

DOD chief in Kabul as exit date looms

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived Sunday in Kabul on his first trip to Afghanistan as Pentagon chief amid swirling questions about how long American troops will remain in the country.

State-owned Radio and Television Afghanistan and popular TOLO Television reported Austin's arrival in Kabul from India. He met with senior Afghan government officials, including President Ashraf Ghani.

According to The Washington Post, which was among the small group of U.S. media traveling with him, Austin said senior U.S. officials want to see "a responsible end to this conflict" and "a transition to something else."

"There's always going to be concerns about things one way or the other, but I think there is a lot of energy focused on doing what is necessary to bring about a responsible end and a negotiated settlement to the war," Austin said.

President Joe Biden said last week in an ABC News interview that it will be "tough" for the United States to meet a May 1 deadline to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. But he said that if the deadline, which is laid out in an agreement between former President Donald Trump's administration and the Taliban, is extended, it wouldn't be by a "lot longer."

In response, the Taliban on Friday

warned of consequences if the U.S. doesn't meet the deadline. Suhail Shaheen, a member of the Taliban negotiation team, told reporters that if U.S. troops stay beyond May 1, "it will be a kind of violation of the agreement. That violation would not be from our side ... Their violation will have a reaction."

Austin met with Ghani, and according to a statement released by the presidential palace, both sides condemned the increase in violence in Afghanistan. There was no mention of the May 1 deadline. Washington is reviewing the agreement the Trump administration signed with the Taliban last year and has been stepping up pressure on both sides in the protracted conflict to find a swift route to a peace agreement.

In a sharply worded letter to Ghani earlier this month, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said it is urgent to make peace in Afghanistan and all options remain on the table. He also warned that it is likely the Taliban would make swift territorial gains if U.S. and NATO troops withdrew. The U.S. spends \$4 billion a year to sustain Afghanistan's National Security Forces.

The Taliban warned America against defying the May 1 deadline at a press conference in Moscow, the day after meeting with senior Afghan government negotiators and international observers to try to jump-start a stalled peace process to end Afghanistan's decades of war.

Washington has also given both the Taliban and the Afghan government an eight-page peace proposal, which both sides are reviewing. It calls for an interim so-called "peace government" which would shepherd Afghanistan toward constitutional reform and elections.

Ghani has resisted an interim administration, causing his critics to accuse him of clinging to power. He says elections alone would be acceptable to bring a change of government.

Both the U.S. and Kabul have called for a reduction in violence leading to a cease-fire. The Taliban say a cease-fire would be part of the peace negotiations. The insurgent movement, however, has not attacked U.S. or NATO troops since signing the agreement.

U.S. military commanders and NATO leaders, however, have argued that the Taliban have not lived up to their part of the peace agreement, which includes a reduction in violence and a separation from al-Qaida and other terror groups.

"The main issue is that Taliban has to reduce violence, Taliban has to negotiate in good faith and Taliban has to stop supporting international terrorist groups like al-Qaida," he said.

Austin has said little on the record about the ongoing stalemate. After a virtual meeting of NATO defense ministers, he told reporters that "our presence in Afghanistan is conditions based, and the Taliban has to meet their commitments."

US, allies hold naval exercise in Middle East

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The U.S. Navy said Sunday that it will hold a major naval exercise alongside Belgium, France and Japan in the Mideast amid tensions over Iran's nuclear program in the region.

The Group Arabian Sea Warfare Exercise will see ships from the four countries conduct

drills in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. Ships involved include the French aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle, as well as the amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island.

The Belgian frigate HNLMS Leopold I and the Japanese destroyer JS Ariake also will take part, as well as aircraft from the four nations.

The drill comes as Iran has

abandoned all limits of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers in the wake of then-President Donald Trump's 2018 decision to unilaterally withdraw from the accord.

President Joe Biden has expressed a desire to return to the deal if Iran honors the deal's limits on its nuclear program. Tensions remain high, however, after militias in Iraq — like-

ly backed by Iran — continue to target American interests.

Biden last month launched an airstrike just over the border into Syria in retaliation, joining every American president from Ronald Reagan onward who has ordered a bombardment of countries in the Middle East.

There was no immediate reaction from Iran to the naval drill.

Iran threatens US base, top general

Associated Press

Iran has made threats against Fort McNair, an Army base in the nation's capital, and against the Army's vice chief of staff, two senior U.S. intelligence officials said.

They said communications intercepted by the National Security Agency in January showed that Iran's Revolutionary Guard discussed mounting "USS Cole-style attacks" against the base, referring to the October 2000 suicide attack in which a small boat pulled up alongside the Navy destroyer in the Yemeni port of Aden and exploded, killing 17 sailors.

The intelligence also revealed threats to kill Gen. Joseph M. Martin and plans to infiltrate and surveil the base, according to the officials, who were not authorized to publicly discuss national security matters and spoke on condition of anonymity. The

base, one of the oldest in the country, is Martin's official residence.

The threats are one reason the Army has been pushing for more security around Fort McNair, which sits alongside Washington's bustling newly developed Waterfront District.

