

Bridge fall delays household shipments

BY ALEXANDER RIEDEL
Stars and Stripes

The movement of military household goods and personal vehicles has faced disruptions in the wake of the recent Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore, though immediate impacts appear to be slight, U.S. Transportation Command said Friday.

The bridge suffered catastrophic damage early Tuesday when the cargo ship Dali collided with a support pillar, leading to an indefinite suspension of vessel traffic at the Port of Baltimore.

The port and its Seagirt Marine Terminal are a key node for the national supply chain networks. Along with the I-695 corridor, which the bridge was part of, they are crucial for facilitating the movement of people and goods along the East Coast.

Shipments that may be affected by the collapse are being identified, and military personnel will be notified of any changes to when they'll receive their goods, command officials said.

"Short term impacts on U.S. Transportation Command missions, including the transportation of household goods and privately owned vehicles, are minimal as these missions can be re-directed to other ports on the East Coast," said Scott D. Ross, a TRANSCOM spokesman.

The command's shipping contractors, meanwhile, are seeking alternative ports and modes of transportation, such as rail and truck, to reduce the impact on shipments, officials said.

"We anticipate increased congestion at alternate ports due to the loss of access to the Port of Baltimore. However, we

assess that the vast majority of potential impacts can be mitigated through our extensive transportation network and by prudent planning and continued communication with our industry partners," Ross said.

International Auto Logistics, the contractor responsible for shipping privately owned vehicles, reported that its cargo was aboard the Dali.

The company is also seeking alternative shipping routes to minimize delays.

All carriers using Baltimore as their primary port are now competing for the same resources at other ports, IAL said, and a decision on where to move operations requires that adequate port space and resources be available to stage vehicle cargo.

"Our customer service team will be reaching out to all cus-

tomers who may experience delivery delays due to this incident as soon as more information becomes available," the company said in a statement Wednesday.

The incident precedes the military's peak moving season, which ramps up in mid-May, raising concerns about potential effects on military movers in the months to come.

While shipments may be diverted over the short term, the rebuilding of the Key Bridge could take years, officials said.

The bridge served as an essential artery for daily travel for thousands in the Baltimore-Washington area.

The reopening of the Port of Baltimore is expected to precede the bridge's restoration, providing some relief to affected logistical operations, Department of Transportation officials said.

Crews removing twisted steel from Baltimore site

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — As crews continued the complicated and meticulous operation of removing the steel and concrete from the fallen Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, some near the site took time on Easter Sunday to reflect on the six workers presumed to have plunged to their deaths.

As cranes periodically swung into place and workers measured and cut the steel to prepare to lift sections of twisted steel, the Rev. Ako Walker held a Mass in Spanish at Sacred Heart of Jesus, about 5 miles up the Patapsco River from the collapse.

"Yes we can rebuild a bridge, but we have to look at the way in

which migrant workers are treated and how best we can improve their situation as they come to the United States of America," Walker said of the men who were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador and were patching potholes.

The bridge fell early Tuesday as the crew of the cargo ship Dali lost power and control and hit the bridge.

Each part of the bridge removed from the water will be lifted onto a barge and floated downstream to the Tradepoint Atlantic logistics center, where it will be inspected, Coast Guard Rear Adm. Shannon Gilreath said.

Everything the salvage crews

do affects what happens next and ultimately how long it will take to remove all the debris and reopen the ship channel and the blocked Port of Baltimore, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore said.

The crew of the Dali, which is as long as the Eiffel Tower is tall, remains onboard the ship. The vessel is tangled in 3,000 to 4,000 tons of debris. Most of its containers remain intact, but a few were torn open or knocked away by the falling debris.

The Dali is managed by Synergy Marine Group and owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd. Danish shipping giant Maersk chartered Dali, which was on its way out of port when it hit the bridge's support column.

Along with clearing the ship-

ping channel to reopen the port, officials are trying to figure out how to rebuild the major bridge, which was completed in 1977 and carried Interstate 695 around southeast Baltimore and was a vital link to the city's centuries of maritime culture.

It took five years to build the original bridge. President Joe Biden's administration has promised to pay the full cost to rebuild and transportation officials said they will work as quickly as possible.

But exactly how long the new bridge will take can't be figured out now. Engineers haven't been able to assess the condition of the ramps and smaller bridges leading to the collapsed structure.

Marines return to Australia for training across South Pacific

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines have returned to northern Australia to train as an air-ground task force for six months across the continent and in the Philippines and Indonesia, a Marine Corps spokesman said Thursday.

This year's 2,000-strong Marine Rotational Force-Darwin is the 13th contingent to arrive in the Northern Territory since 2012, according to a Marine Corps statement that day.

"The Marines and Sailors of Marine Rotational Force-Darwin are honored and excited to continue the legacy of cooperation," force commander Col. Brian Mulvihill said in the statement. "Our strong Alliance contributes to stability in the region and enables the readiness of our forces to respond to any crisis or contingency that arises."

