

Biden, CDC director warn of virus rebound

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and a top health official warned that too many Americans are declaring virus victory too quickly, appealing for mask requirements and other restrictions to be maintained or restored to stave off a “fourth surge” of COVID-19. The head of the CDC said she had a feeling of “impending doom” if people keep easing off.

The double dose of warnings on Monday came even as Biden laid out hopeful new steps to expand coronavirus vaccinations, with all adults to become eligible over the next five weeks. Biden announced plans to expand the number of retail pharmacies that are administering vaccines, and investments to help Americans get to vaccination sites. But the optimism was tempered by stark warnings about the potential for another wave of cases.

“This is deadly serious,” Biden said, urging governors to reinstate mask mandates and other restrictions that some states have been easing.

Hours earlier, during a virtual White House health briefing, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Con-

trol and Prevention, grew emotional as she reflected on her experience treating coronavirus patients who are alone at the end of their lives.

“We have so much to look forward to, so much promise and potential of where we are and so much reason for hope,” she said. “But right now, I’m scared.”

“I’m going to lose the script, and I’m going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom.”

Cases of the virus are up about 10% over the past week from the previous week, to about 60,000 cases per day, with both hospitalizations and deaths ticking up as well, Walensky said. She warned that without immediate action, the United States could follow European countries into another spike in cases and suffer needless deaths.

“I have to share the truth, and I have to hope and trust you will listen,” she said.

Later Monday, Biden addressed the nation from the White House, declaring, “If we let our guard down now, we can see the virus getting worse, not better. People are letting up on precautions, which is a very bad thing.”

Biden delivered a direct appeal to gover-

nors, state and local leaders to reinstate mask-wearing requirements if they have lifted them, and said he encouraged leaders to pause plans to further ease virus-related restrictions.

“Please, this is not politics, reinstate the mandate if you let it down,” he said.

Biden announced that by April 19 at least 90% of the adult U.S. population would be eligible for vaccination — and would have access to a vaccination site within 5 miles of home. Quick vaccination would still depend on supply.

Biden had previously directed that all states make all adults eligible for vaccination by May 1, but many have moved to lift eligibility requirements sooner in anticipation of supply increases.

Meanwhile, the White House is moving to double the number of pharmacies participating in the federal retail pharmacy program — it has emerged as among the most efficient avenues for administering vaccines — and increase the number of doses for them to deliver. Retail pharmacies are located relatively close to most Americans and have experience delivering vaccines like flu shots.

Special Ops diversity chief’s posts under investigation

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The new chief of diversity and inclusion for U.S. Special Operations Command is under investigation for controversial social media posts, including one that compared former President Donald Trump to Adolf Hitler, according to the Pentagon.

John Kirby, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said Monday that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has been notified by Gen. Richard Clarke, the SOCOM commander, of the investigation into the posts made by Richard Torres-Estrada.

“[Austin] appreciated being kept apprised of that and that he supports the work that they’re doing to look at this more deeply,” Kirby said during a news briefing at the Pentagon.

The command announced Torres-Estra-

da as the new chief on Thursday in a tweet, writing that they looked forward to his “contribution in enhancing the capabilities and effectiveness of [Special Operations Forces] through diversity of talent, helping us recruit the best of the best.”

Torres-Estrada’s job involves being an advocate and senior adviser in diversity and inclusion for senior SOCOM leadership, Ken McGraw, a spokesman for Special Operations Command, wrote Monday in an email. The position also leads and directs all diversity and inclusion initiatives, policies and programs at the command, he said.

While Torres-Estrada waits for the results of the investigation, he has been assigned to other duties, McGraw said. The command also does not look into social media posts for hiring of civilians in these positions, he said.

On Friday, Fox News host Tucker Carl-

son pointed to Torres-Estrada’s Facebook posts and criticized his hiring to oversee the command’s new diversity and inclusion strategic plan released March 3.

In one post, a photo from June 2020 of Trump holding up a Bible in front of St. John’s Church in Washington, D.C., was shown side by side with Hitler, who also appears to be holding a book.

In addition to the Hitler post, Carlson also showed a post from May 2020 that depicted police interviewing Goldilocks while also arresting the family of bears from the children’s story. The graphic says: “If you still don’t understand how racism works, remember SHE broke into THEIR house. #StopRacism.” Torres-Estrada’s comment with the post says: “It’s 2020 and yet...”

Kirby said Monday that the Defense Department takes seriously the need to promote diversity and inclusion.

US eyes additional UN action on N. Korea

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration said Monday it's looking at "additional actions" that the United Nations might take to respond to North Korea's recent missile tests.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield wasn't specific about what those actions might entail, but noted that the U.N. Security Council had met last week and renewed the mandate of experts who monitor sanctions against the North. The council was also expected to hold closed-door discussions on North Korea on Tuesday.

"We're looking at additional actions that we might take," Thomas-Greenfield said of the U.S. and other Security Council members.

Meanwhile, President Joe Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan will be meeting in Washington soon with his counterparts from Japan and South Korea to discuss North Korea strategy as the administration finalizes a review of how to approach the country. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who recently returned from Tokyo and Seoul, said the three countries are united in dealing with the challenges posed by Pyon-

gyang.