City leaders have been fighting the Army's plan to add a buffer zone of about 250 feet to 500 feet from the shore of the Washington Channel, which would limit access to as much as half the width of the busy waterway running parallel to the Potomac River.

The Pentagon, National Security Council and NSA either did not reply or declined to comment when contacted by The Associated Press.

As District of Columbia officials have fought the enhanced security along the channel, the Army has offered only vague information about threats to the base.

At a virtual meeting in January to discuss the proposed restrictions, Army Maj. Gen. Omar Jones, commander of the Military District of Washington, cited "credible and specific" threats against military leaders who live on the base. The only specific security threat he offered was about a swimmer who ended up on the base and was arrested.

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's sole representative in Congress, was skeptical. "When it comes to swimmers, I'm sure that must be rare. Did he know where he was? Maybe he was just swimming and found his way to your shore?" she said.

Jones conceded that the swimmer was "not a great example there, but our most recent example" of a security breach.

He said the Army has increased patrols along the shoreline, erected more restricted area signs and placed cameras to monitor the Washington Channel.

Stuttgart apologizes for flyer

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — The idea was to highlight how men can help make a more inclusive workplace, but relying on photos of three men to promote an Army Women's History Month event felt like a dose of "mansplaining" to some in the Stuttgart military community.

"I think it's important to acknowledge that we stumbled, right out of the gates, with our marketing of this event," Col. Jason W. Condrey, the Stuttgart garrison commander, said on Facebook. "I know there were many out there who were puzzled and frustrated that, for the garrison's observance of Women's History Month, on the flyer were three men."

On Monday, the garrison will host a virtual seminar dubbed: "Workplace Allies ... Partnering to Break the Glass Ceiling."

The guest speakers highlighted on a flyer were U.S. Africa Command's Gen. Stephen Townsend and authors Dave G. Smith and W. Brad Johnson, who wrote "Good Guys," a book on how men can support women in the workplace.

The flyer sparked anger from some who took issue with no women being pictured.

"Mansplaining how to break the glass ceiling. This is RIDICULOUS," one community member wrote on the garrison's Facebook page. Others said that the event elevates men's voices rather than women's and that the program should be nixed.

Others expressed appreciation for the topic, but said the timing was off because women should be the focal point.

The program also will feature female members of the military community, including Kate McNeely, Stuttgart's deputy garrison commander, and Col. Lynn Ray of U.S. European Command.

Ray responded to some of the community members expressing concern on the garrison Facebook page, saying that there will be "no soft questions and discussions" during the event.

"I think the comments on this page are good — it's always a positive thing to have differences of opinions ... that creates more exciting interaction," Ray wrote. She urged critics to pose such questions to speakers during the event.

Condrey, who organized the seminar, said he felt it was important to deal with a topic like inclusivity within the military workplace.

Air Force OCP uniform changes to be mandatory

BY KYLE ALVAREZ

Stars and Stripes

All airmen will be required to wear the Operational Camouflage Pattern as a utility uniform starting April 1, according to an Air Force instruction.

The Air Force began changing over to the Army's uniform pattern in 2018, replacing its gray, blue and green tiger stripe uniforms.

With the new uniform, the color of rank insignias will be spice-brown, apart from first lieutenants and lieutenant colonels, who will wear black-threaded insignia. Only coyote-brown T-shirts and either green or coyote brown socks are authorized with OCPs. Undergarments must also be the same shade of brown, the instruction said.

The spice-brown flag patch will be mandatory, while infrared flag patches won't be allowed. Colored patches won't be authorized, except for combat patches.

Squadron patches will be worn on the right sleeve and the higher headquarters patch will be worn on the left sleeve.

Rapid vaccine rollout backfired in some states

Associated Press

Despite the clamor to speed up the U.S. vaccination drive against COVID-19 and get the country back to normal, the first three months of the rollout suggest that faster is not necessarily better.

A surprising new analysis found that states such as South Carolina, Florida and Missouri that raced ahead of others to offer the vaccine to ever-larger groups of people have vaccinated smaller shares of their population than those that moved more slowly and methodically, such as Hawaii and Connecticut.

The explanation, as experts see it, is that the rapid expansion of eligibility caused a surge in demand too big for some states to handle and led to serious disarray.

Vaccine supplies proved insufficient or unpredictable, websites crashed and phone lines became jammed, spreading confusion, frustration and resignation among many people.

The findings could contain an important go-slow lesson for the nation's governors, many of whom have announced dramatic expansions in their rollouts over the past few days after being challenged by President Joe Biden to make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1.

Numerous factors stymied state vaccination performance. Conspiracy theories, poor communication and undependable shipments slowed efforts after the first vials of precious vaccine arrived Dec. 14.

The analysis found that as of March 10, Hawaii had the lowest percentage of its adult population eligible for vaccination, at about 26%. Yet Hawaii had administered 42,614 doses per 100,000 adults, the eighth-highest rate in the country.

In contrast, Missouri had the largest percentage of its adult population eligible at about 92%. Yet Missouri had dispensed 35,341 doses per 100,000 adults, ranking 41st among the states.

