

Army secretary named acting ATF director

Staff and wire reports

WASHINGTON—Army Secretary Dan Driscoll has been appointed as acting director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, replacing FBI Director Kash Patel in that job, a defense official confirmed Wednesday.

The defense official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Driscoll will “dual hat” as Army secretary and acting ATF director but did not provide more information.

It was not immediately clear why Patel was replaced by Driscoll to lead the Justice Department agency that’s responsible for enforcing the nation’s gun laws. The Associated Press reported that one person familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said Patel was removed at the end of

February, just days after he was sworn in.

But that was never publicly announced. Patel on Wednesday afternoon remained on the agency’s website and was identified as the acting director in an April 7 news release. In March, he posted on social media a note he sent to the ATF workforce that read “special message from the acting director.” And senior ATF leaders were only informed Wednesday of the change, according to another person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the move.

Driscoll will remain secretary of the Army, according to a defense official who spoke with The Associated Press. This puts a defense leader — with an already large job — in charge of a domestic law enforcement

agency. U.S. defense officials have historically tried to maintain a strict divide between military forces and law enforcement. U.S. troops are not allowed to participate in law enforcement activities on American soil. They do, however, provide support and intelligence gathering to Custom and Border Protection to help secure the southern border.

Patel was named acting ATF director in an unusual arrangement in February just days after he was sworn in to lead the FBI, putting him in charge of two separate and sprawling Justice Department agencies.

Justice Department officials have been considering a plan to combine the ATF and the Drug Enforcement Administration into a single agency.

The two agencies often work

together, along with the FBI, but are both led by separate directors and are tasked with distinctly different missions.

The plan is designed to “achieve efficiencies in resources, case deconfliction, and regulatory efforts,” according to a recent memo from Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche.

The ATF investigates things like violent crime, gun trafficking, arson and bombings. It also provides technical expertise in tracing guns used in crimes and analyzing intelligence in shooting investigations.

The DEA, meanwhile, is in charge of enforcing the nation’s laws around drugs. Its agents are focused on combating criminal drug networks and stemming the illicit flow of fentanyl and other street drugs.

Options for Trump’s ‘Golden Dome’ head to Hegseth

Associated Press

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — U.S. Space Command said Wednesday that it has finalized options for President Donald Trump’s “Golden Dome” missile defense system and has sent its recommendations to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth for his review and approval.

The futuristic system was ordered by Trump during his first week in office, and if successful, would mark the first time the U.S. would place weapons in space that are meant to destroy ground-based missiles within seconds of launch.

In his January executive order, Trump gave the military 60 days to provide him recommendations on what an overall system would look like.

Recent developments in hy-

personics — and in particular China’s 2021 groundbreaking launch of a warhead system that went into orbit before reentering Earth’s atmosphere — have prompted calls for several years by the U.S. military to develop additional ways to defend against missile strikes.

“It’s time that we can clearly say that we need space fires and we need weapons systems. We need orbital interceptors,” Gen. Stephen Whiting, head of U.S. Space Command, said in a speech kicking off the annual Space Symposium, an industry event held this week in Colorado. “We call these weapons, and we need them to deter a space conflict and to be successful if we end up in such a fight.”

Multiple options were developed, vetted by the Joint Chiefs

of Staff and provided to Hegseth, said Col. Matthew Wroten, Space Command’s head of global warfare requirements. He didn’t give details on what those options look like.

The Defense Department said it would deliver options to Trump in line with his executive order.

Space Command has not said how much it anticipates a space-based defense will cost, but Wroten said the options sent to Hegseth incorporated estimated costs. This week, Trump said his 2026 defense budget proposal will near \$1 trillion.

The program was previously known as Iron Dome but was renamed by the Pentagon in February to Golden Dome.

Wroten said Space Command is now moving forward on de-

veloping specific requirements for Golden Dome. Those requirements will be used to weigh what capabilities and — importantly for defense firms attending the space conference — what commercially available technologies the military will pursue to get an initial system fielded within a few years.

The administration has said Golden Dome will incorporate existing missile defense systems and new space-based capabilities to form a multilayered defense.

In the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan proposed a similar space-based defense, but the Strategic Defense Initiative, also known as “Star Wars,” ultimately did not come to fruition because of technology and cost challenges.

Trump: Military an option to prevent Iran nukes

Bloomberg News

President Donald Trump threatened to use military action against Iran if it were to try and acquire a nuclear weapon, as negotiators are set to meet Saturday to discuss the standoff over Tehran's nuclear program.

Trump told reporters he would "absolutely" consider using military action "if necessary" during an event in the Oval Office on Wednesday. Trump added that Israel would "very much be involved, the leader of that." The president

added that he had an internal deadline for the negotiations to yield results.