Led by an infantry regiment from Camp Pendleton, Calif.,

for the third year in a row, the Marines are scheduled to train until October with Australian troops and counterparts throughout the region.

The force will be supported by Combat Logistics Battalion 5, 1st Marine Logistics Group with a command element from 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, 1st Lt. Colton Martin, a spokesman for the rotational force said by email.

The ground combat element for the force is comprised of 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, with artillery from 1st Battalion, 11th Marine Regiment, and engineers from 1st Combat Engineer Battalion, he said.

Marines of the Darwin rotation will participate in the annual Balikatan drills in the Philippines, Martin said.

Balikatan will include 11,000 U.S. and 5,000 Filipino troops training from April 22 to May 8, the state-run Philippine News Service reported March 20.

Navy lieutenant commander charged with raping boy, 14

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A lieutenant commander with the Navy's Fleet Readiness Center Northwest in Washington state was arrested this month on charges he paid for sex with a 14-year-old boy, according to a court document.

Lt. Cmdr. Lucas Martinez was arrested March 13 on charges of third-degree rape of a child, commercial sexual abuse of a minor, and communication with a minor for immoral purposes, according to a court affidavit from local authorities.

Martinez, 61, met the 14-year-old online on an adult sex website and made arrangements to meet in person. The Navy officer later showed up at the boy's home wearing his green camouflage uniform and paid \$200 to have sex with him, police said.

On Jan. 22, the mother of the 14-year-old contacted the Anacortes Police Department after receiving packages at her home that contained sex toys and sex costumes. The boy told his mother that he had been posing as an 18-year-old to communicate with older men on adult websites and the men would

send him gifts.

On Feb. 9, the victim's mother contacted police again and said her son had admitted that a man, identified as Lucas Martinezmendieta, had paid him \$200 for sex while she had been at work. It is unclear when the pair first met in person. Messages between Martinez and the boy show they first connected in November on an app called Sniffies, specifically for men seeking other men.

Following the encounter, the victim began to ignore and block Martinez. Martinez used different accounts and phones to contact the teen, including a phone number belonging to Naval Information Warfare Systems Command, according to the affidavit. After reviewing messages between the pair and interviewing the child, Martinez was arrested by police at his home in Oak Harbor, Wash.

Martinez told police, "I never slept with a minor, let alone rape."

Martinez posted bail March 19 and was released from jail, the Whidbey News-Times reported. He is still with the Fleet Readiness Center Northwest, according to his service record.

Navy takes helm for closing Red Hill fuel storage facility

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — The Navy on Thursday assumed full oversight of the permanent closure of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii and the long-term cleanup of petroleum contaminated soil and groundwater left after decades of use.

Joint Task Force-Red Hill, the Defense Department entity that had been tasked with emptying roughly 104.4 million gallons of

fuel from the facility, transferred responsibility to the Navy Closure Task Force during a ceremony at Ford Island.

"As you know, for more than 80 years, the facility has kept our ships sailing and kept our aircraft flying," Rear Adm. Stephen Barnett, who commands the Navy task force as well as Navy Region Hawaii, told the audience.

"It's enabled the United States of America to safeguard our nation and its most important as-

sets: our people. But right now, today, it's time for us to move to the next phase. To do this, Navy Closure Task Force will safely, expeditiously decommission this facility."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in March 2022 ordered the World War II-era facility permanently closed after a jet fuel leak contaminated the Navy's water distribution system in late 2021.

The Defense Department established Joint Task Force-Red Hill to empty the 20 massive un-

derground tanks, which first required extensive repair and upgrading of pipelines to preclude any leaks during defueling.

Some members of the first task force have been transitioning to the Navy group over the past few months.

The Navy task force will undertake the multiyear task of emptying about 28,000 gallons of sludge at the bottom of the tanks, cleaning them and removing contaminants that have leached into the soil and aquifer.

Activists sue Park Service over Puerto Rico stray cats

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — A nonprofit organization said Thursday that it sued the U.S. National Park Service over a plan to remove Puerto Rico's famous stray cats from a historic district in the U.S. territory.

The lawsuit filed by Maryland-based Alley Cat Allies comes four months after the federal agency announced it would contract an animal welfare organization to remove an estimated 200 cats that live in an area surrounding a historic seaside fortress in Old San Juan.

The organization would decide whether the trapped cats would be adopted, placed in foster homes, kept in a shelter or face other options.

It wasn't immediately clear if an organization has been hired.

At the time, the National Park Service said it would hire

a removal agency if the organization it contracted failed to remove the cats within six months.

The agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Tourists and locals have long considered the cats both a delight and a nuisance, with the National Park Service stating in 2022 that the population had grown too much as it noted the smell of urine and feces in the area.

Activists have decried the plan, saying six months is insufficient time to remove so many cats and worried they would be killed.

In its lawsuit, Alley Cat Allies requested additional environmental statements from the federal agency.

