

Pentagon moves to reduce suicides

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ordered a number of improvements in access to mental health care on Thursday to reduce suicides in the military, but held off on endorsing more controversial recommendations to restrict gun and ammunition purchases by young troops, sending them to another panel for study.

An independent committee in late February recommended that the Defense Department implement a series of gun safety measures, including waiting periods for the purchase of firearms and ammunition by service members on military property and raising the minimum age for service members to buy guns and ammunition to 25.

In a memo released Thursday, Austin called for the estab-

lishment of a suicide prevention working group to “assess the advisability and feasibility” of recommendations made by the initial study committee — which would include the gun measures. He also asked for cost estimates and a description of any “barriers” to implementing other changes, and set a deadline of June 2 for that report. At no point did he specifically refer to the gun proposals or mention gun safety.

His orders reflect increasing concerns about suicides in the military, despite more than a decade of programs and other efforts to prevent them and spur greater intervention by commanders, friends and family members. But his omission of any gun safety and control measures underscores the likelihood that they would face

staunch resistance, particularly in Congress, where such legislation has struggled in recent years.

The more immediate changes address broader access to care.

To more quickly provide help for troops who may be struggling, Austin directed the Pentagon to hire more behavioral health specialists and implement a scheduling system for appointments where patients receive multiple health care visits weekly when they first seek care.

He also ordered military primary care health clinics to screen for unhealthy levels of alcohol use, make unhealthy alcohol use treatment easier to receive and make sure that mental health care is available through service members’ primary care as well.

“The mental health support available for our teammates must be comprehensive and easy to access,” Austin said in the memo.

The initial study committee recommended that the department require anyone living in military housing to register all privately owned firearms. In addition, the panel said the department should restrict the possession and storage of privately owned firearms in military barracks and dorms.

Confirming findings in annual suicide reports, the panel noted that about 66% of all active-duty military suicides — and more than 70% of those by National Guard and Reserve members — are done with firearms. It said reducing access to guns could prevent some deaths.

Arrest warrant issued for Putin over war crimes

Associated Press

THE HAGUE — The International Criminal Court said on Friday it issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin for war crimes because of his alleged involvement in abductions of children from Ukraine.

The court said in a statement that Putin “is allegedly responsible for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population (children) and that of unlawful transfer of population (children) from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation.”

It also issued a warrant Friday for the arrest of Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, the Commissioner for Children’s

Rights in the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, on similar allegations.

The court’s president, Piotr Hofmanski, said in a video statement that while the ICC’s judges have issued the warrants, it will be up to the international community to enforce them.

The court has no police force of its own to enforce its warrants.

“The ICC is doing its part of work as a court of law,” he said. “The judges issued arrest warrants. The execution depends on international cooperation.”

A possible trial of any Russians at the ICC remains a long way off, as Moscow does not recognize the court’s jurisdic-

tion — a position reaffirmed on Friday by Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova in a first reaction to the warrants.

“The decisions of the International Criminal Court have no meaning for our country, including from a legal point of view,” she said.

But Ukrainian officials were jubilant.

“The world changed,” said presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the “wheels of Justice are turning,” and added that “international criminals will be held accountable for stealing children and other international crimes.”

Ukraine also is not a member

of the court, but it has granted the ICC jurisdiction over its territory and ICC prosecutor Karim Khan has visited four times since opening an investigation a year ago.

The ICC said its pre-trial chamber found “reasonable grounds to believe that each suspect bears responsibility for the war crime of unlawful deportation of population and that of unlawful transfer of population from occupied areas of Ukraine to the Russian Federation, in prejudice of Ukrainian children.”

The court statement said that “there are reasonable grounds to believe that Mr Putin bears individual criminal responsibility for the child abductions.

Russia to award fighter pilots involved in US drone incident

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian fighter pilots involved in an incident with a U.S. drone that resulted in its crash will be given state awards, the Defense Ministry announced Friday. The move appears to signal Moscow's intention to adopt a more aggressive stance toward future U.S. surveillance flights.

The U.S. military said it ditched the Air Force MQ-9 Reaper in the Black Sea on Tuesday after a pair of Russian fighter jets dumped fuel on the surveillance drone and then one of them struck its propeller while it was flying in international airspace. Moscow has denied that its warplanes hit the drone, alleging that it crashed while making a sharp maneuver. It said that its warplanes reacted to a violation of a no-flight zone Russia has established in the area near Crimea amid the fighting in Ukraine.

On Friday, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu lauded the pilots for preventing the drone from flying into the area that Moscow has banned for flights. The Defense Ministry said the ban was "in line with international norms."

Moscow's announcement comes a day after the U.S. military released a declassified 42-second color video of footage showing a Russian Su-27 fighter jet approaching the back of the U.S. drone and releasing fuel as it passes in what appeared to be aimed at blinding the drone's optical instruments to drive it from the area.

On a second approach, either the same jet

or another Russian Su-27 that had been shadowing the MQ-9 struck the drone's propeller, damaging a blade, according to the U.S. military, which said it then ditched the aircraft in the sea. The video excerpt does not show the collision, although it does show the damage to the propeller.

The top U.S. and Russian defense and military leaders spoke Wednesday about the destruction of the drone, underscoring the event's seriousness. The calls between U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Gen. Valery Gerasimov, chief of Russian General Staff, were the first since October.

