

82nd Airborne ordered to Middle East

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

The 82nd Airborne Division was ordered Tuesday to begin deploying to the Middle East, where about 2,000 paratroopers are headed to potentially join operations against Iran.

The soldiers are being drawn from the 82nd Airborne's quick-reaction brigade of 3,000 soldiers known as the Immediate Response Force, which is designed to mobilize anywhere in the world in 18 hours, several news outlets reported late Tuesday citing defense officials.

The contingent headed to the Middle East is comprised of two battalions of roughly 800 soldiers each along with the division's commander, Maj. Gen. Brandon Tegtmeier, and supporting staff, The New York Times reported.

It was unclear where the soldiers will be located in the Middle East, but they were expected to be positioned within striking distance of Iran, officials told the Times.

The deployment order comes as reports say the U.S. has com-

pleted a 15-point peace proposal, which Pakistan delivered, highlighting the urgency within President Donald Trump's administration to resolve a conflict it started alongside Israel almost a month ago. Trump has said he hopes to reach an agreement by Friday.

Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, two of Trump's special envoys, as well as Secretary of State Marco Rubio, have been involved in the negotiations with Iran, according to the president. Pakistan has offered itself as a mediator.

It's unclear who the U.S. would negotiate with, given a lack of clarity about Iran's power structure following the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on the first day of the conflict. Several other leading government and military officials have also been killed.

The president boasted Tuesday that the U.S. is in "a good bargaining position" after weeks of strikes that he says have taken out Iranian missiles, launchers and ships.

A series of Iranian officials

have denied negotiations are taking place, and on Wednesday, Iran dismissed the U.S. plan to pause the war, The Associated Press reported. Iranian state television's English-language broadcaster quoted an anonymous official as saying Iran rejected America's ceasefire proposal and has its own demands for an end to the fighting.

In an overnight statement, the country's military told the U.S. not to "call your defeat an agreement."

"The level of your internal conflicts has reached the point where you are negotiating with yourselves," the armed forces said in a statement carried by Iran's state-run IRIB News.

There's also little clarity over whether Iran will immediately allow commercial ships safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz — a crucial shipping corridor for oil, natural gas, metals and other commodities — as well as how Israel would respond to any deal. There's been little sign of Iran backing down in the face of a relentless bombardment. Iranian media

said more missiles were fired at Israel.

Despite the reported talks, Trump has ordered thousands of troops to the Middle East as he weighs options for ending Iran's stranglehold on the Strait of Hormuz.

The paratroopers will join several thousand Marines also headed to the region, giving Trump options if he decides to launch a ground attack. One possible operation for 82nd soldiers and Marine infantrymen is seizing the strategic Kharg Island, a small strip of land in the Persian Gulf that handles 90% of Iranian oil exports.

Experts say the size of the force being sent to the region isn't large enough to carry out large-scale operations over an expansive amount of territory.

"That (force) is not sufficient for a major invasion nor to hold a single city. [It] says limited/targeted ops only," Alex Plitsas, an expert with the Atlantic Council think tank, said on X.

The Immediate Response Force is a go-to unit for the Pentagon during major crises.

Chaplains will now go by religious insignia, not rank

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The Pentagon is doing away with rank insignias for military chaplains, requiring them to instead display religious insignia as part of broader changes to the chaplain corps, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced this week.

Chaplains will still retain their ranks, Hegseth said in a video announcement Tuesday, but the change is meant to highlight the importance of the chaplain's role as a religious leader.

Eliminating rank insignia will also help junior officers or enlisted personnel feel more comfortable approaching officers, or potentially senior officers, about sensitive subjects, like addiction, relationship or struggles with faith, he said.

"A chaplain is first and foremost a chaplain, and an officer second," Hegseth said. "This change is a visual representation of that fact."

The Pentagon late last year announced plans to overhaul the military's chaplain corps,

which Hegseth said had become too focused on political correctness and secular humanism.

He eliminated the Army's spiritual fitness guide and vowed to streamline the military's faith and belief coding system.

Since 2017, the Defense Department has recognized 221 groups as religious denominations or belief systems, ranging from mainstream to obscure Christian sects, Wiccans and atheists.

That system was impractical

and unusual, Hegseth said this week. Moving forward, the Pentagon will use 31 religious affiliation codes.

"This brings the codes in line with its original purpose: giving chaplains clear, usable information, so they can minister to service members in a way that aligns with that service member's faith background and religious practice," he said.

More than 80% of service members identify as being religious, Hegseth said, without citing a source.

USS Mason leaves Fla. ahead of deployment

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A Navy destroyer assigned to the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group has left its homeport in Florida to begin operations in support of an upcoming deployment, the Navy announced this week.

USS Mason, which serves as the air and missile defense commander for the Bush group, departed Mayport, Fla., on Tuesday, the Navy said in a statement the same day.

The departure comes after months of training, maintenance and certification events as part of the strike group, according to the statement.

It's not clear when Mason will join the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush for the group's scheduled deployment. The Navy has not officially announced where the Bush

will go.

But with USS Gerald R. Ford at a Navy base in Greece for an assessment, repairs and replenishment following a March 12 fire aboard the ship during operations in the Red Sea, there now is only one Navy aircraft carrier in the Middle East.

