

Fighting continues as Trump touts talks

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

Missiles and drones continued to fly in the Middle East on Tuesday after President Donald Trump announced the United States would pause its strikes against Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure until the end of the week.

The ongoing fighting comes as the president has said U.S. negotiators are holding positive talks to potentially end the war — a claim Tehran's leadership has vehemently denied. The president has threatened to attack Iran's energy infrastructure if the country doesn't free up traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, which acts as a critical waterway for nearly 20% of the globe's fuel.

Despite the break in U.S. strikes, Gulf nations said they were continuing to receive drone and missile attacks late Monday and into Tuesday.

Iranian missiles slammed in-

to Tel Aviv's city center, destroying property and wounding several people, Israeli authorities said. The Israel Defense Forces, meanwhile, fired a barrage of attacks on Iran overnight, striking 50 targets, including ballistic missile storage and launch sites, the IDF said.

In Bahrain, home to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, emergency workers responded to a blaze caused by Iranian attacks Tuesday morning, the Interior Ministry said. Amazon said its Bahrain data centers were also disrupted as a result of the ongoing conflict.

The United Arab Emirates, which has received some of the heaviest fire from Iran since the war began, said it intercepted 17 drones and five ballistic missiles Tuesday.

Emirati authorities also said a civilian contractor in the UAE Armed Forces was killed in a strike against Bahrain while on

a routine mission.

Military forces in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia also reported intercepting drones and missiles.

As negotiations continue, the U.S. is prepared to send in thousands more troops and at least three warships to the Middle East to aid in Operation Epic Fury. The president has not ruled out sending in ground forces. A total of 13 U.S. service members have died since the war began Feb. 28. As of Tuesday, U.S. Central Command said 290 troops had been wounded in the operation, 255 of which have returned to duty. Ten have been seriously injured, it added.

The ongoing hostilities have some allies in the Gulf inching toward joining the U.S.-Israeli fight against Iran.

The New York Times reported Tuesday that Saudi Arabia's de facto leader, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has been pushing Trump to continue the

war, and sees a historic opportunity to remake the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, told reporters last week that the kingdom's patience with Iranian attacks was not unlimited, and that "any belief that Gulf countries are incapable of responding is a miscalculation."

Israeli officials said the country will persist with strikes against Iran even as Trump claimed talks are underway to end the conflict.

"We are still at war, period," Energy Minister Eli Cohen said in an interview with Kan radio.

A coalition of 22 nations, including many NATO members and partners, signed a statement over the weekend condemning Iran's attacks on commercial vessels and civilian infrastructure, and said they are ready to contribute to "appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage" through the Strait of Hormuz.

USS Nimitz deploys to South Seas 2026 exercises

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The aircraft carrier USS Nimitz will sail around the southern tip of South America as part of the U.S. 4th Fleet's Southern Seas 2026 deployment, U.S. Southern Command announced Monday.

Along with Nimitz, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley will conduct passing exercises at sea with ships of other nations as they circumnavigate the South American continent.

The Navy said joint exercises are planned with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Mexico, El Salvador,

Guatemala and Uruguay. Port visits are planned in Brazil, Chile, Panama and Jamaica.

Southern Seas 2026 marks the 11th such exercise in the region since 2007. The Nimitz and its Carrier Strike Group 11 will be operating in the waters of the 4th Fleet, which includes the southern Pacific, southern Atlantic and Caribbean.

"Deployments like this demonstrate our unwavering commitment to ensuring a secure and stable Western Hemisphere," said Rear Adm. Carlos Sardiello, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet.

The Nimitz Carrier Strike

Group includes the Nimitz as its flagship, the embarked Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17, the Gridley and the staff of Destroyer Squadron 9.

The air wing consists of six squadrons flying F/A-18E/F Super Hornets, EA-18G Growlers, C-2A Greyhounds and MH-60R/S Seahawks.

Elements include Helicopter Maritime Squadron (HSM) 73, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 6, Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VRC) 40, Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 22, VFA-137, and Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 139.

"We look forward to contin-

uing the Nimitz legacy of teamwork as we engage with and train alongside our regional partners," said Rear Adm. Cassidy Norman, the commander of Carrier Strike Group 11.

USS Nimitz was homeported at Naval Base Kitsap in Bremerton, Wash., until this month, when it was ordered to move to Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia. The Navy's oldest aircraft carrier, commissioned in 1975, was scheduled to begin its retirement and decommissioning next month upon arrival on the East Coast.

The Navy announced this month that the ship will stay in service until at least 2027.

Army to test pilot-optional Black Hawk

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Army has accepted its first optionally piloted Black Hawk helicopter, a modified version of Sikorsky's workhorse utility chopper that can be flown by pilots in the cockpit or by troops on the ground, the service announced Friday.

The OPV Black Hawk will soon enter a testing program to determine how and if the Army can integrate the aircraft into its inventory, according to a Friday news release. The delivery comes after more than a decade of work on the first-of-its-kind helicopter led by Sikorsky—which is owned by defense giant Lockheed Martin—and the Defense Advanced Re-

search Projects Agency, known as DARPA.

“By proving out this technology, the Army aims to unlock a new era of aviation. One that will not only save lives but also ensure that critical missions can be completed under any circumstance,” service officials said in the statement. “The delivery of this first OPV Black Hawk is more than just a hardware handover; it’s a tangible step toward a future where technology and soldiers work together in new and powerful ways to ensure mission success.”