The suit also asked that a judge finds the National Park Service's actions allegedly violate acts including the National Environmental Protection Act.

Calif. storm heads south with rain, mountain snow

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — An Easter weekend storm has slammed into Southern California, bringing more rain and mountain snow to a region already drenched by winter weather.

The slow-moving storm was expected to unleash 1 to 3 inches of rain, as well as up to 2 feet of snow in the mountains above 6,000 feet of elevation, by Monday.

While the National Weather Service's office in Oxnard had not had any reports of major flooding or mudslides by midday Saturday, forecasters issued a flood watch through Sunday afternoon in parts of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura and Los Angeles

counties.

Ryan Kittell, a weather service meteorologist, said the weekend's storm is typical for March but was not an atmospheric river like many of the others that have pounded California in recent winters.

The storm left the San Francisco Bay Area on Friday and "just marched right down the California coast" overnight, bringing most of the rainfall to the Los Angeles area, Kittell said.

The storm then parked itself over the region, where it is expected to stay until Sunday night or into Monday. Showers and possible thunderstorms, with the potential for damaging winds and a tornado, are forecast for that time period.

Trump camp assails Biden for timing of transgender support

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is facing criticism from Donald Trump's campaign and religious conservatives for proclaiming March 31 — which corresponds with Easter Sunday this year — as "Transgender Day of Visibility."

The Democratic president issued the proclamation Friday, calling on "all Americans to join us in lifting up the lives and voices of transgender people throughout our Nation and to work toward eliminating violence and discrimination based on gender identity."

But in 2024, the March 31 designation overlaps with Easter, one of Christianity's holiest celebrations.

Trump's campaign accused Biden, a Roman Catholic, of being insensitive to religion, and fellow Republicans piled on.

"We call on Joe Biden's failing campaign and White House to issue an apology to the millions of Catholics and Christians across America who believe tomorrow is for one celebration only — the resurrection of Jesus Christ," said Karoline Leavitt, the Trump campaign's press secretary. She assailed what she called the Bi-

den administration's "years-long assault on the Christian faith."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said on social media that the "Biden White House has betrayed the central tenet of Easter" and called the decision "outrageous and abhorrent."

White House spokesperson Andrew Bates said the Republi-

cans criticizing Biden "are seeking to divide and weaken our country with cruel, hateful and dishonest rhetoric."

"As a Christian who celebrates Easter with family, President Biden stands for bringing people together and upholding the dignity and freedoms of every American," Bates said. "President Biden will never abuse his faith for political purposes or for profit."

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Andrew Bates
White House spokesperson

Biden devoutly attends Mass and considers his Catholic upbringing to be a core part of his morality and identity. In 2021, he met with Pope Francis at the Vatican and afterward told reporters that the pontiff said he was a "good Catholic" who should keep receiving Communion. But Biden's stances on gay marriage and women having the right to abortion put him at odds with many conservative Christians.

Israeli strike hits hospital tent camp

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — An Israeli airstrike hit a tent camp in the courtyard of a crowded hospital in central Gaza on Sunday, killing two Palestinians and wounding another 15, including journalists working nearby.

An Associated Press reporter filmed the strike and aftermath at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where thousands of people have sheltered after fleeing their homes elsewhere in the war-ravaged territory. People including women and children scattered and cried out.

The Israeli military said it struck a command center of the

Islamic Jihad militant group and claimed the hospital's functioning was not affected.

Tens of thousands of people have sought shelter in Gaza's hospitals since the start of the war nearly six months ago, viewing them as relatively safe from airstrikes. Israel accuses Hamas and other militants of operating in and around medical facilities, and troops have raided a number of hospitals.

Israeli troops have been raiding Shifa Hospital, Gaza's largest, for nearly two weeks and say they have fought heavy battles with militants in and around the medical compound. The military says it has killed scores of fighters, including senior Ha-

mas operatives. It said Sunday it had found numerous weapons hidden there.

Only a third of Gaza's hospitals are even partially functioning, while Israeli strikes kill and wound scores of people every day.

Doctors say they are often forced to treat patients on hospital floors because all the beds are taken, and to operate without anesthetic and other crucial medical supplies.

Those wounded in Sunday's strike lay on the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital floor and gasped while being treated, one clutching at the underside of a stretcher that held someone else.

An international team of doc-

tors who recently visited the hospital said they were horrified by the war's impact on Palestinian children. The World Health Organization director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, says around 9,000 patients urgently need to be evacuated abroad for lifesaving care.

Not far from Shifa Hospital in Gaza City, dozens of Palestinian Christians gathered at the Holy Family Church to celebrate Easter, with incense wafting through the rare building that appeared untouched by war. "We are here with sadness," attendee Winnie Tarazi said. About 600 people shelter in the compound.

Russia launches attacks on Ukraine infrastructure

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A Russian cruise missile strike on infrastructure in Ukraine's western Lviv region killed one man, while another man died in an attack in the northeast officials said Sunday.

