

Hegseth: 'Most intense' strikes to come

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned Tuesday that Iran had yet to see the “most intense” of American military strikes in its 10-day-old bombing campaign that has begun targeting facilities where Iran makes its deadly one-way attack drones.

“We will not relent until the enemy is totally and decisively defeated, but we will do so on our timeline and at our choosing,” Hegseth said during a Pentagon news briefing. “Today will be, yet again, our most intense day of strikes inside Iran — the most fighters, the most bombers, the most strikes, [with our] intelligence more refined and better than ever.”

Hegseth’s vow of an intensified offensive came as Tehran continued targeting neighboring countries with counterstrikes that are shaking world markets, threatening energy infrastructure and stoking fears of a drawn-out con-

flict.

The U.S. military has struck more than 5,000 targets across Iran since the U.S. and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury against the Iranian regime Feb. 28, said Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Caine spoke alongside Hegseth in the pair’s third news briefing since the war’s start. Hegseth and Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Central Command, also held a briefing in Tampa, Fla., last week.

In recent days, U.S. strikes have focused on destroying Iran’s ability to produce the ballistic missiles and one-way attack drones it has lobbed at American bases around the Middle East since shortly after the first American and Israeli bombs dropped in Iran, Caine said.

The strikes have resulted in a 90% decrease in Iranian missile attacks in the region since the war’s opening and an 83% decrease in one-way attack drone

assaults, he said.

“We’ve begun to target Iran’s military and industrial complex ... focusing on centers of gravity to get upstream of the shooters out in the field, in order to deny them the ability to continue to generate those one-way attack drones,” he said.

The U.S. and Israel launched extensive strikes against Iran on Feb. 28 after months of stalled negotiations over the country’s nuclear program. President Donald Trump later that night announced the operation had resulted in the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader. Mojtaba Khamenei has been chosen to succeed his late father.

In addition to the strikes on Iran, Israel has also attacked the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, Iran has attacked American military facilities and civilian infrastructure in nearly a dozen neighboring countries

since the beginning of the conflict, including in Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Iraq. At least seven U.S. soldiers have been killed in those attacks — six in Kuwait and another in Saudi Arabia.

Hegseth and Caine on Tuesday declined to estimate how long strikes would continue against Iran, after Trump earlier this month indicated the campaign would last only several weeks. The war would end, Hegseth insisted Tuesday, when Trump decided it was over.

Trump on Monday gave reporters conflicting information about how long he now expected the bombing to continue.

The president told CBS News on Monday afternoon that he thought “the war is very complete, pretty much.” Later in the day, though, Trump said the operation would continue “until the enemy is totally and decisively defeated.”

Iran attacks oil infrastructure and threatens Trump

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran’s attacks on regional oil infrastructure and pledges to choke off maritime traffic left markets on edge Tuesday as the United States promised blistering new strikes.

Both sides sharpened their rhetoric as they dug in, with Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth again promising the most intense strikes yet, while Iran’s leaders ruled out talks and directly threatened President Donald Trump.

Iran launched new attacks Israel and Gulf Arab countries, and Israel — America’s key ally in the fight — launched more

airstrikes on Tehran and in Lebanon, where it is battling the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

The United Arab Emirates reported two more deaths as nine drones struck the country, while nearly three dozen other drones and missiles were intercepted.

Firefighters battled a blaze in the industrial city of Ruwais — home to petrochemical plants — after an Iranian drone strike, officials said. No injuries were reported there.

Attacks on the wealthy Gulf country — home to the business and travel hub of Dubai — have killed six people and wounded 122 others since the U.S. and Is-

rael launched attacks on Iran on Feb. 28, triggering a shatter-shot response by Tehran across the region.

In Bahrain, authorities said an Iranian attack hit a residential building in the capital, Manama, killing a 29-year-old woman and wounding eight people.

Saudi Arabia said it destroyed two drones over its oil-rich eastern region, and Kuwait’s National Guard said it shot down six drones.

Sirens also sounded in Jerusalem, and sounds of explosions could be heard in Tel Aviv as Israel’s air defenses worked to intercept barrages from Iran.

Hezbollah, which began firing on Israel after the start of the war, launched missiles into Israel.

Witnesses reported hearing several explosions in Tehran in the afternoon as Israel commenced a new wave of airstrikes. Many shops were shuttered.

Iran’s leaders have remained defiant after days of heavy strikes targeting the country’s leadership, military, ballistic missiles and disputed nuclear program. Iran’s parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, said on X that Iran was “definitely not looking for a ceasefire.”

Prewar intel: Iran regime change unlikely

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A U.S. intelligence assessment completed shortly before the United States and Israel launched a war in Iran had determined that American military intervention was not likely to lead to regime change in the Islamic Republic, according to two people familiar with the finding.

The National Intelligence Council's assessment in February concluded that neither limited airstrikes nor a larger, prolonged military campaign would be likely to result in a new government taking over in Iran, even if the current leadership was killed, according to the two people, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe the classified report.