Sikorsky and DARPA began developing the OPV Black Hawk as part of a program designed to ensure the safety of future troops.

As the program progressed, Sikorsky built out a program, known as the MATRIX Autonomy Mission Manager, which functions like a brain for the helicopter—giving it the ability to conduct missions autonomously. But Sikorsky officials said MATRIX would also provide new capabilities to pilots in the cockpit when they fly the optionally piloted aircraft.

When piloted, the new Black Hawk is flown by a “fly-by-wire” electronic flight control system, which replaces the mechanical flight controls in Black Hawks and most military helicopters, according to the Army.

“This makes the aircraft significantly more stable and easier to

handle, particularly in challenging conditions where visibility is low,” Army officials said. “By automating difficult maneuvers, the system dramatically reduces pilot workload, allowing the crew to focus less on the mechanics of flying and more on managing the critical mission at hand.”

Sikorsky first flew the OPV Black Hawk in 2022. In October, it put the aircraft in soldiers' hands for the first time during a National Guard training event in Michigan. During that exercise, a National Guard noncommissioned officer with no aviation experience was able to learn in less than one hour to fly the helicopter in drone mode from a tablet, Sikorsky officials said.

USS Mustin back in Japan after 5-year modernization

By JONATHAN BAEZ
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Mustin returned this week to the homeport of the U.S. 7th Fleet after five years in San Diego for modernization, the service said.

The guided-missile destroyer replaces the USS Robert Smalls, one of 10 Ticonderoga-class cruisers left in the Navy and the last of its kind based in Japan. The cruiser departed earlier this month for San Diego as part of a routine homeport shift.

While in San Diego, the ship's engineering spaces were improved, its command and control systems upgraded and its living spaces refurbished. London-based BAE Systems undertook the work in 2022 under a \$89.4 million Navy contract.

“Mustin Nation is proud to return to Japan,” the destroyer's skipper, Cmdr. Christina Appleman, said in a Navy news release after the ship steamed into port

Monday. “Our arrival has a special meaning for our Sailors and their families. We are rejoining a phenomenal team here in the 7th Fleet and are eager to work alongside our allies and partners in the region.”

A spokesperson for the 7th Fleet did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment Tuesday.

The Mustin was previously based in Yokosuka from July 2006 to June 2021. It now rejoins Destroyer Squadron 15, the Navy's largest deployed destroyer squadron and 7th Fleet's principal surface force.

Commissioned in 2003, the destroyer is named for the Mustin family, whose members served in the Navy for nearly a century.

The Robert Smalls arrived in Yokosuka in 2015 as USS Chancellorsville. It was renamed in 2023 after a man born into slavery who seized a Confederate transport ship during the Civil War and turned it over to Union forces.

After court loss, Pentagon to close its media corridor

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department will no longer allow media organizations to keep offices in the Pentagon building after a federal judge ruled that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had improperly revoked credentials for dozens of them.

The Pentagon will close what's known as the Correspondents' Corridor after deciding that access to the building “cannot be responsibly maintained “without the ability to screen credential holders for security risks,” department spokesman Sean Parnell announced on X.

Parnell said that a “new and improved” press work area would be established in an annex facility outside that will be “available when ready.”

The decision upends decades of precedent to which reporters with media credentials maintained workspaces in the Pentagon building — an arrangement that successive defense secretar-

ies in both Republican and Democratic administrations found posed no security risks. It marked an escalation by Hegseth's office three days after U.S. District Judge Paul Friedman in Washington ruled in favor of a lawsuit brought by The New York Times, which accused the administration of free speech violations.

Last fall, Hegseth demanded that news organizations agree to new limits on their reporting. The Pentagon policy put journalists in danger of being labeled “a security risk” that could've led to credentials being pulled if they were found soliciting material that could be considered classified or Controlled Unclassified Information, a ubiquitous label on Defense Department documents.

That standard, Friedman wrote in his opinion, “provides no way for journalists to know how they may do their jobs without losing their credentials. The policy therefore is vague in violation of the Fifth Amendment.”

Passenger says pilots' 'reflexes' saved lives

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Moments after an Air Canada jet collided at high speed with a fire truck at New York's LaGuardia Airport, killing the pilots and hurling a flight attendant from the aircraft, the passengers took their escape into their own hands.

With the smell of fuel in the air and debris dangling from the obliterated cockpit, passengers tore open emergency exit doors, jumped off the plane's wings and then turned around to catch others coming up behind them, some bleeding or with head wounds.

"Strangely enough, I wasn't scared or panicked. On the contrary, I think most of us were pretty aware of what happened," said passenger Clément Lelièvre. "So we all went outside; we got other people out."

About 40 passengers and

crew members on the regional jet from Montreal, and two people from the fire truck, were taken to hospitals. Some suffered serious injuries, but by Monday morning, most had been released, and others walked away with no treatment.

As investigators continued delving Tuesday into what caused the catastrophic wreck, stories of survival also emerged — including that of the flight attendant, found injured but alive outside the aircraft.

Lelièvre credited the pilots' "incredible reflexes" with saving lives. The pilots braked extremely hard just as the plane touched down, he said.