While calling out Russia for "reckless" action, the White House also tried to avoid exacerbating tensions. U.S. officials emphasized that they have not been able to determine whether the Russian pilot intentionally struck the American drone and stressed that lines of communication with Moscow remain open.

Russian officials also emphasized the need to maintain lines of communication, but they harshly denounced the U.S. action as arrogant disregard of Moscow's no-flight zone.

"This is a clear sign that Russia will keep downing the American drones," pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markov wrote in a commentary on the award announcement. "This decision will receive a strong support from the Russian society that wants the government to toughen its policy."

Turkish leader to back NATO bid for Finland

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said Friday that his government would move forward with ratifying Finland's NATO application, paving the way for the country to join the military bloc ahead of Sweden.

The breakthrough came as Finnish President Sauli Niinisto was in Ankara to meet with Erdogan. Both Finland and Sweden applied to become NATO members 10 months ago in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, abandoning decades of nonalignment.

NATO requires the unanimous approval of its 30 existing members to expand, and Turkey and Hungary are the only countries that have not yet ratified the Nordic nation's bids. The Turkish government accused both Sweden and Finland of being too soft on groups that it deems to be terror organizations, but expressed more reservations about Sweden.

"When it comes to fulfilling its pledges in the trilateral memorandum of understanding, we have seen that Finland has taken authentic and concrete steps," Erdogan told a news conference in Ankara following his meeting with Niinisto.

"This sensitivity for our country's security and, based on the progress that has been made in the protocol for Finland's accession to NATO, we have decided to initiate the ratification process in our parliament," the president added.

Slovakia agrees to give Ukraine fleet of Soviet planes

Associated Press

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia — Slovakia's government on Friday approved a plan to give Ukraine its fleet of 13 Soviet-era MiG-29 fighter jets, becoming the second NATO member country to heed the Ukrainian government's pleas for warplanes to help defend against Russia's invasion.

Announcing the decision, Prime Minister Eduard Heger told a news conference that his government is "on the right side of history." Earlier, Heger tweeted that military aid was key to ensuring Ukraine can defend itself and

all of Europe against Russia.

Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad said Slovakia will receive \$213 million from the European Union as compensation and unspecified arms from the United States worth \$745 million.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has repeatedly asked Western countries for fighter jets. He appealed directly to Heger for aircraft at a European Union summit in Brussels last month.

Slovakia grounded its MiGs in the summer due to a lack of spare parts and expertise to help maintain them after Russian technicians re-

turned home. Ukraine's air force continues to use MiG 29s.

In light of the absence of its own aircraft, Slovakia's fellow NATO members Poland and the Czech Republic have stepped up to monitor Slovak air space, with Hungary set to join later this year.

Bratislava has signed a deal to buy 14 U.S. F-16 Block 70/72 fighter jets, but delivery has been pushed back two years to early 2024.

On Thursday, Poland's President Andrzej Duda said his country would give Ukraine around a dozen MiG-29 fighter jets.

Drills staged amid Japan-S. Korea talks

Associated Press

TOKYO — The United States, Canada, India, Japan and South Korea are staging joint anti-submarine warfare drills amid talks between Japanese and South Korean leaders aimed at strengthening their alliance with Washington against threats from China and North Korea.

The Sea Dragon 23 exercises that started on Wednesday will culminate in more than 270 hours of in-flight training “ranging from tracking simulated targets to the final problem of tracking a U.S. Navy submarine,” the U.S. 7th Fleet said in a news release.

Pilots and flight officers from

all participating countries will also hold classroom training sessions to “build plans and discuss tactics incorporating the capabilities and equipment of their respective nations,” The 7th Fleet said.

The drills are being held as a competition, with the country winning the most points taking home the “Dragon Belt.”

The U.S. Navy is being represented by two P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft, currently based in Guam. It did not say where the exercises would be held or how long they would last.

With 50 to 70 ships and submarines, 150 aircraft and more

than 27,000 sailors and marines ready to deploy at any given time, the 7th Fleet “routinely interacts and operates with Allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific region,” it said.

That includes operating in the South China Sea, where it routinely draws Beijing’s anger by sailing and flying near islands held and fortified by China, which claims the strategic waterway virtually in its entirety.

The exercises also come as China’s navy is taking part in joint search and rescue exercises in the Gulf of Oman with Iran and Russia, three of the countries most at odds with the United States.

Other nations, as yet unidentified, are also taking part in the “Security Bond-2023” exercises, which China’s Defense Ministry says will “help deepen practical cooperation between the participating countries’ navies ... and inject positive energy into regional peace and stability.”

U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said Wednesday that the White House was not concerned by the joint training exercise.

China’s dispute with Japan over tiny islands in the East China Sea has also heated up, with both sides accusing the other of violating their maritime territory.

Calif. bill to shield doctors who mail abortion pills

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Doctors in California who mail abortion pills to people in other states would be protected from prosecution under a new bill to be unveiled Friday in the state Legislature.

The bill would not let California extradite doctors who are facing charges in another state for providing abortion medication. It would also shield doctors from having to pay fines. And it would let California doctors sue anyone who tries to stop them from providing abortions.