The attack in Lviv destroyed a building and sparked a fire, Gov. Maksym Kozitskyi wrote on social media app Telegram. He said that rescue operations were being conducted.

In the Kharkiv region, Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said that an air attack killed a 19-year-old man

Sunday after a projectile hit a gas station.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands in Ukraine's Odesa region were left without power Sunday after debris from a downed Russian drone caused a blaze at an energy facility, Gov. Oleh Kiper said. Some 170,000 homes suffered power outages as a result of the attack, said Ukraine's largest private electric utility operator, DTEK.

The Ukrainian air force said that it shot down nine of the 11 Shahed-type drones launched by Russia overnight, as well as

nine out of 14 cruise missiles.

Russia has escalated its attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure in recent days, causing significant damage in several regions.

Ukrainian energy company Centrenergy announced Saturday that the Zmiiv Thermal Power Plant, one of the largest in the northeastern Kharkiv region, was completely destroyed following Russian shelling last week. Power outage schedules were still in place for around 120,000 people in the region, where 700,000 had lost electric-

ity after the plant was hit on March 22.

In a message Sunday to mark the date when some of Ukraine's Christians celebrate Easter, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged the country to persevere.

"There is not a day or night right now when Russian terror does not try to shatter our lives. Last night, we once again saw rockets and Shaheds launched against our people," he said. "We defend ourselves, we persevere; our spirit does not give up."

\$20 minimum wage for Calif. fast food workers to start

Associated Press

LIVERMORE, Calif. — Most fast food workers in California will be paid at least \$20 an hour beginning Monday when a new law is scheduled to kick in giving more financial security to a historically low-paying profession while threatening to raise prices in a state already known for its high cost of living.

Democrats in the state Legislature passed the law last year in part as an acknowledgment that many of the more than 500,000 people who work in fast food restaurants are not teenagers earning some spending money, but adults working to support their families.

That includes immigrants like Ingrid Vilorio, who said she

started working at a McDonald's shortly after arriving in the United States in 2019. Fast food was her full-time job until last year. Now, she works about eight hours per week at a Jack in the Box while working other jobs.

"The \$20 raise is great. I wish this would have come sooner," Vilorio said through a transla-

tor. "Because I would not have been looking for so many other jobs in different places."

The law was supported by the trade association representing fast food franchise owners. But since it passed, many franchise owners have bemoaned the impact the law is having on them, especially during California's slowing economy.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

County issues disaster declaration for eclipse

TX KAUFMAN COUNTY — A North Texas county issued a disaster declaration ahead of the April 8 solar eclipse, warning of traffic and potential gridlock as the celestial event ends.

Kaufman County Judge Jakie Allen issued the declaration due to “projected and expected number of visitors,” according to a news release from the county’s Office of Emergency Management. County officials are expecting 200,000 people in attendance — nearly double its population — to view the total eclipse as Kaufman and Terrell are in the path of totality.

For several months, law enforcement, fire, emergency response agencies and many others had held meetings to prepare for the eclipse, with their greatest concern being traffic and gridlock. The declaration will last four days from April 5 until April 9.

Ex-Gov. Ventura says he will sell cannabis edibles

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Former Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura has announced he is entering the cannabis market as a seller, as the state still figures out retail sales of the drug on the heels of legalizing marijuana for adults last year.

Ventura is launching his own brand of cannabis edibles in partnership with Retro Bakery, which is based in suburban Minneapolis and producing hemp-derived THC edibles under the Jesse Ventura Farms brand, Minnesota Public Radio

reported.

“I’m a huge supporter of the cannabis industry,” Ventura said in a Wednesday video with rock music playing in the background. “Cannabis saved my family’s life. And now it’s time for me to return to the cannabis world. And you can join me — Jesse Ventura and Ventura Farms — any time you want. We’re in the game.”

Ventura has said the drug helped his wife get her seizures under control, MPR reported. Retro Bakery said the Ventura-branded edibles will be available for pre-order on April 1.

30 Lahaina fire survivors move into housing daily

HI HONOLULU — Hawaii Gov. Josh Green said last week some 3,000 people displaced by Lahaina’s wildfires are still living in hotels more than seven months after the August blaze but that up to 30 people are moving to longer-term housing each day.

Green told a news conference the state and federal government have lined up sufficient long-term rental units to shelter everyone who is currently in one of 11 hotels still housing survivors. The state and federal governments are also building modular transitional housing units. Green said he expects all displaced residents will leave the hotels by July 1.

Nearly 8,000 Lahaina residents were living in 40 hotels in the days immediately after the fire.

State to make porn sites verify visitors’ ages

KS TOPEKA — Kansas is poised to require pornography websites to verify

visitors are adults, a move that would follow Texas and a handful of other states despite concerns about privacy and how broadly the law could be applied.

