

Sen. Kelly sues over punishment efforts

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sen. Mark Kelly of Arizona on Monday sued Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and the Pentagon for initiating proceedings to reduce his retirement rank and military pension after Kelly reminded troops in a video that they can refuse illegal orders.

The federal lawsuit also names the Navy and Navy Secretary John Phelan as defendants, alleging the Trump administration is illegally disciplining Kelly for political speech protected by the Constitution and violating due process laws by publicly charging Kelly with sedition.

Hegseth last week said the military had started administrative actions against Kelly and issued a formal censure letter accusing Kelly of making a series of public statements that “undermined the chain of command,” “counseled disobedience” and constituted “conduct unbecoming an officer.”

Kelly’s lawsuit asks the courts to declare those moves unlawful.

“If permitted to stand, the secretary’s

censure and the grade-determination proceedings that he has directed will inflict immediate and irreparable harm,” the lawsuit states. “Each of these actions also signals to retired service members and Members of Congress that criticism of the executive’s use of the armed forces may be met with retaliation through military channels.”

Kelly said in a statement Monday that Hegseth was engaging in an “unconstitutional crusade against me” and “coming after what I earned through my 25 years of military service, in violation of my rights as an American, as a retired veteran and as a United States Senator whose job is to hold him — and this or any administration — accountable.”

A Pentagon official said the department was aware of the litigation but declined to comment as a matter of policy.

Kelly retired from the Navy as a captain in 2011 after serving as an officer and flying 39 combat missions as a naval aviator. He is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, which is charged with providing congressional oversight of the Defense

Department.

In November, Kelly and five other Democratic lawmakers who served in the military or the intelligence community came under fire from President Donald Trump for releasing a video reminding service members that they are required not to follow unlawful orders.

The video enraged Trump, who called it “seditious behavior at the highest level,” and led to efforts by Hegseth to punish Kelly. The other involved lawmakers did not serve long enough to retire with a military pension or did not fall under military law.

Hegseth in his censure letter also took issue with Kelly’s comments over a six-month period in which the senator criticized military leadership for firing admirals and generals and voiced concerns about the legality of certain military operations, including strikes on alleged drug boats.

The lawsuit states that Hegseth’s actions violate Kelly’s freedom of speech as well as the Speech and Debate clause of the Constitution, which grants immunity to lawmakers for official acts.

Marine brigade on Okinawa reorganizes command

BY BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP COURTNEY, Okinawa — The Marine Corps’ only permanently deployed expeditionary brigade stood up a new headquarters company on Tuesday, aligning it with a Japanese amphibious brigade to streamline joint humanitarian and warfighting missions in the Indo-Pacific.

Maj. Codi Anne Mullen took command of the newly minted Headquarters Company, 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, during a small, intermittently rainy ceremony on Camp Courtney.

As company commander, Mullen provides command and control, administrative and logistical support for the brigade

commander and his 14,500 Marines.

The brigade itself is a middle-weight air-ground task force under the III Marine Expeditionary Force and is larger than the approximately 2,200 Marines of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

“This formation behind you serves as a leadership element that can aggregate and command and control multiple [expeditionary units] in a high intensity conflict,” brigade commander Brig. Gen. Robert Brodie said in his ceremony remarks. “That’s what the job is.”

The brigade is expected to respond rapidly to crises across the Indo-Pacific, including humanitarian and disaster relief. In Nov-

ember, its Marines provided relief in the Philippines following Typhoon Kalmaegi and Super Typhoon Fung-Wong.

Mullen, a native of Riverhead, N.Y., and a 2016 Naval Academy graduate, has been with the brigade since July, according to her LinkedIn profile.

She previously served three years as an aide-de-camp and logistics analyst at Marine Corps Logistics Command in Albany, Ga.

She earned a master’s in operational analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School in 2022.

The company’s mission is to “make sure that the Marines across the brigade are prepared to go when they’re called on,” Mullen told Stars and Stripes after the ceremony.

“It provides ability against any adversary in this region for us to be more responsive and adaptable and able to move forward more rapidly to respond when something occurs,” she said.

III MEF commander Lt. Gen. Roger Turner and 3rd Marine Division assistant commander Brig. Gen. Matthew Good were among the approximately 80 Marines and sailors at the ceremony.

Maj. Gen. Toshikatsu Musha, commander of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force’s Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade, represented the Japanese side.

Brodie said he reorganized the brigade to include a headquarters company to maintain parity with the Japanese marines.

Ex-sailor gets 16 years for selling info to China

Associated Press

A former U.S. Navy sailor convicted of selling technical and operating manuals for ships and operating systems to an intelligence officer working for China was sentenced Monday to more than 16 years in prison, prosecutors said.

A federal judge in San Diego sentenced Jinchao Wei, 25, to 200 months. A federal jury convicted Wei in August of six crimes, including espionage. He was paid more than \$12,000 for the information he sold, the U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement.