"What we're seeing from Pyongyang in terms of these provocations does nothing to shake the resolve of our three countries along with allies and partners around the world to approach North Korea from a position of strength in order to diminish the threat that it poses to the region and beyond," Blinken said.

On Monday, North Korea accused the U.N. of a "double standard" over its reaction to the launches, which violate U.N. sanctions, warning of serious consequences.

Last week, North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles into the sea in a defiance of U.N. resolutions that ban such launches by North Korea. Some experts say North Korea's missile launches, the first of their kind in a year, were aimed at applying pressure on the Biden administration.

Past short-range missile launches by North Korea have typically drawn U.N. Security Council condemnations, but not fresh sanctions. North Korea was slapped with toughened U.N. sanctions in 2016-17 following its provocative run of missile and nuclear tests aimed at acquiring the capability of launching nuclear strikes on the U.S. mainland.

NATO fighters intercept Russian planes

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Allied fighter jets launched a flurry of intercepts Monday stretching from the Arctic to southern Europe as allies countered "an unusual peak" of flights by Russian warplanes, NATO said Tuesday.

Aircraft from seven nations conducted 10 intercepts as they shadowed Russian bombers and fighters over the North Atlantic, North Sea, Black Sea and Baltic Sea, NATO said in a statement.

The intercepts, which occurred in less than six hours, involved six different groups of Russian aircraft near allied airspace.

"Intercepting multiple groups of Russian aircraft demonstrates NATO forces' readiness and capability to guard Allied skies 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year," Brig. Gen. Andrew Hansen, of NATO's Allied Air Command at Ramstein Air Base, said in the statement.

Allied aircraft involved in those missions included warplanes from Norway, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Turkey, Italy, Romania and Bulgaria.

In the High North, Norwegian F-16s scrambled after radars detected two Tupolev Tu-95 Bear bombers, which continued to fly south over the North Sea, prompting the U.K. and Belgium to scramble their fighters, NATO said. Later in the day, the Norwegian F-16s intercepted two Tupolev Tu-160 Blackjack bombers over international waters.

Turkish, Romanian and Bulgarian fighter aircraft also tracked Russian aircraft over the Black Sea until they left the area, while Italian fighter aircraft intercepted a Russian Ilyushin Il-38 maritime patrol plane over the Black Sea near the Russian military exclave of Kaliningrad, the statement said.

While allies regularly intercept Russian military aircraft, NATO has complained that the Russians often do not fly with transponders, which make them invisible to civilian radars.

The Russian planes never entered alliance airspace, and NATO said all the intercepts were conducted in a "safe and routine manner."

Veteran of guided-missile warships chosen to lead Navy Region Hawaii

By WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — A veteran of numerous stints aboard guided-missile warships has been chosen to lead Navy Region Hawaii, which oversees 23,000 acres of land and sea in and around Hawaii, the Pentagon said Monday in a news release.

Rear Adm. Timothy J. Kott will also assume command of Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, which is responsible for maintenance and training of all surface ships and their crews homeported at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

The Pentagon also announced that Rear Adm. Blake L. Converse, current commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet's Submarine Force in Pearl Harbor, will become deputy commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Rear Adm. Jeffrey T. Jablon will take command of the Submarine Force, the Pentagon said last month.

Kott will replace Rear Adm. Robert B. Chadwick II, who will move to San Diego to command Carrier Strike Group Nine.

Kott is currently commander of Carrier Strike Group One, a position he has held since June.

Teen who shot video: Floyd 'begging for his life'

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The teenager who shot the harrowing video of George Floyd under the knee of the Minneapolis police officer now charged in his death testified Tuesday that she began recording because "it wasn't right, he was suffering, he was in pain."

Darnella Frazier, 18, said she was walking to a convenience store with her younger cousin when she came upon the officers, and sent the girl into the store because she didn't want her to see "a man terrified, scared, begging for his life."

Frazier grew emotional at times, breathing heavily and crying as she viewed pictures of officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on Floyd last May.

Floyd's death and the video of Floyd pleading for his life and onlookers angrily yelling at Chauvin to get off him triggered sometimes-violent protests around the world and a reckoning over racism and police brutality in the U.S.

One of the bystanders, who

identified herself as a Minneapolis firefighter, pleaded repeatedly with officers to check Floyd's pulse, but Chauvin continued to kneel on Floyd's neck, and he and fellow officer Tou Thao wouldn't let onlookers get close, Frazier said.

"They definitely put their hands on the Mace and we all pulled back," she told the jury.

Frazier said of Chauvin: "He just stared at us, looked at us. He had like this cold look, heartless. He didn't care. It seemed as if he didn't care what we were saying."

Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson sought to show that Chauvin and his fellow officers found themselves in an increasingly tense and distracting situation, with the growing crowd of onlookers becoming agitated and menacing over Floyd's treatment.

But when Frazier was asked by a prosecutor whether she saw violence anywhere on the scene, she replied: "Yes, from the cops. From Chauvin, and from officer Thao."

When asked to identify the offi-

cer, Chauvin stood up in the courtroom and took off his mask, appearing somber as he looked down and away before putting his mask on.

