

US pursues 'least bad' option for Houthis

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — U.S. officials acknowledge that airstrikes against Houthi militants in Yemen won't deter the group from attacks that have roiled commercial shipping in the Red Sea. Yet that doesn't mean the military campaign will stop anytime soon.

President Joe Biden candidly described the dilemma Thursday when he was asked about the efforts to weaken Houthi capabilities after the Iran-backed group's series of drone and missile strikes disrupted shipping in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a vital trade waterway.

"Are they stopping the Houthis? No. Are they going to continue? Yes," Biden told reporters in comments that fit his long habit of saying the quiet part out loud.

Analysts and outside critics — not to mention the Houthis themselves — have said the aerial military campaign won't prevent them from firing on more ships, especially if the U.S. refuses to target the group's main backer, Iran. Yet in the absence of any better options for now, the Biden administration may have no choice.

"I think that they don't have any great expectations that this is going to succeed in deterring or degrading or defeating the Houthis," said Gerald Feirstein, a former U.S. ambassador to Yemen, who's now at the Middle East Institute in Washington. "Basically, they came to the conclusion that this was the least bad of the bad options that they had."

The comments only further exposed the difficult balancing act Biden faces. He must confront the chaos in the Red Sea caused by the Houthis, who insist they'll keep up their attacks until Israel halts its bombing campaign on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. But he doesn't want to go to war with Iran or pull in even more participants into the conflict. And he's rejected calls at home and abroad to press for a cease-fire in Gaza — an idea Israel won't agree to anyway.

The urgency is only increasing. The Houthi attacks, which the group says are motivated by Israel's war against Hamas, and the U.S. and U.K. response have driven down shipments through a waterway that previously handled 12% of global seaborne trade.

Shippers are diverting everything from oil and gas to livestock to commercial goods around the southern tip of Africa. Insurance costs have also shot up and some underwriters are trying to exclude U.S., U.K. and Israeli vessels from coverage.

Biden's remarks on Thursday prompted hasty clarification from National Security Council spokesman John Kirby, who said every strike — the U.S. has launched five so far, starting last Thursday night — makes it harder for the Houthis to keep up their attacks.

At the same time, a tentative strategy may be emerging, with a focus on continuing the strikes against the Houthis, pressuring Iran and seeking more international support for the campaign. That's despite the understanding that the battle-hardened militants have already endured years of airstrikes from Saudi Arabia's military, have little infrastructure of value to target and have been able to repair or replenish their weapons, thanks to Iran.

The U.K., which has been the only U.S. partner actively participating in the Yemen strikes

within a broader coalition, has tried to pressure Iran diplomatically but concluded that only military action against the Houthis could deter Tehran, a British official said. Still, the U.K. is wary of an open-ended conflict and regional escalation, added the official, who was granted anonymity to speak about private deliberations.

"The attacks on the Houthis, as we all know, are not about defeating the Houthis, which is what the Saudi aim was, it was about reestablishing deterrence," Alicia Kearns, chair of the British Parliament's foreign affairs committee, told reporters in Washington on Thursday.

"Obviously, in some ways, deterrence has improved, because we have seen reduced attacks, but actually that's only happened because we've degraded their capabilities — there will be more strikes, I'm almost certain of that," Kearns said.

With clashes on Israel's northern border with Lebanon and the U.S. already hitting back against Iranian-backed groups in Iraq and Syria, the region is seeing even more flare-ups, like Iran's striking of an alleged Israeli spy base in Iraq.

N. Korea claims test of nuke-carrying underwater drone

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Friday it has tested a nuclear-capable underwater attack drone in response to a combined naval exercise by South Korea, the United States and Japan this week.

The test of the drone, purportedly designed to destroy naval vessels and ports, came days after North Korean leader Kim

Jong Un declared he is scrapping his country's long-standing goal of a peaceful reunification with South Korea and that his country will rewrite its constitution to define South Korea as its most hostile foreign adversary.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have risen to their highest point in years, with Kim accelerating his weapons testing and threatening nuclear con-

flict. The United States and its Asian allies have responded by strengthening their combined military exercises, which Kim calls rehearsals for an invasion.

The underwater drone, which North Korea said it first tested last year, is among a broad range of weapon systems demonstrated in recent years as Kim expands his arsenal of nuclear-capable weapons.

South Korea's military says North Korea has exaggerated the capabilities of the drone.

North Korea's military said it conducted the test in the country's eastern waters in response to a naval drill by the U.S., South Korea and Japan which ended Wednesday in waters south of Jeju island.

It did not say when the test occurred.

War strategy divides Israeli officials

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — A member of Israel's War Cabinet cast doubt on the country's strategy for releasing hostages held by Hamas, saying only a cease-fire can free them, as the prime minister rejected the United States' calls to scale back its offensive.

The comments by former Israeli army chief Gadi Eisenkot late Thursday offered the latest sign of disagreement among top Israeli officials over the direction of the war against Hamas, now in its fourth month.