Wei, an engineer for the am-

phibious assault ship USS Essex, was one of two California-based sailors charged on Aug. 3, 2023, with providing sensitive military information to China. The other, Wenheng Zhao, was sentenced to more than two years in 2024 after he pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy and one count of receiving a bribe in violation of his duties.

U.S. officials have for years expressed concern about the espionage threat they say the Chinese government poses, bringing criminal cases in recent years against Beijing intelligence operatives who have stolen sensitive government and

commercial information, including through illegal hacking.

Wei was recruited via social media in 2022 by an intelligence officer who portrayed himself as a naval enthusiast working for the state-owned China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation, prosecutors said.

Evidence presented in court showed Wei told a friend that the person was “extremely suspicious” and that it was “quite obviously” espionage.

Over the course of 18 months, Wei sent the officer photos and videos of the Essex, advised him of the location of various Navy ships and told him about the Es-

sex’s defensive weapons, prosecutors said.

Wei sold the intelligence officer 60 technical and operating manuals, including those for weapons control, aircraft and deck elevators. The manuals contained export control warnings and detailed the operations of multiple systems aboard the Essex and similar ships.

He was a petty officer second class, which is an enlisted sailor’s rank. The Navy’s website says the Essex is equipped to transport and support a Marine Corps landing force of over 2,000 troops during an air and amphibious assault.

Navy extends Battle Efficiency Award to onshore installations

BY MARC CASTANEDA

Stars and Stripes

For the first time, the Navy has recognized its shore installations for improving facilities, boosting readiness and sharpening operations with the same award long given to warships.

The 2025 Battle Efficiency, or Battle “E,” Award was presented to five installations — large and small — for improvements that enhanced operations and quality of life for the people who live and work there, Naval Installations Command said in a Jan. 6 release.

The largest installation recognized, Naval Base San Diego, earned its award for installing 680 electric vehicle charging stations and increasing shuttle ridership by 200%, according to a Thursday post on the base’s official Facebook page.

Pacific Missile Range Facility Barking Sands in Hawaii — one of the smallest installations honored — built two playgrounds and established 24-hour access to its fitness center, according to a news release. It received the Battle “E” for small installations outside the continental United States.

The Navy listed the other Battle “E” recipients as:

Large: Naval Station Mayport, Fla., for ship and aviation support, ordnance capabilities and housing satisfaction.

Medium: Naval Air Station Whiting Field, Fla., for sustaining more than 1 million flight operations while meeting energy and water conservation goals.

Small (continental U.S.): Naval Air Facility El Centro, Calif., for supporting large-scale aviation training with an exceptional safety record.

Pentagon embracing Musk’s Grok AI chatbot as it draws global outcry

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Monday that Elon Musk’s artificial intelligence chatbot Grok will join Google’s generative AI engine in operating inside the Pentagon network, as part of a broader push to feed as much of the military’s data as possible into the developing technology.

“Very soon we will have the world’s leading AI models on every unclassified and classified network throughout our department,” Hegseth said.

The announcement comes just days after Grok — which is embedded into X, the social media network owned by Musk — drew global outcry and scrutiny for generating highly sexualized deepfake images of people without their consent.

Malaysia and Indonesia have blocked Grok, while the U.K.’s independent online safety

watchdog announced an investigation Monday. Grok has limited image generation and editing to paying users.

Hegseth said Grok will go live inside the Defense Department later this month and announced that he would “make all appropriate data” from the military’s IT systems available for “AI exploitation.” He also said data from intelligence databases would be fed into AI systems.

Hegseth’s aggressive push to embrace the still-developing technology stands in contrast to the Biden administration, which, while pushing federal agencies to come up with policies and uses for AI, was also wary of misuse. Officials said rules were needed to ensure that the technology, which could be harnessed for mass surveillance, cyberattacks or even lethal autonomous devices, was used responsibly.

Danish official: Nation helped US with tanker

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Denmark provided U.S. forces in the east Atlantic with support last week as they intercepted an oil tanker for violations of U.S. sanctions, a Danish government official confirmed on Tuesday, despite tensions between the allies over the Trump administration's desire for control of Greenland.

The official, who was not authorized to comment publicly on the sensitive matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity, declined to provide details about what the support entailed.

But acknowledgment of Danish support for the U.S. operation comes after tensions spiraled between the NATO allies as President Donald Trump renewed calls for the U.S. to take over Greenland. The vast Arctic island

is a semiautonomous territory of Denmark.

The U.S. interception in the Atlantic capped a weeklong pursuit of the tanker that began in the Caribbean Sea as the U.S. imposed a blockade in the waters of Venezuela aimed at capturing sanctioned vessels coming in and out of the South American country.

The White House and Pentagon did not immediately respond to requests for comment. Danish support for the U.S. operation was first reported by Newsmax.

Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio will meet with the foreign ministers of Denmark and Greenland on Wednesday at the White House to discuss Trump's interest in acquiring Greenland, according to a U.S. official and two

sources familiar with the plans who spoke on condition of anonymity because the meeting has not yet been formally announced.

Denmark's foreign minister, Lars Lokke Rasmussen, said earlier Tuesday that Vance would host a meeting with him and his Greenlandic counterpart, Vivian Motzfeldt, in Washington this week, with Rubio in attendance.

Lokke Rasmussen, a former Danish prime minister, has been foreign minister since 2022 in the government of Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

A senior Greenland government official said Tuesday it's "unfathomable" that the United States is discussing taking over a NATO ally and urged the Trump administration to listen to voices from the Arctic island nation. Naaja Nathanielsen, Greenland's

minister for business and mineral resources, said people in Greenland are "very, very worried" about the U.S. rhetoric.

"People are not sleeping, children are afraid, and it just fills everything these days. And we can't really understand it," Nathanielsen said at a meeting with lawmakers in Britain's Parliament.

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte refused to be drawn into the dispute, insisting that it was not his role to get involved.

"I never, ever comment when there are discussions within the alliance," Rutte said, at the European Parliament in Brussels. "My role has to be to make sure we solve issues."

He said that the 32-nation military alliance must focus on providing security in the Arctic region, which includes Greenland.

Protesters, federal agents square off in Twin Cities

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Days of demonstrations against immigration agents left Minnesota tense on Tuesday, a day after federal authorities used tear gas to break up crowds of whistle-blowing activists and state and local leaders sued to fight the enforcement surge that led to the fatal shooting of a Minneapolis woman.

Confrontations between federal agents and protesters stretched throughout the day and across multiple cities on Monday. Agents fired tear gas in Minneapolis as a crowd gathered around immigration officers questioning a man; in St. Cloud hundreds of people protested outside a strip of Somali-run businesses after Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers arrived.

Later that night confrontations erupted between protesters and officers guarding the federal building being used as a base for the Twin Cities crackdown.

With the Department of Home-

land Security pledging to send more than 2,000 immigration officers into Minnesota in what ICE has called its largest enforcement operation ever, the state, joined by Minneapolis and St. Paul, sued the Trump administration Monday to try to halt or limit the surge.

Homeland Security says it has made more than 2,000 arrests in the state since December.

The days after Renee Good was shot in the head by an ICE officer while behind the wheel of her SUV have seen dozens of protests or vigils across the U.S. to honor her and to passionately criticize the administration's tactics.

In response to Monday's lawsuit, Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin accused Minnesota officials of ignoring public safety.

"President [Donald] Trump's job is to protect the American people and enforce the law — no matter who your mayor, governor, or state attorney general is," McLaughlin said.

Judge: US illegally blocked energy grants in blue states

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge ruled Monday that the Trump administration acted illegally when it canceled \$7.6 billion in clean energy grants for projects in states that voted for Democrat Kamala Harris in the 2024 election.

The grants supported hundreds of clean energy projects in 16 states, including battery plants, hydrogen technology projects, upgrades to the electric grid and efforts to capture carbon dioxide emissions.

The Energy Department said the projects were terminated after a review determined they did not adequately advance the nation's energy needs or were not economically viable. Russell Vought, the White House budget director, said "the Left's climate agenda is being canceled."

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta said the administration's action violated the Constitution's equal protection requirements.

"Defendants freely admit that they made grant-termination decisions primarily — if not exclusively — based on whether the awardee resided in a state whose citizens voted for President Trump in 2024," Mehta wrote. The administration offered no explanation for how their purposeful targeting of grant recipients based on their electoral support for Trump — or lack of it — "rationally advances their stated government interest," the judge added.

Projects were canceled in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont and Washington state, states that supported Harris.

A Texas hydrogen project and a three-state project in West Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania were spared, according to clean-energy supporters who obtained a list of the DOE targets.

Activists: Death toll from Iran protests increases to 2,000

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The death toll from nationwide protests in Iran surpassed 2,000 people on Tuesday, activists said, as Iranians made phone calls abroad for the first time in days after authorities severed communications during a crackdown on demonstrators.

The number of dead climbed to at least 2,003, as reported by the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency. That figure dwarfs the death toll from any other round of protest or unrest in Iran in decades and recalls the chaos surrounding the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Iranian state television offered the first official acknowledgment of the high death toll, quoting an official saying the country had "a lot of martyrs" and that it did not release a toll earlier because of the dead suffering gruesome injuries. However, that statement came after activists reported their toll.

The demonstrations began a little over two weeks ago in anger over Iran's ailing economy and soon targeted the theocracy, particularly 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Images obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press from demonstrations in Tehran showed graffiti and chants calling for Khamenei's death — something that could carry a death sentence.

Soon after the new death toll became public, President Donald Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform: "Iranian Patriots, KEEP PROTESTING — TAKE OVER YOUR INSTITUTIONS!!!"