The bill would only protect doctors who are in California. If a doctor left California to provide an abortion to someone in another state, that doctor would not be protected. It also would not protect patients in other states who receive the medication.

State Sen. Nancy Skinner, a Democrat from Berkeley and the author of the bill, said her intent is to make sure California residents who are traveling in other states or living there tem-

porarily — like college students — can still have access to medication that’s legal in their home state. But she acknowledged the bill would also apply to California doctors who treat patients who live in other states.

Massachusetts, New York, Connecticut, Maryland and Vermont have proposed or passed similar laws, according to Skinner’s office.

Connecticut’s law, among other things, blocks criminal summonses from other states related to reproductive health care services that are legal in Connecticut while also blocking extradition — unless the person fled from a state requesting them.

Other states have tried to block the distribution of the abortion pill, known as mifepristone.

Attorneys general in 20 states, mostly with Republican governors, have warned some of the nation’s largest pharmacy companies they could face legal consequences if they distribute the pill within their states.

Calif. buildings still in peril from tumbling cliff

Associated Press

SAN CLEMENTE, Calif. — About two dozen people forced to flee Southern California apartment buildings endangered by a tumbling oceanside hill were warned Thursday that they may be evacuated indefinitely.

Three cliff-top apartment buildings and one nearby building in coastal Orange County’s San Clemente were red-tagged and evacuated Wednesday when the land began to shift and slide away from their backyards down a hillside following torrential rains.

Authorities said there was no timetable for declaring the slope stable enough for residents to return.

“I think everyone should understand we have a dynamic situation here,” Mayor Chris Duncan said during a news conference. “We have another rainstorm coming, the ground is continuing to move, so these structures are still in peril.”

The National Weather Service said heavy rain could hit

Southern California again early next week.

Twenty to 30 residents were evacuated. Some were briefly allowed back home on Thursday to move out their belongings.

Orange County was added to a presidential emergency declaration for areas hard-hit by natural disasters.

About 35 out of 58 California counties are now covered by the declaration, which authorizes federal assistance to help state and local governments deal with a series of fierce winter storms.

California has been hit with 11 atmospheric rivers in a virtually nonstop series that has sparked floods and landslides, toppled trees, stranded mountain dwellers in historically deep snow and downed power lines, leaving thousands without electricity.

Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley said the county had seen more than \$4 million in storm damage, and the figure will escalate.

10 charged in Black man's death at mental hospital

Associated Press

DINWIDDIE, Va. — Video from a state mental hospital shows a Black Virginia man who was handcuffed and shackled being pinned to the ground by deputies who are now facing second-degree murder charges in his death, according to relatives of the man and their attorneys who viewed the footage Thursday.

Speaking at a news conference shortly after watching the video with a local prosecutor, the family and attorneys condemned the brutal treatment they said Irvo Otieno, 28, was subjected to, first at a local jail and then at the state hospital where authorities say he died March 6 during the admission process.

They called on the U.S. Department of Justice to intervene in the case, saying Otieno's constitutional rights were clearly

violated.

"What I saw today was heart-breaking, America. It was disturbing. It was traumatic. My son was tortured," said Otieno's mother, Caroline Ouko.

Otieno's case marks the latest example of a Black man's in-custody death that has law enforcement under scrutiny. It follows the fatal beating of Tyre Nichols in Memphis, Tennessee, earlier this year and comes nearly three years after the killing of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis.

Ben Crump, who represented Floyd's family and is now working with Otieno's, quickly drew a comparison.

"It is truly shocking that nearly three years after the brutal killing of George Floyd by police, another family is grieving a loved one who allegedly died in nearly the exact same manner — being pinned down by police

for 12 agonizing minutes," Crump said in a statement.

Ten people so far have been charged with second-degree murder in Otieno's death. The seven Henrico County Sheriff's deputies were charged Tuesday and additional charges were announced Thursday against three people who were employed by the hospital.

The footage the family watched Thursday has not been publicly released. But Dinwiddie County Commonwealth's Attorney Ann Cabell Baskerville also described it in court Wednesday, saying at the first hearing for the deputies that Otieno was smothered to death, local news outlets reported.

Baskerville said Otieno did not appear combative and was sitting in a chair before being pulled to the ground by the officers, the Richmond Times-Dispatch reported.

Big banks create \$30B aid package for competitor

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Eleven of the biggest U.S. banks Thursday announced a \$30 billion rescue package for First Republic Bank in an effort to prevent it from becoming the third to fail in less than a week and head off a broader banking crisis.

San Francisco-based First Republic serves a similar clientele as Silicon Valley Bank, which failed last week after depositors withdrew about \$40 billion in a matter of hours. New York's Signature Bank was shuttered on Sunday. It appears that First Republic, which had deposits totaling \$176.4 billion as of Dec. 31, was facing similar issues.

The group of banks behind the rescue package confirmed that other unnamed banks had seen large withdrawals of uninsured deposits. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation insures deposits up to \$250,000 for individual accounts.

Republic's shares dropped more than 60% Monday, even after the bank said it had secured additional funding from JPMorgan and the Federal Reserve.

The rescue package brought back memories of the 2008 financial crisis, when banks collectively came to the aid of weaker banks in the early days of the crisis. Banks then bought each other in hurried deals in order to keep the crisis from spreading further.