Earlier Tuesday, a man who was among the onlookers shouting at Chauvin to get off Floyd testified that he called 911 after paramedics took Floyd away, "because I believed I witnessed a murder."

Donald Williams, a former wrestler who said he was trained in mixed martial arts, including chokeholds, returned to the witness stand a day after describing seeing Floyd struggle for air and his eyes roll back into his head. He said he watched Floyd "slowly fade away ... like a fish in a bag."

On Tuesday, prosecutors played back Williams' 911 call, on which he is heard identifying Chauvin by his badge number and telling the dispatcher that Chauvin had been keeping his knee on Floyd's neck despite warnings that Floyd's life was in danger. She offers to switch him to a sergeant.

As he is being switched, Wil-

liams can be heard yelling at the officers, "Y'all is murderers, bro!"

During cross-examination, Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson pointed out that Williams seemed to grow increasingly angry at police on the scene, swearing at and taunting Chauvin with "tough guy," "bum" and other names, then calling Chauvin expletives, which the defense lawyer repeated in court.

Williams initially admitted he was getting angrier, but then backtracked and said he was controlled and professional and was pleading for Floyd's life but wasn't being heard.

Williams said he was stepping on and off the curb, and at one point, Thao, who was controlling the crowd, put his hand on Williams' chest. Williams admitted under questioning that he told Thao he would beat the officers if Thao touched him again.

Williams was among the first witnesses as Chauvin, 45, went on trial on charges of murder and manslaughter in Floyd's death.

Capitol suspect arrested in 'I Was There' T-shirt

Associated Press

Garret Miller didn't speak to the law enforcement officers who arrested him on charges he stormed the U.S. Capitol in January, but the T-shirt he was wearing at his Dallas home that day sent a clear and possibly incriminating message.

Miller's shirt had a photograph of former President Donald Trump, and it said "Take America Back" and "I Was There, Washington D.C., January 6, 2021," federal prosecutors noted in a court filing Monday. Prosecutors are urging a judge to keep Miller jailed while he awaits trial on charges stemming from the Jan. 6 riots.

On a call immediately after his arrest, Miller told his mother, "I don't feel that I've done anything wrong and now I'm being locked up," according to prosecutors.

Like many of the more than 300 people facing federal charges in connection with the siege, Miller

thoroughly documented and commented on his actions that day in a flurry of social media posts.

After Miller posted a selfie showing himself inside the Capitol, another Facebook user wrote, "bro you got in?! Nice!" Miller replied, "just wanted to incriminate myself a little lol," prosecutors said.

Miller joined the mob that breached the Capitol building and later threatened to kill New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and a Capitol Police officer, authorities said. After the Democratic congresswoman tweeted the word "Impeach," Miller tweeted back to her, "Assassinate AOC," according to prosecutors.

A federal magistrate judge in Texas ordered Miller detained after his Jan. 20 arrest. On Feb. 12, a grand jury in the District of Columbia indicted Miller on 12 counts.

Miller's attorney is seeking his release from custody, saying he expressed regret for his actions.

Prosecutor: Don't release teen in Slender Man case

Associated Press

WAUKESHA, Wis. — A judge should deny a request to be released by a Wisconsin woman convicted of stabbing a classmate to please the internet horror character Slender Man because she remains a danger to others, a prosecutor argued in response to the petition for conditional release.

Earlier this month, Anissa Weier, 19, asked Waukesha County Circuit Judge Michael Bohren to release her from the Winnebago Mental Health Institute in Oshkosh. Bohren sentenced her in December 2017 to 25 years in the institution after a jury found her not criminally responsible for her role in the stabbing.

Waukesha County Assistant District Attorney Kevin Osborne filed a response with the court Friday.

"Her mind is still immature, still forming, and still susceptible to

dangerous influences. At this time, she simply cannot safely be released," Osborne wrote, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported.

Weier and her friend, Morgan Geyser, lured their classmate, Payton Leutner, into a Waukesha park in May 2014 following a sleepover. Geyser stabbed Leutner multiple times as Weier encouraged Geyser to inflict the injuries. All three girls were 12 years old at the time.

Leutner barely survived her wounds. Weier and Geyser told investigators that they stabbed her because they thought Slender Man was real and attacking Leutner would make them his servants and keep him from killing their families.

Bohren has scheduled a hearing on the matter June 11.

Geyser is serving a maximum 40-year-old sentence at a mental health facility.

More states opening vaccines to all adults

Associated Press

More than a dozen states will open vaccine eligibility to all adults this week in a major expansion of COVID-19 shots for tens of millions of Americans amid a worrisome increase in virus cases and concerns about balancing supply and demand for the vaccines.

States that opened eligibility to anyone ages 16 and older on Monday included Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Ohio, North Dakota and Kansas.

The rapid expansion has fueled concerns that the number of eager vaccine seekers will far outstrip the available supply of shots, frustrating millions of newly eligible people who have waited since late last year for a chance to get an injection. Other officials have put their faith in a promised glut of vaccines and instead turned their attention to the next challenge: pressing as many people as possible to get the shots so the nation can achieve herd immunity at the earliest opportunity.

On Tuesday, Minnesota opened eligibility, followed by Indiana and South Carolina on Wednesday, Connecticut and Montana on Thursday, and New Hampshire and Colorado on Friday. In New York, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced that residents over 30 would be eligible for vaccinations starting Tuesday, and everyone over 16 can sign up starting April 6.

