone town halls.” Ron DeSantis’ campaign postponed events in Marshalltown and Clear Lake.

By Friday morning, road crews in Iowa and Nebraska were struggling to keep ahead of the fast-falling snow.

The Iowa Department of Transportation’s road conditions map showed that virtually every major highway and interstate was partially or completely covered. The agency said driver visibility was “near zero” in some places, and wind-fueled

drifts were quickly erasing the work of plow drivers.

The Iowa State Patrol posted photos of an icy wreck. “Please, don’t put yourself or others in danger,” the agency wrote. “The road conditions are extremely dangerous!”

Blizzard warnings were issued in southwestern Minnesota.

Bitter cold was the biggest concern in the Dakotas. It was 11 degrees below zero in Bismarck, N.D., on Friday morning, and forecasters warned the weekend will get even worse.

FBI: Stacked bodies found at Colorado funeral home

Associated Press

DENVER — Investigators who entered a Colorado funeral home where nearly 200 abandoned bodies were found encountered stacks of partially covered human remains, bodily fluids several inches deep on the floor, and flies and maggots throughout the building, an FBI agent testified Thursday.

Prosecutors also revealed text messages sent between the funeral home’s owners showing they were under growing financial pressures and had fears that they would be caught for mishandling the bodies. As the bodies accumulated, one of the co-owners even suggested getting rid of them by digging a big hole

and treating them with lye or setting them on fire, according to the texts.

Twenty-three of the bodies had death dates from 2019 and 61 were from 2020, FBI agent Andrew Cohen said. The remains included adults, infants and fetuses. They were being stored at room temperature in a neglected building in the Rocky Mountain town of Penrose, he said.

“It looked like something you’d like to forget but can’t,” he said during a hearing for one of the funeral home’s co-owners.

Investigators also found animal remains and bags of packaged concrete, Cohen said. Some relatives of the deceased received fake ashes rather than

the cremated remains of their loved ones, prosecutors have said.

Police in November arrested funeral home owners Carie and Jon Hallford in Oklahoma after the couple allegedly had fled Colorado to avoid prosecution.

The bodies were discovered in early October after neighbors noticed a putrid smell. The Penrose building had “makeshift” refrigeration units but Cohen said those were not operating when the bodies were found. Near the squat building was a post office and a few scattered homes, spaced out between dry grass and empty lots with parked semitrailers.

The Hallfords are accused of

abusing corpses, stealing, laundering money and forging documents over several years at the Return to Nature Funeral Home, which was based in Colorado Springs and stored remains in nearby Penrose. They are each charged with approximately 190 counts of abuse of a corpse, five counts of theft, four counts of money laundering and over 50 counts of forgery.

Carie Hallford’s attorney, Michael Stuzynski, did not immediately challenge the evidence from the scene that was presented by prosecutors, except to question cell phone data that prosecutors said placed Carie at the Penrose facility with her husband.

Some Americans to get their student loans canceled

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration will start canceling student loans for some borrowers in February as part of a new repayment plan that’s taking effect nearly six months ahead of schedule.

Loan forgiveness was originally set to begin in July under the new SAVE repayment plan,

but it’s being accelerated to provide faster relief to borrowers, President Joe Biden said Friday. It’s part of an effort “to act as quickly as possible to give more borrowers breathing room” and move on from their student debt, the Democratic president said in a statement.

Borrowers will be eligible for cancellation if they are enrolled

in the new SAVE plan, if they originally borrowed \$12,000 or less to attend college, and if they have made at least 10 years of payments. The Education Department said it didn’t immediately know how many borrowers will be eligible for cancellation in February.

Biden announced the new repayment plan last year along-

side a separate plan to cancel up to \$20,000 in loans for millions of Americans. The Supreme Court struck down his plan for widespread forgiveness, but the repayment plan has so far escaped that level of legal scrutiny. Republicans in Congress tried unsuccessfully to block the new repayment plan through legislation and a resolution last year.

Patriots eye Mayo to replace Belichick

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — The New England Patriots have agreed to hire Jerod Mayo to succeed Bill Belichick as the team's first Black head coach, according to a person familiar with the situation.

Details were still being worked out on Friday, according to the person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the team hasn't announced the decision. Mayo played eight NFL seasons and won a Super Bowl ring with the Patriots during the 2014 season.

