

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2025

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US resumes arms deliveries to Ukraine

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — U.S. arms deliveries to Ukraine resumed Wednesday, officials said, a day after the Trump administration lifted its suspension of military aid for Kyiv in its fight against Russia's invasion, and Ukrainian officials signaled that they were open to a 30-day ceasefire backed by Washington.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Wednesday that it's important not to "get ahead" of the question of responding to the ceasefire proposal. He told reporters that Moscow is awaiting "detailed information" about it from the U.S. and suggested that Russia must get that first before it can take a position.

Arms deliveries to Ukraine have already resumed through a Polish logistics center, the foreign ministers of Ukraine and Poland announced Wednesday. The deliveries go through a NATO and U.S. hub in the eastern

Polish city of Rzeszow that has been used to ferry Western weapons into neighboring Ukraine about 45 miles away.

The American military help is vital for Ukraine's shorthanded and weary army, which is having a tough time keeping Russia's bigger military force at bay. But for Moscow, more American aid spells potentially more difficulty in achieving its war aims and likely will be a tough sell in Moscow for Washington's peace efforts.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Wednesday that Washington will pursue "multiple points of contacts" with Russia to see if President Vladimir Putin is ready to negotiate an end to the war. He declined to give details.

"The ball is truly in their court," Rubio said at a refueling stopover in Shannon, Ireland, on his way to talks in Canada with other Group of Seven leading in-

dustrialized nations.

Rubio said he hoped to see Russia stop attacks on Ukraine within the next few days as a first step.

"We don't think it's constructive to stand here today and say what we're going to do if Russia says no," Rubio said, adding he wanted to avoid statements about Russia that "are abrasive in any way."

His comments came amid intensifying Russian effort to push Ukrainian forces out of its Kursk region that has yielded breakthroughs in recent days, Ukrainian soldiers told The Associated Press. The fighting has escalated as ceasefire talks come to a head, with Moscow intent on taking back its territory and Kyiv determined to hold onto it as a bargaining chip in any negotiations.

Ukrainian forces made a daring raid into the Russian region last August in the first foreign occupation of Russian territory

since World War II. They have held on despite intense pressure from tens of thousands of Russian and North Korean troops.

Recent fighting reportedly has focused on the Kursk town of Sudzha, which is a key Ukrainian supply hub and operational base. Ukrainian soldiers said the situation is dynamic and fighting continues in and around the town, but three of them conceded Russian forces were making headway.

Russian state news agencies RIA Novosti and Tass reported Wednesday that the Russian military have entered Sudzha. It wasn't possible to independently verify either side's claims.

Inside Ukraine, Russian ballistic missiles killed at least five civilians, officials said Wednesday.

President Donald Trump wants to end the three-year war and pressured Zelensky to enter talks.

Experts say higher pay needed for shipyard workers

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The resurrection of military shipbuilding in the U.S. will hinge on improving wages and benefits for workers at shipyards, Navy officials and experts said Tuesday as lawmakers raised fears of cuts to shipyard workforces.

Experts testifying before a House Armed Services Committee subpanel cited labor shortages due to poor pay as the main reason for the Navy's yearslong struggle to build ships on time and on budget.

Cost overruns for 46 ships that the Navy has under construction grew from \$3.4 billion to \$10.4 billion in the past budget year while delays for certain naval vessels have stretched up to three years.

"Nothing is more important than addressing the critical labor shortages that afflict all of the shipbuilding and public maintenance

yards," said Eric Labs, a senior analyst for naval forces and weapons at the Congressional Budget Office.

The assessment comes as President Donald Trump's administration seeks to revitalize commercial and military shipbuilding to compete with China while also substantially reducing the Defense Department's civilian workforce.

Democratic lawmakers have expressed concerns in recent weeks that the pending cuts will result in the loss of shipyard employees who are already hard to keep in the job. Retention of critical tradesmen such as welders, shipfitters and pipefitters is especially difficult, Labs said.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., said Tuesday that she voted against advancing Trump's nominee for Navy secretary, John Phelan, because workers at the Navy's Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine have not been exempt

ed from "ill-considered layoffs."

The naval yard largely works on the overhaul, repair and modernization of submarines and must hire about 550 workers annually to keep pace with national security goals, according to Shaheen.

Recruitment at shipyards has been difficult for years, Labs said. Few workers are willing to toil in hot, cold, dirty and unpleasant conditions for \$20 to \$21 per hour when Subway offers \$18 per hour with benefits, he said.

"The differential between retail or even other manufacturing sectors in the areas that surround the shipyard has got to be much, much greater than it currently is," Labs said.

Brett Seidle, the assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said labor issues are the No. 1 problem facing shipbuilding and raising wages by three or four times would motivate people to apply.

Houthi again threaten 'any Israeli vessels'

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels warned shippers early Wednesday that "any Israeli vessel" traveling through nearby Middle East waters is now a target as Israel continues to block aid to the Gaza Strip.

The warning from the Houthis again throws into chaos a crucial maritime waterway between Asia and Europe, threatens revenue from Egypt's Suez Canal and possibly will halt aid shipments to war zones.