In his first public statements on the course of the war, Eisenkot also said that claims the dozens of hostages could be freed by other means amounted to spreading "illusions."

Meanwhile, a communications blackout in the territory entered in its seventh day Friday, the longest such blackout since the war began. The lack of

communications hampered the coordination of aid deliveries and rescue efforts.

Sparked by an unprecedented Oct. 7 Hamas raid into Israel that killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and saw about 250 others taken hostage, the Israeli assault has pulverized much of the Gaza Strip, home to some 2.3 million people. Israel has said more than 130 hostages remain in Gaza, but not all of them are believed to be alive.

Israel's offensive, one of the deadliest and most destructive military campaigns in recent history, has killed nearly 25,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health authorities, and uprooted more than 80% of the territory's population.

The Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza said Friday that 142 people were killed and 278 people wounded the previous day, raising the total death toll

since Oct. 7, to 24,762, and the total number of wounded to 62,108.

Israel has also cut off all but a trickle of supplies into the besieged territory, including food, water and fuel. Several dozen trucks with critical supplies now enter Gaza each day, just a fraction of the prewar volume of about 500 trucks. Both the United States and United Nations have said more aid needs to be delivered.

The United States, Israel's closest ally, has provided strong military and political support for the campaign but has increasingly called on Israel to scale back its assault and take steps toward establishing a Palestinian state after the war — a suggestion Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has soundly rejected.

Speaking during a nationally televised news conference

Thursday, Netanyahu reiterated his long-standing opposition to a two-state solution, arguing that a Palestinian state would become a launching pad for attacks on Israel.

Israel "must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River," Netanyahu said, adding: "That collides with the idea of sovereignty. What can we do?"

The U.S. has said the internationally recognized Palestinian Authority, which governs semi-autonomous zones in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, should be "revitalized" and return to Gaza. Hamas ousted the authority from Gaza in 2007.

Washington has also called for steps toward the establishment of a Palestinian state. The Palestinians seek Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem for their state. Those areas were captured by Israel in 1967.

Ukrainian drone causes blaze at oil depot in Russia

Associated Press

A Ukrainian drone struck an oil storage depot in western Russia on Friday, causing a massive blaze, officials said, as Kyiv's forces apparently extended their attacks on Russian soil ahead of the war's two-year anniversary.

Four oil reservoirs with a total capacity of 1.6 million gallons were set on fire when the drone reached Klinty, a city of some 70,000 people located about 40 miles from the Ukrainian border, according to the local governor and state news agency Tass.

The strike apparently was the latest in a recently intensified effort by Ukraine to unnerve Russians and undermine President Vladimir Putin's claim that life in Russia is going

as normal before its March 17 presidential election.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed to hit more targets inside Russian border regions this year. Russia's air defenses are concentrated in occupied regions of Ukraine, Kyiv officials say, leaving more distant targets inside Russia more vulnerable as Ukrainian forces develop longer-range drones.

The Russian city of Belgorod, also near the Ukrainian border, canceled its traditional Orthodox Epiphany festivities on Friday due to the threat of Ukrainian drone strikes. It was the first time major public events were known to have been called off in Russia due to the drone threat.

Ukrainian national media,

quoting an official in Ukraine's Intelligence Service, said Ukrainian drones on Friday also attacked a gunpowder mill in Tambov, about 370 miles south of Moscow.

But Tambov Gov. Maxim Yegorov said the plant was working normally, according to Russia's RBC news outlet. The Mash news outlet had earlier reported that a Ukrainian drone fell on the plant's premises Thursday but caused no damage.

In another strike fitting the pattern, the Russian Defense Ministry said a Ukrainian drone was downed on the outskirts of St. Petersburg on Thursday.

The drone wreckage fell on the premises of the St. Petersburg Oil Terminal on the city's

southern edge, according to Vladimir Rogov, who is in charge of coordination of the Russian-annexed regions of Ukraine. Mikhail Skigin, the terminal co-owner, confirmed that the drone was targeting the terminal.

St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city, is about 560 miles north of the border with Ukraine.

In Klinty, air defenses electronically jammed the drone but it dropped its explosive payload on the facility, Bryansk regional Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said. There were no casualties, he added.

Russian telegram channels shared videos of what they said was the blaze at the depot, which sent thick black plumes of smoke into the air.

Congress votes to avert a shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress sent President Joe Biden a short-term spending bill on Thursday that would avert a looming partial government shutdown and fund federal agencies into March.

The House approved the measure by a vote of 314-108, with opposition coming mostly from the more conservative members of the Republican conference. Shortly before the vote, the House Freedom Caucus announced it “strongly opposes” the measure because it would facilitate more spending than it supports.

Nevertheless, about half of Republicans joined with Democrats in passing the third stopgap funding measure in recent months.

The action came a few hours after the Senate had voted overwhelmingly to pass the bill by a vote of 77-18.

The measure extends current spending levels and buys time for the two chambers to work out their differences over full-year spending bills for the fiscal year that began in October.