The collision late Sunday came after the fire truck was given permission to check on another plane that had aborted its takeoff after reporting an odor on board and started crossing the tarmac. An air traffic

controller can be heard on airport communications frantically telling the fire truck to stop.

Roughly 20 minutes later, the controller appears to blame himself. "We were dealing with an emergency earlier," the controller said. "I messed up."

A key for investigators will be examining coordination of the airport's air traffic and ground traffic at the time of the crash, said Mary Schiavo, a former Department of Transportation Inspector General.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said LaGuardia is "well-staffed" but faces a shortage of controllers.

The runway where the crash happened is likely to be closed for "days" during the investigation, Jennifer Homendy, chair of the National Transportation Safety Board, which is leading the investigation, said at a news conference Monday. Investiga-

tors need to sift through a lot of debris, she said.

Authorities recovered the plane's cockpit and flight data recorders by cutting a hole in the aircraft's roof and then drove them to the NTSB lab in Washington for analysis, Homendy said.

It was too early in the investigation to answer many questions about the accident, but more information was expected Tuesday, she said.

The crash shut down LaGuardia — the New York region's third-busiest hub — during what was already a messy time at U.S. airports because of a partial government shutdown.

Flights resumed Monday afternoon on one runway and with lengthy delays. The shutdown caused some disruptions at other airports, too, especially for Delta, which has a major presence at LaGuardia.

Mullin confirmed as DHS secretary

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — Markwayne Mullin has been confirmed as Department of Homeland Security secretary, placing the Oklahoma senator in charge of a Trump administration immigration crackdown that has triggered a 37-day funding shutdown of the agency.

The Senate voted 54-45 mostly along party lines Monday to confirm Mullin, a first-term Republican senator and former mixed martial arts fighter who has been a staunch defender of Donald Trump's deportation campaign.

The Oklahoma Republican will assume control of the shuttered department, as Americans contend with the resulting hours-long lines at airports and while Trump's escalating de-

mands have undermined bipartisan efforts to strike a deal to fund the agency.

A furor erupted over DHS' aggressive immigration enforcement tactics after agents killed two U.S. citizen protesters in separate incidents in Minneapolis in January.

The department's federal funding has been shut down since mid-February as Democrats have insisted on restrictions such as requiring agents to stop masking their faces in most situations and to acquire judicial warrants rather than internal administrative warrants to enter homes.

Still, some lawmakers were optimistic that Mullin's confirmation could help push the needle in talks to revive the agency's funding.

Cosby loses civil lawsuit over sex assault in Calif.

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Bill Cosby drugged and sexually assaulted a former waitress in 1972 after escorting her to one of his shows, a civil jury in California concluded Monday, awarding the woman \$19.25 million in damages.

The verdict was the latest turn in a series of legal battles the disgraced entertainer, 88, has faced since allegations that he repeatedly drugged and raped women exploded publicly about a decade ago. He served about three years in a Pennsylvania prison on sexual assault charges before that case was overturned in 2021.

Donna Motsinger, now 84, said in her lawsuit filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court that Cosby had given her wine and a pill that left her unable to move and that she woke up in

her house wearing nothing but her underwear, according to court records, and "she knew she had been drugged and raped by Bill Cosby."

Motsinger sued Cosby in 2023, alleging that, at the time, she was working at a Sausalito, Calif., restaurant called the Trident that was popular with celebrities, including Cosby. One night, Motsinger accepted Cosby's invitation to go with him to his show at the Circle Star Theater nearby. Cosby picked her up at her home in a limousine, according to her complaint, and, on the way to the venue, gave her the wine and a pill that she thought was aspirin.

"Next thing she knew, she was going in and out of consciousness while two men attending to Mr. Cosby were putting her in the limousine," the complaint said.

Colombian military plane fatally crashed shortly after takeoff

Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia—A military transport plane with 128 people on board, mostly soldiers, crashed shortly after taking off Monday in Puerto Leguizamo, Colombia, killing at least 66 people and leaving dozens injured, the head of Colombia's armed forces said.

Gen. Hugo Alejandro López Barreto said that four military personnel were still missing.

"Sadly, as a consequence of this tragic accident, 66 of our military elements died," he said.

"At the moment, we have no information, or indications, that it was an attack by an illegal armed group," Barreto added.

In a video posted on social media, Deputy Mayor Carlos Claros said that the bodies of the victims were taken to the small town's morgue, and that the only two clinics in town treated the injured before they were flown to larger cities. Puerto Leguizamo is located in Putumayo, an Amazonian province that borders Ecuador and Peru.

"I want to thank the people of Puerto Leguizamo who came out to help the victims of this accident," Claros told Colombian television station RCN.

Defense Minister Pedro Sánchez said on X that the plane that crashed Monday was transporting troops to another city in Putumayo.

Images shared online by Colombian media outlets showed a black cloud of smoke rising from a field where the plane crashed and a truck with soldiers rushing to the site.

The airplane had 128 people on board, including 115 were from the Army, 11 crew members and 2 from the National Police. Barreto said 57 people were

evacuated.

Media outlets shared videos of soldiers being rushed from the site on motorcycles driven by local residents, while another group of residents tried to put out the fire that the plane crash had created in a field surrounded by dense foliage.

Carlos Fernando Silva, the commander of Colombia's air force, said details of the crash were not yet known, "except that the plane had a problem and went down about one mile from the airport."