"We don't have much time because we're not going to let them have a nuclear weapon," Trump said. "And we're going to let them thrive, I want Iran to be great. The only thing that they can't have is a nuclear weapon."

The high-level talks set for Oman this weekend will be the first time since September 2022 that the U.S. and Iran are taking part in formal nuclear talks.

Trump did not specify who would conduct or participate in the negotiations, but said that he saw the Saturday meeting as "a start" of the process and that he had a deadline in mind for the discussion.

The two countries haven't directly engaged since 2015, which led to a nuclear deal that Trump eventually pulled out of during his first term. Iranian officials have repeatedly denied they are pursuing nuclear weapons, even as outside observers say they would be able

to produce enough weapons-grade fissile material within weeks.

Since taking office in January, Trump has revived his "maximum pressure" strategy against Iran, targeting its oil exports, the banking system and other key industries.

Iranian officials say their main goal is sanctions relief and that the discussions will take place in an indirect format, contradicting Trump who claimed on Monday that the U.S. was "dealing with them directly."

DOD civilian health care fixes too new to judge, GAO says

BY ALEX WILSON

Stars and Stripes

New Defense Department efforts to improve health care access for civilian employees in Japan and Guam are underway, but it's too soon to tell whether they're working, according to a federal watchdog.

The Government Accountability Office, in an April 3 report, said thousands of U.S. civilian employees and contractors across the Indo-Pacific face persistent obstacles to obtaining medical care, despite their crucial role in supporting missions in the region.

"DOD relies on thousands of federal civilian employees and contractors in Japan and Guam to accomplish its missions," the report states. "However, these individuals face unique challenges accessing health care."

Japan is home to approximately 14,600 U.S. civilians and contractors, many of whom have reported barriers such as language difficulties, complex billing systems, different standards of care and a confusing emergency response network.

To address those concerns, the DOD launched several initiatives over the past year, including a

"Japan Access to Care" working group that began meeting monthly in April 2024 and a new "pre-hire statement of understanding" to inform job candidates about local health care limitations.

The department also started a pilot program in Japan to assist with scheduling appointments, translation and payment support. At Camp Zama, the home of U.S. Army Japan near Tokyo, a health care liaison and translation service has been active since October 2023.

DOD is also working to expand mental health and emergency care access, the report states.

The Japan Civilian Medical Advocacy group, which formed in response to the crisis, welcomed the GAO's findings but cautioned that real change has yet to be seen.

The report did not make any recommendations to further address the situation.

"While JCMA is heartened by GAO's acknowledgment of these longstanding issues, we agree it is still too early to determine whether the DOD's current initiatives will adequately overcome the health care barriers," the group said Tuesday in a statement on Facebook.

DODEA students walk out to defend threatened DEI

BY DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea — When the lunch bell rang Thursday for a 40-minute break at the high school on this Army base, about 40 students used the time to speak out against Defense Department orders rolling back initiatives for diversity, equity and inclusion.

The demonstration included a flag-folding, a student dressed as the Statue of Liberty, signs, banners, flags and several speeches.

Meanwhile, hundreds of students at more than a dozen other Department of Defense Education Activity schools in the U.S., Europe, Japan and Guam were scheduled to gather in a coordinated walkout, said Soojan West, a Humphreys High School senior and an event organizer.

"It was very empowering, especially knowing that we have students all across the globe walking out for this cause," she said by phone after the demonstration.

The walkouts are the most recent in a series of student-led efforts throughout DODEA since Feb. 11, when about 50 students demonstrated at Patch Middle

School in Stuttgart, Germany.

Executive orders on Jan. 23 and Jan. 27 spurred the removal and review of books and curriculum from DODEA schools, the end of activities and themed programs such as Black History Month, and the cessation or reorganization of clubs centered on gender or cultural affiliation.

"These actions are in line with President (Donald) Trump's ongoing commitment to end illegal discrimination and wasteful spending across the federal government," the Education Department said in a Jan. 25 statement. "They are the first step in reorienting the agency toward prioritizing meaningful learning ahead of divisive ideology in our schools."

At Aviano Air Base, Italy, 117 students, about a third of the population of the combined middle/high school, gathered Thursday in back of the gymnasium.

"Diversity is not a threat but a strength of our nation," senior Mia Davila, an event organizer, said in a speech that was heard beyond the fence line. "Our goal is not to disrupt the school environment, but to stand in solidarity."

Trump mulls next steps on his tariffs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In the aftermath of this week's tariff whiplash, President Donald Trump is deciding exactly what he wants out of trade talks with as many as 75 nations in the coming weeks.