The Republican-controlled Kansas Legislature passed the proposal last week, sending it to Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly. The House voted for it 92-31 and the Senate approved it unanimously last month. Kelly hasn’t announced her plans, but she typically signs bills with bipartisan backing, and supporters have enough votes to override a veto.

At least eight states have enacted age-verification laws since 2022 — Texas, Arkansas, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Utah and Virginia — and lawmakers have introduced proposals in more than 20 other states. Weeks ago, a federal appeals court upheld the Texas age-verification requirement as constitutional.

Regulators worry about radioactive waste plans

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Federal officials last week gathered to mark the 25th anniversary of the nation’s only underground repository for radioactive waste resulting from decades of nuclear research and bomb making.

Carved out of an ancient salt formation about half a mile deep, the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant outside Carlsbad has taken in around 13,850 shipments from more than a dozen national laboratories and other sites since 1999.

The anniversary comes as New Mexico raises concerns about the federal government’s plans for repackaging and ship-

ping to WIPP a collection of drums filled with the same kind of materials that prompted a radiation release at the repository in 2014.

That mishap contaminated parts of the underground facility and forced an expensive, nearly three-year closure. It also delayed the federal government’s multibillion-dollar cleanup program and prompted policy changes at labs and other sites across the U.S.

Meanwhile, dozens of boxes containing drums of nuclear waste that were packed at the Los Alamos National Laboratory to be stored at WIPP were rerouted to Texas, where they’ve remained ever since at an above-ground holding site.

Berkeley to halt ban on natural gas piping

CA BERKELEY — The city of Berkeley has agreed to halt enforcement of a ban on natural gas piping in new homes and buildings that was successfully opposed in court by the California Restaurant Association, the organization said.

The settlement follows the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals’ refusal to reconsider a 2023 ruling that the ban violates federal law that gives the U.S. government the authority to set energy-efficiency standards for appliances, the association said in a statement last week.

The restaurant association said Berkeley agreed to settle the case by taking steps to repeal its ordinance, but because the process will take months, the city will immediately stop enforcing the ban to comply with the court ruling.

— From wire reports

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Connecticut stays on course to repeat

Associated Press

BOSTON — Thirty points in a row — that's quite a run.

The NCAA Tournament streak UConn is putting together is pretty, pretty impressive, too.

The defending national champion Huskies scored 30 straight points to power their way back to the Final Four on Saturday night, steamrolling Illinois 77-52 — a March Madness record 10th straight double-digit victory for the top-seeded team.

Donovan Clingan had 22 points, 10 rebounds and five blocked shots, and UConn scored the first 25 points of the second half to turn a five-point lead into a blowout. The Huskies, who cruised to their fifth national title last year, seem inexorably headed for a sixth: Their NCAA Tournament wins this year have come by 39, 17, 30 and 25 points.

"We're going to be tough to beat," UConn coach Dan Hur-

ley said. "It was a special level of basketball that we were playing."

Actor Bill Murray, whose son, Luke, is a Huskies assistant coach, watched the game from a courtside seat and took video of the postgame celebration, where his grandchildren were showered with confetti. "Curb Your Enthusiasm" star Larry David was also part of a heavily partisan crowd the Huskies (35-3) called "Storrs North" for the East Region games that were played about 90 miles from campus.

UConn, which won the Big East Tournament at Madison Square Garden and advanced to the Sweet 16 in Brooklyn, will now get on an airplane for the first time in almost a month and head to the Final Four outside of Phoenix. It will face West Region champion Alabama, which advanced with an 89-82 victory over Clemson later Saturday night.

The Huskies, who set a school record for victories in a season, are the first defending champs to make it back to the national semifinals since Florida won back-to-back titles in 2006 and '07.

That's still a possibility for UConn, too.

"It's not about really trying to win No. 6 or go back-to-back," Hurley said. "It's this time of year, you love your team and you can't imagine what it would be like to not get up the next day and still coach your team. It's what you learn when you win the way we've won: It really is about the work, the journey, the process."

Marcus Domask scored 17 points — 15 in the first half — for Illinois (29-9), and star Terrence Shannon Jr. was held to eight points on 2-for-12 shooting. Shannon, who scored 29 points in Thursday night's Sweet 16 victory over Iowa State and played much of

the season while facing a rape charge in Kansas, snapped a string of 41 straight games scoring in double digits.

Illinois, which had the most efficient offense in the country this season, shot 25% (17-for-67) and scored a season-low 52 points.

Cam Spencer had his first career double-double, scoring 11 points with 12 rebounds for UConn, which reached the Elite Eight with a 30-point win over San Diego State on Thursday night. Hassan Diarra scored 11 and Alex Karaban had 10 points for the Huskies.

But the big problem for third-seeded Illinois was the 7-foot-2 Clingan.

The Fighting Illini (29-9) managed just four points in the first half when Clingan was in the game, with the Connecticut native recording nine points, six rebounds and three blocks before the break. Overall, they were 0-for-19 on shots challenged by Clingan.