The determination undercuts

the administration's assertion that it can complete its objectives in Iran relatively quickly, perhaps in a matter of weeks. The administration has asserted that it was not seeking regime change in Iran, even as the strikes have taken out many figures in the Iranian leadership and President Donald Trump considers whom he would like to see lead the country.

The intelligence assessment concluded that no one powerful or unified opposition coalition was poised to take over in Iran if the leadership was killed, according to the people familiar with the report. It determined that Iran's establishment would attempt to preserve continuity of power if Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed, the people said.

In line with the assessment's findings, Iran's leading clerics on Sunday chose a new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, to succeed his father, who was killed in the war's opening salvo. The son is believed to hold views that are even more hardline than his father, and his selection is a strong sign of resistance from Iran's leadership and an indication the government won't step aside quickly.

The details of the assessment were reported earlier by The Washington Post and The New York Times.

Trump and other top administration leaders have given different justifications for the strikes that began on Feb. 28, saying they were necessary to set back Iran's nuclear weapons program or to preempt an Iranian ballistic

missile attack. While Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has said the war is not aimed at regime change, Trump has said it's something he wants to see.

A spokesperson for the Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined to comment on the assessment on Monday and referred questions to the White House. Director Tulsi Gabbard fired the council's acting chairperson last year after the release of a declassified NIC memo that contradicted statements used to justify deporting Venezuelan immigrants.

Trump, dating back to his first term, has been deeply skeptical of the U.S. intelligence community and has frequently dismissed its findings as politically motivated or part of a "deep state" effort to undermine his presidency.

Trump: 'Less enthusiastic' Vance still backs Iran war

Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. — President Donald Trump said his vice president, JD Vance, was "philosophically a little bit different than me" at the outset of the war in Iran even as he dismissed the notion of a disagreement between the two.

Speaking to reporters on Monday at his golf club in Doral, Fla., the president said Vance was "maybe less enthusiastic about going" but insisted that his decision to launch airstrikes in Iran alongside Israel was necessary.

The war in Iran has stoked tension among Republicans, with some expressing reservations about how the operation fits into the isolationist-leaning movement the party has embraced during the Trump era.

Few have embodied that movement as prominently as Vance, a former Marine. He's now considered a top contender for the Re-

publican presidential nomination in 2028.

If Vance has the reservations Trump hinted at on Monday, he has been publicly supportive of the president since the strikes began. In a Fox News interview with Jesse Watters, Vance rejected comparisons of the Iran operation to earlier wars, including those in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"If you think back to Afghanistan, 20 years of mission creep, 20 years (of) not having a clear objective and 20 years (of) the United States trying to bring liberal democracy to Afghanistan," Vance said at the time. "Iraq was a little bit shorter, but we were still in that country for nearly a decade with no clear mission, no clear definition."

"What's so different about this, Jesse," Vance added, "is that the president has clearly defined what he wants to accomplish."

Ex-engineer accused of lying about plane crash is acquitted

Associated Press

GREENVILLE, Miss. — A jury has acquitted a former engineer overseeing military aircraft maintenance of charges of making false statements and obstructing justice during the criminal investigation of a 2017 military plane crash in Mississippi that killed all 16 service members aboard.

James Michael Fisher was found not guilty Thursday after an eight-day trial in federal court in Greenville, Miss.

Fisher had been the lead propulsion engineer at the Warner Robins Air Logistics Complex in Warner Robins, Ga., in 2011. That's when military investigators said civilian maintenance personnel failed to find defects in a cracked and corroded propeller blade that was installed on a KC-130T transport plane. Investigators said that propeller blade broke apart while the New York-

based plane was in flight from Cherry Point, N.C., to El Centro, Calif., on July 10, 2017.

Fifteen Marines and one Navy corpsman were killed when the propeller blade slammed into the aircraft body, causing a shock that broke the plane into pieces in the sky and sent the wreckage plummeting into soybean fields near Itta Bena, Miss.

A federal grand jury in Mississippi indicted Fisher in 2024, who by then had retired. The indictment accused Fisher of lying to federal agents about changes to inspection procedures during a 2021 investigation, suggesting he was part of a cover-up that shifted blame to maintenance technicians.

But Steve Farese, Fisher's defense lawyer, said someone else cleared technicians to change how propellers were inspected while Fisher was in Brazil, and thus he didn't lie to investigators.

Trump pushes GOP on current voting bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Monday he won't sign any other legislation into law until Congress passes a strict proof-of-citizenship voting bill that he says also must end Americans' ability to vote by mail, a startling demand months before the midterm elections.

Trump told House Republicans during their annual retreat at his golf club in Florida that he doesn't think they will win elections unless voting laws are toughened up to prevent fraud — even though mail ballots are popular in many states and federal law already requires that voters in national elections be U.S. citizens, with scant evi-

dence that noncitizens ever try to vote.

The president wants to bolster the so-called SAVE America Act, which the House has already approved, and he pressed the Senate to push past its filibuster rules to send it to his desk.

Voting experts have said the bill could disenfranchise some 20 million American voters who don't have birth certificates or other documents readily available, a number that would likely swell with the additional ban on mail balloting that Trump is demanding.

"I'm not going to sign anything until this is approved," Trump said, calling it his No. 1 priority.