Curfew set for South Beach after crowds and fighting

Associated Press

MIAMI—Officials imposed an emergency 8 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew for Miami Beach, after hard-partying spring break crowds trashed restaurants, brawled in the streets and gathered by the thousands without masks or social distancing, according to authorities.

At a news conference, officials blamed overwhelming and out-of-control spring break crowds for the curfew, which took effect Saturday night in South Beach, one of the nation's top party spots. Tourists and hotel guests are being told to stay indoors during curfew hours.

It's unclear how long the curfew will remain in effect, but Interim City Manager Raul Aguila told the Miami Herald that he recommends keeping the rules in place through at least April 12. A countywide midnight curfew was already in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"These crowds are in the thousands," Aguila said. "We're at capacity."

No pedestrians or vehicles will be allowed

to enter the restricted area after 8 p.m. and all businesses in the vicinity must close, Aguila said, reading from a statement released by the city.

Local officials and businesses have struggled to balance courting tourists to boost the economy while doing so safely amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

At the same time, local officials banned alcohol from the beach, along with all alcohol sales after 10 p.m. in an effort to curb partying. The city even sent cellphone text messages to tourists warning, "Vacation Responsibly or Be Arrested."

"Spring break in Miami Beach may be one of the great rites of passage, but only if you plan on following the rules. Otherwise, you might as well just stay home and save yourself the court costs," the message read.

But local officials have struggled to enforce COVID ordinances. Under Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' pro-business stance, Florida has no statewide mask rules, limits on capacity or other such restrictions.

Coast-to-coast, rallies protest anti-Asian hate

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A diverse crowd gathered Saturday near the Georgia state Capitol to demand justice for the victims of recent shootings at massage businesses and to denounce racism, xenophobia and misogyny.

Hundreds of people of all ages and varied racial and ethnic backgrounds gathered in Liberty Plaza in Atlanta, and in similar rallies across the country, waving signs and chanting slogans.

In Atlanta, they cheered U.S. Sens. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, and Georgia state Rep. Bee Nguyen, the first Vietnamese American to serve in the Georgia House.

Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old white man, is accused of killing four people inside two Atlanta spas and four others at a massage business about 30 miles away in suburban Cherokee County. Six of the eight people killed Tuesday were women of Asian descent. Another person was shot but survived.

Investigators have said Long confessed to the slayings but said they weren't racially motivated. He claimed to have a sex addiction, which caused him to lash out at what he saw as sources of temptation, according to authorities. Police have said they're still working to establish a motive, including looking into whether the attacks can be classified as hate crimes.

Georgia lawmakers last year passed a hate crimes law allowing additional penalties for certain offenses when motivated by a victim's race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender or disability. A hate crime is not a standalone crime under Georgia law, but can be used to add time to a sentence of someone convicted of another crime.

A couple hundred people gathered in a separate Atlanta park and marched through the streets to join the larger rally, chanting "Stop Asian hate" and "We are what America looks like."

Similar rallies were held from coast to coast. In San Francisco, hundreds gathered in Portsmouth Square, in the middle of Chinatown, to grieve the victims and to call for an end to racist and sexist violence against Asian Americans.

In Pittsburgh, hundreds also rallied, and videos showed former Grey's Anatomy actress and Golden Globe Award winner Sandra Oh speaking to the crowd.

Diner owner seeks jail release in virus case

Associated Press

HOLLAND, Mich. — Supporters boarded the doors at a western Michigan restaurant to show authorities that the owner will keep it closed, a condition necessary to spring her from jail for violating court orders related to COVID-19. Marlena Pavlos-Hackney, meanwhile, remained in custody Saturday, 90 miles away at the Ingham County jail.

Pavlos-Hackney, 55, was arrested Friday, weeks after losing her food license and repeatedly refusing to close the business.

Investigators said Pavlos-Hackney had allowed indoor dining when it was banned and didn't enforce mask rules, ignoring state restrictions intended to reduce the spread of the virus. A sign told customers that their health wasn't her responsibility.

"She didn't really understand the ramifications of what was coming down the pike," said lawyer Robert Baker.

To get out of jail for contempt, Pavlos-Hackney must pay \$7,500 and convince authorities that the restaurant is closed.

"You have selfishly not followed the orders," Judge Rosemarie Aquilina said Friday.

Nevada

LAS VEGAS — The University of Nevada, Las Vegas is changing course and is now planning for in-person spring graduation ceremonies in May as the coronavirus outbreak slows.

UNLV President Keith Whitfield on Friday announced the change from plans announced in February to hold graduation virtually.

Whitfield said in a letter to students and staff that he firmly believes the university "can offer a traditional commencement while adhering to public health guidelines."

Whitfield said that there would be two ceremonies for

spring 2021 graduates at 8 a.m. on May 14 and May 15, and a third ceremony for 2020 graduates on May 14 at 6:30 p.m. All three ceremonies will be held at the university's Sam Boyd Stadium.

