

Navy: Unvaccinated sailors to test weekly

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy is requiring unvaccinated sailors to test themselves each week for COVID-19 before they can report to work, including those who applied for medical or religious exemptions.

Commands were authorized to begin the testing at naval facilities and aboard ships no earlier than this past Sunday if testing supplies were on hand.

The stipulation came in an administrative order issued last week by Vice Adm. William Merz, deputy chief of naval operations for operations, plans and strategy.

Sailors will be counted on to self-test and have the Navy pay for it, the order states.

Unvaccinated service members who have recently recovered from the virus and remain asymptomatic are exempt from testing for 90 days following documented proof of recovery, according to the order.

Testing of unvaccinated reserve sailors

will begin no earlier than Dec. 28, also if supplies are in stock, Merz said.

Guidance for the testing of government civilians and contractors will be issued separately, the order states.

Under the order, a single test would not automatically be accepted if a sailor has to move between commands during the day.

For example, if attending a meeting at another command, the sailor could be required to retest unless permission was granted by that command.

Only unvaccinated active-duty and reserve service members who work remotely full time or work in facilities less than once a week would be exempted from the minimum once-a-week testing, according to the order.

But those service members would have to provide a negative test given within the preceding 72 hours before entering a naval facility.

The order also specifies requirements for recording and maintaining test results and

procedures for positive results.

The order did not address how testing would be set up or who would verify results. It also didn't specify how the Navy would respond if a sailor failed to submit to testing.

It was unclear Tuesday how many Navy commands had started testing.

At Navy facilities in Italy, Spain and Greece, testing will start once the required Food and Drug Administration-approved COVID-19 self-test supplies are received, said Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Comer, a Navy Region Europe Africa Central spokesman.

"Commands will administer and verify tests, which will provide results without further processing," said Comer, who noted testing would be conducted weekly at each command by a designated testing coordinator.

The Navy said Nov. 17 that about 97% of active-duty sailors are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and 99.7% are at least partially vaccinated.

Report backs US strategic shift toward Indo-Pacific

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More American military resources should be dedicated to Guam and Australia as the United States tries to keep pace with the Chinese military in the Indo-Pacific region, the Pentagon announced Monday after completing its monthslong study of U.S. forces around the world.

The report, known as the Global Posture Review, is designed to help the military decide where to position forces throughout the world and determine whether it "has the correct number of troops in the correct places," Pentagon officials have said.

The report, which was announced in February, remains classified and was not released publicly. It supports the continued U.S. strategic shift toward the Indo-Pacific region to "deter Chinese military aggression and threats from North Korea," a senior defense official told reporters at the Pentagon Monday on condition of anonymity.

"Direction from the [review] will strengthen the [Defense Department's] focus on China by reducing posture requirements in other theaters to enable improved warfighting readiness and increase activities in the Indo-Pacific," the official said.

That concept, nicknamed the "Pacific Pivot" during former President Barack Obama's administration, was supported in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which listed China as the "strategic competitor" with the U.S. because of its rapidly growing military, operations to influence other nations and "predatory economics" used in an attempt to dominate the Indo-Pacific region.

The National Defense Strategy sets the nation's military priorities and objectives. The Pentagon is now working on an updated version, which acting Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Mara Karlin said Monday will be influenced by the posture review.

"The results of the Global Posture Review will serve as a disciplining framework

for the department to match our posture to our strategy with benefits accruing for years to come," Karlin told reporters Monday at the Pentagon.

The report calls for "seeking greater regional access for military partnership activities, enhancing infrastructure in Guam and Australia and prioritizing military construction across the Pacific islands," according to the defense official who spoke anonymously. "We are still developing these issues into fully implementable actions that we can discuss with relevant allies and partners."

The report will help decide where U.S. forces are positioned during the next two to three years as U.S. leaders consult allies in the region, the official said. The emphasis on expanding efforts in the region might require the U.S. to consult foreign governments on where to station troops.

The official did not discuss specifics, though some U.S. allies in the Pacific have been open to hosting U.S. forces to protect the region from China's growing influence.

US warns Russia over Ukraine aggression

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Moscow will face “serious consequences” in the event of renewed aggression against Ukraine, America’s top diplomat said Tuesday after arriving in Latvia for high-level talks with NATO allies focused on Russia’s military buildup on the Ukrainian border.

The two-day meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Riga comes amid fears that Russia could soon mount a new offensive into Ukraine.

“Any escalatory actions by Russia would be a great concern to the U.S., as they would to Latvia, and any renewed aggression

would trigger serious consequences,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters as NATO talks got underway.

Blinken said he will consult with allies on NATO’s next steps, but stopped short of spelling out what type of measures NATO could take to try and deter a possible Russian invasion.

The U.S. and its allies have said that Russia has transferred large numbers of troops to its border with Ukraine over the past month.