"It'll guarantee the midterms," he said. "If you don't get it, big trouble."

The president's determination to impose vast election changes has sounded alarms from various voting rights groups as the Trump administration reaches deep into the realm of the states, which, under the Constitution, are in charge of all election ballots and procedures in the U.S.

It also comes as his Republican Party, which narrowly controls Congress, faces headwinds this fall, its majorities at risk.

Democrats largely oppose Trump's efforts to seize more control over elections, and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said Trump's de-

mands would gridlock the chamber.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, who is close with Trump, appeared alongside the president on the stage with other GOP leaders applauding the bill.

But Senate Majority Leader John Thune has said using the so-called "talking filibuster" to pass the voting bill, as Trump and others propose, isn't as easy as it seems.

"We can't find a piece of legislation in history that's been passed that way," Thune told reporters.

Trump has said even if it takes six months, he wants the bill approved before any others will be signed into law.

Judge in Oregon limits tear gas use at Portland ICE building protests

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — A federal judge in Oregon on Monday restricted federal officers from using tear gas at protests at the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement building in Portland, in response to a lawsuit filed by the ACLU of Oregon on behalf of protesters and freelance journalists.

U.S. District Judge Michael Simon issued the preliminary injunction after a three-day hearing in which the plaintiffs — including a demonstrator known for wearing a chicken costume, a married couple in their 80s and two freelance journalists — testified about having chemical or projectile munitions used against them.

The lawsuit, whose defendants include the Department of Homeland Security, argues that federal officers' use of such munitions is a retaliation that chills First Amendment rights.

"Plaintiffs provided numerous videos, which were received in evidence and unambiguously show DHS officers spraying OC Spray directly into the faces of peaceful and nonviolent protesters engaged in, at most, passive resistance and discharging tear gas and firing pepper-ball munitions into crowds of peaceful and nonviolent protesters," Simon wrote, using the term OC Spray to refer to pepper spray.

Simon had previously issued a temporary restraining order similarly limiting federal agents from using chemical munitions during protests at the ICE building. His preliminary injunction is the second in recent days restricting agents' tear gas use at the facility, following that of a federal judge overseeing a separate case brought by the residents of an adjacent affordable housing complex.

Teens in mariachi band released by ICE amid bipartisan criticism

Associated Press

RAYMONDVILLE, Texas — A family whose two teen boys are in a nationally recognized mariachi band in South Texas was reunited Monday afternoon after bipartisan criticism that the Trump administration's campaign for mass deportation overreached by detaining the family.

Brothers Antonio Gámez-Cuellar, 18, and Joshua, 14, were detained along with their 12-year-old brother and their parents Feb. 25.

The teenage boys were prominent members of the McAllen High School Mariachi Oro band, which has visited the White House, performed at Carnegie Hall and won eight state championships.

The family had been checking in regularly with immigration authorities, as instructed, when they were detained, according to a relative and a girl-

friend who organized a GoFundMe account to help the family.

The Department of Homeland Security said they entered the U.S. illegally in 2023 near Brownsville, Texas.

Efrén C. Olivares, an attorney with the National Immigration Law Center who is representing the eldest son, Antonio, clarified that the family had entered the U.S. lawfully through the CBP One app, a legal pathway, in 2023.

Olivares said Antonio was released after attorneys filed a parole request with ICE which ICE granted, and attorneys did not need to ask for a judge's order.

Elected officials from across the political spectrum voiced support for the family, who are from Mexico and had sought asylum in the U.S. and were going through their immigration proceedings.

Russia, Ukraine claim front-line progress

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian and Ukrainian officials are making contradictory claims of battlefield successes in their 4-year-old war, with Ukraine saying it has pushed Moscow's forces back in some places on the front line but the Kremlin insisting that Russia's invasion of its neighbor is making progress.

At the same time, Russia's almost daily aerial attacks on civilian areas continue. Three powerful glide bombs struck the center of the eastern Ukrainian city of Sloviansk, killing

four people, the head of the Donetsk regional military administration, Vadym Filashkin, said Tuesday. At least 16 other people, including a 14-year-old girl, were wounded.

Overnight drone strikes on three other Ukrainian cities wounded at least 17 people, including two children, emergency services said Tuesday.

Ukraine's air force said that it shot down 122 out of 137 drones that Russia launched

U.S.-brokered talks between Russia and Ukraine are on hold as Washington's attention is gripped by the Iran war, which

has drawn the international spotlight from Ukraine's plight as it strives to hold back Russia's bigger army.

Despite being short of soldiers, Ukrainian forces have recently retaken nearly all the territory of the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk industrial region during a counteroffensive, driving Russian troops out of more than 150 square miles, Maj. Gen. Oleksandr Komarenko said in an interview published Tuesday by local media outlet RBC-Ukraine.

There was no independent verification of his description of

the military situation.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed Tuesday that Russian forces have extended their gains in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, whose capture Moscow has made one of the goals of its invasion. Ukraine controlled about 25% of the Donbas six months ago but it now holds just 15-17%, Putin said.

He made the claim during a meeting with Denis Pushilin, the Kremlin-appointed head of the parts of the Donbas controlled by Russian forces. It was not possible to verify the claim.