The rebels in the past have also had a loose definition of what constitutes an Israeli ship, meaning other vessels could be targeted as well.

The statement from the Houthis' Humanitarian Oper-

ations Coordination Center follows a four-day deadline set by the rebels for Israel to resume aid shipments.

"We hope it is understood that the actions taken by the (Houthi military) ... stem from a deep sense of religious, humanitarian and moral responsibility toward the oppressed Palestinian people and aim to pressure the Israeli usurper entity to reopen the crossings to the Gaza Strip and allow the entry of aid, including food and medical supplies," the statement said.

It described the warning as taking hold in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and the Arabian Sea.

The statement added: "Any Israeli vessel attempting to violate this ban will be subject to

military targeting in the declared operational area."

There was no immediate sign of an attack on ships.

Israel earlier this month halted all aid coming into the Gaza Strip and has warned of "additional consequences" for Hamas if the fragile ceasefire in the war isn't extended as negotiations continue over starting a second phase of the pause in fighting.

The move drew intense international criticism as even before the war the over 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza relied on international aid, something that's only intensified after a grinding Israeli military offensive destroyed the enclave.

The maritime security firm

Ambrey warned the statements from the Houthis were "ambiguous," likely putting more ships at risk.

It's "likely to have extended once more toward ships partially owned by Israeli individuals or entities, vessels managed and/or operated by Israeli individuals or entities, vessels heading to Israel and to ships of companies that call Israel," the firm said.

There was no direct threat made against the U.S. Navy, whose Bahrain-based 5th Fleet patrols the Mideast.

However, the earlier Houthi campaign saw American and Western warships repeatedly targeted, sparking the most-serious combat the Navy had seen since World War II.

Ship captain arrested on suspicion of manslaughter

Associated Press

LONDON — The captain of a cargo ship that collided with a U.S. tanker is a Russian national who remains in U.K. police custody, the vessel's owner said Wednesday, as it emerged that the ship failed several safety checks last year.

The 59-year-old man, who hasn't been named by authorities, was arrested by police in northeast England on Tuesday on suspicion of manslaughter by gross negligence over the collision. He hasn't been charged.

Shipping company Ernst Russ, which owns the Portugal-flagged cargo vessel Solong, said that the ship's 14 crew were a mix of Russian and Filipino nationals.

U.K. authorities say they have so far found no evidence of foul play in the crash. Humber-side Police said that detectives

were conducting inquiries alongside partner agencies.

The U.K. Marine Accident Investigation Branch is also involved in investigating what caused the Solong, bound from Grangemouth, Scotland, to Rotterdam, Netherlands, to hit the stationary tanker, which was anchored about 10 miles off the English coast.

The investigation is being led by the U.S. and Portugal, the countries where the vessels are flagged.

Port inspection documents show the Solong failed steering-related safety checks in Dublin, Ireland, in July, with the vessel's "emergency steering position communication/compass reading" unreadable.

Inspectors found a total of 10 deficiencies, including "inadequate" alarms, survival craft "not properly maintained" and fire doors "not as required."

Blaze breaks out on ship towing airfield materials

BY BRIAN McELHINEY
AND KEISHI KOJA
Stars and Stripes

A fire broke out Tuesday aboard a ship towing construction materials for a new Marine Corps airfield in northern Okinawa, but no injuries or environmental damage were reported, according to Japan's coast guard and local media.

The blaze began around 6 a.m. about 10 miles east-southeast of Cape Henoko in Nago city, the coast guard said in a news release Tuesday. The vessel, Marumasa 1, was towing a barge loaded with sand when oil leaked from its engine room, sparking the fire.

The sand was intended for the airfield under construction at Camp Schwab, the Okinawa Times reported Wednesday.

A spokesman for the Okinawa Defense Bureau, an arm of

Japan's Ministry of Defense, declined to comment, stating that Marumasa 1 was not directly contracted by the bureau.

"We will proceed with construction carefully," he said by phone Wednesday. Some Japanese government officials speak to the media only on condition of anonymity.

Crew members extinguished the fire, and the ship's captain reported the incident to the coast guard at 6:08 a.m., according to the news release. However, the vessel was left unable to navigate on its own.

A tugboat began towing Marumasa 1 to Kin Bay at 10:05 a.m., accompanied by the coast guard vessel Awagumo. The vessel anchored in the bay at around 1:30 p.m.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, the coast guard said.

Education Department cuts half its staff

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Education Department plans to lay off more than 1,300 of its employees as part of an effort to halve the organization's staff — a prelude to President Donald Trump's plan to dismantle the agency.

Department officials announced the cuts Tuesday, raising questions about the agency's ability to continue usual operations.

The Trump administration had already been whittling the agency's staff through buyout offers and terminations of probationary employees. After Tuesday's layoffs, the Education Department's staff will sit at half of its previous 4,100, the agency said.

The layoffs are part of a dramatic downsizing directed by Trump as he moves to reduce

the footprint of the federal government. Thousands of jobs are expected to be cut across the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Social Security Administration and other agencies.

The department is also terminating leases on buildings in cities including New York, Boston, Chicago and Cleveland, officials said.