Each graduate will be allowed up to four guests, with everyone required to follow social distancing guidelines and wear face coverings. Whitfield said holding the in-person graduation ceremonies is contingent on approval from local and state authorities and COVID numbers continuing to decline.

South Dakota

PIERRE — State health officials reported three new coronavirus deaths in South Dakota on Saturday and 205 new infections.

Those who died were all over 80 years of age and included one man and two women from Davison, Grant and Minnehaha counties, according to the Department of Health.

The new infections bring the state's total to 115,723, with 2,233 of those still active cases.

There are 69 people hospitalized in South Dakota with 18 patients in intensive care and four on ventilators. In the Black Hills region hospitals, three patients are being treated for COVID-19 with one in ICU and no one on a ventilator.

Minnehaha County led the state with 63 new infections.

Massachusetts

Twenty-nine organizations are asking Gov. Charlie Baker to delay the reopening steps taking effect Monday by at least a month.

Massachusetts moves into the next phase of reopening starting Monday, with large sports venues allowed to open with 12% capacity. Gathering limits for event venues and in public settings will increase to 100 people indoors and 150 people outdoors, the administration said.

"We constantly go back and

look at what we've done and think about it as we look forward," Baker told WBZ. "The idea that this process isn't an iterative one is just wrong. We're constantly talking to people about this."

Carlene Pavlos, executive director of the Massachusetts Public Health Association, drafted the letter to Baker from the groups.

"We're concerned that there's the possibility of a fourth wave of the pandemic just as we're about to see that light that we all need at the end of the tunnel," said Pavlos.

New Hampshire

More colleges and universities in New Hampshire are planning to fully reopen in the fall.

The University of New Hampshire joined Keene State College and Plymouth State University last week in announcing plans to fully resume in-person classes, athletic events and other activities in the fall.

"During the last year, we have learned a lot about using technology to enhance education and student success, and we expect this coming academic year to be even better than the 'normal' of the past," UNH President James Dean said in a recent message to students.

Dean said that he doesn't expect the virus to be eliminated, and that some precautions likely will remain in place.

New Hampshire reported 344 new cases of the coronavirus on Saturday. The results include 201 people who tested positive by PCR test and 143 who tested positive by antigen test, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services said.

Rhode Island

The VA Providence Healthcare System is holding a COVID-19 vaccination clinic for veterans on Monday.

The clinic, which will be open

to all military veterans, will be held at the old Benny's store in Middletown from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"We are using this opportunity to bring more vaccination clinics to our veterans in the areas that they live," Larry Connell, Medical Center Director of the VA Providence Healthcare System, said in a statement. "As we have found with other local clinics, bringing vaccine to veterans makes it easier for them to get the vaccine timely and close to their home."

Veterans who are not enrolled in the VA Healthcare System will need to bring a copy of their DD214 and a photo ID. They will also need to fill out a 1010EZ enrollment form.

The VA Providence Healthcare System continues to vaccinate veterans at its main campus in Providence from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m. on weekdays. Additional vaccination events are being planned.

Texas

AUSTIN — The number of new Texas COVID-19 cases had an uptick on Saturday, according to state data.

According to the Texas Department of State Health Services, another 3,673 new cases were reported, 152 more cases than Friday. The addition of 121 previously unreported cases raised the Texas pandemic total to more than 2.74 million.

The state also reported the fewest COVID-19 hospitalizations since Oct. 8 at 3,620 as of Friday, the most recent total available. The state's Saturday estimate of active cases has also fallen by more than 1,000 to 106,578.

Johns Hopkins University data show researchers say the 119 new COVID-19 deaths raised the state's pandemic death toll to 47,198. The researchers also said the rolling average of daily new cases had fallen by 2,486 cases over the past two weeks, a 38% dip.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man carries toddler into zoo's elephant habitat

CA SAN DIEGO — A father allegedly carried his 2-year-old daughter into an elephant habitat at the famous San Diego Zoo to take a photo with the animals, police said.

An elephant seemed like it wanted to charge at them, and the father dropped his child when they tried to escape the enclosure, San Diego Police Sgt. Ariel Savage told NBC San Diego. He was eventually able to get her out safely.

The elephant was not harmed, zoo officials told The San Diego Union-Tribune.

Man captured after shots, chase, evacuation

TN MONTEREY — A Tennessee man is accused of shooting at a semitruck and leading police on a chase that ended with the evacuation of a truck stop, authorities said.

Xavier Waters of Nashville was charged with aggravated assault, evading police, possession of a stolen firearm and other counts related to the events, news outlets reported, citing police.

The vehicle got off the interstate, but the driver lost control of the vehicle and exited it, running to a nearby truck stop, the statement said. After the truck stop was evacuated, police found Waters hiding inside a freezer, authorities said.

City disputes claims from paraplegic jail inmate

MO ST. LOUIS — St. Louis officials are disputing claims that a para-

plegic inmate hasn't been able to get clean.

Associate City Counselor Brent Dulle told U.S. District Judge Ronnie White that it was an "untenable" argument that Anthony Tillman is suffering irreparable harm by having to bathe instead of take a shower, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

Tillman sued in federal court alleging the downtown jail has no showers for people in wheelchairs and that he has only been provided a basin and a rag for washing.