The \$30 billion in uninsured deposits is seen as a vote of confidence in First Republic, whose banking franchise before the past week was often the envy of the industry.

The bank catered to wealthy clients, many of them billionaires, and offered them generous financial terms.

Anger spreads in France over Macron push to raise age of retirement to 64

Associated Press

PARIS — Protesters disrupted traffic in Paris on Friday as angry critics, political opponents and labor unions around France blasted President Emmanuel Macron's decision to force a bill raising the retirement age from 62 to 64 through parliament without a vote.

Opposition parties were expected to start procedures later Friday for a no-confidence vote on the government led by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne. The vote would likely take place early next week.

Macron ordered Borne on Thursday to wield a special constitutional power to push the highly unpopular pension bill

through without a vote in the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament.

His calculated risk infuriated opposition lawmakers, many citizens and unions.

Thousands gathered in protest Thursday at the Place de la Concorde, which faces the National Assembly building. As night fell, police officers charged the demonstrators in waves to clear the Place. Small groups then moved through nearby streets in the chic Champs-Elysees neighborhood, setting street fires.

Similar scenes repeated themselves in numerous other cities, from Rennes and Nantes in eastern France to Lyon and

the southern port city of Marseille, where shop windows and bank fronts were smashed, according to French media.

French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin told radio station RTL on Friday that 310 people were arrested overnight. Most of the arrests, 258, were made in Paris, according to Darmanin.

The trade unions that had organized strikes and marches against a higher retirement age said more rallies and protest marches would take place in the days ahead.

"This retirement reform is brutal, unjust, unjustified for the world of workers," they declared.

Kings top Nets to clinch winning season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Domantas Sabonis had 24 points and 21 rebounds, and the Sacramento Kings clinched their first winning season since 2005-06 by beating the Brooklyn Nets 101-96 on Thursday night.

De'Aaron Fox added 18 points, six rebounds and five assists for the Kings, who improved to 42-27, second in the Western Conference. They hadn't finished above .500 since going 44-38 in 2005-06, the last of eight straight playoff appearances under Rick Adelman.

Sabonis had 20 points by half-time and the Kings led by as much as 17, but the Nets made it close.

Mikal Bridges scored 23 points for the Nets, who fell 1½ games behind the New York Knicks for fifth place in the Eastern Conference and are just 1½ ahead of seventh-place Miami as they try to avoid the play-in tournament.

Spencer Dinwiddie added 18 points and Nic Claxton had 14 points and 14 rebounds for the Nets.

Nuggets 119, Pistons 100: Nikola Jokic scored 30 points and visiting Denver beat Detroit to snap a season-high four-game losing streak and clinched the Northwest Division.

Jokic, the two-time reigning NBA MVP, had three assists and three rebounds before his first attempt several minutes into the game and finished 14 of 18 from the field with 10 rebounds and nine assists.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 20 points, Jamal Murray had 19 and Aaron Gordon 15 for the Western Conference-leading Nuggets.

Rodney McGruder scored 20 for the Pistons, who have lost 12 of 13 games and have the NBA's worst record. Detroit rookies Jalen Duren had 15 points and 13 assists, while Jaden Ivey added 14 points and six assists.

Suns 116, Magic 113: Josh Okogie made a go-ahead 3-pointer midway through the fourth quarter and blocked Paolo Banchero's attempt at a tying 3 in the final seconds as Phoenix held on to defeat Orlando at home and snap a three-game

losing streak.

Devin Booker led Phoenix with 19 points. Cameron Payne scored 18 points, Deandre Ayton and Chris Paul each had 16 and Okogie finished with 15. The Suns made all 17 of their free throws in the game.

Markelle Fultz scored 25 points, Banchero added 18 and Cole Anthony 17 for Orlando. Franz Wagner had 16 points and 10 rebounds, and Wendell Carter Jr. also scored 16 points.

Pacers 139, Bucks 123: Andrew Nembhard scored 24 points and Aaron Nesmith hit six 3-pointers and finished with 22 points as visiting Indiana rallied late and beat Central Division- and Eastern Conference-leading Milwaukee.

With Nesmith leading the way, Indiana (32-38) shot 20 for 41 from 3-point distance, including 11 of 14 in the second half, and shot 56.5% overall. Meanwhile, Milwaukee (50-20) shot 52.8%, went 11 for 32 from beyond the arc and gave up 13 points off 12 turnovers.

Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 25 points. Jrue

Holiday added 19 and Khris Middleton finished with 16.

Indiana, which was playing without injured leading scorer and All-Star point guard Tyrese Haliburton (ankle), had seven players score in double figures. Buddy Hield scored 20 and T.J. McConnell 19.

Raptors 128, Thunder 111: Pascal Siakam had 25 points and 14 rebounds and Toronto extended its season-high home winning streak to six games with a win over Oklahoma City.

Jakob Poeltl had his third straight double-double with 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Raptors. Gary Trent Jr. added 23 points and Fred VanVleet and Scottie Barnes each had 19. O.G. Anunoby added 17 points.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 29 points and Jalen Williams had 15 for the Thunder, who came in having won three straight and six of seven. Oklahoma City is 13-21 on the road. Josh Giddey scored 13 points, Tre Mann and Isaiah Joe each had 12 and Luguentz Dort scored 10 points for the Thunder.