VA to use AI tool to scan claims for signs of fraud

BY LINDA F. HERSEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs plans to launch an automated fraud-detection tool to scan more than a million disability benefits questionnaires for evidence of fabrication or other problems that could force a new medical exam and impact compensation, according to a VA official.

James W. Smith, a deputy executive director at the Veterans Benefits Administration, told lawmakers that the tool will have the capability to quickly review submitted questionnaires — known as DBQs — that document medical evidence to determine a disability rating and monthly compensation.

The VA's new automated tool is expected to launch in fiscal 2026 and is part of a larger push to fortify the benefits system against fraud and abuse, according to the VA.

But some veterans are raising questions about the effectiveness of an automated tool for uncovering fraud.

"There will be some fraud found, but a lot of DBQs [will be]

questioned that may not be fraud," predicted James Cameron, a Marine Corps veteran and retired benefits service officer.

The plan is to use the tool to re-analyze DBQs dating to 2010 and flag claims with potential problems.

The tool will use artificial intelligence to look for signs that medical evidence was exaggerated or invented.

Implementation of the fraud-detection tool is part of a larger VA strategy to use AI to improve the quality, efficiency and accuracy of programs and services delivered to millions of veterans.

DBQs are downloadable forms available on the VA website that private medical providers fill out to describe the severity of a service-connected condition.

The questionnaires often are a standard part of a claims submission for benefits.

"We have determined that there are telltale signs that a DBQ could potentially be fraudulent," Smith said. "The tool will be [able] to quickly identify potential problem cases. The VA is being proactive in this space."

FDA not backing generic drug to help treat autism

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Food and Drug Administration on Tuesday approved a generic medication for a rare brain disorder, while walking back suggestions by President Donald Trump and other administration officials that the drug showed great promise for people with autism.

The agency said it approved leucovorin for children and adults with a genetic condition that limits delivery of folate, an essential form of vitamin B, to the brain. FDA officials estimate the ultrarare condition impacts fewer than 1 in a million people in the U.S.

It's a major step back from statements made at a White House news conference in September, when Trump and FDA commissioner Marty Makary announced the drug was under review to benefit patients with autism, some of whom have a form of the vitamin brain deficiency.

"It might be 20, 40, 50% of kids with autism," Makary said at the news conference.

The White House event followed promises from Health

Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to determine the cause of autism by September.

But senior FDA officials told reporters Monday that their review was narrowed to focus on the strongest evidence, which only supported the drug's use by patients with the rare mutation that impacts folate levels in the brain.

The FDA officials also pointed out that one study supporting the drug's use for autism was retracted earlier this year.

Leucovorin is a metabolite of folate, which is essential for healthy pregnancies and is recommended for women before conception and during pregnancy. The current FDA label covers leucovorin's use in reducing side effects of certain chemotherapy drugs and treating a rare blood disorder.

Patients affected by the condition targeted by Tuesday's approval experience movement disorders, seizures and other neurological problems that can resemble symptoms of autism.

But professional medical societies say it's far from clear whether the drug helps people with autism.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Life in prison for child sex trafficking makes ballot

CO DENVER — A Colorado voter initiative that would require sentences to life in prison for people convicted of child sex trafficking has qualified for the November ballot.

Protect Kids Colorado, the group backing Initiative 108, submitted nearly 170,000 signatures to qualify for the ballot. The Colorado Secretary of State's Office announced Thursday the measure had qualified.

In stating the intent behind the measure, the group warned that people convicted of the crime, which is now a class 2 felony, can be eligible for parole within eight years. Class 2 felonies carry penalties of between eight and 24 years, which doubles if the charge carries a violent crime designation.

The ballot measure will need majority support among Colorado voters in November to become law. If it passes, it will go into effect in 2027.

Juror emergency delays verdict in murder trial

MI ADRIAN — Jury deliberations in the murder trial involving a woman whose body was discovered in a resealed fertilizer tank were abruptly postponed Friday until Tuesday.

The jury had barely begun weighing the fate of prominent Tecumseh farmer Dale Warner on Friday when one of the jurors told the court he or she had an unspecified emergency, according to the judge.

Lenawee County Circuit

Judge Michael Olsaver considered replacing the juror with one of the alternate jurors, who were dismissed on Thursday. After the alternates were asked if they had viewed media coverage of the case, it was decided to retain the original juror.

Warner, 58, is charged with killing Dee Warner, his wife of 15 years, and then hiding her body in a fertilizer tank. He could be sentenced up to life in prison.

Dee Warner, 52, disappeared in April 2021 and her body was discovered in August 2024. She died from strangulation and blunt force trauma to her head, a medical examiner testified.

State Supreme Court justice retiring

WI MADISON — A conservative Wisconsin Supreme Court justice first elected in 2007 announced Monday that she will not seek a third 10-year term next year, giving liberals another chance to expand their majority as cases affecting redistricting, union rights, school funding and other hot button issues await.