Michigan

LANSING — Detroit on Monday immediately expanded COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to all residents 16 and older, a week earlier than planned, as Michigan continued to confront spiking infection rates that rank third-highest in the country.

Mayor Mike Duggan said the seven-day testing positivity rate in the state's largest city doubled in 10 days to 10.3%. Hospitalizations also doubled over that period but, unlike during the second wave of cases last fall, also in-

volve younger people in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s.

A similar trend is occurring statewide, according to the Michigan Health & Hospital Association, which warned recently that confirmed adult coronavirus hospitalizations could top 2,500 this week — to about two-thirds of past peaks. As of Monday, they had tripled, to more than 2,100, in 4½ weeks.

Detroit also said nonresidents who work in the city can get a shot. Vaccine eligibility will open to Michigan's entire age 16-plus population April 5. About one-third have received a dose; 19% are fully vaccinated. The state wants to inoculate 70% of its population.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — The Indian Health Service announced Monday that it is shifting its vaccine distribution system to target individual hospitals and clinics with high demand for shots and taper supplies to hubs where most eligible patients have received doses.

The U.S. agency is part of a two-pronged national effort to immunize Indigenous communities that also relies on state health agencies. Native Americans have been disproportionately sickened and killed by the pandemic, and are also now at the forefront of federal efforts to deploy vaccine shots in the United States.

Additionally, most Indian Health Service facilities are beginning to offer vaccines to the general population after successfully immunizing vulnerable tribal members. It's a push toward so-called herd immunity that still depends on development of a vaccine for children.

Arizona

PHOENIX — The Republican-controlled Arizona Senate voted Monday to rescind its mandatory mask policy and the House speaker made the same move on his own authority.

The Senate vote on the rules designed to limit the spread of the coronavirus got no support from minority Democrats. All 16 Republicans voted for the rule change. Face masks are now optional, and members continue to have the option of voting from their offices.

The move comes just days after Republican Gov. Doug Ducey blocked cities and counties from continuing to enforce mask requirements. He never issued a statewide mask order but amid a summer surge of virus cases allowed local governments to issue mandates. The mayors of Tucson and Flagstaff have refused to revoke their mask mandates, and they can still be enforced in government buildings and are required in schools.

Democrats pleaded with GOP members to vote against the rule change, with Sen. Lela Alston of Phoenix, a lung cancer survivor, asking them to do so for her and other at-risk members and staff.

Alabama

MONTGOMERY — A spokeswoman for Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said Monday that the state's mask mandate will end April 9 despite the president's request for states to reinstate, or maintain, restrictions.

"As Governor Ivey has previously stated, Alabama's mask mandate ends April 9. We have made progress, and we are moving toward personal responsibility and common sense, not endless government mandates," Ivey spokeswoman Gina Maiola said in a statement.

Alabama has kept a mask mandate in place longer than surrounding states, but Ivey has made clear it will not be extended. The governor has urged Alabamians to keep wearing them as a matter of personal responsibility.

Massachusetts

BOSTON — Massachusetts' pooled COVID-19 testing program for the state's schools has

tested nearly 159,000 people and found a positivity rate of lower than 1%, state officials said Monday.

Under the program, which started last month, teachers, staffers and students in groups of up to 10 are tested. The swabs are then placed in a single tube and shipped to a lab for testing. If the tube is tested and comes back negative, every person in that pool is presumed to be negative for COVID-19.

But because the average pool included seven people, individual prevalence among those tested is well below that number. State officials said it showed there is extremely little evidence of in-school transmission of COVID-19 in Massachusetts.

If the test for a tube comes back positive, the people are tested individually and once positive individuals are identified, they must follow isolation guidelines, while their close contacts must quarantine.

Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas lawmakers on Monday rejected an effort to end the emergency declared because of the coronavirus pandemic, as Gov. Asa Hutchinson repeated his intent to drop the state's mask mandate later this week.

The Arkansas Legislative Council's vote effectively approves Hutchinson's request to extend the emergency he declared because of the pandemic for another two months. The panel reviewed the request under a new law that expands the Legislature's power to terminate an emergency and orders issued under it.

Hutchinson urged lawmakers to keep the emergency in place, saying it would ensure Arkansas continues receiving an additional \$23 million in food stamp benefits. He said it would also keep in place executive orders, such as liability protection for some businesses, that the Legislature is trying to write into law.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Sheriff seeks vandals who dug up grave from 1882

AL OPELIKA — An Alabama sheriff is on the hunt for vandals who dug up the grave of a man buried in 1882.

At Flint Hill Cemetery, somebody removed the hefty slab and dug a deep hole at the grave of early Lee County settler Samuel Jones, the Opelika-Auburn News reported.

Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said he can't say for certain whether the culprits disturbed the settler's remains.

But Edna Ward of the Lee County Cemetery Preservation Commission said investigators found no casket or body.

Jones said whoever dug up the grave may have hoped to find valuables buried with the body, though he added it's unlikely anything valuable was in the grave.