Mayo's hire comes a day after Belichick agreed to part ways with the Patriots after a 24-year run that included six Super Bowl wins.

Mayo immediately rose to the top of the list of viable Belichick

successors after the Patriots took the unique step of announcing they were giving the assistant a long-term extension last offseason.

Mayo, along with Belichick's son and fellow linebackers coach Steve Belichick, handled the play calling duties for the Patriots defense over the past two seasons.

Despite New England's 4-13 record this season, the team's defense has remained highly ranked in several categories despite losing top linebacker Matt Judon and rookie cornerback Christian Gonzalez early to season-ending injuries.

Though it's unclear what the terms of Mayo's deal prior to last season entailed, it came after the 37-year-old interviewed for multiple head coaching jobs

in Philadelphia and Carolina each of the past two years.

In announcing the decision to part ways with Belichick on Thursday, Patriots owner Robert Kraft promised to move quickly on trying to fill the hole.

Kraft said that the mandate for the next coach would be a return to the postseason for a Patriots team that has missed the playoffs in three of the past four seasons and hasn't won a playoff game since the 2018 season.

"We're looking for someone who can help us get back to the playoffs and win," Kraft said. "Believe me, after my family, this is really one of the two most important assets in my life. I am very upset when we don't win games. It carries the whole week. So, I promise you I'll be focused to do the best I can do to

make sure we're putting ourselves in the best long-term position to win for many years."

Mayo isn't expected to have the same control over personnel matters like Belichick did for most of his tenure with the Patriots.

Along with being coach, Belichick also served as New England's de facto general manager.

But Kraft pointed out on Thursday that Belichick didn't receive that power until after he won his third Super Bowl with the team following the 2004 season and that Belichick "earned it and it worked pretty well for most of the time."

That means a new general manager hire, or some other restructuring of the front office, is likely next on Kraft's plate.

Source: Stroman, Yankees agree to \$37M, 2-year deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Marcus Stroman and the New York Yankees agreed Thursday on a \$37 million, two-year contract, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal was subject to a successful physical. The agreement includes an option for 2026 that could become guaranteed.

Stroman posted an Instagram story with a photo of himself in a Yankees uniform.

The right-hander grew up on Long Island, about 55 miles from Yankee Stadium, and spent 2019 and 2021 across town with the New York Mets — he

opted out of the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

Stroman joins a Yankees rotation headed by AL Cy Young Award winner Gerrit Cole that likely will include Clarke Schmidt. Carlos Rodón and Nestor Cortes are coming off injury-plagued seasons.

The 32-year-old Stroman opted out of the final year of his contract with the Chicago Cubs, passing on a \$21 million salary for 2024 to test the open market. He went 16-16 with a 3.73 ERA while earning \$50 million over his two seasons with Chicago.

Stroman missed six weeks last season because of inflammation in his right hip and then a rib cartilage fracture.

Coco Gauff in Australia as teen Grand Slam champ

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Now that the pressure to win a Grand Slam singles title as a teenager is over, Coco Gauff feels liberated enough to discuss her next target: a career tally in double digits.

Could be 10, 11 or more ... no limits. Plus, an Olympic medal in Paris this year. Preferably gold, but silver or bronze would do — in singles, doubles or mixed.

She's entering the Australian Open as a reigning Grand Slam champion, new territory for the 19-year-old American. Had she not fulfilled those expectations at last year's U.S. Open, this would have been her last shot at

being a teenage major winner.

Gauff, who turns 20 in March, believes she can play with more freedom now in pursuit of a second major title as the No. 4 seeded player at Melbourne Park.

The tournament starts Sunday, a day earlier than usual.

Defending champion Novak Djokovic, aiming for a record-extending 11th Australian title and 25th overall, announced ahead of the schedule's release that he'd be playing Sunday night. Djokovic opens against 18-year-old qualifier Dino Prizmic of Croatia.

Gauff's first-round match is against Anna Karolina Schmeiedlova, a 29-year-old from Slovakia.

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Thunder top Trail Blazers by 62 points

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points, Josh Giddey had a triple-double and the Oklahoma City Thunder rolled past the Portland Trail Blazers 139-77 on Thursday night, a 62-point victory that matched the fifth-largest rout in NBA history.

Oklahoma City shattered its previous record for victory margin of 45 points, set twice during the 2012-13 season. The Thunder moved into a tie with the Minnesota Timberwolves for the best record in the Western Conference at 26-11.