Trump is also figuring out next steps with China. He upped his tariffs on Chinese goods to 145% after China placed retaliatory taxes of 84% on imports from the U.S. While his 90-day pause on other tariffs caused the stock market to rally on Wednesday, countries still face a baseline 10% import tax instead of the higher rates announced on April 2.

Kevin Hassett, director of the White House National Economic Council, told Fox News' "Fox and Friends" on Wednesday that the administration already has "offers on the table from more than 15 countries."

Hassett said the next step will be determining exactly what Trump wants out of the negotiations.

"We have a meeting today

with all the top principals where we're going to present to the president a list of what we think his priorities might look like," Hassett said. "And I'm sure he's going to, you know, have his own ideas about where to move things."

Here's where Trump's tariffs showdown stands:

■ **The financial markets can tame Trump.**

With \$28.9 trillion in publicly held debt, the U.S. government can still be beholden to investors who lend it money. Trump might be willing to run roughshod over political rivals, judges he dislikes and a host of political norms, but the bond market showed Wednesday that it can temper his plans.

Going into Wednesday, the interest rate on a 10-year U.S. Treasury note was increasing and approaching 4.5%. That meant the U.S. government was having a tough time finding possible buyers for its debt, as market participants were wondering if Trump's tariffs had caused for-

eign buyers to sour on the U.S. government. Higher interest rates for the government could trigger even higher mortgage rates and auto loans for consumers, among other problems.

Trump on Wednesday said investors were getting "yippy," but after his tariff pause he described the bond market as "beautiful."

■ **The tariff drama is far from done.**

The S&P 500 stock index jumped 9.5% after the pause was announced. But reality crept back in on Thursday and the stock market slumped. Sure, Trump was no longer going to put a 20% tariff on goods from the European Union, a 24% tariff on Japan or 25% on South Korea. But those nations still have imports taxed at an elevated 10%. And tariffs went up against China, locking the world's two largest economies in a trade war.

Plus, the trade war has expanded with China, and 25% tariffs still apply to imported autos, steel and aluminum. Imports

from Canada and Mexico, the two largest U.S. trading partners, still face import taxes of as much as 25%. And Trump still plans tariffs on pharmaceutical drugs, lumber, copper and computer chips.

Because tariffs are taxes paid by importers, the costs generally get passed along to consumers and businesses in the form of higher prices and slower economic growth. The Budget Lab at Yale University estimated on Thursday that even with the pause, Trump's current tariff regime would pull down a household's average disposable income by \$4,364.

■ **What Trump really wants.**

Trump has said he wants to eliminate the \$1.2 trillion trade deficit, which means he no longer wants the U.S. to import more goods than it exports to other nations. He also wants revenues from tariffs to offset his income tax cut plans. The president has also said he wants the tariffs to bring back factory jobs and raise workers' wages.

House bill ties citizenship proof to voter registration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans passed one of their signature issues for the year on Thursday, approving legislation to require proof of U.S. citizenship when registering to vote for federal elections, one of President Donald Trump's top election-related priorities.

Democrats lined up against the bill and warned that it risks disenfranchising millions of Americans who do not have ready access to the proper documents.

Trump has long signaled a desire to change how elections are run in the U.S. and last month issued a sweeping executive order that included a citizenship re-

quirement among other election-related changes.

Top Republicans have argued the legislation, known as the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, is necessary to ensure only citizens vote in U.S. elections and "cements into law" Trump's order.

This marks Republicans' second attempt at passing the SAVE Act. It passed the House last year but failed in the Senate amid Democratic opposition. It's unlikely to fare any better this year.

Republicans hammered on the issue during last year's presidential election, even though voting by noncitizens is rare, already is illegal and can lead to felony charges and deportation.

House GOP advances Trump's big budget bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans narrowly approved their budget framework on Thursday, a political turnaround after Speaker Mike Johnson worked into the night to satisfy GOP holdouts who had refused to advance trillions of dollars in tax breaks without deeper spending cuts.

Johnson stood with Senate Majority Leader John Thune early in the morning at the Capitol and said President Donald Trump's "big, beautiful bill," which seeks as much as \$1.5 trillion in cuts to federal programs and services, was on track. The speaker had abruptly halted voting Wednesday night.

The 216-214 vote pushed the budget plan forward, one more milestone for Johnson, who could only lose a few detractors from his slim Republican majority. A failed vote, particularly as the economy was convulsing over Trump's trade wars, would have been a major setback for the party's agenda in Washington.