Dulle said the jail's doctor concluded Tillman is capable of accessing the shower and washing himself. He said the jail is willing to help him move from his wheelchair to a shower bench or chair.

Counterfeit purses, other items seized at airport

IL CHICAGO — A package containing 445 counterfeit designer purses and other items was seized at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport mail branch, officials said.

The shipment from Thailand was intercepted by Customs and Border Protection officers, the agency reported.

The manufacturer's suggested retail price for the actual items would have topped \$635,000, authorities said.

The bogus products were seized for violating trademark laws. They were being shipped to a home in Wichita, Kan.

Items included 11 Louis Vuitton, 11 Gucci, eight Chanel and four Christian Dior handbags; 131 pairs of Chanel earrings; 72 pairs of Gucci earrings; and 52 Chanel hairclips.

State Police seek help to find missing rifle

NY CHESTER — New York State Police have lost a semi-automatic rifle in the Adirondacks and are now seeking the public's help in tracking it down.

The Rock River AR-15 was first reported missing Tuesday, and at the time, the agency declined to say who the gun belonged to, the Post-Star reported.

The agency updated the release and said the missing gun belongs to state police, and that an investigation into how it went missing is ongoing. The rifle was not stolen, according to the release.

Heli-skiing denied over avalanche concerns

MT BOZEMAN — The U.S. Forest Service has denied permit applications to explore heli-skiing in the Centennial Mountains just west of Yellowstone National Park.

Concerns were raised over heli-skiing's impact on avalanches and hibernating grizzly bears.

Heli-skiing is a type of backcountry skiing, free-riding that involves using a helicopter to access remote areas and slopes of fresh powder snow.

Andrea Zaccardi, senior attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said her organization shared multiple studies that suggested noise from low-flying or landing helicopters can wake grizzly bears from hibernation, causing cubs to die young among other things.

Wanted man who hid in desert is arrested

AZ CASA GRANDE — A 42-year-old Arizona man sought on sex abuse-related charges was arrested after he spent more than three months hiding in the desert, a sheriff's office said.

Deputies aided by Border Patrol agents and state police arrested Marana-area resident David Whitaker after finding him living in a shack he had constructed, the Pinal County Sheriff's Office said.

Whitaker had been at large since Nov. 28 when deputies received a report of his alleged sexual contact with a 13-year-old girl. Whitaker had left his home before deputies got there, the office said in a statement.

Shopping while driving, woman hits sheriff on bike

FL PORT ORANGE — A young woman who said she was using her phone to shop while driving hit a sheriff who was biking in central Florida, authorities said.

Volusia County Sheriff Mike Chitwood tweeted that the driver is in custody. Paige Bergman, 20, was charged with leaving the scene of a crash that caused serious bodily harm.

Deputies found Bergman in her car in her family's driveway where she was recorded during her arrest claiming she had hit a mailbox.

The sheriff said he suffered a broken leg, along with various bumps, bruises and cuts in the crash. The doctors said his fibula should heal on its own without a cast, he said.

— From The Associated Press

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Pandemic makes presence felt on tourney

Associated Press

If you didn't pay attention to college basketball until the NCAA Tournament, the good news is you didn't miss much. The regular season was a revolving door, the schedule and sometimes even the final score determined by which players and teams were entering the sport's COVID-19 protocol and which were coming out.

Besides, Day 2 of the tournament was just like that.

Oregon beat Virginia Commonwealth 1-0 — technically scored a “no-contest” — and advances to meet Iowa because, well, because multiple players on the VCU side tested positive. Their rotten luck. One-fifth of the 2020-21 season got wiped out due to the pandemic, and the coronavirus reminded everyone it doesn't make exceptions just because all the players now have new blue patches affixed to their tournament uniforms reading “NCAA.”

“It just stinks,” said VCU coach Mike Rhoades, whose team was notified at their pregame meal and went straight into quarantine. “There's no way I can sugarcoat it.”

Defending champion Virginia, dealing with COVID-19-related issues of its own, had most of its roster in quarantine until Thursday, didn't arrive in Indiana until Friday, and then promptly got bounced out by 13th-seeded Ohio 62-58. But that was only the second-biggest upset Saturday.

Tiny Abilene Christian, a 14 seed that didn't even officially join Division I until 2018, took down No. 3 Texas, parlaying 23 turnovers and two free throws by Joe Pleasant — a 58.8% shooter from the line — with 1.2 seconds left into a 53-52 win.

“I was visualizing the free throws going in before I shot them,” Pleasant said afterward. “I was just trying to key in on the rim, just lock in and block out the noise.”

UCLA, which entered the main bracket as a No. 11 after a First Four win over Michigan State, overpowered sixth-seeded BYU 73-62 in the day's only other upset. Otherwise, it was all chalk.

Both No. 1 seeds playing Saturday came out breathing fire. Gonzaga, the tournament's overall top seed, crushed Norfolk State, and Michigan man-

handled Texas Southern. No. 2 Alabama had its way with Iona and peripatetic coach Rick Pitino, and Iowa sent Grand Canyon — which chartered two private jets to bring 240 members of the GCU student section to the game — packing.