The temporary measure will run to March 1 for some federal agencies. Their funds were set to run out Friday. It extends the remainder of government operations to March 8.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the president would sign the resolution and urged Republicans to quit wasting time on partisan spending bills.

“House Republicans must finally do their job and work across the aisle to pass full-year funding bills that deliver for the American people and address urgent domestic and national security priorities by passing the President’s supplemental request,” Jean-Pierre said.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has been under pressure from his right flank to scrap a \$1.66 trillion budget price tag he reached with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer earlier this month for the spending bills. Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, said the continuing resolution passed Thursday will facilitate that agreement, and urged colleagues to vote against it.

“It’s Groundhog Day in the

House chamber all the time, every day, yet again spending money we don’t have,” Roy said.

Johnson has insisted he will stick with the deal, and centrists in the party have stood behind him. They say that changing course now would be going back on his word and would weaken the speaker in future negotiations.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said Americans expect Congress to govern and work in a bipartisan fashion.

“Some of my colleagues would see that this government would shut down and don’t care how hurtful that would be,” DeLauro said.

Hunter Biden to appear in private GOP deposition

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hunter Biden has agreed to appear before House Republicans for a private deposition next month, ending months of defiance from the president’s son, who had insisted on testifying publicly.

The House Oversight Committee announced Thursday that the two parties have agreed for Hunter Biden to sit for a deposition on Feb. 28.

“The president’s son is a key witness in this investigation and he’s gonna be able to come in now and sit down and answer questions in a substantive, orderly manner,” Rep. James Comer, chair of the Oversight Committee, told reporters. He added that Hunter Biden will be able to testify publicly after his deposition.

News of the agreement was confirmed by Hunter Biden’s legal team Thursday night.

Republicans had been set to advance a contempt resolution against him to the House floor this week but called it off Tues-

day to give the attorneys additional time to negotiate. If they had voted on the contempt resolution, the referral would have been sent to the Justice Department where the U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia would have had to decide whether to prosecute him.

The agreement concludes months of contentious back-and-forth between President Joe Biden’s son and Republicans who have been investigating his overseas business dealings for over a year in a so far futile effort to connect them to his father.

Republicans first subpoenaed the younger Biden in November, demanding that he appear before lawmakers in a private setting by mid-December. Biden and his attorneys refused to comply with the private interview, saying that it would allow information to be selectively leaked and manipulated by House Republicans and insisted that he would only testify in a public setting.

Experiment uses pigs to help liver failure patients

Associated Press

Surgeons externally attached a pig liver to a brain-dead human body and watched it successfully filter blood, a step toward eventually trying the technique in patients with liver failure.

The University of Pennsylvania announced the novel experiment Thursday, a different spin on animal-to-human organ transplants. In this case, the pig liver was used outside the donated body, not inside — a way to create a “bridge” to support failing livers by doing the organ’s blood-cleansing work externally, much like dialysis for failing kidneys.

Animal-to-human transplants, called xenotransplants, have failed for decades because people’s immune systems rejected the foreign tissue. Now scientists are trying again with pigs whose organs have been genetically modified to be more humanlike.

In recent years, kidneys from genetically modified pigs have

been temporarily transplanted into brain-dead donors to see how well they function, and two men received heart transplants from pigs although both died within months.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is considering whether to allow a small number of Americans who need a new organ to volunteer for rigorous studies of either pig hearts or kidneys.

Some researchers also are looking to use pig livers. A liver has different complexities than kidneys and hearts: It filters blood, removes waste and produces substances needed for other bodily functions. About 10,000 people are currently on the U.S. waiting list for a liver transplant.

In the Penn experiment, researchers attached a liver from a pig — one genetically modified by eGenesis — to a device made by OrganOx that usually helps preserve donated human livers before transplant.

2 weeks of winter storms kill dozens, cause chaos

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Two weeks of storms that have turned roads into icy death traps, frozen people to death from Oregon to Tennessee and caused power outages that could take weeks to fix continued to sock both coasts with another round of weather chaos on Friday.

The rain, snow, wind and bitterly cold temperatures have been blamed for at least 45 deaths in the U.S. over the past two weeks as a series of storms moved across the country. Schools and roads have closed and air traffic has been snarled.

There is hope. The forecast for next week calls for above average temperatures across almost the whole country, according to the National Weather Service.

Snow was falling in New York City and Washington, D.C., on Friday. But the biggest problems remained in places hit hard by storms earlier in the week.

On the West Coast, Oregon's governor declared a statewide emergency Thursday night, nearly a week after the start of a crippling ice storm.

Thousands of residents have been without power since last weekend in parts of Oregon's Willamette Valley because of the freezing rain.

"We lost power on Saturday, and we were told yesterday that it would be over two weeks before it's back on," said Jamie Kenworthy, a real estate broker in Jasper in Lane County.

More than 100,000 customers remained without electricity Friday morning in the state after back-to-back storms, according to poweroutage.us.

Portland Public Schools canceled classes for the fourth straight day amid concerns about icy roads and water damage to buildings, and state offices in Portland were also ordered closed Friday.