The House action was a crucial next step in a lengthy process to unlock the centerpiece to the president's domestic agenda of tax cuts, mass deportations and a smaller federal government. There are weeks, if not months, ahead, on a final product, with more votes in Congress.

Ukraine shares proof of 150 Chinese fighters

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine on Wednesday expanded on its claim that significant numbers of Chinese nationals are fighting for Russia's invading army, saying it had gathered detailed intelligence on more than 150 mercenaries Moscow allegedly recruited through social media. In China, officials called the allegations "totally unfounded."

The Ukrainian accusation and Chinese denial come as the U.S. strives to secure a ceasefire in the more than three-year war.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced Tuesday that the Ukrainian military had captured two Chinese men fighting alongside the Russian army on Ukrainian soil. It was the first time Ukraine had made such a claim about Chinese fighters in the war.

On Wednesday, Zelenskyy said he was willing to exchange the two prisoners of war for Ukrainian soldiers held captive in Russia. Without providing evidence, Zelenskyy said officials in Beijing were aware of Russia's campaign to recruit Chinese mercenaries. He stopped short of saying the Chinese government authorized the mercenaries' involvement in Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine has the names and passport data for 155 Chinese citizens fighting for the Russian army and that "we believe that there are many more of them." He shared with journalists documents listing names, passport numbers and personal details of the alleged Chinese recruits, including when they arrived in Russia for military training and departed for service; the AP has not independently verified the docu-

ments.

China has provided strong diplomatic support for Russia since it launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It has also sold Russia machinery and microelectronics that it can use to make weapons, Western officials say, in addition to providing an economic lifeline through the trade in energy and consumer goods.

China is not believed to have knowingly provided Russia with troops, weapons or military expertise. Zelenskyy said U.S. officials expressed "surprise" when informed of the presence of Chinese mercenaries in Ukraine.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said in Beijing that China has played a "constructive role in politically resolving the Ukraine crisis."

Lin told a daily news briefing

Wednesday that "the Chinese government always asks Chinese citizens to stay away from conflict zones, ... and especially refrain from participating in any party's military operations."

His comments appeared to indicate the captured Chinese had joined Russia's ranks on their own. Both Russia and Ukraine allow foreign soldiers to enlist.

In the meantime, both countries have kept fighting a war of attrition along the roughly 620-mile front line and targeted each other with long-range strikes.

The city of Kramatorsk in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk endured a "massive drone attack" overnight, regional head Vadym Filashkin said, injuring an 11-year-old girl, her mother and her grandmother.

Dominican Republic roof collapse death toll rises

Associated Press

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic — The number of dead in a roof collapse at an iconic nightclub in the Dominican Republic surged to 221 on Thursday, an official said.

Juan Manuel Méndez, director of the Center of Emergency Operations, said crews at the scene were still looking for victims and potential survivors, although no one has been found alive since Tuesday afternoon.

On Wednesday, dozens of people had anxiously searched for their loved ones, growing frustrated upon getting no answers after visiting hospitals and the country's forensic institute. By Thursday, a lone family remained with no answers.

The legendary club was packed with musicians, professional athletes and government officials when dust began falling from the ceiling early Tues-

day. Minutes later, the roof collapsed.

Victims include merengue icon Rubby Pérez, who had been singing to the crowd before the roof fell; former MLB players Octavio Dotel and Tony Enrique Blanco Cabrera; and Nelsy Cruz, the governor of the northwestern province of Montecristi whose brother is seven-time Major League Baseball All-Star Nelson Cruz.

Also killed was a retired United Nations official; saxophonist Luis Solís, who was playing onstage when the roof fell; New York-based fashion designer Martín Polanco; the son and daughter-in-law of the minister of public works; the brother of the vice minister of the Ministry of Youth; and three employees of Grupo Popular, a financial services company, including the president of AFP Popular Bank and his wife.

Michelle Obama addresses speculation about divorce

New York Daily News

Michelle Obama has finally shut down speculation that she and former President Barack Obama are headed for divorce, while admitting her newfound independence fueled the rumors.

When asked what her life looks like these days, the 61-year-old former first lady told Sophia Bush's "Work in Progress" podcast that "it's whatever I want."

With politics in her family's rearview mirror, the "Becoming" author said she now has "freedom" she didn't previously afford herself adding that for the first time in her life, "all of my choices are for me."

"Now I get to look at my calendar, which I did this year ... looking at something I was supposed to do — without naming names — and I chose to do what was best for me, not what I had

to do," she said in a seeming nod to her skipping President Trump's inauguration in January, which former President Obama attended alongside other former presidents.

"People couldn't even fathom I was making a choice for myself," she said.