He added: "I have cancelled all meetings with Iranian Officials until the senseless killing of protesters STOPS. HELP IS ON ITS WAY." Trump did not give details.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking to the Qatar-funded satellite news network Al Jazeera in an interview aired Monday night, said he had continued to communicate with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff.

The communication "continued before and after the protests and are still ongoing," Araghchi said. However, "Washington's proposed ideas and threats against our country are incompatible." He had no immediate reaction to Trump's latest online comments.

The activist group said 1,850 of the dead were protesters and 135 were government-affiliated. Nine children were killed, along with nine civilians it said were not taking part in protests. More than 16,700 people have been detained, the group said.

With the internet down in Iran, gauging the demonstrations from abroad has grown more difficult. The AP has been unable to independently assess the toll. Iran's government has not offered overall casualty figures.

Skylar Thompson with the Human Rights Activists News Agency told AP the new toll was shocking, particularly since it reached four times the death toll of the monthslong 2022 Mahsa Amini protests in just two weeks.

She warned that the toll would still rise: "We're horrified, but we still think the number is conservative."

Death sentence sought for ex-S. Korea leader

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — An independent counsel has demanded a death sentence for former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on rebellion charges in connection with his short-lived imposition of martial law in December 2024.

The Seoul Central District Court said independent counsel Cho Eun-suk's team made the request at a hearing Tuesday. Yoon was expected to make remarks there.

Removed from office last April, Yoon faces criminal trials over his martial law debacle and other scandals related to his time in office. Charges that he directed a rebellion are the most significant ones.

The court is expected to deliver a verdict on Yoon in February.

Yoon has maintained that his decree was a desperate yet peaceful attempt to raise public awareness about what he considered the danger of the liberal opposition Democratic Party, which used its legislative majority to obstruct his agenda and complicate state affairs.

Yoon called the opposition-controlled parliament "a den of criminals" and "anti-state forces."

But lawmakers rushed to object to the imposition of martial law in dramatic overnight scenes, and enough of them, including even those within Yoon's ruling party, managed to enter an assembly hall to vote down the decree.

Russian strike targets Ukraine power grid again

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia launched a second major drone and missile bombardment of Ukraine in four days, officials said Tuesday, aiming again at the power grid amid freezing temperatures in an apparent snub to U.S.-led peace efforts as Moscow's invasion of its neighbor approaches the four-year mark.

Russia fired almost 300 drones, 18 ballistic missiles and seven cruise missiles at eight regions overnight, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on social media.

One strike in the northeastern Kharkiv region killed four people at a mail depot, and several hundred thousand households were without power in the Kyiv region, Zelenskyy said.

The daytime temperature in Kyiv, which has endured freezing temperatures for more than two weeks, was about 10 de-

grees Fahrenheit, with streets covered in ice.

Kyiv has grappled with severe power shortages for days, although Mayor Vitali Klitschko said Monday night's strikes caused the biggest electrical outage the city has faced so far.

More than 500 residential buildings remained without central heating Tuesday. Throughout the city, bare trees were weighed down with icicles and snow was piled up next to sidewalks.

To cope, friends and relatives gathered in those apartments that have power or hot water, at least temporarily.

Klitschko ordered the city to provide one hot meal per day to needy residents. He also announced that workers in the city's water, heating and road maintenance services would receive bonuses for working "day and night" to restore critical infrastructure.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Impeachments removed from Trump photo display

DC WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's photo portrait display at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery has had references to his two impeachments removed, the latest apparent change at the collection of museums he has accused of bias as he asserts his influence over how official presentations document U.S. history.

The wall text, which summarized Trump's first presidency and noted his 2024 comeback victory, was part of the museum's "American Presidents" exhibition. The description had been placed alongside a photograph of Trump taken during his first term. Now, a different photo appears without any accompanying text block, though the text was available online.

Trump ordered in August that Smithsonian officials review all exhibits before the nation celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Arson suspect arrested after synagogue fire

MS JACKSON — Religious leaders and civil rights activists condemned what authorities said Sunday was an act of arson that heavily damaged a historic Mississippi synagogue that had been bombed decades ago for its congregation's role in the civil rights movement.

One person was arrested for investigation of arson, authorities said.

The fire ripped through the Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson shortly after 3 a.m. on

Saturday, authorities said. No congregants or firefighters were injured in the blaze.

Photos showed the charred remains of an administrative office and synagogue library, where several Torahs were destroyed or damaged.

Truck speeds through Iran demonstration

CA LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles police responded Sunday after somebody drove a U-Haul box truck down a street crowded with marchers demonstrating in support of the Iranian people, causing protesters to scramble out of the way and then run after the speeding vehicle to try to attack the driver.

The U-Haul truck, with a window and side mirrors shattered, was stopped several blocks away and surrounded by police cars. ABC7 news helicopter footage showed officers keeping the crowd at bay as demonstrators swarmed the truck, throwing punches at the driver and thrusting flagpoles through the driver's side window.