Police officer shoots pit bull that ran toward her

FL TAMPA — A Florida police officer shot a 6-year-old pit bull that approached her as she and another officer investigated a case of suspicious activity at an apartment complex, authorities said.

Rachel Robledo called Tampa police to report seeing someone holding a gun on the balcony of a nearby apartment on St. Patrick's Day, news outlets reported.

Police officers who responded to the call couldn't locate the suspect, so they decided to speak to Robledo, officials said.

The bodycam footage taken from the officers shows the woman holding back a pit bull as they approached. But the

dog, named Nala, ended up leaving Robledo's apartment and approaching the officers. One officer shot the dog two times, police said.

The dog is recovering, following surgery, news outlets reported.

6 arrested, 93 cited for trespassing onto trail

HI HONOLULU — The Honolulu Police Department has arrested six people and cited 93 over trespassing onto an illegal tourist attraction during a roughly 10-day period earlier this month.

The hikers were cited and arrested for sneaking into the Haku Stairs trail, also known as the "Stairway to Heaven," Hawaii News Now reported.

The hiking trail has become popular online for its scenic views. The trail has been closed since 1987 due to safety concerns and maintenance issues.

Sausage festival crowded amid pandemic changes

AL ELBERTA — Crowds returned to a popular food festival on Alabama's Gulf Coast for a taste of sausage and a taste of normalcy a year after the coronavirus pandemic forced changes to the event.

The tiny city of Elberta welcomed visitors back to the Elberta German Sausage Festival, WKRG-TV reported. Many people went without masks as they strolled between food tents and crafts vendors while cooking smoke and live music filled the air.

"Yes, people are tired of being cooped in and they just want a normal life," said visitor Cathy Mizell, of Satsuma.

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't completely shut down the festival a year ago, but forced it to adopt a drive-thru format.

Group wants answers on dead birds near lake

IN HAMMOND — The deaths of several geese, ducks and other birds around a lake in northwestern Indiana and northeastern Illinois have environmentalists and some area residents seeking answers from officials.

About 10 protesters held a demonstration near Wolf Lake, demanding transparency on how the birds died, the Post-Tribune reported.

"Those geese are big and if it's something naturally causing it, we're not pointing fingers," said Marisa Rowden, administrator for the environmental group Save Whiting and Neighbors. "We just want to be in the know."

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources said it received reports of the dead waterfowl and dead fish dating back to mid-February. The cause of death is still under investigation.

Bakery recovering after struck by car twice

NY CLIFTON PARK — Employees at a Schenectady-area bakery are on edge after their store was struck by a car last week, the second time that had happened in a little more than a month.

On Feb. 23, a car slammed into the Dolce & Biscotti Fine Italian Bakery in Clifton Park and went through its front window when an elderly woman at the wheel hit the gas instead of the

brake.

The bakery had to close for three weeks, and reopened March 12. Last Thursday, a car veered into a support pole a few feet from where the first accident happened.

Owner and executive chef Mary Baldi-Fron said cars exit too fast off Route 9 into the bakery plaza and that there is no signage, street markings or speed bumps to slow people down. She said she's now wary of offering sidewalk seating.

French bulldog puppy found safe after robbery

CA LOS ANGELES — A French bulldog puppy stolen at gunpoint in Los Angeles was found safe and returned to its owners, authorities said.

Police said they are looking for two male suspects in the latest in a string of dog thefts in the Los Angeles area.

The 5-month-old puppy, named Seven, was found days after his family offered \$12,000 for his safe return.

The dog was nabbed outside a Target store in North Hollywood. The men followed the dog's owner from the store and into the parking lot where one of the men pulled out a gun. The suspects ran away with the puppy.

Last month, two men shot Lady Gaga's dog walker, Ryan Fischer, and stole two of the singer's three French bulldogs.

Fischer, who was shot in the chest, survived. The dogs were later turned into police but no arrests were made.

— From wire reports

STARS  STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Baylor, Houston earn spots in Final Four

Associated Press

Another contender emerged from the mist at the NCAA Tournament—nothing dramatic, mind you, like in the movies, because we already knew No. 1 seed Baylor was very good.

But so was third-seeded Arkansas. Yet the Bears ran the Razorbacks into the ground early and then again when it got close, posting a comfortable 81-72 win that demonstrated they're much, much better than good and in the mood for bigger game. They won't have to wait long.

Baylor faces No. 2 Houston, which nearly blew a 17-point lead before shaking off 11th-seeded Oregon State 67-61, come Saturday for a spot in the national championship game. Cougars fans have until then to revel in the memories of Houston's great "Phi Slamma Jamma" tournament teams of the early 80s, but they could be in for a rude awakening.

Because this is how Arkansas coach Eric Musselman began his postgame news conference: "Just want to give Baylor a ton

of credit. I thought that they played phenomenal tonight, especially offensively."

The Bears are fast, tenacious, long-armed and when everything is clicking, brutally efficient, too. Just nine minutes in, they built an 18-point cushion, playing harassing defense and shooting 68% without turning the ball over once. By half, that was trimmed to 46-38. The Razorbacks got within four around the 6-minute mark, then got counter-punched with an 8-1 run because that's what great teams do. They get on top and then figure out how to stay there.