Ice was also a problem in the South. Snow and freezing rain added another coat of ice in

Tennessee on Thursday. More than 9 inches of snow has fallen around Nashville since Sunday, nearly twice the yearly average.

Authorities blamed at least 14 deaths on the weather in Tennessee. They included a box truck driver who slid into a tractor-trailer on an interstate, a man who fell through a skylight while cleaning a roof and a woman who died of hypothermia after being found unresponsive in her home.

The cold in Washington state was blamed for five deaths. The people — most of them presumed homeless — died from exposure to cold in just four days last week in Seattle as temperatures plummeted to well below freezing, the medical examiner's office said.

On Friday, more bitterly cold air was spilling into the Midwest from Canada. Several states were under an advisory as forecasters warned wind chills dipping to minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit could be common through Sunday morning.

Home sales in US slump to a nearly 30-year low

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Sales of previously occupied U.S. homes sank in 2023 to a nearly 30-year low as mortgage rates climbed to the highest level in more than two decades and prices hit record highs, pushing homeownership out of reach for many Americans.

The National Association of Realtors said Friday that existing U.S. home sales totaled 4.09 million last year, an 18.7% decline from 2022. That is the weakest year for home sales since 1995 and the biggest annual decline since 2007, the start of the housing slump of the late 2000s.

The median national home price for all of last year edged up just under 1% to record high of \$389,800, the NAR said.

Mortgage rates surged in 2023, climbing to a two-decade high of 7.08% by late October as the Federal Reserve continued to boost its key lending rate in a quest to cool the economy and tame inflation.

The sharply higher home loan borrowing costs limited home hunters' buying power on top of years of soaring prices. A stubbornly low level of homes for sale also kept many would-be homebuyers and sellers on the sidelines.

Mortgage rates have been mostly easing since November, echoing a pullback in the 10-year Treasury yield, which lenders use as a guide to pricing loans. The yield has largely come down on hopes that inflation has cooled enough for the Federal Reserve to shift to cutting interest rates this year.

The average rate on a 30-year home loan was 6.6% this week, according to mortgage buyer Freddie Mac.

Japan's space agency says unmanned lunar spacecraft landed on the moon

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan's space agency said early Saturday that its unmanned spacecraft is on the moon but is still "checking its status." More details will be given at a news conference, officials said.

The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon, or SLIM, came down onto the lunar surface at around 12:20 a.m. Tokyo time Saturday.

If SLIM landed successfully, Japan would become the fifth country to accomplish the feat after the United States, the Soviet

Union, China and India.

As the spacecraft descended, the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's mission control said that everything was going as planned and later said that SLIM was on the lunar surface. But there was no mention of whether the landing was successful.

Mission control kept repeating that it was "checking its status" and that more information would be given at a news conference. It wasn't immediately clear when the news conference would start.

SLIM started its descent at midnight Saturday, and within 15 minutes it was down to about six miles above the lunar surface, according to the space agency known as JAXA.

At an altitude of three miles, the lander was in a vertical descent mode, then at 165 feet above the surface, SLIM was supposed to make a parallel movement to find a safe landing spot, JAXA said.

About a half-hour after its presumed landing, JAXA said that it was still checking the status of the lander.

Lions fans finally cheering for winner

Associated Press

DETROIT — Eminem stood alongside Pro Football Hall of Famers Barry Sanders and Calvin Johnson before the Detroit Lions hosted their first home playoff game in three decades, soaking up an electric atmosphere at Ford Field.

“The energy in the building was amazing,” Johnson said in a telephone interview, taking a break from snowboarding in Utah. “You could feel it. I wish we could’ve had that kind of experience.”

He’s not alone.

Detroit was an NFL powerhouse a long time ago, winning three league titles from 1952 to 1957 in the pre-Super Bowl era, and the franchise had only one postseason win and that was with Sanders in the backfield 32 years ago and didn’t have success after the regular season with Johnson catching passes from Matthew Stafford.

Until last Sunday’s victory.

The Lions beat the Stafford-led Los Angeles Rams 24-23 in a

wild-card game that whipped the crowd into so much of a frenzy that the decibels were almost as loud as a jet engine.

Detroit’s party might get kicked up a notch.

The Lions are hosting Tampa Bay on Sunday, playing a second home playoff game in one postseason for the first time in team history.

Singer Bob Seger, actor Jeff Daniels, actor, writer and producer Keegan-Michael Key — all from Michigan — are expected to attend the divisional game along with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell and one of the team’s biggest fans: Eminem.

The rapper has expressed himself and shared his fandom recently on Instagram, saying his New Year’s resolution was for the Lions to win the Super Bowl and asking Stafford for a favor.

“Can you just let us have this one?” Eminem asked in a post last week.

Now, Eminem is playfully asking coach Dan Campbell to

put him in the game.

“I’m going to be there that night,” Eminem said. “I will suit up, and I will score us the winning touchdown in the third quarter.”

If Detroit, which is favored by almost a touchdown by FanDuel Sportsbook, beats the Buccaneers, it will move a step closer to potentially reaching the Super Bowl for the first time.