While Ukraine is not a NATO member, allies do provide it military support. The U.S. Army has a training mission in western Ukraine and the Pentagon has provided weap-

onry, such as anti-tank Javelin missiles.

Russia has denied it is massing forces near Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin has made repeated complaints about NATO activities in that country, which he described as a red line for Moscow.

The question NATO must grapple with is whether ramping up support for Ukraine would deter Russia or provoke a conflict that allies want Ukraine to avoid, analysts have said.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Monday that Russia has moved troops, heavy weapons, artillery, armored units, drones and electronic warfare systems to the border.

DOD taps four-star general to review 2019 Syria strike

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Monday tapped an Army four-star general to probe a 2019 U.S. airstrike in Syria and review previous military investigations into the incident that killed civilians and Islamic State fighters mounting their last stand in that country.

Gen. Michael Garrett, the commander of U.S. Army Forces Command at Fort Bragg, N.C., was charged with examining the March 18, 2019, airstrike near the town of Baghouz, said John Kirby, the Penta-

gon’s top spokesman. Garrett will determine whether the strike was legal, whether proper procedures were followed before and after the bombing, and whether initial reviews of the incident were properly conducted.

The selection of a four-star general to lead the new inquiry was a “reflection of how seriously [Austin] has taken the issue,” Kirby said.

“He wants to make sure that that we do a proper review and inquiry of the original incident and the investigations that followed it,” Kirby told reporters Monday at

the Pentagon. “If there are changes to procedures, authorities, if there is needed accountability — he wanted an officer at that senior level to be able to make those calls.”

Garrett will have 90 days to provide Austin a report on his findings, Kirby said.

Austin was briefed last month on the 2019 airstrike after a New York Times investigation alleged military officials quickly determined the strike had killed civilians, including women and children, and some worked to “delay or sanitize” subsequent investigations into the incident.

COVID boosters limited at some US bases in Europe

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — COVID-19 vaccine boosters are still hard to come by for many in U.S. military communities in Europe despite a record surge of coronavirus cases in Germany and other European countries that host American troops.

With an estimated 100,000 people at Army bases in Europe eligible for vaccinations, the service has administered about 4,100 booster shots on the Continent, Gino Mattorano, spokesman for Regional Health Command Europe, said Tuesday. The total figure includes children, who are not yet eligible for booster shots.

Most Army bases in Europe didn’t have any booster appointments available, a check Tuesday of the Defense Department’s online appointment system showed. That is expected to change, Mattorano said.

The health command has received guidance from Army medical leadership in Europe “that we need to open up more booster appointments in December,” Mattorano said.

As of last week, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, the Army’s largest overseas hospital, was accepting booster appointments only for people in certain categories, including seniors 65 and older and younger adults with underlying health conditions.

The limitations have continued even after

federal guidelines issued Nov. 19 made boosters available to all vaccinated adults in the United States.

Mattorano said it can take a few days for the new guidance that booster eligibility has been expanded to reach those staffing the hospital’s appointment line.

The Army’s initial plan had been to wait until early next year to expand booster opportunities so medical workers could prioritize vaccinating people who were still not immunized against COVID-19, he said last week.

Mattorano said details should be announced soon, and he advised people to follow their base’s official social media pages for announcements.

DOD denies Okla. Guard vaccine exemption

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Monday rejected a request by Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt that his state's National Guard be exempt from a Pentagon requirement that all military members be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Stitt, a Republican, had asked Austin in early November to suspend the mandate for members of the Oklahoma Guard.

A spokesman for Stitt, Charlie Hannema, said in response to Austin's rejection letter that the governor "maintains his position"

that he is commander in chief of the Oklahoma Guard while they are on Title 32 status, meaning while they are on active duty under state control but with pay and benefits provided by the federal government.

The dispute is the first critical test of the military's authority to require National Guard troops to get the shot, and it could lay the groundwork for legal battles with states that oppose the vaccine requirement.

So far, Stitt is the only governor to publicly challenge the military mandate.

In his letter to Stitt, a copy of

which was obtained by The Associated Press, Austin left open the question of how the vaccine requirement will be enforced and how far the Pentagon will go to force the issue. He did suggest that Guard troops who refuse the shots could lose their federal status, which could impact their pay and future benefits.

Austin wrote that all members of the Oklahoma Army and Air National Guard, "regardless of duty status," must follow the directions of Army and Air Force service secretaries for COVID-19 vaccine compliance

deadlines. "Failure to do so may lead to a prohibition on the member's participation in drills and training" conducted under Title 32 of the U.S. Code, "and jeopardize the member's status in the National Guard."

Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said any Oklahoma Guard member who refused to take the vaccine could be denied the opportunity to perform federally financed training.

"One could elect not to take the vaccine, of course, but then you would be putting at jeopardy your ability to stay in the National Guard," Kirby said.