USS Abraham Lincoln continues operations in the Arabian Sea in support of Operation Epic Fury, the ongoing joint American and Israeli military campaign against Iran.

On Tuesday, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa/U.S. 6th Fleet said the cause of the fire aboard the Ford, which started in the ship's main laundry area, remained under investigation.

"Specific details and subsequent damage assessment are being evaluated as part of ongoing investigations and will be released at a

later date," NAVEUR-AF/6th Fleet said in a statement in response to Stars and Stripes' questions about the impact of the fire on the ship and its personnel.

Mason has a crew of about 300 and is one of at least two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers assigned to the Bush carrier strike group; the other is USS Ross, homeported in Norfolk, Va.

Mason is among the first destroyers to take on the responsibility of air and surface command, a role traditionally filled by cruisers. With the Navy's aging cruiser fleet nearing retirement, destroyers are bridging the gap.

Bush, which completed a pre-deployment certification exercise March 5, was last deployed to the Mediterranean in August 2022. The carrier returned to Norfolk in April 2023 after more than eight months on deployment.

Army returns max enlistment age to 42, in line with several services

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Those in their late 30s and early 40s can now join the U.S. Army.

The Army increased its maximum enlistment age to 42 this month, bringing its accession policy closer in line with most of the United States' other military services, according to updated service regulation documents published this month.

Individuals up to 42 with or without prior military service can enlist in the Regular Army, the Army National Guard and the Army Reserve, according to the updated Army Regulation 601-210 published March 20. AR 601-210 governs policies and procedures for the Army's enlistment process.

The Army in recent years had capped the enlistment age at 35, although it did accept some older recruits with waivers, officials said. The policy did not change the Army's minimum ages for enlisting, which remain 17 with parental permission or 18.

The updated enlistment age brings the Army in line with the Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard, which all accept recruits up to 42. The Navy accepts recruits up to 41, and the Marine Corps only accepts enlisted recruits up to 28 years old.

It is not the first time the Army has accepted older recruits. The service temporarily in-

creased its maximum enlistment age to 42 in 2006 as it struggled to fill its ranks amid major combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The service dropped its enlistment age back to 35 in 2016.

The Air Force and Space Force were the most recent services to raise their max enlistment age in 2023 when they moved it from 39 to 42 amid a yearslong recruiting slump that saw Air Force recruiters fall short of their enlistment goals for multiple years.

But the Army policy change comes amid a solid recruiting environment in which its recruiters have reached or surpassed their goals in the last year and report being on track to meet their 2026 recruiting aims.

The policy change is meant to better align the service with Defense Department standards, an Army spokesperson said Tuesday.

The updated Army regulation also allows recruits who have a single marijuana possession or drug paraphernalia possession conviction to enlist without a waiver. Such convictions previously would have technically barred potential recruits from enlisting, but those with such convictions were often granted waivers to join the service.

In 2023, Rand Corp. analysts suggested the Army raise its maximum enlistment age to help it increase recruiting at a time when the service had missed its recruiting goals in 2022.

Va. ROTC cadets honored after stopping shooter

Stars and Stripes

Army ROTC cadets attending Old Dominion University in Virginia received eight meritorious service medals and two Purple Hearts on Sunday in recognition of their efforts to stop a shooter at the university two weeks earlier.

The private ceremony saw the unnamed cadets awarded by Army Secretary Dan Driscoll and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Weimer, U.S. Army Cadet Command said in a Facebook post.

On March 12, Mohamed Bailor Jalloh fired in a classroom at the university, killing one person and injuring two others. Jalloh, a previously convicted terrorist and former member of the Army National Guard, was stopped by students.

"The shooter is now deceased thanks to a group of brave students who stepped in and subdued him — actions that undoubtedly saved lives along with the quick response of law enforcement," FBI Director Kash Patel said the day of the shooting in a post on X.

The man who was killed, retired Army Lt. Col. Brandon Shah, 41, was a decorated military veteran who led the university's ROTC program and was credited with boosting its size.

Jury in New Mexico finds Meta culpable of harming teens

Albuquerque (N.M.) Journal

Jurors on Tuesday found digital media giant Meta culpable of failing to protect New Mexico teenagers on the company's platforms in a verdict that came less than a day after attorneys ended closing arguments in the six-week trial.

The jury ordered Meta to pay \$375 million in civil penalties for violations of New Mexico's consumer protection laws.

The jury found Meta liable for both claims brought by New Mexico under the state's Unfair Practices Act.

State Attorney General Raúl Torrez filed the suit against Meta Platforms and CEO Mark Zuckerberg in 2023, alleging the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp failed to protect children from sexual abuse, online solicitation and human trafficking.

"The jury's verdict is a historic victory for every child and family who has paid the price for Meta's choice to put profits over kids' safety," Torrez said of the verdict. "Meta executives knew their products harmed children, disregarded warnings from their own employees and lied to the public about what they knew. Today the jury joined families, educators and child safety experts in saying enough is enough."

Attorneys for New Mexico asked jurors on Monday to impose a penalty of more than \$2 billion against Meta.

The next phase of New Mexico's legal action against Meta will be a bench trial before 1st Judicial District Judge Bryan Biedscheid seeking additional financial penalties and court-mandated changes to Meta's platforms that offer stronger protec-

tions for children, Torrez said in a statement. That portion of the trial has not been scheduled.