The Thunder were on the wrong end of the NBA's biggest blowout, losing by 73 to Memphis on Dec. 2, 2021. It was the Trail Blazers' second-worst loss, having fallen by 65 to Indiana on Feb. 27, 1998.

Jalen Williams scored 21 points, Chet Holmgren added 19 and Giddey had 13 points, 10 rebounds and 12 assists for his ninth career triple-double as the Thunder shot 57% from the field. It was a complete victory for an Oklahoma City team that returned from Wednesday night's win at Miami at 3 a.m. on Thursday morning.

Bucks 135, Celtics 102: Bobby Portis and Giannis Antetokounmpo combined to score 20 straight points during a 25-0 spurt midway through the first half and host Milwaukee rolled

over NBA-leading Boston.

Portis scored 28, Antetokounmpo added 24 and both players had 12 rebounds to help the Bucks win for just the second time in six games. Damian Lillard chipped in 21 points while returning to Milwaukee's lineup after missing the Bucks' 132-116 loss to the Utah Jazz on Monday for personal reasons.

The Bucks led by as many as 43 points in Jrue Holiday's return to Milwaukee, and their 75-38 lead at the break was their fourth-biggest halftime advantage in franchise history. The Bucks hadn't played a game since Monday, while the Celtics were back in action one night after beating the Minnesota Timberwolves 127-120 in overtime.

Boston allowed its highest point total of the season and rested all its starters for the entire second half. The Bucks didn't play any of their starters in the fourth quarter.

Cavaliers 111, Nets 102: Donovan Mitchell scored a season-high 45 points and Cleveland beat Brooklyn in the NBA's third regular-season game in Paris.

Mitchell's quick start sent the Cavaliers to a lead they would never lose and he scored 21 points in the fourth quarter, making four 3-pointers after going 0 for 6 through three, to keep the Nets from coming all the way back after cutting a 26-

point deficit to single digits.

Caris LeVert added 21 points in Cleveland's first time playing outside North America in the regular season, while Jarrett Allen had 12 points and 12 rebounds in his career-best eighth straight double-double. The Cavaliers won their fourth straight, improving to 9-3 since Dec. 16.

Mikal Bridges and Cam Thomas each scored 26 points for the Nets, who matched their worst half of the season with 34 points in the first half and have lost 12 of 15. Lonnie Walker IV added 20 points.

Suns 127, Lakers 109: Bradley Beal had a season-high 37 points, including eight 3-pointers, Devin Booker added 31 and visiting Phoenix routed Los Angeles.

Kevin Durant added 18 points for the Suns, who broke a five-game losing streak to the Lakers. It was Frank Vogel's first victory over his former team. Vogel coached the Lakers for three seasons, including 2020 when they won the NBA title in the Walt Disney World bubble.

D'Angelo Russell had 19 points off the bench as the Lakers fell to 5-11 since winning the NBA In-Season Tournament last month. Los Angeles had seven players score in double figures but committed 17 turnovers that led to 28 Phoenix points.

Beal scored 20 points in the third quarter and the Suns' largest lead was 32 early in the fourth. He was one off tying the Suns' single-game record for 3-pointers shared by six players.

LeBron James had 10 points on 3-of-11 shooting along with nine assists and five rebounds. Anthony Davis and Austin Reaves scored 13 points apiece. All three did not play during the fourth quarter as the Lakers trailed by 27 after three periods.

Mavericks 128, Knicks 124: Kyrie Irving scored 44 points, Tim Hardaway Jr. added 32 in his fifth start of the season and short-handed Dallas, playing without superstar Luka Doncic and two other starters, held off a late charge to beat New York.

After Irving had 20 in the third quarter, the Mavericks led 115-96 with 7:19 left in the game before the Knicks cut the lead to 121-120 with 1:08 to go on Donte DiVincenzo's 3-pointer.

Josh Green hit a 3-pointer with 25 seconds left for the last of his 18 points following three Dallas offensive rebounds for a 124-120 lead. Irving and Hardaway combined to sink four free throws in the final 11.1 seconds to seal the win.

Dallas native Julius Randle led the Knicks with 32 points. Jalen Brunson, playing in Dallas for the first time since leaving the Mavericks in free agency in July 2022, scored 30.