Justice Annette Ziegler, 62, becomes the second conservative justice in as many years to decide against seeking reelection after liberals took majority control of Wisconsin's highest court in 2023. Liberals held onto their majority last year in a race that broke national spending records and saw billionaire Elon Musk traveling to the state to hand out \$1 million checks to conservative voters.

There's another election on April 7 for the open seat caused by conservative Justice Rebecca Bradley's decision not to run

for reelection. The liberal candidate, Appeals Court Judge Chris Taylor, has outraced her conservative opponent, fellow Appeals Court Judge Maria Lazar, allowing her to spend more on television ads.

University probes racist chat tied to GOP official

FL MIAMI — A South Florida university has launched an investigation into a group chat started by an official with the Miami-Dade chapter of the Republican Party that included violently racist, anti-semitic and misogynistic language.

The chat, which was denounced by the state GOP, involved students and several top conservative leaders at Florida International University, according to the Miami Herald, which viewed and independently verified the conversations.

The university said in a statement on Thursday that the conduct of the students was being investigated by the campus police in coordination with local, state and federal law enforcement.

State finds rat lungworm neurological disease

CA LOS ANGELES — A disease that can cause neurological illness and meningitis in people, rat lungworm, has been found in wild opossums, rats and a zoo animal in San Diego County, indicating establishment in California for the first time.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website says the risk to the public of getting this infection is low, but the

infection can be deadly.

If ingested, the worms can cause severe headaches, stiff neck, the sensation of tingling or painful skin, low-grade fever, nausea, vomiting, coma and sometimes death. People who eat freshwater crab, prawns, frogs, snails and slugs are at greatest risk. However, people can also get the disease by eating un-rinsed produce that's been slimed by a snail or slug, or eating a slug or snail that was chopped up in produce.

University's president resigns over relationship

OH COLUMBUS — Ohio State President Walter "Ted" Carter Jr. resigned on Monday after disclosing "an inappropriate relationship" with a woman seeking public resources for her private business.

Carter, 66, said in a statement that he had resigned voluntarily after informing the university's board of trustees of his error. He did not elaborate on the nature of the relationship and said he was leaving with his wife, Lynda.

"For personal reasons, I have made the difficult decision to resign from my role as president of The Ohio State University," he said. "I disclosed to the board of trustees that I made a mistake in allowing inappropriate access to Ohio State leadership."

The university brought Carter on board in 2023 from the University of Nebraska system. He is also a former superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy and holds the national record for carrier-arrested landings with over 2,000 mishap-free touchdowns.

— From wire reports

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Free agency: Walker to KC, Evans to 49ers

Associated Press

Super Bowl MVP Kenneth Walker III is the new running back for Patrick Mahomes in Kansas City, Miami settled on Malik Willis for a reset at quarterback and receiver Mike Evans is headed to San Francisco after 12 years in Tampa Bay.

People with knowledge of the agreements told The Associated Press on Monday, the opening day of NFL free agency, that Walker was leaving Seattle after winning a championship and the Dolphins reached a deal with Willis after announcing earlier in the day that they were releasing Tua Tagovailoa.

The people spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because contracts can't be signed until Wednesday, the first day of the new league year.

The negotiating window opened with a flurry of significant deals, including the Indianapolis Colts keeping their top free agent in receiver Alec Pierce.

Edge rusher Jaelan Phillips and the Carolina Panthers agreed on a four-year, \$120 million contract with \$80 million guaranteed. Philadelphia was hoping to retain Phillips after sending a third-round pick to Miami for him at the trade deadline last season. Phillips had five sacks combined for the Dolphins and the Eagles.

The Dallas Cowboys added edge rusher Rashan Gary in a trade with Green Bay for a 2027 fourth-round pick. The Packers acquired star Micah Parsons from the Cowboys a week before the season started last year. Gary was the 12th overall pick in the draft in 2019, two years before Dallas drafted Parsons in the same spot.

Tennessee was among the teams with the most to spend going into free agency and tapped connections to first-year coach Robert Saleh and new offensive coordinator Brian Daboll on a busy day for the Titans.

Walker and the Chiefs agreed

to a three-year deal worth up to \$45 million, with \$28.7 million guaranteed. The 25-year-old fills perhaps the biggest need as the Chiefs try to bounce back from a 6-11 season. Kareem Hunt and Isiah Pacheco, their top two running backs, are both free agents.

The deal came as Kansas City was nearing an agreement to bring back four-time All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce for his 14th season.

Walker is the fourth Super Bowl MVP to change teams the following season: Larry Brown went from the Cowboys to the Raiders in 1996, Desmond Howard from the Packers to the Raiders in 1997 and Dexter Jackson from Tampa Bay to Arizona in 2003.

The Dolphins reached an agreement with Willis a few hours after dumping Tagovailoa, who later agreed to a one-year deal with Atlanta, and incurring a record \$99 million hit on their salary cap.

Willis will reunite with general manager Jon-Eric Sullivan and first-year coach Jeff Hafley. They were together in Green Bay, where Willis spent the past two seasons.

Miami made another move by agreeing to trade safety Minkah Fitzpatrick to the New York Jets for a seventh-round pick.