"New Mexico is proud to be the first state to hold Meta accountable in court for misleading parents, enabling child exploitation and harming kids," Torrez said.

Advocates hugged one another in celebration outside the courthouse in Santa Fe after the verdict was announced.

One of the jurors, Lindsay Payton, said the trial showed Meta could do more to protect teens in New Mexico from online solicitation and sexual abuse.

"They're not out to do evil in that way — I don't think they're doing it on purpose — but they are aware of what's going on and they know the extent of it and they really need to fix it," Payton said.

Another juror, Molly Archuleta, said the jury grappled with whether Meta willfully and intentionally allowed harm to happen.

"To get 12 people to agree on what is grossly unfair was a struggle," said Archuleta, who works as a registered nurse. While Archuleta said she believes Meta proved they do care about children, she also said she believes justice was "heavily served" in the case.

Jurors found 37,500 violations of state law, or 25% of New Mexico teenagers, based on U.S. Census Bureau figures, Archuleta said.

New Mexico's legal action differs from thousands of other lawsuits filed against social media companies across the country by focusing on what the lawsuit argues is Meta's failure to protect young people from sexual exploitation.

Fire truck in LaGuardia collision had no tracker

New York Daily News

NEW YORK — The Port Authority fire truck that got into a fatal crash Sunday night with an Air Canada jet landing at LaGuardia Airport didn't have transponders installed that could have helped air traffic controllers better track its movements, NTSB investigators said Tuesday.

While radio transmissions made it clear the Port Authority Police aircraft rescue fire truck and several other emergency vehicles were close to the runway, transponders would have allowed controllers in the tower to see them on their instruments, National Transportation Safety Board Chairwoman Jennifer Homendy said.

"The controllers should have all the tools they need to do their job," she said at a press briefing at LaGuardia Airport on Tuesday afternoon. "Whether it's aircraft or vehicles moving in the taxiways, they should have it all."

The NTSB will be investigating all facets of the crash, including the possibility that a tower operator gave the emergency vehicle permission to cross the runway without realizing the Air Canada plane was landing there.

NTSB investigators have yet to interview the Port Authority Police sergeant and officer who were in the fire truck involved in the crash. The sergeant was expected to be released from the hospital Tuesday, and the officer was released the day before.

Homendy said a transponder aboard the fire truck would have ensured it was visible to LaGuardia's airport surface detection system, known as "ASDE-X," which is meant to automatically notify controllers to potential dangers on the tarmac.

Homendy told reporters Tuesday there was no indication any of the fire rescue trucks at LaGuardia Airport were equipped with transponders.

Judge: US government ban on Anthropic AI 'troubling'

Bloomberg News

A judge appeared skeptical of the Trump administration's rationale for banning the federal government from using artificial intelligence technology from Anthropic, a move that the Claude chatbot maker claims could cost it billions in lost revenue.

During a hearing Tuesday in San Francisco, U.S. District Judge Rita F. Lin said it was "troubling" that the Defense Department had designated Anthropic a supply-chain risk, a label normally used to describe U.S. adversaries. Lin said the decision by the government doesn't appear to be "tailored to the stated national security concern."

Instead, the ban that followed

the Pentagon's dispute with the company over AI safety concerns "looks like an attempt to cripple Anthropic," she said. The judge added that she's concerned about whether the government is punishing Anthropic for speaking out publicly about the conflict.

Anthropic sued last month to block the Pentagon's declaration, escalating a high-stakes dispute over safeguards on AI technology used by the military.

Anthropic had asked the judge to issue a preliminary injunction to block the government's ban from staying in effect while the legal fight plays out. Lin didn't rule on that request, but said she'd make a decision in the coming days.

Gulf states weigh options to counter Iran

Bloomberg News

Iran's biggest Gulf Arab neighbors are considering joining the U.S.-Israeli war against Tehran and could be pushed to if Tehran attacks their critical infrastructure, according to several people with knowledge of the situation.

The Gulf's most powerful states, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in particular, are losing patience with Iranian strikes that have already hit ports, energy facilities and airports, said these people, who requested anonymity in order to speak freely. But they would only join the war if the Islamic Republic makes good on its threats to attack vital Gulf power and water infrastructure

— a high threshold, the people added.

Most Gulf states are headed in that direction with some exceptions such as Oman, which wants to maintain its role as mediator, said the people.

Still, they are wary of joining the war given Iran could escalate its attacks on them. They could also end up in a situation where President Donald Trump cuts a deal with Tehran and they're left to deal with a wounded, angry regime, added a European diplomat in the region.

Many governments also fear that could happen even if they don't join the war, said the people.

The war has upended Iran's

relations with its Sunni Arab neighbors. Saudi Arabia and the UAE spent most of the past five years attempting to stabilize ties with the Islamic Republic, in large part to prevent the kind of conflict now raging. Gulf states have long seen Iran's Shiite theocratic regime as trying to extend its ideology and influence to the rest of the region.

In the past two days Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE all intercepted drones and missiles fired by Iran. Abu Dhabi condemned what it called an "unprovoked terrorist attack" by Iran on Bahrain on Tuesday that killed a Moroccan contractor. Several Emirati and Bahraini soldiers were injured in the missile attack.