Department officials said it would continue to deliver on its key functions such as the distribution of federal aid to schools, student loan management and oversight of Pell Grants.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon said when she got to the department, she wanted to reduce bloat to be able to send more money to local education authorities.

"So many of the programs are really excellent, so we need to

make sure the money goes to the states," McMahon said in an interview Tuesday on Fox News.

McMahon told employees to brace for profound cuts in a memo issued March 3, the day she was confirmed by the Senate. She said it was the department's "final mission" to eliminate bureaucratic bloat and turn over the agency's authority to states.

The department sent an email to employees Tuesday telling them its Washington headquarters and regional offices would be closed Wednesday, with access forbidden, before reopening Thursday. The only explanations given for the closures were unspecified "security reasons."

Trump campaigned on a promise to close the department, saying it had been overtaken by "radicals, zealots and Marxists." At McMahon's con-

fimation hearing, she acknowledged only Congress has the power to abolish the agency but said it might be due for cuts and a reorganization.

Whether the cuts will be felt by America's students — as Democrats and advocates fear — is yet to be seen. Already there are concerns the administration's agenda has pushed aside some of the agency's most fundamental work, including the enforcement of civil rights for students with disabilities and the management of \$1.6 trillion in federal student loans.

Even before the layoffs, the Education Department was among the smallest Cabinet-level agencies. Its workforce included 3,100 people in Washington and an additional 1,100 at regional offices across the country, according to a department website.

Trump's tariffs on aluminum, steel imports go into effect

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump openly challenged U.S. allies on Wednesday by increasing tariffs on all steel and aluminum imports to 25% as he vowed to take back wealth "stolen" by other countries, drawing quick retaliation from Europe and Canada.

The Republican president's use of tariffs to extract concessions from other nations points toward a possibly destructive trade war and a stark change in America's approach to global leadership. It also has destabilized the stock market and stoked anxiety about an economic downturn.

"The United States of America is going to take back a lot of what was stolen from it by other countries and, frankly, by incompetent U.S. leadership," Trump told reporters on Wednesday. "We're going to take back our wealth, and we're going to take back a lot of the companies that left."

Trump removed all exemptions from his 2018 tariffs on the metals, in addition to increasing the tariffs on aluminum from 10%. His moves, based off a February directive, are part of a broader effort to disrupt and transform global commerce.

He has separate tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China, with plans to also tax imports from the European Union, Brazil and South Korea by charging "reciprocal" rates starting on April 2.

The EU announced its own countermeasures on Wednesday.

U.S. Trade Representative Jameson Greer responded by saying that the EU was punishing America instead of fixing what he viewed as excess capacity in steel and aluminum production.

Outside forecasts by the Yale University Budget Lab, Tax Policy Center and others suggest that U.S. families would have the costs of the taxes passed onto them in the form of higher prices.

Union sues after email tells USAID staff to destroy docs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A union for U.S. Agency for International Development contractors asked a federal judge Tuesday to intervene in any destruction of classified documents after an email ordered staffers to help burn and shred agency records.

Judge Carl Nichols set a Wednesday morning deadline for the plaintiffs and the government to brief him on the issue. A person familiar with the email said that it was sent to some essential personnel.

It comes as the Trump administration has been dismantling USAID, cutting off most federal funding and humanitarian and development programs abroad, pulling all but a few hundred staffers off the job and shutting down the agency's Washington headquarters.

Lawsuits are mounting over

the abrupt shutdown of most U.S. foreign assistance and the targeting of the aid agency.

In the latest court challenge, Personal Services Contractor Association, representing thousands of contractors now furloughed or fired from USAID, asked the judge to stop destruction to preserve evidence.

The email directed staffers to report to work starting Tuesday. "Shred as many documents first," then stuff remaining classified material into designated bags for burning if the demand on the shredder becomes too great.

A group representing USAID workers, the American Foreign Service Association, said in a statement that it feared documents being destroyed could be relevant to the ongoing lawsuits over USAID's firings and program terminations.

House passes funding bill as shutdown nears

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House passed legislation Tuesday to avert a partial government shutdown and fund federal agencies through September, providing critical momentum as the measure now moves to the Senate, where bipartisan support will be needed to get it over the finish line.

Republicans needed overwhelming support from their members to pass the funding measure, and they got it in the 217-213 House vote. Just one Republican, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, voted against

the measure. And just one Democratic lawmaker, Rep. Jared Golden of Maine, voted for it.

In the Senate, they'll need support from at least eight Democrats to get the bill to President Donald Trump's desk. It's one of the biggest legislative tests so far of the Republican president's second term, prompting Vice President JD Vance to visit Capitol Hill on Tuesday to rally support.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., moved ahead on the bill, essentially daring Democrats to oppose it and risk a shutdown that would begin Saturday if

lawmakers failed to act on the continuing resolution.

Lawmakers said the bill would trim \$13 billion in non-defense spending from the levels in the 2024 budget year and increase defense spending by \$6 billion, which are rather flat changes for both categories when compared with an overall topline of nearly \$1.7 trillion in discretionary spending. The bill does not cover the majority of government spending, including Social Security and Medicare. Funding for those is on autopilot and not regularly reviewed by Congress.