The other winners were Oklahoma, Creighton (narrowly), USC, Kansas, LSU, Colorado (over media favorite and trendy upset pick Georgetown), Florida State and Maryland.

Virginia coach Tony Bennett had an alibi handy for why he didn't make that list, but declined to reach for it.

“I don't know if it would have mattered if it was a normal prep or not,” he said. The loss marked the second time in the Cavaliers' last three NCAA tournament appearances — this time as a No. 4 — that they've lost to a double-digit seed in the first round.

“I'm grateful we got the chance,” Bennett added. “You can't go back and change anything. I thought our guys were as ready as they can given the circumstances.”

Yet not everyone in the same situation had the same result. When No. 3 Kansas started

slowly, trailing 11th-seeded Eastern Washington 46-38 at intermission, coach Bill Self had good reason to wonder how much firepower he had left.

The Jayhawks bowed out of the Big 12 Tournament after a positive test last week and like Virginia, barely made the Indiana state line in time to claim their bracket spot. Forward Jalen Wilson remains in the protocol and 6-foot-10-center David McCormack was cleared to return only Friday. He hadn't practiced in 10 days, didn't start against EWU and after a tiring few minutes in the first half, Self admitted thinking that having McCormack use up all five of his fouls before he ran out of gas was the most he could expect.

Instead, McCormack staked out a spot in the heart of an Eagles defense stretched thin by the Jayhawks' timely perimeter shooting and scored a game-high 22 points as Kansas pulled away.

“He kind of got his legs under him and he was really, really good in the second half,” Self said afterward. He sounded as surprised as anyone else. “I mean really, really good.”

No. 14 Abilene Christian ousts third-seeded Texas

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Joe Pleasant slowed his breath and calmed himself.

In the most pressure-packed moment of his college career, the Abilene Christian junior forward was perfect on two free throws from a spot where he'd struggled in the past.

When he picked off a final desperation pass by Texas at midcourt, Pleasant and his teammates erupted in a celebration that nearly spilled into the stands.

Another double-digit seed is moving on in the NCAA Tournament, and this one at the expense of the flagship school in Abilene Christian's home state.

“We just beat the University of Texas. Little ol' Abilene Christian out in West Texas built a program that went toe-to-toe with the University of Texas and it's an incredible

story,” Wildcats coach Joe Golding said. “It's what March is about.”

Abilene Christian and its frantic defense bounced coach Shaka Smart and the Longhorns out of the NCAA Tournament in the first round yet again, as the 14th-seeded Wildcats stunned No. 3 seed Texas 53-52 Saturday.

Pleasant, a 58.8% foul shooter on the season, made two from the line with 1.2 seconds left, and Abilene Christian took down its in-state rival in the first meeting between the schools.

Pulling off one final upset in a first round filled with two years' worth of excitement, the Wildcats (24-4) became the fourth team seeded 13th or lower to reach the round of 32 in this NCAA Tournament, joining 15th-seeded Oral Roberts and No. 13 seeds Ohio

and North Texas.

“We needed March Madness, man. We needed some type of normalcy to our country,” Golding said. “We needed people to fill out brackets. We needed people to cheer for the underdog.”

There was plenty of cheering for Abilene Christian by its fans clad in purple as the Wildcats caused all kinds of headaches for the bigger, more talented Longhorns and got just enough offense to pull off their first NCAA Tournament victory in their second appearance.

Pleasant finished with 11 points as did Coryon Mason. Abilene Christian was blown out by Kentucky two years ago when it made its first trip to the NCAAs.

Now, the Wildcats will face No. 11 seed UCLA in the second round Monday.

Lightning's Vasilevskiy runs win streak to 11

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 30 shots for his franchise-record tying 11th consecutive victory, Victor Hedman had three assists and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Chicago Blackhawks 4-1 on Saturday.

Steven Stamkos had a goal and an assist, and Yanni Gourde, Anthony Cirelli and Brayden Point also scored for Tampa Bay. Alex Killorn had two assists, and the Lightning improved to 12-2-0 at home.

Vasilevskiy's winning streak is the ninth longest in league history and matches the team record set by Louis Domingue from Nov. 29, 2018 to Feb. 19, 2019. Vasilevskiy improved to 20-3-1 on the season, tied for the second fewest games required to reach the 20-win mark in NHL history behind only Tiny Thompson in 1929-30 for the Boston Bruins.

"Vasy was incredible back there tonight, pretty much like he has been this entire year," Cirelli said. "Every game he's been there making those huge saves for us when we've needed them."

Alex DeBrincat scored for the Blackhawks, who have lost four straight and six of seven. Malcolm Subban finished with 25 saves.

"We're being tested, it's been a hard stretch," Chicago coach Jeremy Colliton said. "We haven't been perfect, there are areas we'd like to be better in and maybe you end up breaking through when you do that."