In this case, guard Davion Mitchell's speedy runs through the Arkansas defense opened up space at the perimeter, which teammate MaCio Teague took full advantage of to nail consecutive three-pointers and put the game out of reach.

"It just showed how focused and ready to play we were," said Baylor coach Scott Drew, who took over a scandal-plagued program in 2003 and brought the Bears to the cusp of

a Final Four twice before. "We got good looks and the guys made them."

Not bad timing, either, with overall top seed Gonzaga and the final No. 1, Michigan, expected to validate their championship credentials against No. 6 USC and No. 11 UCLA, respectively, when the Elite Eight round wrapped up Tuesday.

Houston's win over Oregon State was a different story. Like Baylor, the Cougars came flying out of the gate, rolling to a 34-17 lead at intermission. Then they went cold, shooting a miserable 29% in the second half as the Beavers, improbably, looked set to become the lowest-seeded team to make a Final Four.

But then Houston's Quentin Grimes punctured that balloon with a three-pointer with 3:21 left to break a 55-all tie, Oregon State couldn't buy a basket, and the Cougars made enough free throws the rest of the way for a shaky win.

"It was right there within our grasp with the effort we showed in the second half," Beavers

coach Wayne Tinkle said. "Really proud of this group. We got every single ounce out of them."

Gonzaga's Bulldogs, on the other hand, have yet to be pushed anywhere near their limits. They've won 33 straight dating to the 2019-20 season. They're 29-0 this time around and the last 26 have all been by double-digits. They've got NBA Draft lottery talent, a deep bench and like Michigan, and now Baylor, they've proven capable of responding every time push comes to shove.

Thus far, the Zags have done it mostly on offense.

But what all those high-scoring wins obscure is how good they can defend when they need to. They've held opponents below their scoring average in 20 games, including the past six and might be getting even better. Their win against Creighton was the seventh time Gonzaga held an opponent to at least 10 points worse than their average.

"This is not a one-trick pony," cautioned Bluejays coach Greg McDermott. "These guys can play on both ends of the floor."

Paydirt: Logano takes the checkered flag in a haze

Associated Press

BRISTOL, Tenn. — Somewhere under the thick red haze floating over Bristol Motor Speedway, Joey Logano took the checkered flag for NASCAR's first Cup Series race at a dirt track in 50 years.

He couldn't see much—visibility was next to nothing during this Monday dust storm—but Logano clung to the familiar bottom lane around the bullring to collect the checkered flag on this NASCAR experiment.

Logano got a jump on Denny Hamlin on the overtime restart to earn his third career victory at Bristol. But this was not the Bristol of old, the track had been covered with 2,300 truckloads of red Tennessee clay so that NASCAR

could add a dirt track to the Cup schedule for the first time since 1970.

"How about Bristol on dirt, guys! This is incredible," Logano said to the crowd, a reduced capacity sellout of about 30,000 fans.

"There's nothing like winning at Bristol, but putting it on dirt and being the first to do it is very special."

Logano became the seventh race winner through seven races this season and gave Team Penske back-to-back victories. Ryan Blaney won in a Penske Ford last week.

The Logano victory closed a weekend of uncertainty and even some hysteria as NASCAR launched this drive through the dirt. It was broadcast partner Fox

who wanted a dirt race on the Cup schedule and Speedway Motorsports, seeking some new energy at its beloved Bristol bullring, said it would take the race.

So NASCAR awarded the experiment to Bristol, bypassing dozens of quality established dirt tracks across the country. The snub extended to Tony Stewart, who had successfully hosted seven Truck Series races at his Eldora Speedway dirt track in Ohio but said was never considered for a Cup race.

Marcus Smith, the CEO of Speedway Motorsports, insisted concrete Bristol was up to the challenge and he told The Associated Press he'd spent nearly \$2 million to make the dirt dream a reality.

Smith was pleased with the buzz generated by the event, even as NASCAR huddled for solutions to extreme dust, poor tire durability and shifting weather conditions that made the buildup a muddy mess. When race day finally arrived, torrential overnight rains had flooded the Bristol grounds and NASCAR had to postpone Sunday's show by a day.

Through all the consternation, Smith remained optimistic and headed to the track Monday morning convinced this dirt project was a success. The final product was a doubleheader—Martin Truex Jr. won his first Truck Series race in 15 years to open the day—and then Logano closed the Cup race with the overtime victory.

UConn women reach 13th straight Final Four

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — It took a great game from phenomenal freshman Paige Bueckers and a last-second stop with a disputed nonfoul call to keep UConn's run of Final Four appearances going.

Bueckers scored 28 points and the top-seeded Huskies used a huge run spanning the final two quarters to beat No. 2 Baylor 69-67 on Monday night and reach a 13th consecutive Final Four in the women's NCAA Tournament.

"Each year that we do it, I still can't believe it," said UConn coach Geno Auriemma, who was showered by his team with confetti after the game.

The Huskies have made the national semifinals every season since 2008 and have won six titles during that span. They will face Arizona on Friday night. The Wildcats are playing in their first Final Four after beat-

ing Indiana.

Bueckers was 6 years old when UConn started its run of appearances in the national semifinals.

"To be part of that history is wild," Bueckers said. "It's why I came here. ... Saw that as a young kid, wanted to be a part of that. It's surreal."