Petro seized on the accident to promote what he called his longtime campaign to modernize planes and other equipment used by his country's military, saying those efforts have been blocked by "bureaucratic difficulties" and suggesting that some officials should be held accountable.

Critics of the president pointed out that military aircraft have been given less flight hours under the Petro administration due to budget cuts, which leads to less experienced crews.

Erich Saumeth, a Colombian aviation expert and military analyst, said that the Hercules C-130 that crashed Monday had been donated by the United States to Colombia in 2020. Three years later, it went through a detailed revision known as an overhaul, in which its engines were inspected and key components were replaced.

"I don't think this plane crashed because of a lack of good parts," Saumeth said. He said that investigations will have to determine why the engines of the Hercules, which has four propellers, failed so quickly after take off.

Early elections in Denmark held after Greenland crisis

Associated Press

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Danish voters went to the polls Tuesday in a general election, with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen seeking a third term at the helm of the Scandinavian country after a standoff with President Donald Trump over the future of the kingdom's semiautonomous territory of Greenland.

More than 4.3 million are eligible to have their say in the vote for the new Folketing, or parliament, in Copenhagen, which is elected for a four-year term.

Frederiksen called the election in February, several months before she had to in apparent hopes that her resolute image in the crisis over Greenland would help her with voters in the European Union and NATO member country.

In her second term, her support had waned as the cost of living rose — something that, along with pensions and a po-

tential wealth tax, has been a prominent campaign issue.

The 48-year-old center-left Social Democrat is known for strong support of Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion and for a restrictive approach to migration — continuing a tradition in Danish politics that goes back two decades.

Two center-right challengers hope to oust Frederiksen as prime minister. One is in her current government — Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen of the Liberal, or Venstre, party.

The other is Alex Vanopslagh, 34, of the opposition Liberal Alliance, which calls for lower taxes and less bureaucracy, and for Denmark to abandon its refusal to use nuclear power.

Greenland, which took up much of the government's energy in recent months, hasn't been a significant issue in the campaign because there is broad agreement on its place in the kingdom.

EU and Australia sign free trade, defense pacts

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — The European Union and Australia on Tuesday agreed on the final text of a free trade agreement, some two years after negotiations broke down over Australian demands for more red meat market access and complaints about Australian products labeled with traditionally European names such as prosecco.

The breakthrough comes as both the EU and Australia seek to diversify their trading networks and reduce their economic reliance on China and exposure to uncertain U.S. tariffs.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Australian Prime Minister An-

thony Albanese signed the agreement at the Australian Parliament House after protracted negotiations that began in 2018.

The leaders also announced a new defense partnership that will bring closer military cooperation and the start of negotiations toward Australia becoming an associate of the research and innovation funding program Horizon Europe.

Albanese said that the new defense partnership would provide a framework for the EU and Australia to cooperate on global challenges, marking as areas of collaboration defense industries, maritime security, cyber security, countering terrorism and combating hybrid threats such as disinformation.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Feds drop charges in church protest case

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Federal prosecutors have dropped charges against a Minnesota woman accused of taking part in a January protest at a St. Paul church, after her attorney said she was misidentified and never attended the demonstration.

The dismissal, filed late Friday in federal court, ends the case against Heather Danae Lewis, 50, one of 39 people charged in connection with a protest at Cities Church. The charges were dismissed with prejudice, meaning they cannot be brought again.

Lewis, an engineer with no history of activism, became a suspect after investigators relied on cellphone location data and video footage from the scene, according to her attorney. Hunter said Lewis had been in a nearby parking lot that morning to pick up items from an auction, placing her near the gathering point but not at the protest itself.

Man convicted of murder given second chance

MA BOSTON — A 37-year-old man convicted of a 2008 Boston killing has been granted parole under the Commonwealth v. Mattis decision, a Supreme Judicial Court ruling that allows a second chance for 18-to-20-year-olds previously sentenced to life without parole.

Elbert Newson, of Dorchester, was 19 when he and a co-defendant participated in the fatal shooting of Thomas Webb, 17. Webb was petting a neighbor's dog outside a Jamaica Plain

apartment building on Sept. 15, 2008, when the killing occurred.

Newson was convicted of first-degree murder in 2011 and sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Newson, who has served 17 years in prison and is currently at MCI-Norfolk, became eligible for parole after the Supreme Judicial Court's 2024 decision to make life without the possibility of parole for "emerging adults" unconstitutional.

State's electric vehicle growth peters out

OR PORTLAND — Demand for electric vehicles was essentially flat in Oregon last year, a dramatic reversal after years of rapid growth. New state data shows that growth in registrations of new gas-powered cars outpaced growth in electrics for the first time in at least a decade.

The slowdown in electric vehicle sales coincides with the expiration of a \$7,500 federal tax credit last year and declining sales at Tesla, the most popular electric vehicle brand in the U.S. Registrations of new Teslas in Oregon fell 5% last year.

The advent of electric vehicles sparked enormous interest in Oregon — helped along by state and federal government tax incentives that could shave thousands of dollars off the cost of a new electric car. Electric vehicle registrations grew at an annual rate of 28% between 2014 and 2024, according to data from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

By 2024, 1 in 7 new cars in Oregon was electric.