The Jets further revamped their defense by agreeing to deals with former Saints linebacker Demario Davis, who will return for a third stint in New York, former Falcons defensive tackle David Onyemata, former Bengals edge rusher Joseph Ossai and former Packers pass rusher Kingsley Enagbare.

The 49ers added a proven pass catcher in Evans for quarterback Brock Purdy, agreeing to a three-year contract with a player who had 1,000 yards receiving in each of his first 11 seasons before injuries limited Evans to eight games in 2025.

The move for the 32-year-old comes with the Niners planning

to release Brandon Aiyuk; they placed him on the reserve/leff squad list last season after he stopped showing up to rehabilitate a knee injury that had sidelined him for a year.

The Colts keeping Pierce on a \$116 million, four-year deal coincided with them sending Michael Pittman Jr. to Pittsburgh for a late-round draft pick. Pittman spent his first six seasons with Indianapolis.

Tennessee's headliners were defensive end John Franklin-Myers and cornerback Alontae Taylor on deals with annual average values of at least \$20 million. Franklin-Myers played for the Jets when Saleh was head coach.

The Titans filled a need at receiver by adding Wan'Dale Robinson, who was drafted by the Giants when Daboll was a rookie head coach in 2022. Daboll was fired by the Giants last season.

Another former Giants player, cornerback Cor'Dale Flott, also is headed to the Titans, who are rebuilding a battered secondary and have a decision looming on L'Jarius Sneed's future.

The 25-year-old Robinson was the first player 5-foot-8 or shorter with 1,000 yards receiving since 5-7 Richard Johnson in 1989 and the third since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger. Robinson had 1,014 yards on 92 catches.

Onyemata, a fourth-round pick of the Saints in 2016, also knows Glenn from their time in New Orleans. He played the past three years in Atlanta and has 31 career sacks and 401 tackles.

Ossai had five sacks in each of the last two seasons for Cincinnati.

The Vikings kept one of their unrestricted free agents off the market with a new contract for 10th-year veteran linebacker Eric Wilson, and they agreed to terms with former Pittsburgh Steelers cornerback James Pierre.

Wilson, who returned to his original team last season, had ca-

reer highs in tackles for loss (17), sacks (6½), quarterback hits (10) and forced fumbles (four).

Cleveland added guard Zion Johnson, a 2022 first-round pick who spent his first four seasons with the Los Angeles Chargers. The Browns are looking at an overhaul in the offense, with several starters in free agency.

Running back J.K. Dobbins is returning to Denver on a two-year contract. He ran for 772 yards and four touchdowns over 10 games before a foot injury in November ended his season.

Detroit agreed to a contract with Larry Borom, the likely replacement for Taylor Decker after he asked for his release before the start of free agency. Borom has 38 starts over five seasons with Miami and Chicago.

Buffalo has a starting need at cornerback and agreed to a three-year deal with Dee Alford. He has 23 starts in 64 games over four seasons with Atlanta.

Alford could start opposite Christian Benford. The Bills also agreed to sign quarterback Kyle Allen to a two-year contract, bringing him back for a second stint as Josh Allen's backup following Mitch Trubisky's departure to Tennessee.

The Giants brought in two players familiar to new coach John Harbaugh from his time in Baltimore, adding tight end Isaiah Likely and All-Pro punter Jordan Stout. They also filled a defensive need with linebacker Tremaine Edmunds.

Looking to bounce back from a 5-12 season, Washington spent big money in free agency to sign edge rusher Odafle Oweh, while also bringing back starting left tackle Laremy Tunsil. Oweh's contract is worth \$100 million over four years, with \$68 million guaranteed.

The Cowboys made another move for a beleaguered defense that was among the NFL's worst last season, agreeing on a three-year deal with safety Jalen Thompson, who spent his first seven seasons in Arizona.

UConn, UCLA women contend for top seed

Associated Press

UNCASVILLE, Conn. — There's little doubt that UConn and UCLA will be the top two seeds in the women's NCAA Tournament when the bracket is revealed Sunday.

They were 1-2 in both of the selection committee's top 16 reveals over the last month with the Huskies No. 1 both times. Both have been dominant since the last reveal on March 1, winning their conference tournaments convincingly. Still there's an argument to be made that UCLA should be in the conversation for the top overall seed, especially after an eye-popping 51-point win over Iowa in the Big Ten championship game Sunday.

The Bruins picked up three first-place votes in the AP Top 25 poll Monday, ending UConn's eight-week run as the unanimous No. 1 team.

UConn coach Geno Auriemma said he's fine with whatever the committee decides.

"I wouldn't be surprised and

I would be OK with it," he said. "I don't really care one way or the other, you know, I don't know, the last time we've been a number one seed, it's been a couple of years. ... If you said UCLA is the number one, number one, I would say, wow, they're really damn good and I would have absolutely no problem with that. I mean, look what they did the last game they played."

History is on UConn's side though as 12 teams have entered the tournament unbeaten in the last 25 years and 10 of those have earned the No. 1 overall seed. The only exceptions, Princeton in 2015 and Notre Dame a year earlier. The Tigers had no claim to be the top overall seed despite having their best season ever.

The Irish were second overall in 2014 because UConn also was undefeated that season. The two teams met for the national championship and the Huskies won.