While there are scores of long-suffering fans in the Motor City, it has also attracted some new ones and engaged with them in the digital age.

Sweta Patel, who was born in India and lives in suburban Detroit, didn’t know what a first down was about a decade ago. The 41-year-old Patel has developed her knowledge of the game and affinity for the organization thanks to some interactions on social media and in person as a season-ticket holder.

When she posted on social media about having knee surgery, Lions players wished her a speedy recovery. When Patel

shared that she had a miscarriage in 2021, she heard from Campbell himself shortly after he was hired.

“He’s just a man of the people,” she said. “His voice was almost cracking in that video, and it just really brought some comfort to me.”

Mike McCord and millions more in Michigan have waited a long time for their favorite team to bring them joy.

The 68-year-old McCord was a toddler when his late father, Darris, a Pro Bowl defensive lineman, helped Detroit beat Cleveland at Briggs Stadium, which was later known as Tiger Stadium, for the NFL title in 1957.

McCord began attending games six-plus decades ago and his family has had season tickets for more than a half-century, passing the passion for the Honolulu Blue and Silver down to his 36-year-old daughter, Riley.

“It’s been a long 50 years,” he said. “We’ve been through thick and thin — mostly thin.”

Tomlin remains ‘on go’ for the Steelers through 2024

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Mike Tomlin remains “on go” in Pittsburgh.

Both in 2024 and likely beyond.

The NFL’s longest-tenured head coach said Thursday he plans on returning to the Steelers for an 18th season, brushing aside speculation that he was on the cusp of burning out and considering taking a step back.

Tomlin shook his head and

chuckled “no” when asked if he told anyone he needed a break, saying his passion for his job has only intensified the deeper he gets into a career that includes a Super Bowl ring, but also a playoff-win drought that sits at seven years and counting following a 31-17 loss to Buffalo in the opening round on Monday.

The Steelers finished 10-8 in Tomlin’s 17 seasons and have never finished below .500 since

he took over for Bill Cowher in January 2007.

Yet Pittsburgh has also been stuck on a treadmill of sorts since reaching the AFC title game in 2016, a stretch that includes five seasons of somewhere between 8 to 10 wins and four quick playoff exits.

While Tomlin believes the Steelers have closed the gap on the teams playing in the divisional round this weekend, he also allowed it doesn’t matter.

“It all sucks, it does,” Tomlin said. “It’s not degrees of suck. It all sucks. I’d rather be working.”

Instead, Tomlin will spend the coming weeks interviewing for an offensive coordinator — a candidate he said will come from outside the organization — and start prepping for the NFL draft and free agency.

Tomlin is entering the final year of a contract extension he signed in 2021.

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Defending champ Sabalenka, Gauff advance Down Under

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka and U.S. Open winner Coco Gauff had commanding wins at the Australian Open on Friday to reach the fourth round.

Second-seeded Sabalenka beat Lesia Tsurenko 6-0, 6-0 in 52 minutes while No. 4-seeded Gauff lost just two games in beating fellow American Alycia Parks 6-0, 6-2.

Sabalenka, who won her first Grand Slam tennis title here 12 months ago, has dropped just six games in three rounds.

“Last year, Iga (Swiatek) won so many sets 6-0 and this is one of the goals, to try to get closer to her,” Sabalenka joked. “I’m just super-happy with the level I’m playing so far. Hopefully I can

just keep going like that or even better.”

The pair did not shake hands — as is the convention for Ukrainian players against opponents from Russia or Belarus, where Sabalenka is from — but Tsurenko congratulated Sabalenka verbally.

Sabalenka will play Amanda Anisimova, who continued her comeback with a 7-5, 6-4 win over Paula Badosa. Anisimova, who took seven months out of the game last year for mental health reasons, hit 40 winners.

“It’s quite unbelievable,” the American said. “For sure taking a step away from the game ... gave me a new perspective. I’m trying to be in the present. I think in the past I was getting too caught up in the past and the future.”

Sabalenka said she expects a tough match against Anisimova, who has won four of their five matches.

“She’s an incredible player and I’m really happy to see her back,” Sabalenka said.

Gauff played an almost flawless match as she beat Parks in 61 minutes, making just eight unforced errors to the 34 of her less experienced opponent.

Sixteen-year-old Mirra Andreeva continued her remarkable Australian Open debut when she came from 5-1 down in the final set to beat Diane Parry of France 1-6, 6-1, 7-6 (5).

The Russian player was in tears when she was one game from defeat but she produced a brilliant comeback, saving a match point at 2-5 before winning the deciding tiebreak 10-5.

Djokovic advances to 4th round after defeating Etcheverry in straight sets

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Novak Djokovic is starting to get into Grand Slam form, winning in straight sets Friday for the first time in the tournament with a 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (2) victory over Tomas Martin Etcheverry in his 100th match at the Australian Open.

The 24-time major winner is 92-8 at Melbourne Park, where he’s won the title 10 times and is on a 31-match winning streak.