Silver says NBA's In-Season Tournament will return

Associated Press

PARIS — NBA Commissioner Adam Silver says the In-Season Tournament will "no doubt" be back next season with some unspecified tweaks.

So, most likely, will another regular-season trip to Paris — perhaps this time with multiple games for the teams selected.

Silver touched on both of those possibilities for the 2024-

25 schedule on Thursday before the Brooklyn Nets and Cleveland Cavaliers played the NBA's third regular-season game in Paris.

The In-Season Tournament, like the play-in that's used to determine the Nos. 7 and 8 seeds for each conference in the playoffs, began with a one-year trial so the league could evaluate it before deciding whether

to bring it back.

The tournament wrapped up last month with the Los Angeles Lakers beating the Indiana Pacers in Las Vegas for the championship. It was mostly well-received by teams and fans. Silver said team presidents recently met and discussed potential modifications, including how to break ties, the appearance of the courts and perhaps

the name of the event.

"We are pleased with the success after the first season and no doubt it will be back next year, probably with just a couple of tweaks," Silver said. "Then beyond that, as we're talking to television partners, maybe figuring out exactly when the best time of year is to do it, maybe it will make sense to make some other modifications."

NCAA considers new tier of Division I

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The NCAA on Thursday took the first step toward determining whether President Charlie Baker's idea to create a new subdivision in which schools directly pay athletes can become a reality.

The Division I Board of Directors asked policy makers to evaluate a proposal Baker made last month in a letter to members.

Baker said he wants the association to create a new tier of Division I sports for highly resourced schools that would require them to offer at least half their athletes a payment of at least \$30,000 per year through a trust fund. The first-year president also proposed allowing all Division I schools to offer unlimited educational benefits to athletes and to enter into name, image and likeness licensing deals with athletes.

"I can't say where it's going to go or how it's going to end, but I think it's an important conversation to have," said Georgia President Jere Morehead, chairman of the D-I board.

The proposal now goes to the Division I Council, a group made up mostly of athletic directors and conferences com-

missioners.

"This will give the D-I Council the opportunity to involve (other) conference commissioners, athletic directors, college presidents, and then come back to us with updates as they will plan to do at our April meeting," Morehead said.

Baker has been adamant about framing the proposal as just a conversation starter. He has no power to enact legislation.

The council's role is to try to determine if and how Baker's idea could work while also gauging support for the idea among membership.

Morehead stressed that no matter what the NCAA does to change the model for college athletics, especially at the very top where high-profile sports such as football and basketball generate billions of dollars for schools, the enterprise still needs a federal law to provide some antitrust protection.

"Congress has the opportunity to do some things right now to help stabilize the collegiate environment," Morehead said. "There are many bills that have been introduced or about to be introduced. And we're really at a critical juncture for Congress

to do some things. And if having this conversation about a new model helps get us to the finish line, that's important."

Republican members of Congress Cathy McMorris of Washington and Gus Bilirakis of Florida announced Thursday they have scheduled a hearing for Jan. 18 on college athletics and NIL in which they expect Baker to appear. It will be the 11th hearing on Capitol Hill since 2020 on college athletics, and the second in four months for Baker.

The NCAA has been asking for help from Congress for years in regulating NIL compensation after a patchwork of state laws were passed and the association — fearful of litigation — decided to take a mostly hands-off approach.

Now the NCAA is getting more involved. On Wednesday, the council approved a package of new NIL rules aimed at creating some transparency for athletes and schools. The NCAA's plan is to encourage athletes to report their NIL deals in an effort to build a database that can be used to inform decisions. The NCAA also wants to have a registry of agents and companies that

work with athletes and have some standardized components of an NIL contract.

A separate proposal still being worked on by the council — similar to one of Baker's items — would bring NIL activities in-house, allowing schools to facilitate deals between athletes and companies. Schools would still not be permitted to directly pay athletes for NIL or use it as a recruiting inducement.

That seems to contradict Baker's vision of a new subdivision.

Florida deputy athletic director Lynda Tealer, chairwoman for the council's NIL working group, said Baker's plan for schools to compensate athletes would likely require some congressional intervention to prevent the athletes from being deemed employees of their institutions.

Tealer said the board asks the council to take up Baker's proposal in its entirety while also considering the possibility of breaking it up into individual pieces.

"So it'll end up with a council to flesh it out a little bit more and then ultimately come back to the board for approval," she said.