If the selection committee

decides to buck that trend it won't change which region UConn is in. UCLA will play in the Sacramento Regional and the Huskies would be in the Fort Worth Regional since geography is big factor in placing teams.

Where it potentially could make a difference would be that the overall No. 1 team would play its regional final on Sunday, giving that team an extra day's rest before the Final Four on April 3. There would still be a chance for the No. 2 team to still play Sunday as well.

UConn won last year's NCAA championship as a No. 2-seed and played the Saturday-Monday schedule. The Huskies beat UCLA in the Final Four by 34 points — the largest margin in the national semifinals history. The Bruins were the top overall seed last season.

The committee uses 12 criteria to determine who belongs in the field and where teams should be seeded. One of those

is the NET ranking system. The Huskies are No. 1 in the NET and the Bruins are second.

UConn played the hardest nonconference schedule in the country, but the Big East has had a down year. The Huskies have been dominant all season long and have been winning by an average of more than 38 points a game — the third best in NCAA history.

UCLA was unbeaten in the Big Ten, which is one of the top two conferences in the country. The Bruins were 18-1 against quad 1 opponents — elite teams. The lone Bruins loss was to Texas in November on a neutral court.

"I think sometimes people put too much stock in what conference you play in, what your record was, who you played against and all this other stuff," Auriemma said. "There's some mid-majors out there, I don't even know what conference they're in, but I guarantee you don't want them showing up in your gym in the second round."

SGA hits last-minute 3 to lift Thunder past Nuggets

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander drilled a step-back 3-pointer with 2.7 seconds left to cap a frantic final minute on a night he matched Wilt Chamberlain's record for consecutive 20-point games, and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Denver Nuggets 129-126 on Monday night.

Gilgeous-Alexander finished with 35 points and a career-high 15 assists, becoming the second player in NBA history to have those totals and zero turnovers. He also had nine rebounds. In the third quarter, Gilgeous-Alexander reached the 20-point mark for the 126th straight game, equaling Chamberlain's streak from 1961-63.

With Oklahoma City leading 126-122, Denver's Nikola Jokic hit

a 3-pointer and Oklahoma City's Jaylin Williams was called for an off-ball foul fighting through a screen. Jamal Murray made the free throw with 8.5 seconds remaining to tie the game.

Gilgeous-Alexander responded, elevating over Spencer Jones for his second 3 in the final 14 seconds. Denver's Aaron Gordon missed a 61-foot heave at the buzzer.

The Thunder are 6-0 since Gilgeous-Alexander returned from an abdominal strain that sidelined him for nine games.

Jokic had 32 points, 14 rebounds and 13 assists. It was his 24th triple-double of the season and the 188th of his career. Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 28 points and Gordon added 23 points and 10 rebounds for the Nuggets.

Cavaliers 115, 76ers 101:

James Harden scored 21 points to become the ninth player in NBA history with more than 29,000 career points, Keon Ellis added 19 off the bench, and host Cleveland cruised to a victory over short-handed Philadelphia.

Donovan Mitchell had 17 points and six assists for Cleveland, which is 8-1 at home since Jan. 23.

Quentin Grimes scored 17 points and Cameron Payne had 12 points for Philadelphia.

Nets 126, Grizzlies 115: Day-Ron Sharpe matched a season high with 19 points, Ochai Agbaji added 18 and host Brooklyn beat injury-plagued Memphis.

The Nets, who rested leading scorer Michael Porter Jr., had six players score in double figures. The Grizzlies had only eight players available.

Jazz 119, Warriors 116: Brice

Sensabaugh scored 21 points, two-way player Blake Hinson made the go-ahead 3-pointer in the final minute, and host Utah outlasted Golden State.

Hinson made four 3-pointers including one from the right wing with 29.9 seconds remaining to shock the Warriors, who were without Stephen Curry and several other rotation regulars.

Clippers 126, Knicks 118: Kawhi Leonard scored 29 points, Benedict Mathurin added 28, and host Los Angeles beat New York to climb back to .500 for the first time since early November.

The Clippers are 32-32 and have won five of their first six games in March as they try to improve their potential position in the NBA Play-in Tournament. They began the season in a 6-21 tailspin.

Gonzaga reaches 29th straight WCC final

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS— Graham Ike had 24 points and 11 rebounds to lead No. 12 Gonzaga to a 65-56 victory over Oregon State on Monday night and put the Bulldogs in the West Coast Conference Tournament championship game for the 29th straight time.

Gonzaga (29-3) was to play Santa Clara in the title game on Tuesday night. It will be the Zags' last WCC championship before heading to the Pac-12 Conference next season.

Oregon State's seasons ends at 17-16.

Ike, the WCC player of the year, made 10 of 17 shots for his 14th double-double this season and 45th of his career. He was the only Gonzaga player to score in double figures.

Jorge Diaz Graham led the Beavers with 15 points and Noah Amenhauser scored 11.

Gonzaga, which never trailed, entered the game as the national leader in scoring points in the lane at 45.2 per game and outscored the Beavers 38-24 inside. The Zags' defense also was critical to outscoring Oregon State 16-0 on the fast break.