Omicron found to have spread earlier than initially thought

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — New findings about the coronavirus's omicron variant made it clear Tuesday that the emerging threat slipped into countries well before their defenses were up, as two distant nations announced their first cases and a third reported its presence before South African officials sounded the alarm.

The Netherlands' RIVM health institute found omicron in samples dating from Nov. 19 and 23. The World Health Organization said South Africa first reported the variant to the U.N. health agency on Nov. 24. Meanwhile, Japan and France reported their first cases of the new variant that has forced the world once again to pinball between hopes of returning to normal and fears that the worst is yet to come.

It remains unclear where or when the variant first emerged or how contagious it might be — but that hasn't stopped wary nations from rushing to impose travel restrictions, especially on visitors coming from southern Africa. Those moves have been criticized by South

Africa and the WHO has urged against them, noting their limited effect.

The latest news, however, made it increasingly clear that travel bans would struggle to stop the spread of the variant. German authorities said they had an omicron infection in a man who had neither been abroad nor had contact with anyone who was.

The WHO warned Monday that the global risk from omicron is "very high" and that early evidence suggests it may be more contagious. Others sent more reassuring messages, like European Medicines Agency chief Emer Cooke, who insisted that the 27-nation European Union was well prepared for the variant. While it is not known how effective current vaccines are against omicron, Cooke said the shots could be adapted within three or four months if need be.

But nearly two years after the virus first held the world in its grip, the current response echoed in many ways the chaos of the early days, including haphazard travel bans and a poor understanding of who was at risk and where.

Federal agencies won't punish vaccine holdouts before 2022

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Federal employees who have not complied with the coronavirus vaccine mandate will not face aggressive discipline including unpaid suspensions or firing until at least early next year, according to guidance from the White House sent to unions.

The American Federation of Government Employees said Monday that administration officials have told the union that agencies for now will continue offering counseling and education to the roughly 3.5% of workers who have yet to receive a vaccine or request an exemption.

Agencies will pursue only "education and counseling efforts through this holiday season as the first step in an enforcement process" and take no further actions beyond a possible letter of reprimand "for most employees who have not yet complied with the vaccination requirement until the new calendar year begins in January," according to the White House message to agencies.

The guidance comes as con-

cerns over the globally spreading omicron variant led President Joe Biden on Monday to again urge Americans to get vaccines and boosters. As of last week, 92% of roughly 3.5 million federal and military personnel had received at least one shot, while another 4.5% had requested exemptions.

The White House disputed that the guidance represents a change in when employees could face more serious consequences for ignoring the mandate. Federal workers faced an initial deadline last week to show that they'd gotten at least one shot or had requested an exemption.

Union leaders said they supported giving unvaccinated workers leeway to get shots.

Attorneys who represent federal employees said it is common for agencies to hold off on disciplinary actions of all kinds around the holidays. They also said that the administration, having said all along that it hoped to avoid firing people for failure to comply with the mandate, would likely keep incentivizing vaccinations rather than punishing employees who resist.

NYC OKs safe havens for drug users

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The first officially authorized safe havens for people to use heroin and other narcotics have been cleared to open in New York City in hopes of curbing overdoses, the mayor and health commissioner said Tuesday.

The “overdose prevention centers” — commonly known as supervised injection sites — have been discussed for years in New York and some other U.S. cities and already exist in Canada, Australia and Europe.

A few unofficial facilities have operated in the city for some time, allowing drug users a monitored place to partake.

Proponents say the facilities save lives by recognizing the reality of drug use and providing a place where users are watched for signs of overdoses, which claimed a record number of lives in the city and nation last year.

“I’m proud to show cities in this country that after decades of failure, a smarter approach is possible,” Mayor Bill de Blasio

said in a statement.

Opponents, however, see the sites as a moral failure that essentially sanctions people harming themselves, and federal law bans operating a place for narcotics use.

The New York sites were opening Tuesday at existing needle exchange programs, city Health Commissioner Dr. Dave Chokshi said.

Such sites generally have monitors who watch for signs of overdose and can administer an antidote if needed.

Chokshi suggested the facilities also would offer people referrals to drug treatment and other services and “bring people in from the streets, improving life for everyone involved.”

More than 2,060 people died of overdoses last year in the nation’s most populous city, the most since reporting began in 2000. Nationwide, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated there were more than 93,300 overdose deaths in 2020, up nearly 30% from the prior year’s number.

Junk forces spacewalk delay, too risky for astronauts

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — NASA called off a spacewalk Tuesday because of menacing space junk that could puncture an astronaut’s suit or damage the International Space Station.

Two U.S. astronauts were set to replace a bad antenna outside of the space station. But late Monday night, Mission Control learned that a piece of orbiting debris might come dangerously close.

There wasn’t enough time to assess the

threat, so station managers delayed the spacewalk for at least a few days.