Democrats mostly worried about the discretion the bill gives the Trump administration on spending decisions. They are already alarmed by the administration's efforts to make major cuts through the Department of Government Efficiency run by billionaire Trump adviser Elon Musk. And they say the spending bill would fuel the effort.

Spending bills typically come with specific funding directives for key programs, but hundreds of those directives fall away under the legislation. So the administration will have more leeway to reshape priorities.

600 more troops deployed to US-Mexico border

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Another 600 Army and Air Force troops were announced Tuesday for deployments to the U.S. border with Mexico as President Donald Trump touted a dramatic decrease in migrants arrested for unauthorized entry into the country.

The latest deployment announcement included about 40 intelligence analysts from Air Force active-duty and Reserve units and about 590 engineers from the Army Corps of Engi-

neers and the 18th Airborne Corps, according to U.S. Northcom Command.

A timeline for these troops to deploy has not been determined.

This will bring the number of service members assigned to the federal border security mission to about 9,600.

The deployments are part of a southwest border mission to assist the Department of Homeland Security that began in 2018 during Trump's first term in office and continued under former President Joe Biden.

When Trump returned to the White House on Jan. 20, about 2,500 National Guard troops remained along the border.

Trump signed an executive order on his first day back to declare an emergency at the border and order additional active-duty service members be deployed to "seal the border."

People crossing between legal ports of entry peaked in December 2023, with federal agents recording nearly 302,000 migrants, according to Customs and Border Protection.

Numbers have declined since

then with the agency reporting more than 61,000 migrant crossings in January, the most recent official data available.

CBP officials haven't formally reported February data, but Trump said only 8,326 migrants were arrested last month.

Troops working with border agents do not typically interact directly with migrants but instead work in support roles such as detection and monitoring, data entry, training, transportation, vehicle maintenance, warehousing and logistical support.

Trump buys a new Tesla at White House to back Musk

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump shopped for a new Tesla on the White House driveway on Tuesday, selecting a shiny red sedan to show his support for Elon Musk's electric vehicle company as it faces blowback because of his work to advance the president's political agenda and downsize the federal government.

"Wow," Trump said as he eased his way into the driver's seat of a Model S. "That's beau-

tiful."

Musk got in on the passenger side and joked about "giving the Secret Service a heart attack" as they talked about how to start a vehicle that can reach 60 mph in a few seconds.

Trump told reporters that he would write a check for the car, which retails for roughly \$80,000, and leave it at the White House so his staff can drive it.

The president also said he hopes his purchase will boost

Tesla, which is struggling with sagging sales and declining stock prices.

It was the latest — and most unusual — example of how Trump has demonstrated loyalty to Musk, who spent heavily on his comeback campaign last year and has been a key figure in his second administration.

Tesla's stock price increased nearly 4% on Tuesday after dropping almost 48% since Trump took office in January.

Others have also rallied to

Musk's defense. Alex Jones, a prominent conspiracy theorist, said that he bought a customized version of a Cybertruck that he'll give away to a customer of his online store.

Presidents almost never drive for security reasons. Joe Biden got behind the wheel of an electric truck while promoting domestic manufacturing, and Barack Obama took a spin with Jerry Seinfeld in the White House driveway for a comedy show.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

State to be first to ban fluoride in drinking water

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Utah will become the first state to ban fluoride in public drinking water, despite widespread opposition from dentists and national health organizations.

Republican Gov. Spencer Cox said he would sign legislation that bars cities and communities from deciding whether to add the mineral to their water systems.

Fluoride strengthens teeth and reduces cavities by replacing minerals lost during normal wear and tear, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The addition of low levels of fluoride to drinking water has long been considered one of the greatest public health achievements of the last century.

The ban comes weeks after federal health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who has expressed skepticism about water fluoridation, was sworn into office.

15 hurt when school bus overturns on highway

NJ MONTVALE — A school bus carrying 31 people overturned on the Garden State Parkway in New Jersey, sending more than a dozen people to hospitals, officials said.

New Jersey State Police said 15 people, including the driver and 14 young people, were treated for injuries from the Monday night crash.

Gov. Phil Murphy said in a social media post that he had been briefed on the crash involving a bus from Lakewood. State po-

lice and the state Department of Transportation were on the scene and an investigation was ongoing, he said.

Montvale Mayor Mike Ghasali said in a social media post that no deaths were reported, but there was one serious injury — a 14-year-old boy who was pinned under the bus.

Judge's trial in wife's death ends in mistrial

CA SANTA ANA — The case of a Southern California judge charged with murder for fatally shooting his wife ended in a mistrial Monday after a jury was unable to reach a unanimous verdict.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Eleanor J. Hunter declared the mistrial in the case against now 74-year-old Orange County Superior Court Judge Jeffrey Ferguson.

Eleven of the 12 jurors had wanted to declare Ferguson guilty of second-degree murder, and prosecutors said they are prepared to retry the case.

Prosecutors said during trial that Ferguson shot his wife Sheryll with a handgun in 2023 while the couple was watching television at their home in Anaheim Hills after they had argued. Ferguson did not deny shooting his wife and testified that it was an accident.

Hunter scheduled a hearing Thursday on how to proceed.