Alabama tops Clemson, makes its first-ever Final Four

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Every time Clemson tried to cut down its deficit, Alabama fired up a 3-pointer. Over and over and in such quick succession that the Crimson Tide looked like a video game.

Mark Sears made seven 3-pointers and Alabama recovered from its early long-distance woes with 16 3s to beat Clemson 89-82 on Saturday night, sending the Tide to the Final Four for the first time.

"Man, just feeling a lot of emotion," said Sears, the only Alabama native on the team. "Being from the state of Alabama and to do it with this group of guys, it's amazing."

The Tide (25-11) will face defending national champion UConn in Glendale, Ariz., next Saturday. Alabama knocked off top-seeded North Carolina to reach the Elite Eight.

Sears' 3-pointers were one off his career high. He finished with 23 points and was named the Most Outstanding Player of the NCAA Tournament's West Region.

Freshman Jarin Stevenson airballed a couple of 3s in the first half, when Alabama missed 12 of its first 13 from long range. He ended up making a career-high five 3s and had 19 points off the bench.

"We don't win this game without him," Sears said. "Jarin hit 3 after 3 after 3 and kept us in this ballgame. He was huge."

Tide coach Nate Oats added, "Jarin grew up tonight."

The Tide donned red T-shirts with the entirely appropriate slogan "Net Worthy" as they celebrated while a bucket of red-and-white confetti was dumped on them. Oats walked into the postgame news conference wearing the net around his neck.

Clemson (24-12) was seeking its first Final Four appearance, too, in a matchup of schools better known for their national championship football teams.

Joseph Girard III led Clemson with 19 points, and Ian Schieffelin had 18 points and 11 rebounds.

The Tide buried the Tigers in an ava-

lanche of 10 3s in the second half to pull away. Sears hit a 3, then turned and put his fingers to his lips. After he sank the Tide's eighth 3 of the half, Sears playfully stuck out his tongue and nodded his head as he ran up the court.

"I live for those moments. This is what March Madness is about," Sears said. "When you're a kid, you want to be in these moments. It feels like my dream came true today. My dream definitely came true today."

Clemson had allowed only 14 3-pointers in its first three March Madness games.

"They get those 3s up fast and it seems like they'll never miss," Girard said.

The Tide were shooting before the Tigers could get back downcourt and set their zone defense.

"There's not very many teams that play that way," Clemson coach Brad Brownell said.

The Tigers tried desperately to keep up and finished 8-for-26 from 3-point range.

Braves pound 19 hits, hammer Phillies

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Ozzie Albies, Matt Olson, Marcell Ozuna and Michael Harris II all homered and an expected battle of aces fizzled early in the Atlanta Braves' 12-4 win over the Philadelphia Phillies on Saturday.

A 14-game winner in 2021 and 2022, Atlanta's Max Fried lasted only seven batters, walked three and got just two outs before he was chased in the first inning trailing 3-2.

No worries for the Braves.

Philadelphia's Aaron Nola was even worse.

In the right-hander's first regular-season start since he signed a seven-year, \$172 million deal to stay with the Phillies, Nola (0-1) had one of the worst outings of his career. He surrendered homers to Albies and Olson as part of the 12 hits he gave up in just 4⅓ innings. Nola allowed seven runs on another blustery day in front of 44,068 fans expecting a pitchers' duel.

The Braves battered Nola — who had made six straight opening-day starts — and five

more Phillies pitchers for 19 hits a day after the NL East champs scored seven runs in the eighth inning of a 9-3 win in the season opener.

Yankees 5, Astros 3: Oswaldo Cabrera hit a tying two-run homer in the seventh, Juan Soto had a go-ahead drive for his first homer and visiting New York rallied for the third straight game in a win over Houston.

Rangers 11, Cubs 2: Jared Walsh homered in his first at-bat for Texas after watching his new teammates get their World Series rings, and host Texas beat Chicago.

Giants 9, Padres 6: Michael Conforto hit a grand slam, rookie Jung Hoo Lee hit his first big league home run and Jordan Hicks won his San Francisco debut, beating Dylan Cease and host San Diego.

Rays 5, Blue Jays 1: Randy Arozarena homered and drove in two runs, celebrating his solo shot by signing autographs for fans after returning to the dugout, to lead host Tampa Bay to a victory over Toronto.

Orioles 13, Angels 4: Gunnar Henderson homered lead-

ing off the bottom of the first inning, and then added a two-run triple in Baltimore's nine-run sixth as it pounded Los Angeles for a second straight game.

Brewers 7, Mets 6: Rhys Hoskins drove in four runs, a day after his hard slide into Jeff McNeil caused dugouts to empty, and Yohan Ramírez was ejected for throwing behind the Milwaukee designated hitter's back in the visiting Brewers' victory over New York.

Pirates 9, Marlins 3: Jared Jones struck out 10 in 5⅓ innings to win his major league debut and lead visiting Pittsburgh over Miami.