It’s the first time a spacewalk has been canceled because of threat from space junk.

The space station and its crew of seven have been at increased risk from space junk since Russia destroyed a satellite in a missile test two weeks ago.

It wasn’t immediately clear whether the object of concern was part of the Russian satellite wreckage.

During a news conference Monday, NASA officials said the Nov. 15 missile test resulted in at least 1,700 satellite pieces big enough to track, as well as thousands more too small to be observed from the ground but still able to pierce a spacewalker’s suit.

NASA officials said astronauts Tom Marshburn and Kayla Barron faced a 7% greater risk of a spacewalk puncture because of the Russian-generated debris.

But they said it was still within acceptable limits based on previous experience.

Iran strikes hard line as talks over nuclear deal resume

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran struck a hard line Tuesday after just one day of restarted talks in Vienna over its tattered nuclear deal, suggesting everything discussed in previous rounds of diplomacy could be renegotiated.

Speaking to Iranian state television, Ali Bagheri, Iran’s top nuclear negotiator, referred to everything discussed thus far as merely a “draft.” It remained unclear whether that represented an opening gambit by Iran’s new president or signaled serious trouble for those hoping to restore the 2015 deal that saw Tehran strictly limit its enrichment of uranium in

exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

The United States left the deal under then-President Donald Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran in 2018. Since the deal’s collapse, Iran now enriches small amounts of uranium up to 60% purity — a short step from weapons-grade levels of 90%. Iran also spins advanced centrifuges barred by the accord, and its uranium stockpile now far exceeds the accord’s limits.

President Joe Biden has said America’s willing to re-enter the deal, though the negotiations continue with U.S. officials not in the room as in previous rounds of talks since Wash-

ington’s withdrawal.

“Drafts are subject to negotiation. Therefore, nothing is agreed on unless everything has been agreed on,” Bagheri said. “On that basis, all discussions that took place in the six rounds are summarized and are subject to negotiations. This was admitted by all parties in today’s meeting as well.”

That directly contradicted comments Monday by the European Union diplomat leading the talks.

“The Iranian delegation represents a new administration in Tehran with new understandable political sensibilities, but they have accepted that the work done over the six first

rounds is a good basis to build our work ahead, so no point in going back,” Enrique Mora said.

Another state TV segment saw Bagheri in Vienna saying Iran demanded a “guarantee by America not to impose new sanctions” or not re-impose previously lifted sanctions.

Mohammed Eslami, the country’s civilian nuclear chief, reiterated that demand in comments to Iran’s state-run IRNA news agency.

“The talks (in Vienna) are about return of the U.S. to the deal and they have to lift all sanctions and this should be in practice and verifiable,” he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

FedEx driver questioned on packages in woods

AL HAYDEN — The recent discovery of hundreds of packages in a wooded area in Alabama have led authorities to question a FedEx driver, a sheriff said.

As many as 400 packages of varying sizes were found in a ravine about 30 miles north of Birmingham, authorities said. The discovery was made on private property near the small town of Hayden in Blount County, Sheriff Mark Moon said.

The county sheriff said in a statement on the department's Facebook page that investigators had spoken with security personnel from the Memphis, Tenn.-based company and have identified a driver.

The company said in a statement that the person involved was no longer providing service for FedEx Ground and added it was cooperating with law enforcement on its investigation.

State troopers get 2nd arrest on major highway

CT WINDSOR — For the second time in three days, state troopers in Connecticut have had a confrontation with someone on a major roadway.

In an incident in the northbound lanes of Interstate 91 near Windsor, state police said that after a two-car accident occurred, the driver of one of the cars was standing outside the car and refused to move out of the roadway when directed by police.

A scuffle ensued, and the driver was eventually taken into custody and was being assessed

for injuries, according to state police.

Days earlier, a New York City man found crouching near a concrete barrier on the Merritt Parkway ran onto the highway, according to police. Two troopers eventually caught up to him and he was arrested on charges including assaulting a police officer.

Woman tried to save her pets from burning home

MI HIGHLAND TOWNSHIP — A woman was rescued from her burning southeastern Michigan home after she refused to leave while trying to save some of her exotic animals, birds, ferrets and other pets.

Deputies pulled the 41-year-old Highland Township woman through a small basement window, the Oakland County sheriff's office said.

The fire was reported about 50 miles northwest of Detroit. It likely started when one of the family's dogs knocked over a heater near a bed of straw in the garage, according to the sheriff's office.

The woman and three other residents of the home were treated at a hospital for smoke inhalation. A pig and three dogs also were saved.

Fed charged with pulling work gun on bar patron

MT BOZEMAN — A Drug Enforcement Administration agent from Colorado was charged with felony assault with a weapon for reportedly pulling his government-issued handgun on a man at a Bozeman bar while he was

intoxicated.