Iran says Gulf states are legitimate targets because the U.S. uses their airspace and territories to attack it — a claim they all reject.

Spokespeople for the foreign ministries of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

Majed Al-Ansari, spokesperson for Qatar's foreign ministry, told a press briefing on Tuesday that Gulf states will have to find ways of coexisting with Iran. The Islamic Republic, a country of 90 million people, sits only just across the Persian Gulf from them. "It's up to the Iranians post this war to decide how they will rebuild the trust," Al-Ansari said.

Russia, Ukraine use drones to escalate aerial barrages

Associated Press

Russian air defenses downed 389 incoming Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defense Ministry said Wednesday, in what was the largest reported overnight attack on Russian regions and Crimea since Moscow's forces invaded Ukraine more than four years ago.

The drones were stopped over 13 Russian regions as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

Also Wednesday, a drone attack set Russia's Ust-Luga port on the Baltic Sea on fire as Ukraine carried out the most intense air strike on its foe in over a year.

It came a day after Russia fired almost 1,000 drones and 34 missiles at civilian areas of Ukraine in the space of 24 hours, extending its usual nighttime barrage into daylight hours in one of its biggest aerial attacks of the war.

At least six people were killed and around 50 people were in-

jured, Ukrainian authorities said.

Ukrainian forces also carried out a missile strike on the Belgorod region on the border with Ukraine overnight, damaging energy infrastructure, its Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said. Power, water and heating supplies were disrupted, he said.

Meanwhile, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said on Wednesday that his nation will gradually cut off gas supplies to Ukraine until Russian oil deliveries resume through the Druzhba pipeline. The transit of natural gas through Hungary plays a key role in fulfilling the energy needs of Ukraine.

Russian oil supplies to Hungary and Slovakia have been halted for nearly two months after what Ukrainian officials say were Russian drone attacks that damaged the pipeline, which crosses Ukrainian territory, and that continuous strikes risk the lives of technicians trying to repair it.

Danish leader's party wins vote; talks await

Bloomberg News

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's party won a closely contested election by pledging stability in global turmoil, setting the stage for difficult coalition talks to secure a third term in power.

The premier's Social Democrats emerged as the biggest with 21.9% of the Tuesday parliamentary vote overshadowed by President Donald Trump's threats over Greenland, after all ballots were preliminarily counted. Still, it's the party's worst result in more than a century.

With both traditional camps short of a clear majority, Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen of the centrist Moderates landed the role of kingmaker. His election-night plea to continue with a cross-bloc coalition was dismissed by Liberal leader Troels Lund Poulsen, who ruled out cooperating with Frederiksen, narrowing options for the talks that are due to start

Wednesday.

The election is one in a string of European ballots shaped by Trump's return to the White House. While Danish parties are unified in standing up to the U.S., key votes starting with an April ballot in Hungary will help determine how Europe positions itself toward the U.S.

The Danish election — typically domestically focused — was dominated by foreign and security policy. The crisis drove home just how impacted Danes are by the shift in the global order.

The 48-year-old Frederiksen had been polling poorly before the U.S. president renewed his claims over the Arctic territory in January, but saw a boost in backing following her handling of the dispute. That prompted her to call the vote early, with Danes galvanized by Trump's pressure to rally around their leader — mirroring the outcomes of Canadian and Australian votes last year.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Some NYU professors on strike; classes continue

NY NEW YORK — A New York University faculty union went on strike Monday for raises and job security, while classes were scheduled to continue.

The strike impacts about half of NYU's full-time faculty members, who are represented by Contract Faculty United-UAW. The professors, known as "contract faculty," are not on a track to earn tenure.

In raw numbers, that's nearly 1,000 NYU professors. It does not include full-time tenure-track faculty, adjunct faculty, or graduate student workers who are represented by other unions.

In February, members voted 90% in favor of authorizing a strike, with 75% of the unit participating, according to the union.

NYU spokesman Wiley Norvell said the school administration had presented a "generous and comprehensive package," including the highest minimum salaries of any unionized contract faculty in the country.

Suit: Airline crew caused disabled man's fall, death

NV LAS VEGAS — Relatives of a disabled Allegiant passenger filed a lawsuit Friday against the airline, alleging that the company was responsible for his death after crew members pushed him in an unsecured wheelchair, and he fell face-first.

Tony Adkins is suing Allegiant Travel Co. and Allegiant Air in connection with a March 28, 2024, incident involving his son, Hunter Adkins.

Officials for Allegiant, headquartered in Las Vegas, could not be reached immediately for comment.

Hunter Adkins, 24, had lived with muscular dystrophy and used a wheelchair, the complaint said. As he, his father, and his 9-year-old brother prepared to board their flight at Huntington Tri-State Airport in West Virginia, where the family lives, the captain ordered ground and flight crews to hurry the process to keep the next flight on schedule, according to the lawsuit.

Adkins' attorneys alleged that, as a result, extra wheelchair assistants who were supposed to help transfer Adkins from his motorized wheelchair to an "aisle wheelchair" were reassigned to load luggage.

Attorneys said Adkins was transferred from his personal wheelchair to one that lacked safety straps. According to the complaint, when the assistant pushing Adkins up the ramp reached the plane door and attempted to enter the cabin, the wheelchair tipped over.