Oregon has an additional rebate program for electric vehicles, but demand for the rebates

far exceeds available capital and the program typically operates for just a couple months each year.

GOP gas tax holiday pitch on hold as prices climb

MD BALTIMORE — Maryland Senate President Bill Ferguson pushed back Friday morning against a proposal by Republican state lawmakers for a 30-day break from the state gas tax as gas prices have risen since the start of the war in Iran.

Ferguson, a Baltimore City Democrat, said that the gas tax accounts for about a quarter of the revenue used for transportation projects.

"It's as tempting as ever for anyone in this period of high cost to say, of course, let's just roll back all taxes. The reality is, people still have to drive to work, they still have to use the bridges, they still have to use transit systems to get to and from cultural events, to work, to school, you name it," Ferguson said during a Friday news conference.

Republican leaders in the Maryland General Assembly pitched the gas tax holiday on Thursday, adding that a pause would provide immediate relief for Marylanders.

Family's party bus, SUV crash on highway; 5 die

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A two-vehicle crash in southwestern Minnesota on Friday involving an SUV and a family's party bus left five people dead and eight injured, according to the State Patrol.

The head-on collision occurred shortly after 4:40 p.m. Friday about 17 miles north of

Windom on Highway 71 near 240th Street in Cottonwood County, said Minnesota State Patrol Sgt. Troy Christianson.

Four of the people who died and at least two of the injured were related and were gathered to celebrate a birthday, according to a family member.

The driver of the SUV, Martin Nickolas Hanson, 67, of Springfield, Minn., also died.

The State Patrol is investigating which driver might have crossed into the other's lane, Christianson said.

Bill bolsters nature-based coastline protection

FL MIAMI — Building along the water's edge comes with consequences as the sea rises, and for decades the first line of defense against flooding has been concrete seawalls.

Now, Florida is leaning into another approach: "living shorelines" such as mangrove forests, oyster reef restoration and hybrid options like 3D-printed walls.

Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law Thursday that will make obtaining a permit for nature-based solutions easier as well as help fund them.

The law, which will take effect July 1, calls for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to create a permitting process for installing living shorelines that will have a faster application review.

The law also stipulates the DEP should incentivize new technology, like 3D-printed sea walls that are designed to mimic nature and give coral and algae surfaces to latch onto while creating a home for fish and crabs.

— From wire reports

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Virginia women knock off No. 2 Iowa in 20T

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Kymora Johnson scored 28 points as 10th-seeded Virginia became the first First Four to reach the regional semifinals after an 83-75 double-overtime win over No. 2 seed Iowa on Monday in a women's NCAA Tournament second-round game.

The Cavaliers (22-11) won three games in five days, defeating Arizona State 57-55 in Thursday's First Four game, following that with an 82-73 overtime win over Georgia in Saturday's first-round game, and then the Hawkeyes (27-7), who were playing in front of a sellout home crowd of 14,332.

It's the first time Virginia has advanced to the second weekend of the tournament since 2000. It's also the first time a 10-seed has reached the Sweet 16 since Creighton did it in 2022. The Bluejays also beat Iowa in the second round that year to advance.

The Hawkeyes had chances to win the game in regulation and at the end of the first overtime. Chazadi Wright's turnaround jumper with one second left in regulation missed, then Iowa missed two shots at the end of the first overtime, a 3-pointer by Taylor Stremlow and a putback attempt by Ava Heiden.

Fort Worth Regional 1

No. 1 UConn 98, No. 9 Syracuse 45: Azzi Fudd scored 26 of her 34 points in the first half in her final game at Gampel Pavilion and the Huskies used a 31-0 run to roll to a win over the Orange to advance to the Sweet 16 for the 32nd season in a row.

Fudd tied her career highs in points and 3-pointers and added five assists and four steals. Her eight 3-pointers are one short of the NCAA Tournament single-game record held by Purdue's Courtney Moses, UConn's Kia Nurse and Iowa's Caitlin Clark.

Sarah Strong had 18 points

and nine rebounds as UConn (36-0) won its 52nd consecutive game. Blanca Quinonez added 18 points for the Huskies, who led 33-8 after one quarter and 65-12 at halftime as they advance to play North Carolina in the Fort Worth 1 regional semifinal Friday.

Uche Izoje scored 12 points and Sophie Burrows had 10 for Syracuse (24-9).

No. 2 Vanderbilt 75, No. 7 Illinois 57: Mikayla Blakes scored 25 points as the host Commodores beat the Fighting Illini to advance to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 2009.

Vanderbilt (29-4) now is one win from matching the 30-win seasons of the 1993 Final Four squad and the 2001-02 Commodores for most wins in program history.

Blakes just missed the first triple-double of her career. She checked out with 2:12 left with 10 rebounds and nine assists along with four steals. Justine Pissott scored 18 points, making four 3-pointers. Aubrey Galvan added 12.

Illinois (22-12) came in with the youngest team in this tournament after having to replace four starters.

No. 6 Notre Dame 83, No. 3 Ohio State 73: Hannah Hidalgo put together another dominant performance with 26 points, 13 rebounds and eight steals as the Fighting Irish advanced to the Sweet 16 for the 15th straight time.

It is the second time in the second-team AP All-American's career she has had at least 20 points, 10 rebounds and seven steals in a game. Hidalgo had her eighth double-double of the season and the 16th of the junior's career.