The driver, a man who was not identified, was detained "pending further investigation," police said in a statement Sunday evening.

The police statement said one person was hit by the truck but nobody was seriously hurt. Two people were evaluated by paramedics and both declined treatment, the Los Angeles Fire Department said.

Supporters press for Thomas Paine memorial

DC WASHINGTON — Some 250 years after "Common Sense" helped inspire the 13 colonies to declare

independence, Thomas Paine might receive a long-anticipated tribute from his adopted country.

A Paine memorial in Washington, D.C., authorized by a 2022 law, awaits approval from the U.S. Department of Interior.

It would be the first landmark in the nation's capital to be dedicated to one of the American Revolution's most stirring, popular and quotable advocates — who also was one of the most intensely debated men of his time.

Ali will be honored with commemorative stamp

KY LOUISVILLE — Muhammad Ali once joked that he should be a postage stamp because "that's the only way I'll ever get licked."

Now, the three-time heavyweight champion's quip is becoming reality.

Widely regarded as the most famous and influential boxer ever and a cultural force who fused athletic brilliance with political conviction and showmanship, Ali is being honored for the first time with a commemorative U.S. postage stamp that features a 1974 black-and-white Associated Press photo of Ali in his famous boxing pose.

Inmates dead, officer injured in prison fight

GA DAVISBORO — Three inmates were killed and a corrections officer and several other inmates were injured when a fight broke out Sunday at a state prison in Georgia, according to local police.

A fight broke out among the inmates at the Washington State Prison, leaving three inmates dead, Davisboro Police Chief

Leondus Dixon said in an email.

A corrections officer was injured and 12 inmates were taken to local hospitals for treatment, Dixon said.

The medium security prison in Davisboro, about 130 miles southeast of Atlanta, has a capacity of about 1,550 inmates, according to the Georgia Department of Corrections website.

World War II Memorial closes until mid-May

DC WASHINGTON — The National World War II Memorial, in Washington, D.C. — which draws millions of visitors annually — will be closed for the next five months to allow for a \$3.7 million renovation project to update lighting and other aging infrastructure, officials said.

Work includes installing new lights at the large fountain and pillars to restore nighttime visibility of the site.

The National Park Service made the announcement Thursday, stating that the grounds will be closed to visitors during the construction period.

The memorial is expected to re-open in mid-May.

"We know how disappointing this will be for many people, especially veterans, families, and visitors who have planned meaningful trips to stand in this sacred place of remembrance," said Holly Rotondi, the executive director of the Friends of the National World War II Memorial, a non-profit organization that supports the memorial. "We share that disappointment, and we're truly sorry for the impact this will have on planned visits," Rotondi said in an email.

— From wire reports

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Texans stifle Rodgers, Steelers for road win

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sheldon Rankins is well-versed in the Houston Texans' nondescript playoff history. The veteran defensive tackle is hell-bent on writing a different ending this time.

And he's hardly alone. The NFL's best defense is eager to prove it's a unit capable of winning a championship.

So far, so dominant and so, so good.

Rankins returned a fumble by Aaron Rodgers 33 yards for a touchdown early in the fourth quarter to break open a tight game, and Houston beat the Pittsburgh Steelers 30-6 on Monday night for the first road playoff win in franchise history.

"We're here for it all," Rankins said after the Texans (13-5) won their 10th straight game. "I won't sugarcoat it, won't dance around that topic. We're here for the whole thing."

The next step comes Sunday at New England (15-3), where Houston will try to reach the AFC Championship game for the first time.

If the Texans can replicate what they did at chilly Acrisure

Stadium, they might get there. They limited Pittsburgh (10-8) to 175 total yards, including 81 in the second half. Coach DeMeco Ryans called it the best defensive performance in the franchise's 24-year history.

"Every time we go out there, we show (we're the best)," said Houston cornerback Calen Bullock, who picked off what might be the final pass of Rodgers' Hall of Fame career and raced 50 yards for the final score. "We went out there and showed it today. I don't think they even scored a touchdown."

No, they didn't. The Steelers managed just a pair of first-half field goals by Chris Boswell to lose at home on a Monday night for the first time since 1991. Pittsburgh and coach Mike Tomlin have now dropped seven straight playoff games, with Tomlin tying former Cincinnati coach Marvin Lewis for the longest postseason losing skid in NFL history.

"I don't necessarily compare it to any other moment," Tomlin said. "It's the here and now, and certainly it's difficult. But that's what we sign up for. That's the life we live."

C.J. Stroud turned it over three times but also threw a first-half touchdown pass to Christian Kirk, who had eight catches for 144 yards. Woody Marks had 112 yards rushing for the Texans, who had been 0-6 on the road in the postseason.

"It's all about moving forward and trying your best to flush it and keep going," Stroud said. "Every time we had to bounce back, we made more plays."