The Huskies (28-1) trailed 55-45 late in the third quarter before scoring 19 consecutive points, including 10 by Bueckers, who became the third first-year player to make first-team All-America.

"Paige got that look in her eye, started getting some buckets. And when Paige is scoring, the rest of the team really gains a lot of confidence," Auriemma said. "Our defense got just really good at the end, and we got some great stops."

The Bears (28-3) wouldn't go away as Bueckers went cold in the final minutes. Trailing 64-

55, NaLyssa Smith, an All-American herself, ended Baylor's drought with 6:47 left and sparked a 12-4 burst that got the Bears within one after DiJonai Carrington converted two free throws with 19.3 seconds left.

After a timeout, Baylor fouled Christyn Williams, who missed both free throws to give Baylor one last chance. Carrington, who finished with 22 points, drove the lane to the left and missed a contested jumper from the baseline where a foul could have been called, but wasn't.

"I personally don't see it as a controversial call. I've seen the replay, and one girl fouled me in my face and one girl fouled me in my arm," Carrington said. "So, at that point you can't do anything else. We drew up a play, (Smith) got fouled posting up and I got fouled driving. Nothing we could really do about that situation in particular. But, you know, turn the

page."

LeBron James even tweeted that a foul should have been called. Bears coach Kim Mulkey agreed.

"I've got still shots and video from two angles. One kid hits her in the face and one kid hits her on the elbow," Mulkey said.

Williams corralled the rebound and was fouled with 0.8 seconds left. She hit one of the free throws before Bueckers stole the inbounds pass at the buzzer.

No team has played UConn tougher over the last decade than Baylor, with each team winning four of the matchups. The Lady Bears (28-3) had won the previous two, including a 74-58 win at Connecticut in January of 2020.

They were supposed to meet this past January, but Mulkey came down with COVID-19 around Christmas and the game was canceled.

McDonald helps power Arizona women past Indiana

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Arizona asks Aari McDonald to do just about everything for the Wildcats. And just about every game, she delivers all she's got.

McDonald scored 33 points in a dizzying display of razzle-dazzle shot making and gutsy leadership in crunch time, carrying the No. 3 seed Wildcats to a 66-53 win over No. 4 seed Indiana on Monday night, sending Arizona to its first Final Four in women's NCAA Tournament history.

"Just being a little player, I always play with a chip on my shoulder," said McDonald, who stands just 5-foot-6 but used her small frame to slip under and around defenders or shake them off the dribble.

"A lot of people say I'm too small. I'll never do this, I'll never do that. That drives me," she said.

The Pac-12 player of the year controlled just about every Wildcats possession, hitting the Hoosiers with slashing drives, timely rebounds and even a banked-in three-pointer.

She briefly left the game with a twisted left ankle late in the fourth quarter, but had it taped up and limped back on the court to score six more points. Her three-point play with 34 seconds left put the exclamation point on the victory.

Arizona (20-5) advanced to Friday's national semifinal against top-seeded UConn, which reached its 13th straight Final Four when it beat No. 2 seed Baylor earlier Monday.

Wildcats coach Adia Barnes, who led Arizona to the Sweet 16 as a point guard in 1998, is now the sixth coach to lead her alma mater to the women's Final Four.

Barnes has said she took a

risk when she returned to coach her alma mater five years ago, when it was one of the worst programs in the Pac-12. Then McDonald transferred from Washington and the two have been not-so-quietly building the program in the desert ever since.

"Aari, I asked her to do everything. She has done everything the whole time she's been here," Barnes. "And I'm proud of all of these young women around her. They fight and they play for her, and it's just amazing."

McDonald topped 30 points for the second straight tournament game. She scored 31 against Texas A&M two days earlier. Against the Hoosiers, she was 12-for-20 shooting and made 5 of 6 three-pointers.

"I always want to be better than I was the day before," McDonald said.

History was going to be made

whichever team won Monday night. Indiana advanced past the Sweet 16 for the first time but its methodical, grinding game simply ran into a player it couldn't match for 40 minutes.

It worked for three quarters. After pulling back from an eight-point deficit in the third behind a workhorse night from Mackenzie Holmes in the post, the Hoosiers had tied it 48-48. But a scoring drought of more than three minutes kept them from making a charge in a game Indiana led only one minute of the second quarter.

Holmes scored 20 and grabbed eight rebounds to lead the Hoosiers (21-6), and they tried to use her presence in the post to control the game until the late scoring problems.

"I feel like we got some good looks, we couldn't put an exclamation point on some of them," Indiana coach Teri Moren said.

Harden's triple leads Nets past T-wolves

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Harden had 38 points, 13 assists and 11 rebounds, tying the Nets' single-season record with his 12th triple-double in just 32 games, and Brooklyn held off the Minnesota Timberwolves 112-107 on Monday night.

"He's our leader and he's meant a lot to us. Another triple-double and you can't take it for granted, but you tend to, a little bit, because he's able to pull these out of a hat almost every night," Nets coach Steve Nash said.

Kyrie Irving added 27 points in his return after missing the three-game road trip last week for family reasons.

Hall of Famer Jason Kidd had 12 triple-doubles for the Nets in both the 2006-07 and 2007-08 seasons.