Medical helo crash kills pilot, 2 hospital staffers

MS CANTON — A medical helicopter that crashed in a wooded area in Mississippi reported “a flight control problem” shortly before a Monday crash that killed all three people on board, federal

authorities said.

The pilot was going to attempt to land the helicopter in a field, according to radio traffic from the chopper to its company’s communications base. It crashed shortly after that and caught fire, authorities said.

Killed were crew members Jakob Kindt, 37, and Dustin Pope, 35, the University of Mississippi Medical Center said in a statement. The pilot, Cal Wesołowski, 62, who worked for a partner agency, also died.

The helicopter was returning to its base in Columbus, Miss., from a patient transport when it crashed in Madison County around 12:30 p.m. Monday, the University of Mississippi Medical Center’s vice chancellor for health affairs, Dr. LouAnn Woodward, said.

2,000 prison guards fired in wake of wildcat strike

NY ALBANY — New York fired more than 2,000 prison guards Monday for failing to return to work after a weeks-long wildcat strike that crippled the state’s correctional system, but said enough officers had come back on the job to declare the illegal work stoppage over.

Then on Tuesday, those prison guards were barred from being hired for other state jobs by Gov. Kathy Hochul as officials took steps to recover from a three-week wildcat strike that severely strained the corrections system.

The state and the guards’ union struck a new deal to end the strike this weekend, but it was contingent on at least 85% of staff returning to work by Monday morning.

Although the number return-

ing fell short of the 85% goal, Commissioner Daniel Martuscello said the state would honor the deal’s overtime and some other provisions.

He said the National Guard would remain in place at prisons in a support position while the department undertakes an aggressive recruiting campaign to attract additional employees.

LA DA won't back new sentence for Menendezes

CA LOS ANGELES — The district attorney of Los Angeles County said Monday that he does not support the resentencing of Lyle and Erik Menendez because the brothers have repeatedly lied about why they killed their parents at their Beverly Hills home in 1989.

Resentencing, which could make the brothers immediately eligible for parole, is just one of the pathways they are pursuing to walk free after their 1996 convictions for murder. District Attorney Nathan Hochman’s predecessor, who lost reelection, had backed resentencing, and advocates for the siblings had waited anxiously to see whether the new DA would do the same.

Hochman told reporters his decision hinged on the fact the brothers had failed to take “complete responsibility” for lies told as the case unfolded, including their original claim that they did not kill their parents.

He said their repeated argument that they shot their parents in self-defense does not match the facts of the case that show their premeditated steps to plan the killings and make it look like a gang hit.

— From wire reports

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Cavs clinch Central with 15th straight win

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — All-Star Darius Garland scored 18 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter and the NBA-leading Cleveland Cavaliers rallied for a 109-104 victory over the Brooklyn Nets on Tuesday night, matching the longest winning streak in franchise history at 15 games and clinching the Central Division.

Jarrett Allen had 23 points and 13 rebounds, and Evan Mobley had 21 points, nine rebounds and six assists for Cleveland, which also began this season with a 15-game win streak. The Cavaliers trailed by 18 points in the third quarter.

Cleveland is 55-10 — tying the fifth-best start in NBA history — and owns the best home record in

the league at 30-4. All-Star guard Donovan Mitchell (left groin soreness), forward De'Andre Hunter (illness) and guard Ty Jerome (rest) didn't dress for the game.

Pacers 115, Bucks 114: Tyrese Haliburton made a fade-away 3-pointer while being fouled and completed the four-point play with 3.4 seconds left, as host Indiana stunned Giannis Antetokounmpo and Milwaukee.

Haliburton ran along the left sideline, took an inbounds pass from Andrew Nembhard and launched a 3 while falling out of bounds, absorbing contact by Antetokounmpo, and the ball found the net with Haliburton sprawled on the floor in the corner.

After Haliburton made the free throw for a one-point lead, Antetokounmpo raced up the court and got off a clean 3-point try, but the shot fell short at the buzzer, and the Pacers drew even with the fourth-place Bucks in the Eastern Conference standings.

Pistons 123, Wizards 103:

Cade Cunningham had 27 points and 10 assists, and host Detroit beat NBA-worst Washington in a physical game that included two late flagrant fouls by the Wizards.

The Wizards' Richauna Holmes was ejected in the fourth quarter for throwing an elbow to the face of the Pistons' Ausar Thompson while securing a rebound. A few minutes later,

Washington's Marcus Smart was assessed a flagrant-1 foul for elbowing Detroit's Tim Hardaway Jr.

Pelicans 127, Clippers 120: Zion Williamson had 22 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds, and host New Orleans snapped a four-game slide with a victory over Los Angeles.

The Pelicans briefly lost a lead that was as large as 21 points in the first half, when the Clippers missed 13 of their first 14 3-point shots. But New Orleans rallied back in front late in the third quarter and held off LA thanks in large part to Williamson. He had 10 points, five rebounds and five assists in the fourth quarter, invigorating the crowd with one clutch play after another.

Defensive moves highlight second day of NFL free agency

Associated Press

The Philadelphia Eagles' top-ranked defense is getting a major makeover a month after winning the Super Bowl.