Point put Tampa Bay in front at 6:21 of the opening period, cutting across the crease for a pass from Killorn and stuffing the puck inside the far post for his 12th goal of the season.

Cirelli increased the lead to 2-0 during 4-on-4 play when he cut from just below the blue

line away from Duncan Keith and took a feed from Mikhail Sergachev. Cirelli cut in alone and deked to his backhand before flipping a puck over Subban at 1:53 of the second period. Sergachev picked up his 100th career assist on the play.

The Blackhawks controlled most of the second period despite being kept off the board.

Chicago had 1:22 of a 5-on-3 power play but was unable to register a shot on goal and just four shot attempts.

"Five-on-three, have to convert," DeBrincat said. "They do a good job of blocking shots, getting in lanes. But we have two extra guys out there so we should be able to make a play. Obviously, we have to work on that. It just wasn't there today."

Patrick Kane was denied on a breakaway chance at 7:55, and Pius Suter was stopped on a breakaway chance at 15:28.

The Lightning wound up scoring twice more in the second period to build a 4-0 lead despite the Blackhawks' 24-11 advantage in shot attempts.

Gourde broke in with speed down the left wing boards and cut in for a one-handed shovel attempt that was turned aside, but he found the rebound at 14:15.

On a late power play chance, Stamkos won a faceoff back to Hedman, who put a shot on goal before Killorn was able to retrieve the rebound and get a pass over to Stamkos at the left circle for a one-timer at 18:21.

"Tonight was one of those games where between the second and third we are up on the scoreboard but we were not pleased with our effort," Stamkos said. "There are going to be games like this throughout the course of a season, you just want to minimize them as much as possible."

Zibanejad, Rangers knock off red-hot Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Mika Zibanejad scored the go-ahead goal with 2:32 left, Keith Kinkaid made 28 saves and the New York Rangers beat the Washington Capitals 3-1 Saturday night to snap the NHL's longest winning streak at seven.

New York has won three of four against East Division-leading Washington this season. The Rangers led for much of the game Friday night before losing on two late goals by Alex Ovechkin.

It looked like a similar recipe Friday after Pavel Buchnevich gave New York a lead late in the first period with his 11th goal of the season off a perfect pass from defenseman Adam Fox. John Carlson tied it on a rebound with 14:05 left, and the Capitals threatened on an ensuring power play.

Kinkaid kept New York in the game, and Zibanejad won it almost singlehandedly. He hounded Washington defenseman Brenden Dillon in the offensive zone, stole the puck and roofed a shot past Ilya Samsonov.

Panthers 2, Predators 0: Chris Driedger stopped 21 shots, Aleksander Barkov and Anthony Duclair scored, and host Florida dominated Nashville.

The Predators' Juuse Saros stopped 47 of 48 shots, but Nashville couldn't solve Driedger in his first start since March 7.

Oilers 4, Jets 2: Leon Draisaitl's third-period goal proved to be the winner as host Edmonton rallied from two goals down and beat Winnipeg.

Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist, and Darnell Nurse and Devin Shore also scored. Mike Smith made 29 saves. The Oilers have won three consecutive games and are tied with the Toronto Maple Leafs atop the North Division.

Avalanche 6, Wild 0: Philipp Grubauer made 31 saves, Gabriel Landeskog had a goal and two assists, and host Colorado beat Minnesota.

Cale Makar had a goal and an assist, Nathan MacKinnon had three assists and Mikko Rantanen scored his third goal in two games.

Islanders 6, Flyers 1: Casey Cizikas scored twice in New York's four-goal first period, and the Islanders ended a two-game skid that followed a nine-game winning streak.

Blues 5, Sharks 2: Ryan O'Reilly snapped a third-period tie 12 seconds after

San Jose was penalized for a faceoff violation, Jordan Kyrrou scored twice and visiting St. Louis beat the Sharks.

Penguins 3, Devils 1: Bryan Rust and Jake Guentzel each had a goal and an assist, helping visiting Pittsburgh end a two-game skid.

Canadiens 5, Canucks 4 (SO): Tomas Tatar scored the shootout winner for host Montreal, fooling Braden Holtby with deft stick-handling in the sixth round of the tie-breaker.

Blue Jackets 3, Hurricanes 2 (SO): Oliver Bjorkstrand scored in the fourth round of the shootout to give visiting Columbus a win over Carolina.

Maple Leafs 2, Flames 0: Jack Campbell made 31 saves for his second shutout of the season and host Toronto beat Calgary.

Stars 3, Red Wings 0: Tanner Kero broke a scoreless tie late in the second period, Anton Khudobin stopped all 21 shots he faced and visiting Dallas pulled away to beat Detroit.

Coyotes 5, Ducks 1: Derick Brassard completed a hat trick early in the second period and visiting Arizona beat Anaheim to end a five-game losing streak.

LeBron injures ankle in Lakers' loss

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James left in the second quarter with a high right ankle sprain that the Lakers said will sideline him indefinitely, and Los Angeles went on to fall 99-94 to the Atlanta Hawks on Saturday.