Marcus Domask, No. 10 Illinois outlast Michigan State

Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Marcus Domask scored 15 points, including four free throws in the closing minutes that helped No. 10 Illinois hold off Michigan State 71-68 on Thursday night.

Coleman Hawkins and Ty Rodgers also scored 15 points apiece for the Illini (12-3, 3-1 Big Ten), who bounced back after a close loss at then-No. 1 Purdue last Friday.

Tyson Walker scored 17 points and A.J. Hoggard added 16 for the Spartans (9-7, 1-4), who fell into a last-place tie with

Michigan in the conference standings.

Walker and Hoggard each missed tying 3-pointers in the final 15 seconds.

Santa Clara 77, No. 23 Gonzaga 76: Adama-Alpha Bal made a go-ahead layup with 4.6 seconds remaining and host Santa Clara beat Gonzaga.

With former Santa Clara great and Basketball Hall of Famer Steve Nash in attendance, Bal finished with 17 points and six assists as the Broncos (12-6, 3-0 West Coast Conference) snapped a 26-

game skid against the Bulldogs. Santa Clara hadn't beaten Gonzaga since Jan. 20, 2011.

Brenton Knapper added 16 points for Santa Clara.

Anton Watson matched a career high with 32 points to lead Gonzaga (11-5, 2-1). He added nine rebounds and six steals. Ryan Nembhard scored 15 of his 21 points in the second half for the Bulldogs.

No. 24 Florida Atlantic 85, Tulane 84: Alijah Martin hit two of three free throws after being fouled by Tulane's Jaylen Forbes on a desperation 3-point

attempt that was not close to going in with less than a second left, and Florida Atlantic escaped with the win.

Nick Boyd tied a career high with 21 points to lead FAU (12-4, 2-1 American Athletic Conference), which led 83-74 after Brandon Weatherspoon's 3 with 3:03 left, but nearly collapsed.

Vladislav Goldin had 19 points and 11 rebounds for the Owls.

Forbes scored 28 points and Kevin Cross added 20 points and 11 rebounds for the Green Wave (10-5, 1-2).

Panthers defeat Kings 3-2 in overtime

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sam Reinhart scored on a backhander with less than a second to play in overtime, Matthew Tkachuk tied it late in regulation and the Florida Panthers beat the Los Angeles Kings 3-2 on Thursday night for their ninth straight victory.

Sam Bennett also scored for Florida, which trailed 1-0 and 2-1. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 32 shots and assisted on Reinhart's winner.

Trevor Moore and Drew Doughty scored for Los Angeles. The Kings are 0-3-4 in their past seven games.

Oilers 3, Red Wings 2 (OT): Darnell Nurse scored 1:20 into overtime and visiting Edmonton beat Detroit to match a franchise record with its ninth straight victory.

Edmonton also won nine in a row late last season and in 2001.

Oilers superstar Connor McDavid tied it midway through the third period and Zach Hyman scored a go-ahead goal with six minutes left in regulation, but Calvin Pickard could not stop a shot from Olli Maatta from a sharp angle a couple of minutes later.

Andrew Copp also scored for Detroit.

Kraken 4, Capitals 1: Joey Daccord made 25 saves, Tye Kartye ended a lengthy goal drought and visiting Seattle beat Washington for its eighth straight victory.

Alex Wennberg and defensemen Justin Schultz and Adam Larsson also scored for the Kraken, who tied the longest winning streak in the three-year history of the franchise and are 10-0-2 in their past 12. Seattle hasn't lost since before Christmas, a run that included Daccord posting a shutout in the Winter Classic.

The Capitals have lost seven of nine despite increased production from Alex Ovechkin. The captain assisted on Max Pa-

cioretty's first goal since re-tearing his right Achilles tendon roughly a year ago.

Knights 2, Bruins 1 (OT): Alex Pietrangolo scored 46 seconds into overtime on a 2-on-1 and Vegas handed Boston its third straight extra-time loss to start a four-game trip.

Jack Eichel also scored for the Knights, and Mark Stone assisted on the winner. Logan Thompson made 32 saves. Matt Grzelcyk scored for Boston, and Jeremy Swayman made 23 stops.

The Knights had lost seven of nine games. Boston fell by 4-3 scores in a shootout Monday night at Colorado and overtime Tuesday night at Arizona.

Lightning 4, Devils 3 (OT): Darren Raddysh scored 1:52 into overtime and host Tampa Bay beat New Jersey.