Ryan Donahue, 32, of Parker, Colo., made an initial appearance before Gallatin County Justice of the Peace Rick West, who set his bail at \$150,000, the Bozeman Daily Chronicle reported.

Donahue had met a group of people at a bar and restaurant in downtown Bozeman and the group eventually went to another bar, court records said. As they were leaving, Donahue reportedly pulled his Glock 17 handgun out of a concealed carry holster and put it on or near the man's neck, prosecutors said.

Bystanders were able to wrestle the gun away from Donahue.

Man convicted in hitting girlfriend's car at station

NC CHARLOTTE — A jury in North Carolina has convicted a man of charges arising from an argument with his ex-girlfriend in which he shot at her car and rammed it while she was at a police station.

In February 2019, when the woman drove off with her four children, Kendrick Piggie chased her for 30 minutes, ramming her car, brandishing a gun and threatening to kill her, prosecutors said. The woman drove to a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department division station and informed officers that Piggie had hit her car and had a gun, The Charlotte Observer reported.

Despite being at the police station, prosecutors said Piggie rammed the woman's car two more times and fired six shots, hitting her car twice. Piggie

tried to escape, but he wrecked his SUV and was captured hiding behind trash bins.

2 separate bulldogs stolen, 1 still missing

NY HUNTINGTON — There's been joy and anxiety for the owners of two French bulldogs on Long Island over the holiday weekend.

One of the pooches was stolen during a Thanksgiving Day burglary in Huntington, and her owners offered a \$5,000 reward. To the relief of the Hauck family, 4-year-old Stella was found wandering the street in Center Moriches, about 30 miles away.

Suffolk County police reported a burglary at a home in Bay Shore in which clothing, cash and a 3-month-old male French bulldog named Zushi were stolen.

All 11 passengers in van injured in rollover crash

WI EAU PLEINE — Authorities said all 11 occupants of a passenger van were injured when the vehicle rolled over on an icy road in central Wisconsin. They were transported to area hospitals for treatment.

The Portage County Sheriff's Office said the crash happened on US Highway 10, about half a mile east of the town of Eau Pleine. The van left the roadway, overturned and came to rest in the center median.

The conditions of the injured are not known. One occupant of the van was ejected and one was partially trapped and had to be extricated, the sheriff's department said.

— From wire reports

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Kelly leaving Notre Dame for LSU job

Associated Press

LSU is hiring Brian Kelly away from Notre Dame, a stunning move by one of the most accomplished coaches in college football jumping from the sport's most storied program to a Southeastern Conference powerhouse.

The move was confirmed Monday night by a person familiar with the decision who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because neither school was prepared to make an official announcement. Yahoo! Sports first reported the hire.

It was the second bombshell in college football in as many days, coming a little more than 24 hours after Southern California pulled Lincoln Riley away from Oklahoma. LSU might have topped it by luring Kelly from South Bend to Baton Rouge.

The 60-year-old Kelly became the winningest coach in Notre Dame history earlier this season, surpassing Knute Rockne. In 12 seasons with the Fighting Irish, Kelly is 113-40, including the current run of five straight double-digit victo-

ry seasons.

Notre Dame completed an 11-1 season on Saturday and still is in contention to reach the College Football Playoff for the third time in the last four years.

Kelly, who did not return a text message sent by AP, was on the road recruiting for Notre Dame when the news broke.

No previous Notre Dame coach has left the Irish, winners of eight AP national championships, to take a job at another school since the AP poll started in 1936. Rockne's successor, Hunk Anderson, went from Notre Dame to North Carolina State after going 3-5-1 in 1933.

LSU's coaching search started in October, when it reached an agreement to part ways with coach Ed Orgeron at the end of the season. The change came less than two years after Coach O led the Tigers to a national championship.

LSU finished a 6-6 regular season on Saturday, upsetting Texas A&M at home in Orgeron's last game.

Kelly is agreeing to take over the Tigers just a few weeks after he had publicly dismissed

the idea of moving on when asked about possibly being a candidate at USC.

"No. I mean, look, I think Mike Tomlin had the best line, right?" Kelly told reporters, referring to the Pittsburgh Steelers coach. "Unless that fairy godmother comes by with that \$250 million check, my wife would want to take a look at it first. I'd have to run it by her."

LSU paid Orgeron about \$9 million this season, among the highest-paid coaches in college football along with Alabama's Nick Saban, Clemson's Dabo Swinney and Texas A&M's Jimbo Fisher.

Orgeron was due to make an average of \$7 million over the length of his contract but agreed to a \$16.9 million buyout paid through 2025. Kelly's full salary at Notre Dame, a private school, is unknown but it is believed to be north of \$5 million per year.

In the past month alone, Michigan State has given Mel Tucker a 10-year, \$95 million deal and Penn State extended James Franklin's contract to 10 years at \$7.5 million per season. Those deals are similar to the

10-year guaranteed contract Fisher received from A&M when he was hired away from Florida State at the end of the 2017 season by then-Aggies athletic director Scott Woodward.