Fellow AP All-America pick Jaloni Cambridge tied a career high with 41 points for the Buckeyes (27-8), the second-most points by an Ohio State player in an NCAA Tournament game.

The Buckeyes became the

first team in women's tournament history to be eliminated three straight years at home.

Vanessa de Jesus scored 15 points and Cassandre Prosper 13 for the Fighting Irish (24-10), who have won 11 of their last 13.

Fort Worth Regional 3

No. 3 Louisville 69, No. 6 Alabama 68: Elif Istanbuluoglu had 18 points and a key steal with 1:42 remaining that led to Reyna Scott's one-handed jumper as the shot clock expired, Imari Berry added two free throws with 8.2 seconds left and the Cardinals held off the Crimson Tide.

Louisville (29-7) reached its first Sweet 16 since 2023 despite several missed late free throws. Istanbuluoglu made 1 of 2 foul shots and Scott missed both with 2.3 seconds to go to give Alabama one last chance for a desperation basket.

Diana Collins grabbed the rebound and launched a shot from midcourt that bounced off the backboard, sending the Cardinals to a matchup Saturday against No. 2 seed Michigan in the Fort Worth 3 regional.

Tajianna Roberts also scored 18 points for Louisville, which won despite making just 8 of 16 from the foul line and 7 of 26 from 3-point range.

No. 5 Kentucky 74, No. 4 West Virginia 73: Teonni Key scored 19 points, Clara Strack had 18 points and 15 rebounds for her 16th double-double of the season and the Wildcats nearly gave up a big lead but held on to beat the Mountaineers to advance to the Sweet 16 for the first time in a decade.

Kentucky (25-10) will meet top-seeded and Southeastern Conference rival Texas on Saturday in Fort Worth, Texas. The Wildcats will make their seventh trip to the regional semifinals in program history and first since 2016.

West Virginia (28-7) nearly stormed back from a double-di-

git deficit. Sydney Shaw scored 11 of her 23 points in the fourth quarter and two Jordan Harrison free throws with 1:20 left brought the Mountaineers within 72-71. But West Virginia never retook the lead.

Sacramento Regional 2

No. 1 UCLA 87, No. 9 Oklahoma State 68: The Bruins led all the way, repelling the Cowgirls' lone run in the third quarter, and UCLA won to reach the Sweet 16 for the fourth consecutive year.

Lauren Betts had a career-high 35 points on 15-of-19 shooting and nine rebounds for the Bruins (33-1), who led by 25 points in the first half.

Betts received a standing ovation when she left with a minute to go in the final home game of her career.

Seeking a return trip to the Final Four, UCLA advanced to play fourth-seeded Minnesota (24-10) in a matchup of Big Ten opponents Friday in Sacramento.

Sacramento Regional 4

No. 1 South Carolina 101, No. 9 Southern Cal 61: Joyce Edwards had 23 points and 10 rebounds, Madina Okot added her 22nd double-double this season with 15 points and 15 rebounds and the Gamecocks advanced to their 12th straight Sweet 16.

South Carolina (33-3) opened with a 13-0 run, was ahead 51-21 at halftime and cruised to its 18th straight NCAA win at home. The Gamecocks will get a rematch at the Sacramento 4 Regional when they face fourth-seeded Oklahoma, one of two teams to defeat South Carolina this season.

Okot, the 6-foot-6 Mississippi State transfer, had 10 points and 11 rebounds before halftime while fifth-year point guard Raven Johnson, playing her final game at Colonial Life Arena, reached 1,000 career points in the opening half.

Sweet 16 down to bracket of high-majors

Associated Press

Cinderella has been kicked out of the dance early for the second straight season.

Following a madness-promising first day of upsets, the NCAA Tournament has turned into a high-major affair.

The Sweet 16 invite is for power-conference programs only.

Advocates for fewer automatic qualifiers and bracket expansion will have a field day with this one.

“I think parity is great for the game, but things change,” said Arizona coach Tommy Lloyd, who spent 21 seasons as an assistant at Gonzaga.

The Big Ten is the big conference on the block, pushing through a league-record six teams into the Sweet 16—three in the same region.

The SEC has four Sweet 16 teams, the Big 12 three, the Big East two, the ACC one.

Mid-majors: zero for the second straight season.

East Region

The top three seeds made it through the East.

St. John’s is the Darling.

The fifth-seeded Red Storm (30-6) blew a 12-point lead against Kansas, but Dylan Darling, who hadn’t hit a shot all day, scored at the buzzer for a 67-65 win that sends St. John’s to the Sweet 16 for the first time since 1999.

Next up for the Johnnies is a date with Duke on Friday in

Washington.

The Blue Devils (34-2) and star freshman Cameron Boozer had an opening 1-vs.-16 scare against Siena, but took it out on TCU with an 81-58 win to reach the Sweet 16 for the third straight season.

The second regional semifinal will likely leave both teams bruised and battered.

UConn (31-5) lost in the second round last season following consecutive national championships but clamped down on UCLA to earn a Sweet 16 return.

Michigan State (27-7) is in the Sweet 16 for the 17th time under coach Tom Izzo, led by the dynamic duo of Jeremy Fears Jr. and Coen Carr.

South Region

No. 2 seed Houston avoided having to play reigning national champion Florida — Iowa made sure of that — and will be playing at home for the South Region.