A day after defensive tackle Milton Williams and edge rusher Josh Sweat accepted offers to leave Philly via free agency, the champs agreed to send safety C.J. Gardner-Johnson to the Houston Texans for guard Kenyon Green and a swap of late-round draft picks, a person with knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Like free-agent contracts, trades became official with the start of the new league year Wednesday.

Green, who was the 15th overall pick in the 2022 draft, started 23 games for Houston over two seasons. He didn't play in 2023 because of a shoulder injury.

The Texans also agreed to trade left tackle Laremy Tunsil to the Washington Commanders on Monday. They have big holes up front on an offensive line that struggled to protect C.J. Stroud last season.

The Buffalo Bills also moved to upgrade their defense, bringing in pass rusher Joey Bosa on a one-year, \$12.6 million deal to replace the departing Von Miller.

Minnesota continued an aggressive reconstruction of its interior lines by agreeing to terms on contracts with former Washington defensive tackle Jonathan Allen (three years, \$60 million) and former Indianapolis guard

Will Fries (five years, \$88 million), who followed center Ryan Kelly from the Colts to the Vikings.

Allen missed half of last season after tearing a pectoral muscle, but he returned for the final four games, including the playoffs as the Commanders reached the NFC championship game.

Because Allen was released last week for salary cap savings before the expiration of his previous contract, Minnesota was allowed to host the two-time Pro Bowl pick on a visit to team headquarters and announce the deal ahead of the signing period.

With the addition of Fries and Kelly, the Vikings have taken two big steps toward smoothing out the expected debut of quarterback J.J. McCarthy — after his rookie season was waylaid by a knee injury and Sam Darnold departed for the Seattle Seahawks.

Fries will bring instant chemistry with Kelly, a four-time Pro Bowl pick over nine seasons with Indianapolis whose arrival might well mean the end of Garrett Bradbury's six-year tenure as Minnesota's starting center.

The Vikings have had one of the best tackle tandems in the league with Christian Darrisaw and Brian O'Neill, but interior pass protection has hurt them often. That was never more apparent than in their wild-card round loss to the Rams two months ago, when Darnold was sacked nine times.

The biggest roster reshaping is going on in

San Francisco, which released edge rusher Leonard Floyd, who quickly agreed to a one-year, \$10 million deal with the Atlanta Falcons.

The 49ers have lost several starters from last season's team through free agency, trades and releases. General manager John Lynch said last month at the scouting combine that San Francisco would need to get younger and cheaper after going 6-11 in an injury-plagued 2024 season.

The Seahawks locked up a key player on defense, signing linebacker Ernest Jones IV to a three-year contract worth a reported \$28.5 million. Jones was set to become a free agent Wednesday.

Jones played a big part in Seattle's defensive turnaround last season under first-year coach Mike Macdonald. He took over as middle linebacker as soon as he arrived and had 94 tackles, two passes defensed, one forced fumble and an interception in 10 games.

The New Orleans Saints are bringing former Kansas City Chiefs cornerback and Louisiana native Justin Reid (three years, \$31.5 million) back to his home state. They also re-signed tight end Juwan Johnson to a three-year deal that his agent, AJ Vaynerchuk, confirmed was worth up to \$34.5 million.

The Chiefs are also losing veteran receiver DeAndre Hopkins, who agreed to a one-year, \$6 million contract with the Baltimore Ravens.

Gonzaga tops Saint Mary's for WCC title

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The metrics — and oddsmakers — indicated Gonzaga was far better than its record, and there was little doubt the Bulldogs had the ability to once again compete at a high level.

Maybe it was simply a matter of timing.

Braden Huff scored 18 points in just his second start of the season as Gonzaga avenged two regular-season losses to Saint Mary's, beating the 19th-ranked Gaels 58-51 in the West Coast Conference Tournament championship Tuesday night.

The Bulldogs (25-8) secured the WCC's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament, although both teams were safely in the field regardless of the outcome.

"We've had an inordinate amount of one-possession

games," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said. "I think that's why we're such an interesting seed going into this NCAA Tournament. I think we were 350th in luck in Kenpom. We've had more banked 3s on us than I could ever, ever remember in my entire career.

"Whether it's law of averages coming through or just a little resiliency ... or maybe it's just desperation by some seniors who don't want this thing to end."

The Bulldogs also got some measure of revenge for losing to Saint Mary's in last year's title game, which ended Gonzaga's run of four conference championships and 10 of 11. The Bulldogs also extended their national record to 18 consecutive 25-win seasons.

The Gaels (28-5) had their

seven-game winning streak stopped. Saint Mary's also had won 17 of 18 games.

"We've had a great year," Gaels coach Randy Bennett said. "We did not play well tonight."

Khalif Battle scored 14 points for Gonzaga, Graham Ike added 11 and Ryan Nembhard had 10.

Mitchell Saxen led Saint Mary's with 20 points but only scored six after halftime. Two-time WCC Player of the Year Augustas Marciulionis finished with 12 points.

The Gaels were attempting to become the first team since San Diego in 1996-97 to beat the Bulldogs three times in a season. But Gonzaga entered the game with the higher Kenpom rating, ninth to 22nd for St. Mary's, and was a 3½-point favorite at BetMGM Sportsbook.