Woodward is now the AD at LSU. There had been much speculation he would target Fisher again and rumors about Riley going to LSU had persisted for weeks. Instead, Woodward landed Kelly, who is likely to be the next coach in line for a megadeal.

Fisher's move — a national championship-winning coach leaving one traditional power for another — has been a rarity in the history of college football.

Now there have been two similar shake-ups in a matter of days. The coaching carousel, sped up by everything from impatient athletic directors seeking a winner to the early signing period for recruits and the always-busy transfer portal, won't slow down anytime soon. Oklahoma and Notre Dame are still among the top jobs in college football and filling them could tip more dominos around the country.

Washington Football Team wins third straight

Associated Press

LANDOVER, Md. — Ron Rivera was left adrift without a kicker and felt like he had to go for it in every situation.

The final roll of the dice by "Riverboat Ron" on fourth-and-goal opened the door for some heroics by Russell Wilson, but Kendall Fuller's interception on Seattle's two-point conversion attempt allowed Washington to hold on and beat the Seahawks 17-15 Monday night for the team's third consecutive victory.

"It meant a lot just because of the way these guys fight," said Rivera, who pointed at and encouraged fans while walking off

the field. "In spite of everything that's gone on during the game with the injuries, we were able to come out on top, so good for these guys."

After Taylor Heinicke's fourth-down pass to Logan Thomas at the goal line was ruled incomplete on video review, Wilson led the Seahawks on a 10-play, 96-yard touchdown drive in just over two minutes. He connected with Freddy Swain on a 32-yard TD pass with 15 seconds left, but his two-point throw to Swain was picked off by Fuller, preventing Wilson from leading a memorable comeback on his 33rd birthday.

"You've seen Russell do that for the last 10 years, and you never count him out," Heinicke said.

He almost got another chance when it looked as if Seattle (3-8) had recovered an onside kick. But the Seahawks were penalized for an illegal formation on the first attempt and failed to recover the second.

"The last few minutes of the game shows that we have the right character of guys," Wilson said. "That's what's special about this team just to believe that something great's going to happen."

The loss likely ended Seattle's hopes for any longshot playoff

bid.

Wilson was 20-for-31 for 247 yards and two TD passes, but he missed several throws and lost three consecutive games for the first time as the Seahawks' starting quarterback.

"The film doesn't lie, you know," coach Pete Carroll said. "He missed some stuff."

Washington (5-6) moved into the final NFC wild-card spot with the win. "We got some momentum right now," receiver Terry McLaurin said.

J.D. McKissic caught a touchdown pass from Heinicke, ran for another and accounted for 56 yards from scrimmage.

Flames top Pens in 7-round shootout

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Mikael Backlund scored the deciding goal in the seventh round of a suspenseful shootout and the Calgary Flames beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 2-1 on Monday night after blowing a late lead.

Backlund broke in off the right side and ripped a shot into the top corner over Tristan Jarry's glove.

"I wasn't expecting to get picked, really," Backlund said with a chuckle, pointing to his 0-for-7 record in previous shootouts. "But when I heard my name, I got excited and tried the move I've been working on in practice."

Jacob Markstrom sealed the victory by stopping Brock McGinn on Pittsburgh's final attempt. The goalie pumped his fist as Flames teammates spill-

ed over the boards to celebrate Calgary's second victory in extra time.

The Flames' Johnny Gaudreau and the Penguins' Kris Letang scored in the third round of the tiebreaker.

Milan Lucic scored in regulation for Calgary, which is 6-1-2 in its last nine games. Markstrom finished with 21 saves to improve to 9-4-4.

Jake Guentzel scored for Pittsburgh, and Jarry had 31 stops while dropping to 10-4-4.

"We didn't like our game tonight," Guentzel said. "I think Tristan played an unbelievable game. Kept us in the game all game. We know we have to be better. Just to get a point, I think it's a big point for us."

Coyotes 1, Jets 0: Karel Vejmelka stopped 46 shots to earn his first NHL shutout as visiting

Arizona beat Winnipeg.

Antoine Roussel scored the game's only goal to help the Coyotes get just their fifth win of the season (5-15-2).

Connor Hellebuyck had 14 saves for the Jets, who are 1-5-1 in their last seven games. The team went 0-for-6 on the power play, including 0-for-5 in the third period.

Roussel, who was left alone in front of the net, converted a pass from Loui Eriksson past a helpless Hellebuyck with 2:01 left in the second period. It was Roussel's third of the season.

Canucks 2, Canadiens 1: Connor Garland scored the tie-breaking goal in the second period, Thatcher Demko had 33 saves and visiting Vancouver held on to beat Montreal.

Elias Pettersson had a power-play goal to help the Canucks

snap a four-game losing streak.