Only Roger Federer (117) and Serena Williams (105) have played more matches at the season’s first major.

Djokovic has had health issues and been dealing with a sore right wrist. He lost sets in each of the first two rounds against 18-year-old Croatian qualifier Dino Primzic and

Alexei Popyrin, when he challenged a heckler to “say that to my face.”

Against 24-year-old Etcheverry, he didn’t even face a break point.

Not that the 30th-seeded Etcheverry didn’t challenge him, really going for his ground strokes and chasing down drop shots — to the point where he had to veer off court to avoid the net in the third set and nearly crashed into the umpire’s chair.

Djokovic, as he got closer to victory, started to put his index finger to his ear after hitting winners, bringing more support and noise from the Rod Laver Arena crowd.

After closing with a pair of aces to move into the fourth round here for the 16th time,

his celebration was calm.

“It was a great match,” Djokovic said. “The best performance I had during this tournament. I’m pleased with the way I played, particularly the first two sets.

“He raised his level in the third set (and) we went toe-to-toe.”

Djokovic will play either No. 16 Ben Shelton or No. 20 Adrian Mannarino, who were playing a third-round night match at Kia Arena. Djokovic went on court when they were in the first set, and was finished while the Shelton-Mannarino match was still going.

Djokovic beat Shelton in the U.S. Open semifinals one match before capturing his record 24th Grand Slam singles title.

Miami TE returning for 9th year

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Miami tight end Cam McCormick said Thursday that he is coming back for a ninth season of college football.

He is believed to be the first with a ninth season granted by the NCAA. McCormick’s career was derailed multiple times by season-ending injuries, some of which earned him a medical redshirt from the NCAA, and all players who participated in college athletics in 2020 got another year of eligibility because of the pandemic.

McCormick spent the first seven of his college seasons at Oregon, transferred to Miami for the 2023 season and will keep playing there in 2024.

East Tennessee State said former linebacker Jared Folks was the NCAA’s first eighth-year player when he played for the Bucs in 2021. There have been multiple athletes with seven years of college eligibility, including Isis Young — a women’s basketball player who appeared for Florida, Fordham, Syracuse and Siena over her seven seasons and decided against getting an eighth year.

But McCormick — who has undergone at least six surgeries because of football injuries — seems to be the first with nine, and certainly the first at the major college football level.

He missed most of his senior season of high school in 2015 because of an injury, then red-shirted after enrolling at Oregon in 2016 and appeared in all 13 of Oregon’s games in 2017. Over the next four years, he played in exactly three games.

McCormick played in one game before a season-ending injury in 2018, missed all of the 2019 season with injury, missed the 2020 season because of injury and the pandemic, and then played in two games in 2021 before another season-ending injury.

Brunson leads Knicks past Wizards

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson had 41 points, eight rebounds and eight assists, leading the New York Knicks to a 113-109 victory over the Washington Wizards on Thursday night.

Brunson scored 18 of the Knicks' 21 points during a lengthy stretch of the fourth quarter, helping them push a one-point lead to 105-97 with 1:26 remaining.

He finished 14 for 27 from the field and scored at least 30 for the second straight night after missing two games because of a bruised left calf.

Julius Randle added 21 points for the Knicks, while Donte DiVincenzo and OG Anunoby each had 19. The Knicks improved to 8-2 since Anunoby joined the lineup Jan. 1 after be-

ing acquired from Toronto.

The Knicks host the Raptors in the first meeting between the teams since the trade Saturday when RJ Barrett and Immanuel Quickley return to Madison Square Garden.

Jordan Poole scored 24 points for the Wizards.

Timberwolves 118, Grizzlies 103: Anthony Edwards scored 26 of his 28 points in the second half, Rudy Gobert had 17 points, 10 rebounds and a season-high-tying six blocks and West-leading Minnesota beat injury-ravaged Memphis.

Naz Reid scored 20 points and Mike Conley had 17 points and 10 assists for the Wolves, who outscored the Grizzlies 37-17 in the fourth quarter.

Jaren Jackson Jr. had 36 points and Luke Kennard added 18 points for the Grizzlies.

Pacers 126, Kings 121: Benedict Mathurin scored 25 points and short-handed Indiana held off host Sacramento.

Indiana was without newly acquired forward Pascal Siakam, who had yet to join the team following a trade with Toronto, while fellow All-Star Tyrese Haliburton missed his fifth straight game because of a strained left hamstring.

T.J. McConnell had 20 points and 10 assists to help Indiana win for the 10th time in 13 games. Kevin Huerter had a career-high 31 points for Sacramento.

Thunder 134, Jazz 129: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 31 points, Jalen Williams had 11 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter and visiting Oklahoma City snapped Utah's six-game winning streak.

Williams, who shot 11 of 14, made four 3-pointers and has scored at least 25 points in three consecutive games. Josh Giddey had 20 points and 10 rebounds.

Collin Sexton scored 31 points and Lauri Markkanen added 26 for the Jazz. They had their nine-game home winning streak stopped.