Georgia's Carter gets 1-year probation, \$1,000 fine

Associated Press

ATHENS, Ga. — Georgia defensive tackle Jalen Carter was given 12 months' probation and a \$1,000 fine on Thursday after pleading no contest to misdemeanor charges of reckless driving and racing related to a crash that killed Bulldogs offensive lineman Devin Willock and a recruiting staff member.

Projected as one of the top players in next month's NFL

draft, Carter was sentenced in Athens-Clarke County Municipal Court, according to a statement from attorney Kim T. Stephens. Carter also must complete 50 hours of community service and a state-approved defensive driving course, and his driving privileges have been suspended for 120 days.

The state can't bring additional charges against Carter, the statement said, adding that Carter en-

tered the pleas "in order to resolve this matter in the most efficient manner possible."

Athens-Clarke County Solicitor General Will Fleenor said in a statement that law enforcement evaluated whether more serious charges were needed. Talks between his office, the district attorney's office and the prosecuting attorneys' council determined the traffic offenses were appropriate.

The Athens-Clarke County Police Department had issued an arrest warrant for Carter on March 1, alleging that he raced his 2021 Jeep Trackhawk against a 2021 Ford Expedition driven by recruiting staffer Chandler LeCroy on Jan. 15. LeCroy, 24, and Willock died in the crash, which happened hours after Georgia celebrated its second consecutive national championship with a parade and ceremony.

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No. 15 seed Princeton stuns Arizona

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Ryan Langborg lifted Princeton to its first lead with 2:03 to play and the Tigers used a late-game run to earn their first NCAA Tournament win in 25 years, topping No. 2 seed Arizona 59-55 on Thursday.

The 15th-seeded Tigers (22-9) scored the final nine points, holding the Pac-12 Tournament champion scoreless over the final 4:43.

Tosan Evbuomwan scored 15 points in Princeton's first tournament victory since beating UNLV in 1998 when current coach Mitch Henderson was a player for the Tigers.

Princeton advanced to play seventh-seeded Missouri in the second round of the South Region.

Azuolas Tubelis scored 22 points for the Wildcats (28-7), who haven't won a tournament game in consecutive years since 2014-15.

It marked the third straight year and 11th time overall that a No. 15 seed won a first-round game. Arizona is the only school to be on the wrong end of one of those upsets twice, also losing to Steve Nash and Santa Clara in 1993.

Missouri 76, Utah State 65: Missouri used a second-half scoring spurt from Kobe Brown to win its first NCAA Tournament game in 13 years, beating Utah State.

Brown hit three 3-pointers in a span of just over three minutes to fuel a 13-2 run that turned a two-point deficit into a 62-53 lead.

The seventh-seeded Tigers (25-9) held on from there, stopping a six-game tournament skid with their first win since beating Clemson in the first round in 2010. Missouri advanced to play 15th-seeded Princeton.

The 10th-seeded Aggies (26-9) have dropped their last 10 tournament games since beat-

ing Ohio State in the first round in 2001. The loss was also the 11th straight for a Mountain West team in the NCAAs.

The game was close for most of the second half until Brown and D'Moi Hodge took it over midway through the second half by scoring 20 straight points for the Tigers.

Furman 68, Virginia 67: JP Pegues made a 3-pointer with 2.4 seconds remaining, and No. 13 seed Furman completed a rally from a 12-point second-half deficit to hand fourth-seeded Virginia another first-round loss in Orlando, Fla.

Making their first trip to the NCAA Tournament in 43 years, the Paladins (28-7) advanced to the second round in the South Region, where they will play fifth-seeded San Diego State on Saturday.

Furman earned its first tournament berth since 1980 by beating Chattanooga for the Southern Conference title, capping a season-long quest to redeem itself after losing the league's automatic berth to the Mocs on a 35-foot buzzer-beater in last year's Southern final.

In the aftermath of that loss, Jalen Slawson and Mike Bothwell both decided to return for their fifth seasons with the Paladins. Slawson took over the game when Bothwell fouled out with just over six minutes remaining, scoring nine consecutive points to turn a 54-48 deficit into Furman's first lead of the game, 57-54, with 5:02 to go.

Jalen Slawson, the Southern Conference player of the year, finished with 19 points, 10 rebounds and four assists.

Kihei Clark threw a bad pass that Garrett Hien intercepted at midcourt with 7 seconds to go, setting up Pegues' go-ahead basket, his only 3 of the game.

Virginia (25-8) was eliminated in the first round as the higher-seeded team for the third time in its past four NCAA tournaments. Kadin Shedrick led

the Cavaliers with 15 points, 13 rebounds and four blocks.

San Diego State 63, Charleston 57: Matt Bradley scored 17 points, including two free throws in the final minute, and No. 5 seed San Diego State held on to beat 12th-seeded Charleston in Orlando, Fla.

The Aztecs (28-6) won their first game in the Big Dance since 2015 — ending a four-game losing streak — and snapped an 11-game skid for the Mountain West Conference.

The Cougars (31-4) lost for the first time in six weeks and have not won an NCAA Tournament game since 1997.

Ante Brzovic led Charleston with 12 points and eight rebounds. Ryan Larson added 11 points, and seventh-year senior Dalton Bolon finished his college career with 10 points.