The defenseman scored from the left circle. NHL scoring leader Nikita Kucherov got his second assist on the goal, giving him 69 points this season.

Luke Glendenning had two goals, and Brayden Point also scored for the Lightning. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 27 saves.

Dawson Mercer, Jesper Bratt and Nathan Bastian scored for New Jersey.

Blues 5, Rangers 2: Jordan Kyrou had his third career hat trick, Jordan Binnington made 40 saves and host St. Louis beat New York.

Brandon Saad and Pavel Buchnevich also scored for St. Louis. The Blues are 8-4-0 since Drew Bannister took over as interim coach after Craig Berube was fired.

Adam Fox and Vincent Trocheck scored for New York. The Rangers have lost three straight for the first time all season.

Sharks 3, Canadiens 2: Mackenzie Blackwood made 33 shots and NHL-worst San Jose snapped a 12-game losing streak with a victory over host Montreal.

Luke Kunin, Fabian Zetter-

lund and Nikita Okhotiuk also scored for San Jose. The Sharks improved to 9-29-3, winning for the first time since Dec. 12. They opened the season with an 11-game skid.

Brendan Gallagher and Mike Matheson scored for Montreal.

Jets 2, Blackhawks 1: Nikolaj Ehlers scored with 1:05 left and NHL-leading Winnipeg beat visiting Chicago to extend its franchise-record winning and points streaks.

Gabe Vilardi tied it with 3:29 left, with Adam Lowry assisting on both goals, and Laurent Brossoit stopped 19 shots to help the Jets push their winning streak to eight and points run to 14.

Connor Murphy scored early in the second period for Chicago. The Blackhawks are playing without Connor Bedard, the rookie star who had surgery on his jaw Wednesday.

Islanders 4, Maple Leafs 3 (OT): Mathew Barzal scored 21 seconds into overtime, Ilya Sorokin made 32 saves and host New York rallied to beat Toronto.

Barzal capped a comeback with his 12th goal of the season after assisting on the first three goals. Kyle Palmieri, Alexander Romanov and Bo Horvat also scored and defenseman Noah Dobson had four assists.

Toronto star Auston Matthews scored twice early in the second period for a 3-1 lead. He leads the NHL with 33 goals. Bobby McMann also scored for the Maple Leafs.

Canucks 4, Penguins 3 (OT): Elias Pettersson scored on a breakaway in overtime to lift visiting Vancouver past Pittsburgh for its fourth straight victory.

Pettersson took a lead pass from Filip Hronek and beat Tristan Jarry for his 22nd goal of the season and second of the game. He also had two assists and now has seven goals and 12 points in his past four games.

Brock Boeser also scored twice, J.T. Miller added three assists and Thatcher Demko made 31 saves.

Sidney Crosby scored twice for Pittsburgh, including the tying goal with 28.2 seconds left. Marcus Pettersson scored his first of the season.

Flames 6, Coyotes 2: Yegor Sharangovich scored two of his three goals in the third period and visiting Calgary chased Arizona goalie Karel Vejmelka with a four-goal first.

Sharangovich, Mikael Backlund, Rasmus Andersson and Blake Coleman scored in the first period, and Sharangovich finished his second career hat trick in the third.

Jacob Markstrom made 33 saves to help the Flames win for the fifth time in seven games. Coleman also had two assists.

Lawson Crouse and Clayton Keller scored for the Coyotes. They have lost four of five after winning six of seven.

Hurricanes 6, Ducks 3: Seth Jarvis had a goal and two assists and host Carolina beat Anaheim to run its points streak to seven despite losing goalie Pyotr Kochetkov in the second period.

Kochetkov exited after he was bowled over by Isac Lundestrom during a pileup. Just 34 seconds later, Noesen gave Carolina the lead.

Jordan Martinook and Stefan Noesen each had a goal and an assist and Brady Skjei, Andrei Svechnikov and Jack Drury also scored.

Lundestrom, Ryan Strome and Frank Vatrano scored for the Ducks.

Sabres 5, Senators 3: Tage Thompson scored twice in host Buffalo's victory over Ottawa.

JJ Peterka, Peyton Krebs and Dylan Cozens also scored and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 25 saves.

Claude Giroux had two goals and Vladimir Tarasenko also scored for Ottawa. The Senators have lost five straight.