Bulls 116, Raptors 110: Nikola Vucevic had 24 points and 14 rebounds, DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points against his former team and visiting Chicago beat Toronto.

Coby White added 23 points to help the Bulls snap a four-game losing streak in Toronto. Chicago outscored Toronto 74-50 on points in the paint.

Scottie Barnes had 31 points, one shy of his career best, for Toronto.

South Florida rallies to beat No. 10 Memphis 74-73

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Kasean Pryor made a go-ahead free throw with 4 seconds left, and South Florida rallied from a 20-point deficit to stun No. 10 Memphis 74-73 on Thursday night.

Pryor finished with 21 points and 10 rebounds, and reserve Selton Miguel led USF with 23 points, going 5 of 10 from 3-point range. The Bulls (10-4, 3-1 American Athletic Conference) have won eight of nine and ended a 10-game winning streak for the Tigers (15-3, 4-1).

With the game tied at 73,

Pryor took an inbound pass alone in the paint and elevated for dunk but took a hard foul from Nae'Qwan Tomlin. Pryor made the first free throw but missed the second, and Memphis' Jahvon Quinerly missed a 3-pointer at the buzzer.

David Jones led Memphis with 25 points and Quinerly finished with 15. Chris Youngblood had 13 points for USF.

No. 14 Illinois 88, Michigan 73: Coleman Hawkins had 21 points and 10 rebounds and visiting Illinois beat Michigan.

Quincy Guerrier had 16

points and 14 rebounds, Ty Rodgers added 15 points, and Marcus Domask scored 15 for the Illini (13-4, 4-2 Big Ten).

Tarris Reed Jr. scored 20 points to lead the Wolverines (7-11, 2-4). Olivier Nkamhoua added 16 points and Dug McDaniel 14 for Michigan, which has lost six of seven.

No. 23 Florida Atlantic 86, Wichita State 77: Alijah Martin scored 22 points, Johnell Davis added 19 and No. 23 Florida Atlantic rallied from an 11-point deficit in the second half to beat visiting Wichita State.

Martin had 16 points in the second half and Davis had 14 after halftime for the Owls (14-4, 4-1 American Athletic Conference), who won their third straight. Vladislav Goldin scored 17 and Tre Carroll added 10 off the bench for Florida Atlantic.

Quincy Ballard scored 18 points on 8-for-10 shooting for Wichita State (8-9, 0-4), which dropped its sixth straight. Colby Rogers also had 18 for the Shockers, who haven't had a losing streak this long since 2008-09.

3 players score 18 points as Miami tops No. 4 NC State

Associated Press

CORAL GABLES, Fla. — Jasmine Roberts, Shayeann Day-Wilson and Lashae Dwyer scored 18 points each and Miami beat No. 4 North Carolina State 73-59 on Thursday night.

Roberts and Day-Wilson both shot 7 of 14 from the field as the Hurricanes (12-5, 2-4 Atlantic Coast Conference) built an early double-digit lead.

N.C. State (15-2, 3-2) rallied from a 14-point deficit early in

the third quarter to cut it to 56-50 on Mimi Collins' two free throws with 5:59 remaining in the fourth. But the Hurricanes responded with a 14-2 run capped by Dwyer's 3-pointer with 2:05 left for a 70-52 lead.

Collins scored 18 points and Shaniya Rivers added 17 for the Wolfpack, playing without their top scorer, 6-foot-5 center River Baldwin, who missed her third straight game because of an ankle injury.

Pastrnak hat trick leads Bruins to win

Associated Press

BOSTON — David Pastrnak scored on the opening shift and added two insurance goals late in the third period as the Boston Bruins beat the Colorado Avalanche 5-2 on Thursday night.

Jake DeBrusk and Jakub Lauko also scored for the Bruins, who won their third straight and improved to 8-1-3 in their past 12 games.

Cale Makar had an assist for the Avalanche but fell one point short of tying Hall of Famer Bobby Orr as the fastest defenseman to reach 300 career points. Orr did it in his 279th game on Dec. 13, 1970. Makar played his 279th game Thursday and now has 299 points.

Nathan MacKinnon and Miles Wood scored for Colorado, which lost for just the fourth time in 14 games.

Jeremy Swayman made 30 saves for Boston. Making his league-leading 37th start, first-time All-Star Alexandar Georgiev stopped 26 shots for the Avalanche.

Oilers 4, Kraken 2: Warren Foegele scored twice, Leon Draisaitl had a goal and three assists, and host Edmonton rallied past Seattle to extend its winning streak to a franchise-record 12 games.

Zach Hyman also scored for Edmonton, and Stuart Skinner stopped 25 shots. The Oilers are 20-3-0 in their past 23 games to improve to 25-15-1. They tied the record for the longest winning streak by a Canadian team set by the 1967-68 Montreal Canadiens.

Eeli Tolvanen and Jared McCann scored for Seattle. The Kraken lost their third in a row during the tail end of a six-game trip after a nine-game winning streak.