Maryland 67, West Virginia 65: Maryland overcame a sluggish start and a final heave at the buzzer by Kedrian Johnson to beat West Virginia in Birmingham, Ala.

Johnson led all scorers with 27 points, but his potential winner bounced off the side of the rim as the horn sounded, allowing the eighth-seeded Terrapins (22-12) to advance.

Maryland, led by Julian Reese with 17 points and nine rebounds, meets top-seeded Alabama in the South Region on Saturday.

Alabama 96, Texas A&M-Corpus Christi 75: Alabama buried Texas A&M-Corpus Christi under an early 3-point onslaught, and the NCAA Tournament's top seed won easily even with star freshman Brandon Miller going scoreless.

The Crimson Tide (30-5) set aside their off-court distractions and buried 10 first-half 3s in a predictably easy win over the 16th-seeded Islanders (24-11) at Legacy Arena, less than an hour from campus.

Miller, the All-American who has been beset by questions

about his presence at the scene of a fatal shooting, sat out the final 14 minutes and missed all five field goal attempts.

Alabama advanced to play eighth-seeded Maryland. The Tide coasted after leading 54-34 by the half.

Nick Pringle scored 17 points and had a season-high 13 rebounds. Mark Sears made three 3s in a 58-second span of the first half and scored 15 points.

Trevian Tennyson led the Islanders with 20 points. Isaach Mushula scored 16 and Owen Dease 14.

West Region

Kansas 96, Howard 68: Jalen Wilson had 20 points and seven rebounds for No. 1 seed and defending national champion Kansas, which allowed absent and recovering coach Bill Self to rest during an easy victory over Howard in Des Moines, Iowa.

Self is still recovering from a recent heart procedure.

Gradey Dick had 19 points and 11 rebounds in the freshman's first NCAA Tournament game. K.J. Adams Jr. scored 13 points and Dajuan Harris Jr. added 11 points for the Jayhawks (28-7), who will play Arkansas in the second round on Saturday.

Kansas, which has won 16 consecutive first-round games, is trying to become the first repeat NCAA winner in 16 years.

Shy Odom had 15 points and eight rebounds for the Bison (22-13), who were making the program's first tournament appearance since 1992.

Arkansas 73, Illinois 63: Ricky Council IV scored 18 points and Arkansas survived some anxious moments in the second half against an Illinois team that wouldn't go away.

Devo Davis had 16 points for the eighth-seeded Razorbacks, who used relentless defense and

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rebounding to build big leads but couldn't get comfortable until the final minute. Arkansas (21-13) faces top-seeded Kansas on Saturday.

Terrence Shannon Jr., held scoreless the first 16 minutes, finished with 20 points to lead the Illini (20-13). It was the first time in five tournament appearances since 2011 that Illinois didn't make it out of the first round.

The Razorbacks were up double digits in the middle of the first half, but no lead has been safe this season. In seven games they blew leads with scoring droughts of five minutes or longer. That didn't happen this time.

Northwestern 75, Boise State 67: In Sacramento Calif., Boo Buie scored 22 points to lead Northwestern past Boise State in the Wildcats' second appearance ever in the NCAA Tournament.

The seventh-seeded Wildcats (22-11) previously made it to the Big Dance in 2017, and just like that time, they made sure they wouldn't be one-and-done.

Northwestern never trailed in a game that was close most of the way and advanced to play No. 2 seed UCLA.

The 10th-seeded Broncos (24-10) are still searching for their first tournament win, losing their opener for the ninth time in as many tries. Max Rice scored 17 points to lead Boise State and Naje Smith added 14.

Chase Audige added 20 points for the Wildcats and Ty Berry scored 13, including three 3-pointers.

UCLA 86, UNC Asheville 53: Jaime Jaquez Jr. scored 17 points and UCLA raced out to a fast start and never looked back against UNC Asheville.

The second-seeded Bruins (30-5) scored the first 14 points of the game and rolled from there. Amari Bailey also scored 17 points and David Singleton had 11.

UCLA advanced to play seventh-seeded Northwestern.

Drew Pember scored 13

points for the 15th-seeded Bulldogs (27-8). UNC Asheville, which won the Big South regular-season and tournament titles, has now lost all five times the school has advanced to the round of 64.

East Region

Duke 74, Oral Roberts 51: Jeremy Roach matched his career high with 23 points, and No. 5 seed Duke beat Oral Roberts in Orlando, Fla., in the school's first NCAA Tournament game since Jon Scheyer took over as the Blue Devils' coach.

Dariq Whitehead added 13 points for the Blue Devils (27-8), winners of the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament. Roach also scored 23 in the ACC title game victory over Virginia.

Scheyer helped Hall of Fame coach Mike Krzyzewski win two of his five national titles as a Duke player and assistant. In his first NCAA Tournament game as Krzyzewski's replacement, Scheyer led Duke to a 10th consecutive win and a second-round matchup against fourth-seeded Tennessee.

Oral Roberts (30-5), a 12 seed, entered the tournament on a nation-leading 17-game winning streak but was unable to replicate its success of two years ago, when the Golden Eagles upset Ohio State and Florida during a surprising run to the Sweet 16. Summit League player of the year Max Abmas was limited to 12 points on 4-for-15 shooting.