Marks' 13-yard touchdown run with 3:43 to go sealed it, and Bullock got his pick-6 less than a minute later.

Rodgers passed for just 146 yards in the final game of his 21st season. Whether there's a 22nd is anyone's guess. The four-time MVP will take some time before deciding whether to return next fall.

While Rodgers' play down the stretch was one of the reasons the Steelers won the AFC North, he struggled in much the same way as his predecessors, Russell Wilson and Mason Rudolph, did.

"I'm not going to make any emotional decisions," Rodgers said. "I'm disappointed. Obviously, it was such a fun year. A lot of adversity but a lot of fun."

More adversity than fun in the end. Rodgers' final pass of the night was a forced downfield throw that Bullock stepped in front of, and Rodgers tried and failed to tackle Bullock on the way to the end zone.

Pittsburgh's defense, long the biggest problem during a playoff victory drought that is nearing a decade, forced Stroud into numerous mistakes and kept the Steelers in the game until late.

The result, however, was the same as it has been for Pittsburgh and Tomlin since they fell to New England in the 2016 AFC championship game, with a long walk to the locker room and a longer-than-hoped-for offseason to figure out what went wrong.

The Steelers failed to capitalize on the miscues from a jittery Stroud, who fumbled twice and threw a pick. They scored just three points off those turnovers.

Not even the return of wide receiver DK Metcalf from a two-game suspension for making contact with a fan in Detroit helped. Metcalf finished with two catches for 42 yards and had a critical drop that cost Pittsburgh a chance to extend a 3-0 lead.

Harden passes Shaq on scoring list in Clippers' victory

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Kawhi Leonard scored 35 points and James Harden had 32 to move into ninth place on the NBA's career scoring list, and the Los Angeles Clippers beat the Charlotte Hornets 117-109 on Monday night for their fourth win in five games.

Jordan Miller added 14 points and Ivica Zubac had nine points and 11 rebounds for Los Angeles.

LaMelo Ball had 25 points and nine rebounds to lead Charlotte in its third loss in four games. Kon Knueppel scored 18 points, Moussa Diabaté had 13 points and 15 rebounds, Brandon Miller also scored 13 and Miles Bridges added 11.

Harden, who began the night 14 points behind Shaquille O'Neal's 28,596 points for ninth, had 13 in the first half and then moved

ahead on a 3-pointer early in the third quarter.

Jazz 123, Cavaliers 112: Keyonte George scored 32 points, Lauri Markkanen added 28 and visiting Utah bounced back after a 55-point loss to beat Cleveland.

George had 16 points during the third quarter, when the Jazz rallied from a 10-point deficit and regained control to begin their five-game road trip with a victory.

Pacers 98, Celtics 96: Pascal Siakam scored 21 points, including the decisive 7-foot bank shot with 6.1 seconds remaining, and host Indiana won three straight games for the first time this season, beating Boston.

The Celtics' Derrick White missed a go-ahead 3-point attempt in the final seconds.

76ers 115, Raptors 102: Tyrese Maxey scored 33 points, Joel Embiid had 27 and visiting Philadelphia used an 80-point first

half to beat Toronto.

VJ Edgecombe and Paul George each scored 15 points as the 76ers bounced back from Sunday's overtime loss to the Raptors to win for the sixth time in eight games.

Mavericks 113, Nets 105: Cooper Flagg scored 27 points and matched a season high with three steals, and Naji Marshall had three straight baskets down the stretch and finished with 22 points as host Dallas beat Brooklyn.

The Mavericks (15-25) snapped a two-game skid. The Nets (11-26) have lost four consecutive games.

Kings 124, Lakers 112: Malik Monk made seven 3-pointers and scored 26 points to help host Sacramento beat Los Angeles.

DeMar DeRozan had 32 points and six assists for the Kings (10-30), who won their second straight after a seven-game skid.

Devils beat Wild, snapping 4-game skid

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Jesper Bratt and Ondrej Palat each scored twice and the New Jersey Devils beat the Minnesota Wild 5-2 on Monday night to snap a four-game skid.

Dawson Mercer had a goal and an assist for New Jersey, and Nico Hischier and Dougie Hamilton each had two assists. Jacob Markstrom finished with 20 saves.

Ryan Hartman and Marcus Foligno scored for Minnesota, and Jesper Wallstedt had 24 saves. The Wild lost in regulation for just the second time in 10 games (4-2-4) and third in the last 18 (11-3-4).

Bratt scored his two goals 21 seconds apart to push the Devils' lead to 4-1 at 7:49 of the third period. On the first, he got a nice feed from Hamilton in front and beat Wallstedt for a two-goal lead. He then redirected Hamilton's point shot past the goalie for his 11th of the season.

Palat, who had two goals coming into the game, then got his second of the night at 9:39 after Mercer tapped a centering pass over in front for a four-goal lead.