Golden Knights 5, Rangers 1: Ivan Barbashev had his first two-goal game of the season and Logan Thompson made 29 saves as host Vegas topped New York.

Barbashev ended his 10-game goal drought, hitting the back of the net for the first time since Dec. 21. Jonathan Marchessault had a goal and an assist, Keegan Kolesar also scored and Brett Howden added an empty-net goal with the Golden Knights short-handed. Mark Stone and Nic Roy each had two assists.

Thompson, who made several sensational saves, has allowed just eight goals over his past five starts for the defending Stanley Cup champions. He has been carrying the load in the crease with Adin Hill out with a lower-body injury.

Mika Zibanejad scored a power-play goal for the Rangers.

Capitals 5, Blues 2: T.J. Oshie had a hat trick against his old team and host Washington beat St. Louis for its second consecutive victory.

Oshie's two goals on the power play and a late empty-netter gave him five goals in his past four games after scoring just two in his first 21 this season. It was Oshie's sixth career hat trick and first since Oct. 25, 2021.

Dylan Strome also scored his team-leading 16th of the season and had an assist. Alex Ovechkin set up Strome's goal in his return from a three-game injury absence. Max Pacioretty assisted on Oshie's first two goals, and Nicolas Aube-Kubel also scored for Washington.

Charlie Lindgren made 18 saves against one of his former teams to improve to 9-4-3 this season.

Nathan Walker had two goals for St. Louis against his old team. The Blues have lost three in a row and four of five.

Flyers 5, Stars 1: Owen Tippett scored twice, including a highlight-reel goal late in the third period, Scott Laughton converted a penalty shot and streaking Philadelphia defeated visiting Dallas for its fifth straight victory.

Sean Walker and Cam Atkin-

son also scored for Philadelphia, which outshot Dallas 43-16. Morgan Frost added two assists and Sam Ersson made 15 saves for the Flyers, who snapped a seven-game losing streak to the Stars.

Tyler Seguin scored for Dallas, which lost for just the second time in six games.

Lightning 7, Wild 3: Nikita Kucherov had three assists to reach 500 for his career, Anthony Cirelli scored twice and host Tampa Bay beat Minnesota.

Kucherov, who leads the league with 75 points, had his fourth game this season with three or more assists. He reached the milestone in his 688th game, the third-fewest among active players behind Connor McDavid (527) and Sidney Crosby (554).

Waltteri Merela, Brayden Point, Steven Stamkos and Michael Eyssimont also scored for the Lightning, and Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 30 saves.

Jake Middleton had a goal and two assists for the Wild. Joel Eriksson Ek and Marco Rossi had the other goals for Minnesota, which fell to 2-8-1 in its past 11 games.

Canucks 2, Coyotes 1: Dakota Joshua broke a tie with 58 seconds left in the second period and the NHL-leading Vancouver Canucks beat visiting Arizona for their sixth victory in seven games.

Thatcher Demko stopped 20 shots and Elias Pettersson also scored to help the Canucks improve to 30-11-4, good for a one-point edge over East-leading Boston.

Travis Dermott scored his first goal of the season for the Coyotes, and Connor Ingram made 24 saves.

Predators 2, Kings 1: Ryan O'Reilly had a power-play goal and an assist, Gustav Nyquist also scored and visiting Nashville edged Los Angeles.

Roman Josi had an assist for the fifth straight game and Ju-

se Saros made 33 saves as the Predators won for the third time in four games.

Drew Doughty scored and David Rittich stopped 31 shots for the Kings, who lost for the 10th time in 11 games.

Sabres 3, Blackhawks 0: Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 19 saves for his second consecutive shutout and host Buffalo blanked Chicago in a game delayed a day because of snow.

Zemgus Girgensons, JJ Peterka and Rasmus Dahlin scored.

Luukkonen had his third NHL shutout, also beating San Jose 3-0 on Monday. Arvid Soderblom stopped 28 shots for the struggling Blackhawks, who have two wins in their past 11 games.

Maple Leafs 4, Flames 3: Auston Matthews had a hat trick to push his NHL-leading goals total to 37 and added an assist in Toronto's comeback victory over host Calgary.

Mitch Marner also scored and Martin Jones made 24 saves to help the Maple Leafs end a four-game skid and improve to 22-13-8. William Nylander and Pontus Holmberg each had two assists.

Yegor Sharangovich, former Toronto forward Nazem Kadri and Andrew Mangiapane scored for the Flames, who had won a season-high four in a row. Dan Vladar stopped 29 shots.

Senators 6, Canadiens 2: Tim Stutzle had a goal and two assists, Joonas Korpisalo stopped 21 shots and host Ottawa beat Montreal.

Brady Tkachuk, Rourke Chartier, Vladimir Tarasenko, Mathieu Joseph and Parker Kelly also scored as the Senators (16-24-0) won for the second time in eight games.

Cole Caufield and Michael Pezzetta scored for the Canadiens (19-19-7), who dropped to 1-8-0 on the tail end of back-to-backs. Cayden Primeau made 32 saves.