Quadruple amputee charged with murder

MD LA PLATA — A professional cornhole player celebrated for excelling against the odds has been arrested for murder.

According to the Charles County Sheriff's Office in Maryland, Dayton James Webber, 27, is accused of shooting and killing a front-seat passenger in his vehicle during an argument Sunday night.

Cornhole is a popular lawn game where players toss bean bags from 27 feet away at a raised board with a hole, aiming to reach 21 points.

Webber has gained some fame for winning cornhole tournaments as a quadruple amputee. In 2023, he was featured by NBC's "Today" and ESPN where he talked about losing his limbs to a bacterial infection at 10 months old and his unlikely journey to stardom. ESPN also reported on Webber in 2010 when he was wrestling as a 12-year-old.

Detectives say officers with the La Plata Police Department were flagged down near La Plata Road and Radio Station Road in La Plata by two witnesses who said they saw the shooting happen. Bradrick Michael Wells, 27, of Waldorf, has been identified as the victim.

Webber left the scene but was arrested in Charlottesville, Va., about two hours later.

Man charged in connection with gift card fraud scheme

MI DETROIT — A California man has been charged in connection with a major gift card fraud scheme, the Michigan Attorney General's Office said.

Sinjuan Song was arraigned Friday through the 51st District Court in Waterford on one count of conducting a criminal enterprise, a 20-year felony, and two counts of possession of a fraudulent financial transaction device, each a four-year felony.

Authorities allege the 31-year-old is connected to an organized retail crime group that distributed altered gift cards in March 2025 at Meijer locations in White Lake, Waterford, Auburn Hills, Southgate, Allen Park and Taylor.

According to Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel's office, such scams typically involve empty, unsold gift cards

stolen from retail stores. The cards are then altered to reveal their unique redemption numbers, recorded by scammers and concealed again with an adhesive before being returned.

Scammers use computer programs to monitor when any card is activated, and when a shopper places a balance, it is transferred into another digital account, Nessel's office said.

'Kinda terrifying': Fireball streaks across sky

CA SAN LUIS OBISPO — A rare fireball put on a dazzling display across the California sky on Sunday night.

According to NASA Space Alerts, an official NASA account on X dedicated to alerting the public to "cosmic activity in near-Earth space," the meteor was first spotted around Chowchilla on Sunday night going at a speed of 35,000 mph. The agency said the fireball traveled "58 miles through the upper atmosphere before disintegrating 29 miles above Calflax."

"This fireball does not appear to be related to other recent bright meteors," NASA said.

The display spawned more than 230 reports of sightings from California, Arizona and Nevada, according to the American Meteor Society, which allows members to submit sightings of meteor events on its website. One user, Gregory E., who spotted the fireball from Lake Nacimiento in San Luis Obispo County around 8:20 p.m., said it was "like nothing I've ever seen before." Other users noted the fireball appeared in an array of colors, including blue, green, red and orange as it streaked across the sky.

— From wire reports

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UNC parts ways with Davis after 5 seasons

Associated Press

Hubert Davis appeared to be the right men's basketball coach to be North Carolina's bridge from Dean Smith to Roy Williams and into the future. Instead, that run lasted just five years.

The Tar Heels have parted ways with Davis, announcing Tuesday night that they had made "a leadership change" to end Davis' tenure as successor to retired Hall of Fame coach Williams. Davis' time featured multiple high points, but also wild swings of results, an inconsistency that runs contrary to North Carolina's status as a tradition-rich blueblood with a hallmark of sustained top-tier success.

In its announcement, the school said athletic director Bubba Cunningham and executive associate AD Steve Newmark — who will take over as Cunningham's successor in July — made the recommendation ultimately accepted by chancellor Lee Roberts.

"We appreciate all that Hubert

has done for Carolina as a player, assistant coach, head coach and community leader — he has helped make special memories we will never forget," Cunningham said in a statement. "This was not an easy decision because of Hubert's tremendous character and all he has given to the program, but we must move forward in a way that allows our team to compete more consistently at an elite level."

In his own statement posted on social media, Davis said he had been "let go" by the school and that he hopes to continue coaching.

"My desire was to continue to coach here," Davis said. "This opportunity has truly been such a blessing. I thank Jesus literally every day for giving me the opportunity, relationships and experiences with the kids and my staff.

"I am very proud of what we were able to accomplish together. My goal is to coach again in the very near future."

The program with six NCAA

titles and a national-record 21 Final Fours now has just three March Madness wins in the four seasons since an unexpected run to the 2022 national title game in Davis' debut season. UNC reached the Sweet 16 as a No. 1 seed in 2024 before being upset by Alabama, but otherwise hasn't reached the round of 32 in that span, and even missed the NAAs entirely in 2023.

The final blow was Thursday's overtime loss to VCU in the NCAA Tournament in which the Rams rallied from 19 down for the biggest comeback in first-round history, changing the tenor of conversations about Davis' future. And by Saturday, Cunningham said the school was evaluating "all facets" of the program.

Ultimately, that led to moving forward without the 55-year-old Davis, a popular former Tar Heels player under Smith who went on to play 12 years in the NBA, work in broadcasting at ESPN, then join Williams' staff as an assistant in 2012.

Now one of the most coveted jobs in college basketball is open for only the fourth time since Smith's retirement after 36 seasons in October 1997.