Ryan Poehling scored for the fourth time in 10 games, and Jake Allen had 40 saves for the Canadiens one day after Montreal fired general manager Marc Bergevin.

Kraken 7, Sabres 4: Jared McCann and Mason Appleton each scored two goals, and visiting Seattle beat Buffalo.

Brandon Tanev had a goal and two assists, and Carson Soucy and Jaden Schwartz also scored for the expansion Kraken, who had their season-high scoring total.

Chris Driedger made 32 saves as Seattle won its fourth in five games and second straight on the road for the first time.

Jeff Skinner had two goals for the Sabres, who have lost six of seven overall.

Scherzer, Seager get big deals ahead of end of CBA

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Right-hander Max Scherzer agreed to a record-setting \$130 million, three-year contract with the New York Mets and shortstop Corey Seager struck a \$325 million, 10-year deal with the Texas Rangers on Monday as players and teams rushed to reach agreements before an expected lockout.

The pair are among among eight players who in recent days have agreed to contracts totaling \$1.268 billion in guaranteed pay.

Scherzer and Seager are leaving the high-spending Los Angeles Dodgers for free-agent riches elsewhere with teams that have aggressively added players before what likely will be Major League Baseball's first work stoppage since 1995.

The five-year collective bargaining agreement expires Wednesday, and owners are expected to announce a signing freeze.

Scherzer's \$43.33 million average salary under Monday's agreement is 20% higher than the previous mark, the \$36 million Yankees pitcher Gerrit Cole is averaging in his \$324 million, nine-year contract with New York.

Scherzer would have the right to opt out after the 2023 season to become a free agent once again. Scherzer also receives a full no-trade provision, requiring his approval for any deals. The agreement also includes award bonuses.

New York also has pending deals with center fielder Starling Marte (\$78 million for four years), outfielder/first baseman Mark Canha and infielder Eduardo Escobar, all contingent on successful physicals. The Mets could emerge as the top spender following their first full offseason under owner Steven Cohen, who bought the team in November 2020 from the Wilpon and Katz families in a deal

that valued the Mets at a baseball-record \$2.42 billion.

Seager was the World Series MVP in 2020 and a two-time All-Star in his seven seasons with the Los Angeles Dodgers. He hit .306 with 16 homers and 57 RBIs in 95 games this year, when he broke a finger on his right hand after getting hit by a pitch May 15 and missed 2½ months.

Seager's total dollars match Giancarlo Stanton for the fifth-highest in baseball behind Mike Trout (\$426.5 million for 12 years), Mookie Betts (\$365 million for 12 years), Fernando Tatis Jr. (\$340 million for 14 years) and Bryce Harper (\$330 million for 13 years).

Texas committed \$500 million over two days to middle infielders, following an agreement Sunday on a \$175 million, seven-year contract with Gold Glove second baseman Marcus Semien, also subject to a successful physical.

Other nine-figure deals in re-

cent days:

■ Wander Franco, a 20-year-old infielder with just 70 games in the major leagues, agreed to a \$182 million, 11-year contract with Tampa Bay.

■ Right-hander José Berrios, who could have become a free agent next offseason under the current rules, agreed with Toronto at \$131 million over seven years.

■ Free agent right-hander Kevin Gausman agreed to a \$110 million, five-year contract with the Blue Jays, pending a successful physical.

■ Free agent left-hander Robbie Ray, the AL Cy Young Award winner, agreed to a \$115 million, five-year contract with Seattle, subject to a successful physical.

■ Center fielder Byron Buxton, also one season shy of free-agent eligibility, agreed to a \$100 million, seven-year contract with Minnesota, a deal subject to a successful physical.

Nuggets top Heat, end skid at 6 games

Associated Press

MIAMI — Nikola Jokic returned and scored 24 points, Aaron Gordon added 20 and the Denver Nuggets snapped their longest losing streak in nearly six years by beating the short-handed Miami Heat 120-111 on Monday.

Bones Hyland scored 19 and Will Barton added 14 for the Nuggets, who had dropped six straight. Jokic, the reigning NBA MVP, hadn't played in the last four of those because of a wrist injury but finished with 15 rebounds and seven assists.

Jeff Green scored 12 for Denver, which shot 58% on the day it was revealed Michael Porter Jr. will need back surgery. Porter has been limited to nine games this season.

Bam Adebayo finished with 24 points and 13 rebounds for the Heat, who were without their two leading scorers — Jimmy Butler was out with a bruised tailbone, and Tyler Herro missed the game with what the team called general body soreness.

Kyle Lowry had 17 points and 14 assists.

Bulls 133, Hornets 119: Lonzo Ball and Chicago won the battle of the Ball brothers,

riding a stellar performance by Nikola Vucevic to a win over LaMelo Ball and visiting Charlotte.