The Cougars (30-6) will be surrounded by Big Ten teams, starting with a 2-mile trip from campus against Illinois on Thursday.

The Fighting Illini (26-8) are big — bigger than any team in the country.

They used that size to their advantage, clobbering Penn and VCU to reach the Sweet 16 for the second time in three seasons under coach Brad Underwood.

The second East semifinal will be the battle of the corn.

No. 4 seed Nebraska (28-6) is

the closest thing the Sweet 16 has to an underdog — only because it had never won an NCAA Tournament game prior to this season.

No. 9 seed Iowa (23-12) finished 10-10 in the Big Ten but has bullied its way through the bracket so far, reaching the Sweet 16 for the first time since 1999 by ending Florida’s repeat bid.

Midwest Region

Michigan has looked every bit a top seed, winning its first two games by an average of 22 points.

Next up is a showdown with No. 4 seed Alabama on Friday in Chicago.

The Crimson Tide (25-9) washed away Texas Tech by raining down 19 3-pointers in a 90-65 thrashing to reach the Sweet 16 for the fourth straight season.

No. 2 seed Iowa State took a big hit when All-America forward Joshua Jefferson sprained his ankle in the Cyclones’ opener and didn’t play against Kentucky.

It did little to slow them down; Iowa State (29-7) spun away from the Wildcats 82-63 to reach the Sweet 16 for the third time under coach T.J. Otzelberger.

The Cyclones hope to have Jefferson back for Friday’s game and will likely need him against Tennessee.

The No. 6 Volunteers (24-11) have been Sweet 16 regulars under coach Rick Barnes and made it four straight by outlasting Virginia 79-72.

West Region

The West has an SEC team disguised as Cinderella.

Texas has a world of resources and plays in the SEC, yet found itself in Dayton, Ohio, as a No. 11 seed.

The Longhorns (21-14) pulled it together at just the right time in their first season under coach Sean Miller, knocking off No. 3 seed Gonzaga to become the sixth First Four team to reach the Sweet 16.

That earns them a spot in the West semifinals against No. 2 Purdue on Thursday in San Jose, Calif.

Coach Matt Painter has molded the Boilermakers (29-8) into a model of consistency, reaching the Sweet 16 seven times the last nine seasons — including the 2024 title game — with their 79-69 win over Miami.

The showdown between No. 1 Arizona and No. 4 Arkansas will be an NBA scout’s delight.

The Wildcats (34-2) go eight deep in potential future pros and guard Jaden Bradley has a knack for making the biggest plays at the biggest moments.

John Calipari set the standard for recruiting NBA lottery picks at Kentucky, and it’s been no different in his second season in Fayetteville. Fabulous freshman Darius Acuff Jr. was the star in the Razorbacks’ 94-88 win over High Point, scoring 36 points as Arkansas secured its second straight Sweet 16 berth.

Senators shut down Rangers to close wild-card gap

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Reimer kept expecting the New York Rangers to put shots on net.

They rarely did.

And by the end of the game Monday night, the Ottawa Senators had allowed just nine shots on goal in a 2-1 victory at Madison Square Garden. It was the fewest shots against in franchise history, New York’s lowest output since 1955 — and the worst by any NHL team since 2003, predating the salary cap.

“The boys played great,” said Reimer, the Ottawa goalie.

Shane Pinto scored on the power play, Warren Foegele added his fifth goal in nine games since being traded and the Senators made up more ground in their chase to make the playoffs.

The Rangers had just nine shots on goal, matching a franchise worst set Dec. 11, 1955, in a defeat at Detroit. They lost for a 25th time in 34 home games this season.

Ottawa won its third in a row, improving to 14-3-2 since Jan. 25 and moving two

points back of the second and final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with 12 games to play.

Even more impressive, they did so after losing two more players to injury and playing more than half the game with just four defensemen. Thomas Chabot left in the final seconds of the first period after taking a stick to the right arm from New York captain J.T. Miller, and Lassi Thomson exited his first game in the league since Nov. 25, 2022, with an undisclosed lower-body injury in the second.

Thunder beat 76ers for 12th straight win

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 22 points, Jalen Williams added 18 in his return to the lineup and the Oklahoma City Thunder won their 12th game in a row Monday night with a 123-103 victory over the short-handed Philadelphia 76ers.

Jared McCain had 13 points for Oklahoma City in his first game in Philadelphia since last month's trade. The defending NBA champions improved to 57-15, the best record in the league.

VJ Edgecombe scored 35 points for the 76ers, who played without Tyrese Maxey, Joel Embiid and Paul George. Philadelphia began the day as the No. 7 seed in the Eastern Conference play-in tournament, but was just a half-game back of fifth-place Toronto.

Williams was back in the lineup after missing 16 games with a right hamstring strain.

McCain helped the Thunder jump out to a 35-25 lead after the first quarter with a pair of 3-pointers. OKC increased its lead to 24 and was never threatened after taking a 65-43 lead into halftime.

McCain, drafted by the Sixers with the No. 16 overall pick last year, drew loud cheers when he entered in the first quarter. Philadelphia sent McCain to the Thunder for draft picks at the February trade deadline. The 76ers are 10-12 since the deal.