Two hours after the game, the Lakers announced that James is out indefinitely. The defending NBA champions already are without All-NBA big man Anthony Davis, who has missed 14 consecutive games with a right calf injury and likely won't play again until April.

"Nothing angers and saddens me more than not being available to and for my teammates!" James tweeted later Saturday. "I'm hurt inside and out right now. The road back from recovery begins now. Back soon like I never left."

James was hurt when he rolled his ankle under Solomon Hill, who was called for a foul as he reached awkwardly for a steal. The 36-year-old superstar screamed and fell to the court clutching at his ankle, yet he got up and briefly stayed in the game.

"I haven't necessarily seen him scream and squall like that, probably ever, not even with that groin," said Kyle Kuzma, who was with the Lakers when James missed 17 games with a groin injury two seasons ago. "It had to hurt a little bit, for sure."

After the injury, James hit a corner three-pointer that extended his NBA-record streak of games with at least 10 points to 1,036, but he called a timeout and left

the court shortly afterward. James knocked over a chair in frustration as he went to the locker room.

"The mood of the team is we're disappointed we lost, and we've got to come back and get one tomorrow," Los Angeles coach Frank Vogel said. "I won't disclose what LeBron was like (in the locker room). It's in-house."

John Collins had 27 points and a season-high 16 rebounds, and Trae Young added 14 points and 11 assists for the Hawks. They opened an eight-game trip with their eighth straight victory under new coach Nate McMillan — but only after their defending champion opponents lost their 17-time All-Star to an injury that could shake the NBA's balance of power if it turns out to be serious.

With James out, the remaining Lakers rallied and actually took a one-point lead to halftime, but missed their first 11 shots of the second half. Danilo Gallinari scored 14 of his 18 points after halftime for Atlanta, which is on its longest winning streak since January 2015.

"That was the first thing I told the guys: We can't relax because LeBron is out of the game," McMillan said. "We have to keep up the pressure, and I thought our guys did that."

James' absence left Los Angeles without three starters in the second half, and the Hawks capitalized for their first road victory over the Lakers since March 2016. Along with Davis, Marc Gasol missed his seventh straight game since February af-

ter sitting out under the NBA's health and safety protocols.

"It's different without (James), without AD," Gallinari said. "Of course they're a different team. But at the same time, all of the players that stepped up are all NBA veterans with experience, guys that won championships. I would say it's anyway a very good win."

Montrezl Harrell had 23 points and 11 rebounds, while Dennis Schröder had 16 points and seven assists against his former team for the Lakers, whose four-game winning streak ended amid much bigger concerns.

Harrell suggested Hill's actions during James' injury were "not a basketball play," and said the officials should have considered giving him more than a personal foul.

Rondo Returns: The Lakers played a tribute video to former guard Rajon Rondo, who had five assists in 14 minutes during his first trip to Staples Center since the Lakers' championship run in the Florida bubble. Rondo, who already got his championship ring through the mail earlier this season, watched the video appreciatively.

Rondo also stoked more nostalgia from Lakers fans when he got a technical foul in the third quarter for a weird bit of gamesmanship, inexplicably shoving the basketball into Schröder's face after a whistle.

"I love competitors who really try to compete against me on the court, but that's not competing," Schröder said. "I'm going to leave it at that."

Short-handed Sixers, led by Harris, knock off Kings

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tobias Harris knows the Philadelphia 76ers are an elite NBA team with Ben Simmons and Joel Embiid in the lineup. Harris wanted to show they're pretty good without the pair of All-Stars, as well.

Harris scored 23 of his 29 points in the first half and fell just short of a triple-double to lead the short-handed 76ers over the Sacramento Kings 129-105 on Saturday night.

"He really set the tone tonight with his attitude and then obviously his play," Philadelphia coach Doc Rivers said. "His total play was phenomenal."

The Eastern Conference-leading 76ers (29-13) played without starters Embiid, Simmons and Seth Curry.

Harris said winning without their stars is a mentality.

"Are we willing to fall into the distraction of, 'Hey, we don't have two of our top dogs?' Or are we willing to embrace it?" Harris said. "I take that stuff personal when people believe we can't win without those guys because I know how much talent we have as a group. And I know how well we play together as a team as a whole. We have a culture and a system here that works. When we trust it and do what is asked of us, we're a hell of a team."

Shake Milton had 28 points and Danny Green scored 18 for Philadelphia. Harris added 11 rebounds and eight assists.

Bucks 120, Spurs 113: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 26 points and a season-high 15

assists, leading host Milwaukee past San Antonio for its sixth straight victory.

Khris Middleton added 23 points, and Jrue Holiday had 21. Antetokounmpo grabbed eight rebounds, barely missing a triple-double.

Lonnie Walker scored a career-high 31 points for the Spurs.

Clippers 125, Hornets 98: Paul George had 21 points and 10 assists, Kawhi Leonard added 17 points and Los Angeles emerged from two inconsistent weeks with a big victory over Charlotte.

Grizzlies 111, Warriors 103: Jonas Valanciunas and Dillon Brooks scored 19 points each, Valanciunas added 15 rebounds and host Memphis beat Golden State to split the two-game set.