Foligno scored a power-play

goal with 19 seconds remaining for the final margin.

Mercer gave New Jersey a 1-0 lead midway through the first period on their first shot on goal of the game, a one-timer from the inside edge of the right circle off a pass from Nico Hischier from behind the goal line.

Hartman tied the score 1-1 with 6:19 remaining in the second period as he deflected Brock Faber's long point shot through traffic for his 12th.

Palat put the Devils back ahead with 8 seconds to go in the middle period off a pass from Hischier.

Kraken 4, Rangers 2: Shane Wright scored the tiebreaking goal in the third period, and visiting Seattle rallied from two goals down and beat New York on Monday night.

Eeli Tolvanen, Jordan Eberle and Jared McCann also scored for the Kraken, and Philipp Grubauer had 19 saves.

Mika Zibanejad and Sam Carrick scored for the Rangers, and Jonathan Quick finished with 25 saves. New York fell to 5-12-4 at Madison Square Garden this season.

Red Wings 4, Hurricanes 3 (OT): Andrew Copp scored at 3:27 of overtime, lifting host

Detroit over Carolina.

Alex DeBrincat, who scored and had two assists, set up Copp for the game-winning goal by passing him the puck in front of the net.

The Red Wings pulled into a tie atop the Eastern Conference with the Metropolitan-leading Hurricanes.

Panthers 4, Sabres 3: Anton Lundell scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and A.J. Greer scored twice as visiting Florida beat Buffalo.

Jacob Bryson, Zach Benson and Alex Tuch scored for the Sabres, who lost for just the second time in the past 15 games.

Lightning 5, Flyers 1: Brandon Hagel, Jake Guentzel and Nikita Kucherov each had a goal and an assist as visiting Tampa Bay notched its 10th consecutive victory with a win over Philadelphia.

The Lightning have a 10-game winning streak for the fourth time in team history and the first time since a franchise-record 11-game streak in February 2020.

Canadiens 6, Canucks 3: Mike Matheson and Juraj Slafkovsky scored goals 37 seconds apart to start the third period, propelling host Montreal over

last-place Vancouver.

Elias Pettersson, Evander Kane and Max Sasson scored for the Canucks.

Oilers 4, Blackhawks 1: Connor McDavid extended his career-high point streak to 19 games, helping visiting Edmonton beat short-handed Chicago.

McDavid picked up a secondary assist on Edmonton's first two goals.

Stars 3, Kings 1: Jason Robertson scored late in the third period, Wyatt Johnston scored his 25th goal of the season and visiting Dallas defeated Los Angeles.

Matt Duchene added an empty-net goal with 17.4 to go, and the Stars have won two of three following a season-worst six-game winless streak.

Maple Leafs 4, Avalanche 3 (OT): William Nylander scored 3:59 into overtime and visiting Toronto defeated Colorado to bring the Avalanche's 17-game home winning streak to an end.

Nylander took a pass from Oliver Ekman-Larsson and lined it past Trent Miner.

Cale Makar, Brock Nelson and Martin Necas scored for Colorado, while Nathan MacKinnon finished with three assists.

Blue Jackets fire coach Evason, hire Bowness to step in

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets fired coach Dean Evason and named hockey-lifer Rick Bowness as his replacement Monday.

Evason is the first NHL coach fired this season. General manager Don Waddell announced the abrupt change with his team sitting in last place in the Eastern Conference 45 games into the season with a record of 19-19-7.

"This season has been a frustrating one for all of us and the bottom line is we are

not performing at a level that meets our expectations," Waddell said. "We all share in that responsibility, me included, and while this was not a decision that was made lightly, it is one that needed to be made at this time. Dean did a tremendous job last year under extremely difficult circumstances, and I thank him for that."

Assistant Steve McCarthy, who had been with the organization for nearly a decade, was also fired.

Bowness is back in the league after he retired in the

spring of 2024, ending a stint with the Winnipeg Jets.

Bowness, who coached Dallas to the Stanley Cup Final in the 2020 pandemic bubble, turns 71 on Jan. 25, and at 70 becomes the oldest head coach in the NHL.

"Rick Bowness is a tremendous coach with invaluable experience and knowledge, and he will bring a steadiness to our team at an important juncture in our season," Waddell said. "He is a good communicator whose teams play with structure, are sound defensively and we believe he is

the right person to bring out the best in our group."

Bowness has been head coach for seven different teams during his lengthy career, dating to the original Jets in 1988. He did some broadcasting with TNT since stepping away from his most recent job in Winnipeg.

Evason was just past the midway point of his second season in charge of the Blue Jackets. Waddell's first order of business upon becoming GM was to fire then-coach Pascal Vincent and put Evason behind the bench.

Koepka back with PGA Tour after leaving LIV

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Brooks Koepka is returning to the PGA Tour just five weeks after bolting from LIV Golf, agreeing to a one-time program for elite players that comes with a financial penalty which could rank among the largest in sports.