"You've got to go through some hardships in order to win," Battle said. "We've been practicing for this moment. I think we were prepared more than ever going into this tournament, so I'm happy we were able to hoist the trophy."

Takeaways

Gonzaga: The Bulldogs committed four turnovers while forcing 18—including two shot-clock violations in the final minutes.

Saint Mary's: The Gaels became the first ranked team since No. 25 Texas A&M in 2011 to go at least 0-for-16 (as the Gaels did) from 3-point range and commit 18 or more turnovers.

The teams went 1-for-31 on 3-pointers, the third-worst combined percentage in any game over the past 20 years.

UNCW denies No. 12 seed Delaware in CAA final

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donovan Newby had 17 points, Noah Ross scored 12 of his 14 points in the second half and UNC Wilmington denied No. 12 seed Delaware a historic end to the tournament with a 76-72 victory Tuesday night in the Coastal Athletic Association championship game.

The second-seeded Seahawks (27-7) secured their league-record seventh CAA title since the 1982-83 season — and their first since capturing back-to-back titles in 2016 and '17.

The Blue Hens (16-20) entered the tournament on a six-game losing streak, including a 30-point loss to UNCW in the regular-season finale. Delaware then rattled off four wins for a chance at becoming just the third team in Division I men's history to win five games in five days en route to a conference title.

Newby made four straight free throws in the final 13.8 seconds, the last two after freshman Izaiah Pasha made a 3-pointer for the Blue Hens to get within 74-72. Newby was a perfect 8-for-8 at the line.

Bo Montgomery added 13 points and Khamari McGriff had 10 for UNCW.

Pasha led Delaware with 21 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and Niels Lane

added 20 points. Cavan Reilly scored 13 and John Camden 12.

The Seahawks jumped out to a 22-10 lead after 13 minutes as the Blue Hens started the game by making just 3 of 19 shots. But Delaware got back in it by making five straight shots to begin a 16-3 run to get within 31-28 with 1:17 left.

John Camden sank a contested 3-pointer with 15:30 left in the second half to give the Blue Hens their first lead, 41-40, since they were 5-4.

Horizon League

Robert Morris 89, Youngstown State

78: At Indianapolis, Josh Omojafro scored 24 points and grabbed 13 rebounds, and the Colonials beat the Penguins to clinch an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament.

Robert Morris (26-8) will make its ninth appearance in the tournament, most recently in 2015 when the Colonials beat North Florida in the First Four before losing to No. 1 seed and eventual champion Duke in the first round.

Omojafro led all five starters in double figures as Robert Morris lead the entire way. Kam Woods scored 17, Alvaro Folgueiras had 14, Amarion Dickerson had 13 and DJ Smith had 11.

Juwani Maxey scored 23 points and Nico Galette added 21 for Youngstown State (21-13).

The Penguins are 0-4 in conference championships.

Cris Carroll made a 3 to get Youngstown State again within two at 54-52 with 11:23 remaining, but Folgueiras countered with a 3 almost two minutes later and the Penguins never got closer.

Northeastern Conference

St. Francis (Pa.) 46, Central Connecticut State 43: At New Britain, Conn., Daemar Kelly hit a go-ahead jumper with nine seconds left and Chris Moncrief made one of two free throws after he stole the ball to help the Red Flash stun the top-seeded Blue Devils.

No. 3 seed St. Francis (16-17) ended Central Connecticut's winning streak at 14 games and earned its second trip to the NCAA Tournament.

The Red Flash had lost five in a row to the Blue Devils (25-7), including twice this season by a combined 31 points.

St. Francis won its only other conference tournament in 1991. The fourth time was the charm for head coach Rob Krimmel, who lost in the title game in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

Bruins score 3 in third, beat Panthers

Associated Press

BOSTON — David Pastrnak scored a goal and assisted on Pavel Zacha's winner as the Boston Bruins scored three times in the third period to overcome a two-goal deficit and beat the Florida Panthers 3-2 on Tuesday night.

Four days after Bruins captain Brad Marchand was traded to the Panthers, his former team beat his new one and sent the defending Stanley Cup champions to their first loss in seven games. Boston, which had lost eight of nine heading into the trade deadline, has since won back-to-back games against likely playoff teams from Florida.

The former Bruins captain was well-represented by jerseys in the crowd, including two fans wearing new No. 63 Panthers sweaters along the glass next to the penalty box.

Dmitry Kulikov scored to snap a 46-game drought, and Mackie Samoskevich made it 2-0 early in the third period on a 5-on-3 power play. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 21 shots for Florida, which had won 11 of its previous 13 games.

Boston made it 2-1 when Casey Mittelstadt, one of the team's deadline acquisitions, found Pastrnak in front midway through the third. Mason Lohrei tied it with 6:09 left, and Pastrnak fed Zacha for the winner with 3:17 left.

Jeremy Swayman made 24 saves for the Bruins.

Devils 5, Blue Jackets 3: Jesper Bratt had a goal and two assists, Luke Hughes added a goal and an assist and New Jersey beat visiting Columbus.