Tennessee 58, Louisiana-Lafayette 55: Tyreke Key scored 12 points, Jahmai Mashack added 11 and Tennessee survived a late scare to hold off Louisiana-Lafayette.

The Ragin' Cajuns (26-8) whittled an 18-point deficit to three in the final minute — creating some tense moments and a couple technical fouls — but the Volunteers (24-10) closed it out by forcing tough shots and making just enough free throws.

Tennessee, which lost six of 10 heading into the tournament, advanced to face fifth-seeded Duke.

The Vols should hope to take

much better care of the ball than they did against the Sun Belt Conference Tournament champions. They finished with 18 turnovers in the fourth game without starting point guard Zakai Zeigler, who tore a ligament in his left knee in the team's regular-season finale.

Jordan Brown led the Ragin' Cajuns with 16 points.

Midwest Region

Houston 63, Northern Kentucky 52: With All-American Marcus Sasser watching from the bench in Birmingham, Ala., top-seeded Houston shook off Northern Kentucky.

Chants of "NKU!" and "Overrated!" filled Legacy Arena as the 16th-seeded Norse trailed by only three at halftime and made it 36-all with under 16 minutes to go against the Cougars (32-3).

But Houston pulled away behind 16 points from Jarace Walker, advancing to face ninth-seeded Auburn on Saturday.

Sasser suffered a groin injury last weekend in the American Athletic Conference Tournament. He got the start and knocked down an early 3-pointer, but the school said he aggravated the injury, forcing him to sit out the rest of the game.

Sam Vinson scored 15 points to lead Northern Kentucky (22-13), which shot 5 of 34 from 3-point range.

Auburn 83, Iowa 75: John Broome had 19 points, 12 rebounds and five blocked shots, and Auburn beat Iowa.

The ninth-seeded Tigers (21-12) made 11 of 12 free throws over the final four minutes to lock up a second-round matchup with No. 1 seed Houston.

The eighth-seeded Hawkeyes (19-14) twice got within four points in the second half but came no closer.

Auburn had five players score in double figures. Wendell Green Jr. had 15 points, and Tre Donaldson and KD Johnson each finished with 11. Allen Flanigan scored 10.

Payton Sandford scored 21 points for Iowa. Kris Murray

had 15 points on 5-of-18 shooting and nine rebounds. Filip Rebraca scored 14 points.

Texas 81, Colgate 61: Sir' Jabari Rice scored 23 points and No. 2 seed Texas shut down sharpshooting Colgate in Des Moines, Iowa.

Rice made five of his seven 3-pointers in the first half, helping the Longhorns get off to a fast start. Marcus Carr finished with 17 points and Dylan Disu had 17 points and nine rebounds.

Texas (27-8) shot 13 for 23 from 3-point range while advancing to a second-round matchup against Penn State.

In another inspired performance under interim coach Rodney Terry, Rice and the Longhorns picked the perfect time to get hot on the perimeter against the nation's leading outside shooting team. They matched their season best for 3-pointers made.

Keegan Records and Ryan Moffatt each scored 13 points for the 15th-seeded Raiders (26-9), who went 3 of 15 from long range and fell to 0-6 all-time in NCAA Tournament play.

Penn State 76, Texas A&M 59: Andrew Funk made 8 of 10 3-pointers and scored 27 points as Penn State beat Texas A&M for its first NCAA Tournament victory in 22 years.

Funk, in his first year at Penn State after transferring from Bucknell, led the Nittany Lions to their ninth win in their last 11 games. They next play Texas on Saturday.

Jalen Pickett, the biggest star for Penn State (23-13), played another strong all-around game with 19 points, eight assists, no turnovers and seven rebounds.

Penn State's previous tournament win was its second-round upset of North Carolina in 2001. The Nittany Lions lost to Temple in the Sweet 16, and they lost to the Owls again when they returned to the tournament in 2011.

Dexter Dennis scored 19 points to lead Texas A&M (25-10), which shot 34% in its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2018.

Panthers have 7-goal 1st period in win

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Carter Verhaeghe scored twice in Florida's franchise-record, seven-goal first period and the Panthers beat the Montreal Canadiens 9-5 on Thursday night.

Florida scored six goals in the second period against Boston on April 5, 2000. Against Montreal, the Panthers came just shy of tying the franchise record for goals in a game set in 1997, going scoreless in the third period.

The teams combined for 10 first-period goals to tie the NHL record for goals in a first period. It also was the fastest first 10 goals in an NHL game, with Florida getting the 10th goal at 13:18.

Aaron Ekblad also scored twice for Florida, helping the Panthers pull within three points of the final wild-card spot. They are 4-0-1 in their last five.

Ekblad, Colin White, Gustav Forsling, Ryan Lomberg and Sam Reinhart also scored for Florida as the Panthers led 7-3 after one. Florida padded its lead with goals from Ekblad and Matthew Tkachuk in the second period.

Sergei Bobrovsky made 24 saves for Florida.

Mike Matheson, Michael Pezzetta, Rem Pitlick, Anthony Richard and Rafael Harvey-Pinard scored for Montreal.

Bruins 3, Jets 0: Jeremy Swayman made 36 saves for his third shutout of the season and eighth overall in NHL-leading Boston' victory over host Winnipeg.