Davis, who played for the Tar Heels from 1988-92, finished with a 125-54 record at UNC for a 69.8% win percentage.

The high point of Davis' tenure came early, with a wild late-season ride to the 2022 NCAA championship game that seemed to validate Williams' backing of his former assistant. That included two of the Tar Heels' biggest wins against famed rival Duke, the first in spoiling Hall of Famer Mike Krzyzewski's home finale at Cameron Indoor Stadium and the second a month later to end Coach K's career in the first-ever tournament meeting at the Final Four.

Davis also won an Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title in 2024, while he would become the first coach in ACC history to win at least 20 games in each of his first five seasons.

Brunson lifts Knicks over Pelicans for 7th straight win

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jalen Brunson scored 32 points, including 15 in the fourth quarter, and the New York Knicks beat the New Orleans Pelicans 121-116 on Tuesday night for their seventh straight victory.

Karl-Anthony Towns and OG Anunoby each added 21 points for New York (48-25), which pulled within percentage points of Boston (47-24) for second place in the Eastern Conference. Towns also grabbed 14 rebounds.

But it was Brunson who made the difference for the Knicks in a game that was close throughout the second half. He scored 10 straight points for New York midway through the fourth quarter, including back-to-back baskets after New Orleans had cut it to 109-107 with 4½ minutes remaining.

Zion Williamson scored 22 points and Jeremiah Fears had 21 for the Pelicans.

The Knicks have feasted on a soft part of their schedule, beating Indiana twice, Utah, Brooklyn and Washington during the win-

ning streak, which came entirely against teams with losing records. They will get tested on a four-game road trip that begins Thursday at Charlotte and features stops at NBA champion Oklahoma City and Houston.

Nuggets 125, Suns 123: Nikola Jokic had 23 points, 17 rebounds and tied a season high with 17 assists to lead visiting Denver over Phoenix.

Jokic made the go-ahead basket, knocking down a 12-foot jumper with 11.5 seconds left. The Suns' Devin Booker got a good look at a potential winning 3-pointer, but it bounced off the rim.

Phoenix trailed 117-109 with 3:19 left, but methodically worked its way back. Booker made a tough jumper in the lane to tie the game at 123 with 30.2 seconds remaining. He had 22 points and eight assists.

Jokic had his NBA-leading 29th triple-double of the season by early in the third quarter. The three-time MVP shot 9-for-16 and delivered several pinpoint passes, in-

cluding one that went the full length of the court for a layup by Christian Braun.

Cavaliers 136, Magic 131: Donovan Mitchell scored 42 points, James Harden added 26 and host Cleveland beat Orlando to extend its winning streak to four games.

It is Mitchell's sixth game with at least 40 points this season, tied for fourth-most in the league.

Paolo Banchero had 36 points for the Magic (38-34), which has dropped six straight and dropped into a three-way tie with Charlotte and Miami for eighth place in the Eastern Conference.

Hornets 134, Kings 90: Coby White made six of host Charlotte's franchise-tying 26 3-pointers and finished with 27 points as it routed Sacramento for its fourth straight win.

LaMelo Ball had 20 points on six 3s and Moussa Diabate added 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Hornets (38-34), who pulled within two games of Atlanta for sixth place in the Eastern Conference.

Houston, Illinois move past strong openers

Associated Press

Houston coach Kelvin Sampson wanted his Cougars simply to stick to what they do best in defending with their typical toughness to open March Madness. Illinois coach Brad Underwood hoped his team would “just let it rip.”

They got what they wanted in the opening weekend of the NCAA Tournament while posting the two most lopsided scoring margins of any teams to advance to the Sweet 16. Now they will try those very different approaches against one another in a Thursday clash in Houston.

The second-seeded Cougars rolled to 31-point wins against both Idaho and Texas A&M. That came while allowing just 0.839 points per possession (104 points on 124 possessions).

“Everybody’s got a style,” coach Kelvin Sampson said after the 88-57 win against the Aggies. “We have a style. Texas A&M has a style, but it doesn’t come down to what you are doing vs. them. It’s how you do what you do.”

Houston allowed the Vandals and Texas A&M to score on just 37.1% of their possessions, with those teams shooting a combined 31.5% while making 12 of 54 3-pointers (22.2%).

The third-seeded Fighting Illini had the second-largest scoring margin (plus-56) of the first weekend while averaging 1.382 points per possession (181 points on 131 possessions). They scored on 60.3% of their possessions against Penn and VCU.

Things figure to be tighter against the stingy Cougars, and whichever team is the most successful doing what it does best will likely advance. Houston is a 3.5-point favorite, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

Shooting the 3

Purdue is shooting the 3-pointer better than anyone heading to the regional round so far, while Alabama continues firing from long range at a frenetic pace under Nate Oats.

The Boilermakers made 22 of 38 3-pointers in wins against

Queens and Miami, good for 57.9% to lead all tournament teams. They were the only tournament team to make more than half their attempts while playing multiple games.

In all, six Sweet 16 teams shot at least 40% from 3-point range in the tournament’s opening weekend, including Michigan (46.8%, 22 of 47) and Michigan State (45.7%, 21 of 46).