Nico Hischier, Timo Meier and Paul Cotter also scored and Cody Glass had two assists to help the Devils win their second straight after losing four of five. Jacob Markstrom finished with 17 saves.

Mathieu Olivier scored twice and Kirill Marchenko also had a

goal for Columbus, which has lost three of its past four. Elvis Merzlikins had 22 saves.

Hischier, Cotter and Bratt scored in New Jersey's three-goal first period before Olivier and Marchenko scored nearly four minutes apart in the second to pull Columbus within one.

Senators 5, Flyers 2: Brady Tkachuk scored 24 seconds into the game, Michael Amadio scored the go-ahead goal and Ottawa won at Philadelphia.

Tkachuk scored on the opening shift of the game, one-timing a pass from former Flyer Claude Giroux past Ivan Fedotov for his 27th goal of the season and the 400th point of his NHL career.

The teams traded goals until Amadio put the Senators ahead for good with a wrist shot at 15:01 of the second period.

Jamie Drysdale and Rodrigo Abols scored for the Flyers, who lost their fifth straight — all at home.

Penguins 3, Golden Knights 2 (OT): Erik Karlsson scored 49 seconds into overtime to lift Pittsburgh over visiting Vegas.

The Golden Knights tied it late in regulation on a slap shot by Noah Hanifin with 6 seconds remaining.

The Golden Knights never touched the puck in the extra period. Pittsburgh controlled the faceoff and held onto it until Karlsson ripped his ninth goal of the season from just above the right circle.

Sidney Crosby scored twice for Pittsburgh, which has won two in a row. The Penguins superstar has 23 goals this season, including five in his past five games.

Tristan Jarry made 35 saves in his first home start in nearly two months.

Hurricanes 4, Lightning 1: Seth Jarvis scored a short-handed goal and Pyotr Kochetkov stopped 23 shots as host Carolina beat Tampa Bay.

Jordan Martinook, Jack Rosovic and Sean Walker also

scored for the Hurricanes, who won their fifth straight.

Gage Goncalves had a goal for Tampa Bay, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 27 saves. The Lightning lost for only the third time in their past 13 games.

Jarvis' goal at 4:29 of the first period was his team-leading fourth short-handed tally of the season and one behind Florida's Sam Reinhart for the league lead.

Wild 2, Avalanche 1 (SO): Matt Boldy scored the winner in a shootout to give Minnesota a win over visiting Colorado.

Mats Zuccarello scored in regulation and in the shootout for the Wild, while Filip Gustavsson made 27 saves.

Joel Kiviranta scored and Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 22 shots for the Avalanche, whose six-game winning streak ended.

Zuccarello opened the shootout with a goal, and Gustavsson stoned Nathan McKinnon on the other end. After Boldy scored, Martin Necas' rush trickled off the end of his stick to give Minnesota the win.

Jets 2, Rangers 1: Gabriel Vilardi scored the tiebreaking goal early in the second period, Connor Hellebuyck stopped 21

shots for his 38th win of the season and Winnipeg beat visiting New York.

Vladislav Namestnikov also scored and Cole Perfetti had two assists to help the Jets win for the third time in four games.

Mika Zibanejad scored for New York, and Igor Shesterkin finished with 22 saves. The Rangers have lost four straight (0-2-2) after winning four of five.

Canadiens 4, Canucks 2: Juraj Slafkovsky had a goal and two assists as visiting Montreal beat struggling Vancouver.

Nick Suzuki and Cole Caufield each had a goal and an assist, and Mike Matheson added an empty-netter in the final minute for the Canadiens.

Filip Hronek had a goal and an assist and Elias Pettersson

also scored for the Canucks. Kevin Lankinen made 23 saves.

Capitals 7, Ducks 4: Aliaksei Protas had the first hat trick of his NHL career, Alex Ovechkin and Pierre-Luc Dubois each had three points and Washington extended its winning streak to five with a victory at Anaheim.

The game was tied at 4-all before the Capitals scored three times in the final 6:35. Nic Dowd had the go-ahead goal at 13:25. Anthony Beauvillier gave Washington some breathing room with 1:36 remaining before Protas — who has fifth multi-goal effort in his last 37 games — completed the hat trick with an empty-net goal with 17 seconds left.

Ovechkin, nine goals from passing Wayne Gretzky's NHL career mark of 894, had three assists. Dubois had a goal and two assists.

Dylan Strome added a goal and Logan Thompson stopped 25 shots.

Kings 4, Islanders 1: Phillip Danault and Quinton Byfield scored in the second period as Los Angeles beat visiting New York.

Vladislav Gavrikov and Drew Doughty also scored for the Kings, who have won three straight after losing five in a row (0-3-2). Darcy Kuemper finished with 33 saves to get his 20th win of the season.

Anders Lee scored and Ilya Sorokin had 28 saves for the Islanders, who had two goals disallowed for goalie interference. New York has lost two straight and three of the last five.

Predators 3, Sharks 2: Kieffer Bellows scored his first NHL goal in nearly two years as Nashville won at San Jose.

Filip Forsberg had a goal and an assist, and Steven Stamkos also scored for the Predators, who won their fourth straight.

Patrick Giles and Collin Graf scored in the third period to tie it for the Sharks, who have lost three straight.