Brooklyn won for the 18th time in 21 games.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 31 points and 12 rebounds for Minnesota. Rookie Anthony Edwards had 23 points and 10 boards.

Wizards 132, Pacers 124: Russell Westbrook had 35 points, a season-high 21 assists and 14 rebounds for his NBA-leading 16th triple-double, helping Washington past visiting Indiana.

Westbrook also claimed the franchise career triple-double record in just his 38th game with the Wizards, this one coming while teammate and NBA leading scorer Bradley Beal sat out with a bruised hip. Darrell Walker had 15 triple-doubles in

283 games for Washington between 1987-1991.

Clippers 129, Bucks 105: Marcus Morris scored 25 points and three other starters had at least 20 points, helping host Los Angeles beat Milwaukee for the Clippers' sixth straight victory.

Kawhi Leonard added 23 points and nine rebounds, Luke Kennard had a season-high 21 points and Reggie Jackson added 20 points.

Los Angeles made 19 three-pointers, one off its season high.

Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 32 points, making 10 of 12 free throws, and Jrue Holiday added 24 points in the opener of a six-game trip, their longest of the second half.

Jazz 114, Cavaliers 75: Donovan Mitchell scored 19 points and Rudy Gobert added 18 points and 17 rebounds to power host Utah to its sixth straight win. Mike Conley contributed 18 points for the Jazz, who have won 20 straight at home after dropping their first two home games of the season.

Heat 98, Knicks 88: Jimmy Butler scored 27 points and Miami snapped a six-game losing streak with a win at New York.

Bam Adebayo scored 20 points, Duncan Robinson added 20, and Tyler Herro finished with 18 as Miami improved to 23-24.

Pelicans 115, Celtics 109: Zion Williamson scored 28 points and New Orleans held on after blowing most of a 17-point,

fourth-quarter lead to win the first game in front of Boston fans since before the pandemic.

Brandon Ingram had 25 points and nine assists and Josh Hart had 15 points and 15 rebounds for the Pelicans, who won for the fourth time in five games.

Mavericks 127, Thunder 106: Luka Doncic scored 25 points to help Dallas roll to a win at Oklahoma City.

Kristaps Porzingis had 20 points and nine rebounds, and Tim Hardaway Jr. added 19 points for the Mavericks. Dallas shot 53% from the field and never trailed in snapping a two-game losing skid.

Grizzlies 120, Rockets 110: Jonas Valanciunas scored a season-high 30 points, including eight down the stretch, and added 15 rebounds to help Memphis win at Houston.

Pistons 118, Raptors 104: Saben Lee scored 14 of his 19 points in the first half in his second career start, and host Detroit beat Toronto.

Kings 132, Spurs 115: De'Aaron Fox scored 24 points, Richaun Holmes had 23 points and 12 rebounds, and Sacramento won at San Antonio for its fifth straight victory.

Warriors 116, Bulls 102: Stephen Curry made a triumphant return from a five-game absence with a bruised tailbone to score 32 points with six three-pointers, and host Golden State snapped a four-game losing streak by beating Chicago.

Flyers rally to OT win, give Sabres 18th straight loss

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Ivan Provorov scored 42 seconds into overtime, and the Philadelphia Flyers overcame a three-goal deficit to pull out a 4-3 win and hand the Buffalo Sabres their 18th consecutive loss Monday night.

The Flyers scored three times in the third period to overcome a 3-0 deficit, with Sean Couturier forcing overtime by tipping in Provorov's point shot with 1:29 left, and Philadelphia's net empty for an extra attacker.

Kevin Hayes started the Flyers' comeback by scoring 1:50 into the third, when his shot

deflected in off Rasmus Dahlin's stick. Claude Giroux scored 10 minutes later, by converting Couturier's no-look pass in front of the net.

"I think when you're down a few goals, obviously you rely on your offensive guys to make a difference and get you back in the game," Couturier said. "We found a way to do that tonight. But like I said, we can't put ourselves in those situations too often and expect to win many games."

Penguins 2, Islanders 1: Casey DeSmith made 19 saves after starter Tristan Jarry's mysterious exit and host Pittsburgh held on to beat New York

for the sixth time in eight meetings this season.

Jarry left after the first period and DeSmith filled in by holding the Islanders at bay as the Penguins pulled even with New York for second place in the East Division.

Oilers 3, Maple Leafs 2 (OT): Darnell Nurse scored 17 seconds into overtime and Edmonton won at Toronto.

After Oilers goalie Mike Smith stopped Auston Matthews on a 2-on-1 break right off the faceoff of the extra period, Edmonton broke the other way, with Connor McDavid passing to Nurse for his 12th goal of the season, and second in two

games.

Sharks 4, Wild 3 (SO): Erik Karlsson scored twice in regulation and then added the deciding goal in the eighth round of the shootout to lead host San Jose over Minnesota.

Avalanche 5, Ducks 2: Philipp Grubauer got his 100th career win with a 13-save night to lead host Colorado past Anaheim.

Golden Knights 4, Kings 1: Tomas Nosek scored in the second period and host Vegas beat Los Angeles.

Jets 5, Flames 1: Mark Scheifele had two goals and an assist to lead Winnipeg to a win at Calgary.