Koepka plans to resume his PGA Tour career in the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines at the end of the month.

But he will not be eligible for PGA Tour equity grants for five years, he will not receive FedEx Cup bonus money in 2026 and he cannot play signature events unless he earns his way in.

The out-of-pocket cost is a \$5 million charity donation to be decided jointly with the tour. The financial repercussions — no access to equity or FedEx Cup bonus money this year — is a potential loss the tour puts at \$50 million and upward.

Brian Rolapp, the CEO of PGA Tour Enterprises, outlined the agreement with Koepka and details of the “Returning Member Program” in a memo to players Monday. A copy of the memo was obtained by The Associated Press.

Rolapp made clear, however, this was a one-time program

and not a precedent.

It applies only to players who have won majors or The Players Championship from 2022 through 2025, meaning Bryson DeChambeau, Jon Rahm and Cameron Smith would be the only LIV players who could return. They have three weeks to decide.

Koepka will have to earn his way into \$20 million signature events. He would be added to the field to not take a spot from another tour player.

The board, which has a majority of players led by Tiger Woods, approved the program.

Rolapp described Koepka’s case as a “unique situation.” He said the solution was guided by what would make the PGA Tour stronger, preserving playing opportunities for current members and responding to fans who want to see all the best players together.

But this is far from an open path back for LIV players if they want to return. The program had the tone of an ultimatum for the trio of stars still in the Saudi-funded league.

“Only those who have recently achieved the highest accomplishments in the game are eligible to return to the PGA Tour,

where the best players in the world compete, week in and week out,” Rolapp wrote. “This is a one-time, defined window and is not a precedent for future situations.

“Once the door closes, there is no promise that this path will be available again.”

This can be viewed as catering to the stars — the tour has a history of that with the Player Impact Program and sponsor exemptions — but the stars are limited to a four-year window of big wins.

Those ineligible to return under this program — assuming they even want to — include Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickelson, seven-time LIV winner Joaquin Niemann, Ryder Cup player Tyrrell Hatton of England and Patrick Reed.

Koepka, a five-time major champion, was one of the biggest names to sign with LIV Golf in June 2022. He said in a 2023 podcast with influencer and boxer Jake Paul that his contract was for at least \$100 million and that “I signed for the dough.”

Koepka, in a brief telephone interview, said he wasn’t entirely sure the PGA Tour would allow him back this quickly but

“I’m grateful it’s come to this.”

“I’ve got a lot of work to do with some of the players,” he said about the reception he gets. “There’s definitely guys who are happy, and definitely guys who will be angry. It’s a harsh punishment financially. I understand exactly why the tour did that — it’s meant to hurt. But it (his departure) hurt a lot of people.”

Rolapp said he understands there will be questions about holding a defector to LIV accountable, “especially after earning substantial compensation elsewhere.”

“Ultimately, by accepting membership in the Returning Member category, Brooks is making the decision to return to the PGA Tour now — something our fans want, and something that strengthens both the game and our organization.”

The financial penalty is based largely on the value of the equity and how the 35-year-old Koepka performs. Assuming he averages a top-30 finish over the next five years and holds his equity shares until he is 50, tour officials estimate the potential loss of earnings at anywhere from \$50 million to as high as \$85 million.

WNBA, players’ union halt business after no CBA deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The WNBA and its players’ union agreed to a moratorium for league business Monday.

The moratorium, which was confirmed by the league, was necessary because the sides failed to reach a deal on a new collective bargaining agreement or an extension of the current one by Friday night’s deadline.

The sides are continuing to negotiate on a new CBA but are far apart on salaries and revenue sharing.

The moratorium will halt the initial stages of free agency in which teams would seek to deliver qualifying offers and franchise tag designations to players.

Before the moratorium, the WNBA, under U.S. labor law, had a status-quo obligation to

allow teams to send out qualifying offers under the expired CBA agreement. Sunday was the first day teams would have sent out offers to players.

While the moratorium makes sense for both sides, they are still far apart on key issues.

The league’s most recent offer last month would guarantee a maximum base salary of \$1 million in 2026 that could reach \$1.3 million through revenue sharing. That’s up from the current \$249,000 and could grow to nearly \$2 million over the life of the agreement, a person familiar with the negotiations told the AP earlier this month. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the negotiations.

Under the league’s proposal, players

would receive in excess of 70% of net revenue — though that would be their take of the profits after expenses are paid. Those expenses would include upgraded facilities, charter flights, five-star hotels, medical services, security and arenas.

The average salary in 2026 would be more than \$530,000, up from its current \$120,000, and grow to more than \$770,000 over the life of the agreement. The minimum salary would grow from its current \$67,000 to approximately \$250,000 in the first year, the person told the AP.

The proposal would also pay star young players like Caitlin Clark, Angel Reese and Paige Bueckers, who are all still on their rookie contracts, nearly double the league minimum.