The Crimson Tide, meanwhile, lead all tournament teams with 31 made 3s through two rounds, at least five more than any other team. And their 78 attempted 3s were tied with 12-seed High Point for the most in the tournament, at least eight more than any other team.

Winning profiles, tiers

Slightly more than half of the remaining teams (21) ranked inside the top 10 at one end of the court to offset a ranking outside the top 25 in the other.

That leaves 20 outliers that reached the sport’s final weekend without holding top-10 sta-

tus in at least one category.

Looking at the three tiers of the 16 teams that will play this week:

■ Six favorites entered the tournament with top-25 rankings at both ends of the floor: 1-seeds Duke, Arizona and Michigan, and 2-seeds Houston, Iowa State and Michigan State. Of that group, the Blue Devils and Wildcats were top-5 in both categories.

■ Five teams ranked in the top 10 at one end of the court: 2-seed Purdue, 3-seed Illinois and 4-seeds Alabama, Arkansas and Nebraska. The Cornhuskers were the only one of that quintet to rank in the top 10 defensively.

■ The five outliers: 2-seed UConn, 5-seed St. John’s, 6-seed Tennessee, 9-seed Iowa and 11-seed Texas. The Huskies are the surprise addition in this group after flirting with earning a No. 1 seed coming down the stretch, but they entered March Madness ranked 30th in offense (122.0 points per 100 possessions) and 11th in defense (94.1).

Acuff-Thomas teamup stokes Arkansas’ tournament run

Associated Press

Arkansas freshmen Darius Acuff Jr. and Meleek Thomas were plotting their on-court relationship in chats while they were still recruits.

“We talked about it in high school when we first committed and like I said, it don’t just take a game, it takes practice, workouts, just it takes a lot of communication, I would say, and we have that,” Acuff said.

The duo’s chemistry is a big reason the Razorbacks (28-8) have advanced to the Sweet 16. Fourth-seeded Arkansas faces No. 1 seed Arizona (34-2) on Thursday in the NCAA Tournament’s West Region.

Acuff, an AP first-team All-American, scored 36 points in the Razorbacks’ 94-88 second-round

victory over High Point on Saturday night. Thomas scored 19.

“It takes a lot of communication, a lot of togetherness, like Darius said,” Thomas said. “We spoke about that before the season and when you’re genuinely happy for your teammate, you’re genuinely happy for your brother, then you really get excited and you get enjoyment out of seeing him dominate and do well. So like when he’s on, it’s like, ‘Yeah, keep doing you.’”

The duo stands out in a season of fantastic freshmen, including Duke’s Cameron Boozar and BYU’s AJ Dybantsa. Together, Acuff (23.3) and Thomas (15.6) combine for an average of nearly 40 points per game.

Acuff, the Southeastern Conference player of the year, holds Ra-

zorbacks single-season records with 817 points and 229 assists, eclipsing the previous marks during March Madness. His 36 points against High Point were the most ever for an Arkansas player during the tournament.

Acuff’s combined 60 points in the first two tournament games are the most scored by a freshman in the opening rounds, passing the record of 57 reached by Cam Thomas at LSU, Zion Williamson at Duke and Kevin Durant at Texas.

The 6-foot-3 Acuff is considered among the top picks in the NBA draft, should he choose to go pro. Known for his strength and a focused determination on the court, he had 30 points and 11 assists in the SEC title game victory over Vanderbilt.

Thomas gives balance to Arkansas’ backcourt, often knocking down the key shot. Against High Point, he hit a long 3-pointer with 6:11 left in the game as the Razorbacks started to shift the momentum.

Against Arizona, Arkansas will face another high-scoring freshman duo in Brayden Burries and Koa Peat. The Wildcats beat No. 9 seed Utah State 78-66 on Sunday to advance.

The Razorbacks are making their 37th NCAA Tournament appearance. They won the national title in 1994 and were runners-up in 1995. They have been to the Final Four five times, but not since ‘95.

This season, Arkansas has its supremely confident freshman twosome.

Sharangovich lifts Flames past Kings in SO

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Yegor Sharangovich scored in the fourth round of the shootout to lead the Calgary Flames to a 3-2 victory over the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday night.

Olli Maatta and Zayne Parekh, each with their first goals of the season, scored in regulation time for the Flames, who have won four games in a row for the first time this season. Dustin Wolf stopped 23 shots.

Quinton Byfield scored both goals and Darcy Kuemper made 21 saves for Los Angeles, which has points in seven of their last nine but just three victories. They have dropped four straight.

With the loss the Kings fall three points behind the Nashville Predators for the final wildcard berth in the Western Conference.

Calgary tied the game 1-1 at 14:50 of the second period when Ryan Strome and Victor Olofsson combined to set up Maatta as the three veterans the Flames added at the trade deadline combined to get Calgary on the scoreboard.

Olofsson was part of the Nazem Kadri deal with Colorado. Maatta came over from Utah in the MacKenzie Weegar trade. Strome was picked up from Anaheim for a seventh-round pick to replace Kadri at center.

Maatta has one goal and five assists in 10 games with Calgary after recording just a single assist in 22 games with the Mammoth.

Byfield's second of the night 17 seconds into the third period restored the Kings' lead, but Parekh tied it with a power-play goal at 13:02.

After Morgan Frost and Artemi Panarin exchanged goals in the first three rounds of the shootout, Sharangovich's winner came when he mishandled the puck but it slipped through Kuemper's pads.