Twins 5, Royals 1: Byron Buxton drove in the tying run in the eighth inning, Christian Vázquez drove in the go-ahead run to start off a four-run ninth, and visiting Minnesota rallied for a victory over Kansas City.

Tigers 7, White Sox 6 (10): Carson Kelly hit run-scoring singles in the seventh and 10th innings, helping visiting Detroit rally for a victory.

Nationals 7, Reds 6: Eddie Rosario capped a three-run ninth inning off All-Star closer

Alexis Díaz with a tiebreaking sacrifice fly, and visiting Washington beat Cincinnati.

Kyle Finnegan pitched around a walk in the bottom half for the save as the Nationals rebounded from an opening 8-2 loss on Thursday.

Guardians 12, Athletics 3: Bay area native Steven Kwan homered and reached base four times, and visiting Cleveland had 15 hits in a rout of Oakland before a crowd of just 5,425.

Rockies 9, Diamondbacks 4: Charlie Blackmon had two hits and two RBIs, Nolan Jones hit a two-run triple and visiting Colorado used a five-run fifth inning to beat Arizona.

Mariners 4, Red Sox 3 (10): Julio Rodriguez hit a walk-off RBI single in the bottom of the 10th inning, and Seattle starter Logan Gilbert allowed just one run in seven innings in a victory over Boston.

Cardinals 6, Dodgers 5 (10): Paul Goldschmidt drove in the go-ahead run in the 10th inning with a groundout after Mookie Betts homered again to help host Los Angeles tie it in the ninth, and St. Louis prevailed.

Tatum, Celtics pull away in third quarter, top Pelicans

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Jayson Tatum scored 23 points and the Boston Celtics rebounded from back-to-back losses to Atlanta, pulling away in the third quarter for a 104-92 win over the New Orleans Pelicans on Saturday.

Kristaps Porzingis added 19 points, 10 rebounds and four blocked shots and Jaylen Brown scored 17 as the Celtics, who at 58-16 have the NBA's best record, avoided what would have been their first three-game skid of the year.

Derrick White had 15 points and Jrue Holiday had 13 points, seven assists and eight rebounds.

Zion Williamson scored 25 for New Orleans and CJ McCollum added 24.

Porzingis said stopping the two-game skid — only the Celtics' third losing streak

of the season — was less important than simply playing well.

"Last year Denver lost four in a row at one point, and I think the team that won before that lost five in a row," he said. "But winning is a nice habit for sure."

Ahead 59-57 at halftime, Boston took control in the third quarter, limiting New Orleans to 11 points while Porzingis had two of his blocks. The Celtics went ahead 79-68 on Tatum's 3-pointer with 4:12 left in the quarter and led by double digits the rest of the way, going up by 22 in the fourth quarter.

Magic 118, Grizzlies 88: Wendell Carter Jr. had 15 points and 13 rebounds, Jalen Suggs and Cole Anthony added 15 points each and host Orlando broke a three-game losing streak with a rout of Memphis.

A day after committing two late turnovers and blaming himself for a loss to the

Los Angeles Clippers, Paolo Banchero sat out the fourth quarter and finished with 13 points, nine rebounds and seven assists.

The win moved the Magic a game and a half behind New York in the race for the fourth Eastern Conference playoff spot. With eight games left in the regular season, the Magic are in fifth place, 1½ up on Indiana and 2½ up on Miami. Their 43 wins are the most for the franchise since 2010-11.

Bucks 122, Hawks 113: Giannis Antetokounmpo had six dunks while scoring 36 points and visiting Milwaukee overcame Bogdan Bogdanovic's 38 points to end Atlanta's four-game winning streak.

Antetokounmpo added 16 rebounds and Khriston Middleton scored 21 points as the Bucks snapped a two-game losing streak.

Dejounte Murray had 20 points, 12 assists and eight rebounds.

Iowa, LSU set up rematch of title game

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Let the hype begin!

Caitlin Clark had 29 points and 15 assists to lead top-seeded Iowa to an 89-68 win over fifth-seeded Colorado in the women's NCAA Tournament on Saturday, setting up a rematch of last year's national title game against LSU.

"I think we're excited. Anytime you have a chance to go up against somebody you lost to, it brings a little more energy," Clark said. "I think overall it's just going to be a really great game for women's basketball. They're really solid one through five. We know we are going to have to rebound the basketball."

The Tigers, who beat the Hawkeyes in the championship game a year ago, topped UCLA in Saturday's earlier semifinal in the Albany 2 Region. The teams will play Monday night.

"I think everyone's pretty excited for it," Iowa coach Lisa Bluder said. "These are two really good basketball teams. Unfortunately they are meeting this early. Everyone that's left now is really good. LSU is certainly that. It's going to be highly emotional and highly competitive."

Clark got the Hawkeyes (32-4) going early, driving to the basket for easy layups or throwing fantastic passes. About the only thing missing from Clark's day was one of her signature midcourt logo shots. She took a couple, but missed.