Trent Frederic, Pavel Zacha and Tomas Nosek scored to help Boston rebound from its first consecutive regulation losses of the season.

Frederic opened the scoring at 50 seconds of the first period with his 15th goal of the season. Zacha added his 18th with 6:38 left in the first. Nosek scored into an empty net with six seconds left for his sixth of the season.

Connor Hellebuyck stopped 21 shots for the Jets.

Lightning 4, Devils 3, SO: Steven Stamkos had two goals and an assist in regulation, and Alex Killorn and Ross Colton scored in the shootout to lift visiting Tampa Bay past New Jersey.

Colton also scored in regulation. Andrei Vasilevskiy made 26 saves for Tampa Bay, which won its second in a row over New Jersey after a victory Tuesday night.

Timo Meier had two goals in the third period and Tomas Tatar also scored for New Jersey. Akira Schmid made 21 saves.

Oilers 4, Stars 1: Connor McDavid scored his NHL-leading 57th goal and added an assist in Edmonton's victory over visiting Dallas.

McDavid pushed his NHL-best points total to 131—30 more than second-place linemate Leon Draisaitl. Draisaitl assisted on McDavid's goal.

Warren Foegele and Mattias Janmark scored for Edmonton in the first period, with Janmark connecting short-handed for the first of his two goals. Stuart Skinner made 25 saves for the Oilers.

Wyatt Johnston scored for Dallas.

Flames 7, Golden Knights 2: Tyler Toffoli and Blake Coleman each scored and Calgary won for the first time in Vegas.

MacKenzie Weegar, Mikael Backlund and Dillon Dube also scored and Jacob Markstrom stopped 17 shots to win for the fourth time in his last six starts. The Flames scored seven goals for the third time this season.

Jonathan Quick, who made 23 saves, lost for the first time since being acquired by Vegas. Zach Whitecloud and Reilly Smith scored for the Golden Knights.

Rangers 4, Penguins 2: Chris Kreider scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and added an empty-netter, and Igor Shesterkin made 30 saves to help host New York beat Pittsburgh.

Mika Zibanejad and Tyler Motte also scored for the Rangers. They won for the eighth time in their last 10 home games.

New York is 6-1-1 in its last eight home games against Pittsburgh, and the teams will square off again Saturday night at The Garden.

Jake Guentzel and Rickard Rakell scored for Pittsburgh.

Avalanche 5, Senators 4: Mikko Rantanen had a goal and two assists, Lars Eller scored a strange deciding goal and visiting Colorado beat Ottawa for its fourth straight victory. Colorado defenseman Cale Makar had a goal and an assist, and Lars Eller, Valeri Nichushkin and Evan Rodrigues also scored. Nathan MacKinnon had three assists, and Jonas Johansson stopped 31 shots.

Drake Batherson, Shane Pinto, Travis Hamonic and Brady Tkachuk scored for Ottawa, Tim Stutzle had three assists and Mads Sogaard made 25 saves. The Senators have lost four in a row.

The Avalanche scored three times in the second period, with Eller's odd goal making it 5-2 late in the period.

On what the Senators appeared to think was icing against the Avalanche, the puck bounced off the end boards and was in the corner of the crease by Sogaard's pad. With Senators' defenseman Jake Sanderson standing next to his netminder, no whistle came to end the play. After a couple of seconds, Eller skated in and jammed the puck past a confused group of Senators. After a lengthy review on a goaltender interference challenge from Senators coach DJ Smith, the goal stood.

Kings 4, Blue Jackets 1: Carl Grundstrom had a goal and an assist in Los Angeles' four-goal second period, Pheonix Copley made 30 saves and the Kings beat Columbus at home.

Drew Doughty, Anze Kopitar and Viktor Arvidsson also

scored to help the Kings improve to 7-0-1 in their past eight games.

Kirill Marchenko scored for Columbus. Daniil Tarasov was pulled in the second period after allowing four goals on 27 shots, and Michael Hutchinson made nine saves in relief. The Blue Jackets have lost five of six.

Coyotes 3, Canucks 2: Travis Boyd scored twice, Ivan Prosvetov stopped 29 shots and Arizona beat visiting Vancouver to stretch its points streak to seven games.

Prosvetov helped the Coyotes withstand a string of early penalties in his second start this season and Boyd had his second multi-goal game this month after going five seasons without one.

Lawson Crouse also scored to help stretch Arizona's home winning streak to five straight games. The Coyotes are 5-0-2 since losing to Carolina on March 3.

Vancouver's Elias Pettersson had a goal and an assist, and Andrei Kuzmenko scored for the second straight game. Thatcher Demko had 24 saves for the Canucks, who had their five-game winning streak end.

Kraken 2, Sharks 1, OT: Vince Dunn scored 1:58 into overtime to lift visiting Seattle past San Jose.

Oliver Bjorkstrand had a goal and an assist for the Kraken, tying on a breakaway at 7:03 of the third period. Philipp Grubauer stopped 31 shots.

Sharks forward William Eklund scored on a penalty shot for his second career goal, both in the last two games. James Reimer made 30 saves.

Blackhawks 2, Predators 1: Alex Stalock made 35 saves to lead Chicago past host Nashville.

Lukas Reichel and Joey Anderson scored for Chicago, which has won two straight.

Roman Josi scored late for Nashville.