Panthers 5, Kraken 4 (SO): Florida gave up a three-goal,

third-period lead but recovered for a shootout home win over Seattle on Vinnie Hinostroza's goal.

The Panthers led 4-1 on Noah Gregor's goal with 7:39 to play, but Seattle's Matty Beniers, Jordan Eberle and Bobby McMann scored in a span of 2:21 to force overtime. Eberle and McMann scored just 14 seconds apart.

Seattle, which has lost eight of 10, has not won since beating the Panthers 6-2 at home on March 15.

Senators 3, Red Wings 2: Carter Yakemchuk scored a second-period goal and also had an assist in his NHL debut as the streaking visiting Ottawa edged Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday night.

Yakemchuk, the No. 7 overall pick of the 2024 draft, had been playing for the American Hockey League's Belleville Senators. He was called up earlier in the day with defensemen Thomas Chabot, Dennis Gilbert, Nick Jensen, Jake Sanderson and Lassi Thomson sidelined by injuries.

Maple Leafs 4, Bruins 2: Matthew Knies scored a pair of goals and Toronto snapped a three-game losing streak with a road victory over Boston.

Max Domi and William Nylander also scored for the Maple Leafs and John Tavares had three assists as Toronto outshot Boston 35-20 and avoided a three-game season sweep in the Original Six rivalry. Anthony Stolarz finished with 18 saves.

Canadiens 5, Hurricanes 2: Cole Caufield scored his 44th goal of the season and Jakob Dobes made 41 saves as host Montreal held off Carolina.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Ivan Demidov had a goal and an assist each, and Oliver Kapanen also scored as Montreal erased a two-goal deficit for its second consecutive win.

Blackhawks 4, Islanders 3: Anton Frondell had an assist in his NHL debut, Nick Lardis and Frank Nazar each had a goal and

an assist and visiting Chicago defeated New York.

Ilya Mikheyev and Tyler Bertuzzi also had goals for the Blackhawks, who scored four straight goals and snapped a two-game skid.

Blue Jackets 3, Flyers 2: Zach Werenski continued his torrid scoring pace with a goal and an assist as visiting Columbus defeated Philadelphia.

The Blue Jackets outshot the Flyers 6-0 in the opening three minutes of the period.

Avalanche 6, Penguins 2: Martin Necas scored twice, Nathan MacKinnon poured in his NHL-leading 46th goal and visiting Colorado breezed past the Pittsburgh.

Necas, Sam Malinski and Parker Kelly scored within a 1:55 span late in the first period to break it open as the Avalanche atoned for one-sided loss to the Penguins last week in Denver by returning the favor in Pittsburgh. Cale Makar picked up the assist on Necas' first goal, boosting his career point total to 499. Ross Colton scored an empty-netter late.

Lightning 6, Wild 3: Erik Cernak scored a tiebreaking goal with 2:53 left in the third period Minnesota goaltender Filip Gustavsson misplayed a carom off the end boards and host Tampa Bay beat the Wild.

Tampa Bay rallied from a two-goal deficit, scoring three goals in the second period and five unanswered overall over the second and the third to win for the fourth time in five games and fifth time in seven.

Blues 3, Capitals 0: Jimmy Snuggerud and Otto Stenberg scored, Joel Hofer made 21 saves and host St. Louis beat Washington.

Jordan Kyrou scored his team-leading 17th goal into an empty net with 41 seconds remaining to seal the win for Hofer, who earned his sixth shutout of the season and the eighth of his career.

Predators 6, Sharks 3: Filip

Forsberg scored a goal and assisted on two others to lead Nashville to a home victory over San Jose in a matchup of teams headed in opposite directions in the standings.

Matthew Wood, Roman Josi, Luke Evangelista, Brady Skjei and Steven Stamkos also scored and Juuse Saros made 27 saves for Nashville, winners of a season-high five consecutive games. Jonathan Marchessault had three assists.

Devils 6, Stars 4: Jack Hughes scored twice in the Devil's four-goal first period, and visiting New Jersey handed Dallas consecutive losses in regulation for the first time in two months.

Jesper Bratt and Connor Brown also had goals as the Devils put four of their first five shots past Jake Oettinger to end the Dallas goalie's career-best point streak at 14 games. Oettinger was pulled after the first period.

Jets 4, Golden Knights 1: Mark Scheifele had a goal and two assists — and a rare fighting major in the second period — to lead the Winnipeg to a home victory over Vegas.

Kyle Connor, Alex Iafallo and Cole Perfetti also scored for Winnipeg, which snapped a five-game home skid against Vegas.

Oilers 5, Mammoth 2: Connor McDavid scored twice to give him 401 career goals and 1,200 points, sparking Edmonton Oilers to a road victory over Utah.

McDavid became the fifth player in Oilers history to reach 400 goals when he took a feed from Mattias Ekholm and Evan Bouchard and beat Karel Vejmelka with 7:53 left in the second period.

Ducks 5, Canucks 3: Mikael Granlund scored twice, Alex Killorn had a goal and an assist, and visiting Anaheim beat Vancouver.

Anaheim grabbed a 2-1 lead in the second period, only to see Vancouver rally and tie the game twice before McTavish scored the winner at the 5:45 mark of the third.