She finished the first half with 15 points and eight assists as the Hawkeyes were up 48-35 at the break.

Iowa scored the first six points of the third quarter and Colorado (24-10) could not get within single digits the rest of the way.

LSU 78, UCLA 69: Angel

Reese says the Tigers are embracing the role of "good villains" as they make a run toward repeating as national champions.

Flau'jae Johnson had 24 points and 12 rebounds and Reese put up her 26th double-double of the season as LSU (31-5) advanced to the Elite 8.

Reese had 16 points and 11 rebounds before fouling out late in the game for the Tigers, who closed the game on a 14-2 run. Aneesah Morrow had 17 points and Mikaylah Williams added 12.

USC 74, Baylor 70: Freshman All-American JuJu Watkins drove the length of the floor for a go-ahead three-point play with 3:13 left and finished with 30 points, leading the top-seeded Trojans into the Elite Eight of for the first time since 1994.

Watkins scored nine straight points for USC in the closing

minutes and powered a decisive 8-0 run. McKenzie Forbes added 14 points for USC (29-5), which will face third-seeded UConn on Monday in the Portland 3 Region final for a spot in the Final Four.

UConn 53, Duke 45: Paige Bueckers scored 24 points to lead the third-seeded and injury-depleted Huskies back to the Elite Eight.

A year after having to watch March Madness while sidelined by a knee injury, Bueckers was again the best player on the floor, lifting the Huskies into their 28th regional final. And this one will be among the more unlikely in coach Geno Auriemma's 39-year tenure.

UConn dressed eight players and played only six. But it still has Bueckers, the 2021 national player of the year who has returned to that form after injuries limited or sidelined her for most of the past two seasons.

Bobrovsky helps Panthers edge Red Wings in SO

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sam Reinhart scored the lone shootout goal and Aleksander Barkov scored twice in regulation to lead Florida over Detroit 3-2 on Saturday.

Sergei Bobrovsky showed up big in the shootout and made 20 saves for Florida, which had lost six of seven games coming into this one. Now, they sit tied with the Boston Bruins for the top seed in the Atlantic Division.

Dylan Larkin, who exited 28 seconds into the game after taking a shot to the inside of the knee, returned and scored a game-tying goal in the final minutes of the third period for the Red Wings.

Barkov responded with two goals in the third period.

Golden Knights 2, Wild 1 (OT): Jonathan Marchessault scored into an empty net 3:30 into overtime to give visiting Ve-

gas a victory over Minnesota.

Oilers 6, Ducks 1: Connor McDavid scored two goals and added an assist to take the lead in points this season as host Edmonton dumped Anaheim.

Rangers 8, Coyotes 5: Alexis Lafreniere had three goals and two assists, Jonathan Quick broke the victory record for U.S.-born goalies and NHL-leading New York reached 50 wins, beating host Arizona.

Avalanche 7, Predators 4: Nathan MacKinnon had two goals and two assists, Yakov Trenin got the go-ahead goal against his former team, and host Colorado rallied to clinch a playoff spot.

Maple Leafs 3, Sabres 0: Toronto center Auston Matthews became the NHL's first two-time 60-goal scorer in 30 years, scoring with 5:37 left in his team's victory over host Buffalo.

Blue Jackets 4, Penguins 3

(SO): Alexandre Texier and Damon Severson scored in the shootout and host Columbus broke a six-game losing streak with a victory over Pittsburgh.

Hurricanes 3, Canadiens 0: Pyotr Kochetkov made 26 saves for his fourth shutout of the season to help visiting Carolina beat Montreal.

Blackhawks 5, Flyers 1: Connor Bedard had an assist to increase his rookie-leading points total, Philipp Kurashev, Joey Anderson and Lukas Reichel each added a goal and an assist and visiting Chicago defeated Philadelphia.

Lightning 4, Islanders 1: Steven Stamkos reached the 30-goal mark for the ninth time in his career and host Tampa Bay beat New York to extend its point streak to nine games.

Senators 3, Jets 2: Brady Tkachuk scored the winning goal on the power play with 1:45

left in the game to give visiting Ottawa a victory over Winnipeg.

Bruins 3, Capitals 2 (SO): Hampus Lindholm scored a goal at one end, prevented one at the other and visiting Boston beat Washington in a shootout in a potential first-round playoff preview.

Sharks 4, Blues 0: Filip Zadina and Mikael Granlund scored goals just 27 seconds apart and visiting San Jose dealt a damaging blow to St. Louis' slim playoff chances with a win.

Flames 4, Kings 2: Nazem Kadri had a goal and an assist, Jacob Markstrom made 16 saves and host Calgary beat Los Angeles to end a five-game losing streak.

Stars 3, Kraken 0: Wyatt Johnston had a goal and an assist, Jake Oettinger had his second shutout of the season and visiting Dallas beat Seattle for its seventh straight win.