The Bulls shot a season-high 59.6% from the field and had five players score in double figures. Vucevic had a season-best 30 points and grabbed 14 rebounds. DeMar DeRozan scored 28 points, and Zach LaVine, a game-time decision because of an illness, finished with 25.

76ers 101, Magic 96: Seth Curry scored 24 points, Tobias Harris had 17 and host Philadelphia needed free throws in the final minute to beat Orlando.

The Magic (4-18) showed grit in a fiery second half and rallied from 16 down to tie it 93-all on Mo Bamba's dunk with 57 seconds left.

Timberwolves 100, Pacers 98: Karl-Anthony Towns scored 16 of his 32 points in the third quarter and Anthony Edwards added 21 as host Minnesota rallied past Indiana.

The Timberwolves trailed by 12 early in the third before Towns led a comeback that sent them to their seventh win in eight games. Michael Beasley hit a tiebreaking

three-pointer for Minnesota with 51.5 seconds left in the fourth.

Rockets 102, Thunder 89: Christian Wood had 24 points and a career-high 21 rebounds as Houston won its third straight game by defeating visiting Oklahoma City.

Cavaliers 114, Mavericks 96: Jarrett Allen scored 28 points and Lauri Markkanen had 24, both season highs, as Cleveland won at Dallas.

Allen also grabbed 14 rebounds and Darius Garland added 18 points for the Cavaliers.

Spurs 116, Wizards 99: Derrick White scored 24 points, Dejounte Murray had 22 points and 10 rebounds, and host San Antonio beat Washington to win consecutive games for the first time this season.

Jazz 129, Trail Blazers 107: Donovan Mitchell scored 30 points and Rudy Gobert had 21 points and 16 rebounds in host Utah's victory over Portland.

Pelicans 123, Clippers 104: Jonas Valanciunas scored 29 of his career-high 39 points in a spectacular first half, and visiting New Orleans beat Los Angeles for the second time this month.

Baylor, Wisconsin, Duke thrive with retooled rosters

Associated Press

PARADISE ISLAND, Bahamas — Baylor coach Scott Drew knew his sixth-ranked Bears might need time to blend a changed roster after they lost four starters from a national-championship run.

Instead, Baylor rolled through the Battle 4 Atlantis. It was among a group of teams — including Maui Invitational champion Wisconsin and No. 5 Duke in its takedown of No. 1 Gonzaga — that thrived over Thanksgiving week after retooling in the offseason.

It's quite a starting point if each continues an upward trajectory, too.

"It's kind of like dating," Drew said of two-time transfer James Akinjo as his new point guard. "You just start dating somebody, you've got to figure things out. When you're married a couple of years, you know what your wife likes and doesn't

like. We'll continue to go through that process."

The Bears' departed starters include a first-team Associated Press All-American in Jared Butler, a third-team All-American and No. 9 overall NBA draft pick in Davion Mitchell and their second-leading scorer in MaCio Teague.

Drew turned to Akinjo, who had prior stops at Georgetown and Arizona. Talented freshman forwards Kendall Brown and Jeremy Sochan arrived. Returnees like L.J. Cryer and Matthew Mayer stepped into bigger roles. And Baylor (7-0) keeps winning big, the last against Michigan State in the Atlantis title game with Akinjo as MVP.

The Bears have won 13 straight dating to last year's title run in the Indianapolis bubble.

"Nobody cared who scored, they all played pretty hard defensively," Spartans coach Tom

Izzo said. "It was nice to watch. Unfortunately I had to watch them from a negative side."

At the relocated Maui Invitational in Las Vegas, Wisconsin beat Texas A&M, No. 12 Houston and Saint Mary's with its youngest team in decades. The Badgers (5-1) lost six seniors and have two returning starters and 12 underclassmen. The average age of their opening-night starting lineup was 19.8 years, down from 22.6 last year.

The driving force was sophomore Johnny Davis, who averaged 23.7 points and 6.7 rebounds over three games to become the Maui MVP. Davis averaged 7.0 points as a freshman reserve but is playing roughly 32 minutes a game in a starring role.

"I'm learning just like everybody else is watching this group mature and grow in front of us," Wisconsin coach Greg Gard said after the win against the

Cougars.

Then there were the Blue Devils (7-0), who beat Gonzaga in Las Vegas on Friday in a late-March-caliber game. Duke missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1995 last season, but reloaded with a top-flight recruiting class, a veteran boost from Marquette transfer Theo John and a surge from veteran co-captain Wendell Moore Jr.

That group could have a claim to No. 1 in the AP Top 25 in Hall of Famer Mike Krzyzewski's final season.

"Since the offseason, every day we've been trying to come in and be consistent and practice well," star freshman Paolo Banchero said. "One thing is no bad practices. ... So when you just stack days like that, coming in every day and be consistent, in big games like this you're going to be able to pull out wins and battle it out."