Santa Clara 76, No. 21 Saint Mary's 71: Sash Gavalyugov scored 23 points including a back-breaking 3-pointer to lead the Broncos over the Gaels to take a big step toward making the Big Dance.

The WCC tournament champ receives the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. While Gonzaga is safely in the tournament, Santa Clara (26-7) has been considered on the bubble. The Broncos entered this game No. 42 in the NCAA's NET rankings and No. 37 in Kenpom.

Saint Mary's (27-5) could

take a hit in the tournament seeding, but the Gaels figure to get into the field of 68. They were No. 20 in the NET and No. 22 in KenPom.

This is the first time since 2021 that the WCC final hasn't been between Gonzaga and Saint Mary's.

Elijah Mahi added 19 points for the Broncos and Allen Graves finished with 10.

Troy 77, Georgia Southern 61: Thomas Dowd finished with 23 points and 13 rebounds, and the regular-season champion Trojans ended the five-day run of the No. 10 seed Eagles in the championship game of the Sun Belt Conference Tournament in Pensacola, Fla.

Dowd made 8 of 12 shots with two 3-pointers and 5 of 6 free throws for Troy (22-11), which earned a second straight trip to the NCAA Tournament and its fourth overall.

Georgia Southern (21-16) became the fourth team to win five games in five days in a conference tournament.

Jerrell Bellamy scored 15 on 7-for-11 shooting for Troy. Victor Valdes added 12 points and six assists.

Furman 76, East Tennessee State 61: Cooper Bowser had 21 points and 11 rebounds as the No. 6 seed Paladins knocked off the top-seeded Buccaneers to secure the Southern Conference title and NCAA Tournament bid.

Furman (22-12) won its eighth SoCon title and first since defeating 2023.

Tom House added 13 points off the bench for Furman and Alex Wilkins, who scored a career-high 34 to help rally from an 11-point halftime deficit in the semifinals, scored 12. Bowser was 9-for-12 from the field to help the Paladins shoot 51%.

Kempe scores in OT to lift Kings past Blue Jackets

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Adrian Kempe scored his second goal of the game with 1:26 left in overtime to give the Los Angeles Kings a 5-4 win over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Monday.

With the victory, Los Angeles moved within a point of Seattle in the race for the final Western Conference wild-card spot.

Columbus tied the score late for the second straight home game. Kirill Marchenko scored on the power play at 18:04 to force the extra period.

Brian Dumoulin had a goal and two assists. Scott Laughton scored for the second straight game since joining the Kings from Toronto and added an assist. Artemi Panarin also scored. Anton Forsberg made 28 saves for Los Angeles in the opener of a five-game trip.

Connor Garland scored twice — his first goals since coming to Columbus from Vancouver —

and Denton Mateychuk added a goal and an assist. Jet Greaves made 26 saves for Columbus, which has lost two straight at home.

The Blue Jackets are two points behind Boston in the race for the second Eastern Conference wild-card spot, and three points behind the Islanders for third in the Metropolitan Division.

Rangers 6, Flyers 2: Mika Zibanejad had two goals and an assist, and New York scored on three power plays in a road win over the Philadelphia.

Noah Laba and Alexis Lafreniere each had a goal an assist. Gabe Perreault and Vladislav Gavrikov also scored for the Rangers, who won for the third time in five games. Igor Shesterkin finished with 32 saves.

Matvei Michkov and Sean Couturier scored for the Flyers.

Capitals 7, Flames 3: Connor McMichael scored twice and

host Washington beat Calgary.

Justin Sourdif had a goal and two assists and Hendrix Lapierre added a goal and an assist for Washington. Tom Wilson, Ethen Frank and Ryan Leonard also scored for the Capitals, who ended a three-game slide.

Matvei Gridin, Blake Coleman and Yegor Sharangovich scored for Calgary, which has lost five of its last six.

Blackhawks 3, Mammoth 2 (OT): Frank Nazar scored a power-play goal with 2:24 left in overtime to give Chicago a home victory over Utah.

Andrew Mangiapane scored his first goal as a Blackhawk since being acquired in a trade from Edmonton last week, and Andre Burakovsky lifted the puck on his stick lacrosse style and flicked it into the net to tie the game at 2-2 late in the second period. It was his first goal since Jan. 7, a span of 19 games.

Drew Commesso made 22

saves. Connor Bedard had two assists for Chicago, including one on Nazar's winner.

Barrett Hayton and Dylan Guenther scored for Utah, which is battling for a wild-card playoff spot in the Western Conference and had won the first three games of a five-game road trip. Vitek Vanecsek had 23 saves.

Senators 2, Canucks 0: James Reimer stopped 16 shots for his first shutout of the season and 32nd of his career, and visiting Ottawa beat Vancouver.

Ridly Greig scored in the second period for Ottawa, and Brady Tkachuk added an empty-netter with 1:20 remaining, extending his point streak to seven games — six of those after he helped the United States win Olympic gold in Milan.

Ottawa has points in seven straight games (5-0-2) and 11 of 12 (9-1-2) as it chases an Eastern Conference wild-card spot.