Pacers 128, Magic 126: Pascal Siakam scored 37 points and blocked Paolo Banchero's attempted layup in the final seconds to help visiting Indiana end its franchise-record 16-game losing streak with a win over Orlando.

Banchero scored 39 points for the Magic, who have lost five straight.

Banchero drove to the basket with a chance to tie the game after Orlando won a jump ball with 6.4 seconds left. But 7-foot-1 Jay Huff and the 6-9 Siakam were

under the basket, and Banchero could not get the shot over them.

Jarace Walker had 20 points for the Pacers. Andrew Nembhard, who hit a 3-pointer with 1:33 remaining for Indiana's final points, finished with 13 points, 14 assists and seven rebounds.

Pistons 113, Lakers 110: Daniss Jenkins scored a career-high 30 points, including six in the final 34 seconds, and host Detroit ended Los Angeles' nine-game winning streak.

The Pistons overcame 32 points from Luka Doncic and 24 from Austin Reaves to win their fourth straight and seventh in eight games. Jalen Duren added 20 points and 10 rebounds.

Doncic was cleared to play Sunday after the NBA rescinded his 16th technical foul of the season, which triggers a one-game suspension.

LeBron James went scoreless in the first half but finished with 12 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds.

Spurs 136, Heat 111: Victor Wembanyama scored 26 points as visiting San Antonio beat Miami for its sixth straight win.

The Spurs' victory, coupled with Houston's 132-124 loss to Chicago, allowed them to clinch the Southwest Division.

Wembanyama added 15 rebounds and five blocks for San Antonio. Keldon Johnson scored 21 points while adding six rebounds. Dylan Harper went 9-for-14 from the field (3 for 5 from 3-point range) to finish with 21 points.

Norman Powell led the Heat with 21 points. Tyler Herro had 18 points.

Hawks 146, Grizzlies 107: Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 26 points and eight players scored in double figures as host Atlanta routed Memphis.

The Hawks had a 116-75 advantage after three periods on the way to their 11th straight home win and 13th victory in 14 games.

Onyeka Okongwu and Jonathan Kuminga scored 16 points apiece, CJ McCollum had 15 and Dyson Daniels added 12. Corey Kispert, Zaccharie Risacher and Jock Landale each added 11 as Atlanta shot 49-for-92 (53%) from the field overall and 25-for-54 (46%) from 3-point range.

GG Jackson scored 26 points, Tyler Burton added 20, Ty Jerome finished with 17 and Walter Clayton Jr. 16 for the Grizzlies, who shot 33% (14 for 43) from 3-point distance.

Bulls 132, Rockets 124: Matas Buzelis' layup in the final seconds put host Chicago ahead to stay, and Collin Sexton came off the bench to score 25 points in a victory over Houston.

The Bulls (29-42) led by as many as 22 points after scoring a season-high 41 points in the first quarter. But Chicago trailed by four points late and needed Buzelis' basket with 10.2 seconds remaining to move ahead to stay and post its first win over the Rockets in the teams' last five games.

Kevin Durant fueled Houston's (43-28) comeback by scoring 15 of his game-high 40 points in the fourth quarter.

Durant was 15 of 23 from the field, marking the ninth straight game he shot 50% or better, which is the third-longest streak of his career.

Warriors 137, Mavericks 131 (OT): Moses Moody scored 23 points before crumpling to the floor with an apparently serious left knee injury late in overtime as Golden State beat Dallas, extending the Mavericks' home losing streak to 12 games, their longest in 32 years.

Moody had just stolen the ball from Dallas rookie standout Cooper Flagg near midcourt and was all alone at the basket when his left leg buckled as he went up for the shot. He lost the ball and went to the floor holding his knee with 58 seconds remaining in the extra period.

Flagg had 30 points and nine

assists but also finished with seven turnovers, including three in an 11-0 Warriors run that broke a tie at the start the fourth quarter. Daniel Gafford scored 20.

Raptors 143, Jazz 127: RJ Barrett scored 27 points, Sandro Mamukelashvili added 23 and visiting Toronto defeated Utah.

Ja'Kobe Walter had 21 points and Scottie Barnes finished with 20 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds as the Raptors (40-31) stopped a two-game skid.

Jazz rookie Ace Bailey had 37 points and Brice Sensabaugh scored 24 off the bench for Utah (21-51), which has lost six of seven and is eliminated from playoff contention.

Trail Blazers 134, Nets 99: Toumani Camara had career highs of nine 3-pointers and 35 points to help host Portland beat Brooklyn for the Trail Blazers' largest margin of victory this season.

The Nets have lost eight straight and 18 of the last 20. Brooklyn (17-55) is a game behind Indiana (16-56) and a half-game behind Washington (16-55) for the best draft lottery odds.

Camara made 10 of 12 shots from the field. Deni Avdija scored 18 points and Scoot Henderson had 13 points, five assists and four steals for Portland.

Clippers 129, Bucks 96: Kawhi Leonard scored 28 points in 25 minutes and host Los Angeles pummeled Milwaukee.

Brook Lopez added 19 points, Darius Garland had 15 points and six assists, and the Clippers won consecutive games following four straight losses.

Gary Trent Jr. paced the Bucks with 20 points off the bench. Ryan Rollins led their starters with 13, and Milwaukee had five players in double figures. The Bucks have lost 10 of their past 14 games, including three of four since sitting superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo because of a left knee injury.