"They had to assume that my husband and I are divorcing, that this couldn't be a grown woman just making a set of decisions for herself. ... If it doesn't fit into the stereotype of what people think we should do, then it gets labeled as something negative," she added.

When speaking to students at Hamilton College last Thursday, the ex-president admitted to being in "a deep deficit" with his wife following his two-term presidency.

"I have been trying to dig myself out of that hole by doing occasionally fun things," he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man who killed 2 at game gets 76-year sentence

TN HUMBOLDT — A Tennessee man has been sentenced to 76 years in prison for killing two men and wounding a third in a shooting at a high school basketball game more than three years ago.

Jadon Hardiman, 21, was sentenced Monday after he was convicted in November of charges including second-degree murder, attempted murder, aggravated assault and weapons offenses, Gibson County district attorney Frederick Agee said in a statement.

Hardiman, then 18, attended a basketball game between Humboldt and North Side high schools on Nov. 30, 2021. He entered the gymnasium's crowded concession area and pulled a semi-automatic .40 caliber handgun, prosecutors said. He fired three shots at Justin Pankey, a 21-year-old former Humboldt basketball player.

Pankey was hit one time and died within seconds, Agee said. A second bullet hit Xavier Clifton, a former North Side basketball player, who was standing in the concession line. Clifton was shot in the neck and paralyzed. He died in March 2022.

A third shot struck another man in the back of the head. He survived.

Bill fails; state to keep splitting electoral votes

NE LINCOLN — A bill to make Nebraska's method of awarding presidential electoral votes a winner-take-all system failed to survive a filibuster Tuesday after two Republican lawmakers broke with their own party.

The bill's failure preserves the Omaha area's "blue dot" congressional district that has seen its electoral vote — one of Nebraska's five — go to Democratic candidates in three of the past five presidential elections.

Republican Sen. Merv Riepe, of Ralston, followed through on his promise not to support the winner-take-all proposal, despite a full-court press by Gov. Jim Pillen to apply public pressure on him.

Man pleads guilty in crash that killed police officer

CT HARTFORD — A 20-year-old Connecticut man accused of causing a car crash that killed a Hartford police officer and seriously wounded that officer's partner pleaded guilty on Tuesday to several charges, including manslaughter.

Richard Barrington was an 18-year-old high school junior at the time of the 2023 crash. Besides manslaughter, he has pleaded guilty to first-degree assault and interfering with a police officer, his lawyer Cameron Atkinson said.

Authorities said Barrington fled a traffic stop conducted by other officers, drove through two red lights and smashed into the passenger side of another cruiser that was responding to an unrelated emergency call on Sept. 6, 2023.

Local leaders seek state's help amid federal job cuts

VA ALEXANDRIA — Northern Virginia leaders urged lawmakers on Tuesday to enact emergency legislation to help stabilize their local economy as the White

House cuts federal jobs, which they said has sharply impacted the dense cluster of government employees and contractors based in the suburbs of the nation's capital.

In presentations to a House of Delegates bipartisan committee addressing federal reductions, local authorities described the job reductions as a once-in-a-lifetime overhaul of Fairfax County's economy that would push high-salary workers to leave the state. Fairfax County Board Chairman Jeff McKay said the shift would impact staffing at other ventures, ranging from child care services to staffing at the county jail.

"We got through COVID because we had a lot of federal support," said McKay, a board member of the state's most populous county. "We will get no federal support with this. In fact, it is federal actions that are causing these actions."

As of Tuesday, roughly 1,300 federal employees and contractors have filed unemployment insurance claims with the Virginia Employment Commission since the end of January, Secretary of Labor George "Bryan" Slater said to a reporter during the meeting.

Soccer coach charged in death of 13-year-old boy

CA LOS ANGELES — A youth soccer coach has been charged in the death of a 13-year-old whose body was found on the side of a Southern California road.

Los Angeles County prosecutors said Monday that the boy was reported missing by his family March 30 after he boarded a train to visit the coach in Lancaster, north of Los An-

geles. His body was found several days later in Ventura County, northwest of Los Angeles.

Prosecutors said Mario Edgardo Garcia-Aquino was charged with one count of murder, with the special circumstance allegation of murder during the commission or attempted commission of lewd acts with a child. The charges make him eligible for the death penalty. Prosecutors said Garcia-Aquino is accused of killing the teen, Oscar Omar Hernandez, and then dumping his body along the roadside.

Prosecutors said Garcia-Aquino is accused in a separate case of sexually assaulting a 16-year-old male in Palmdale, north of Los Angeles, in February.

State AG launches US Senate primary challenge

TX AUSTIN — Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is running for the U.S. Senate in a primary challenge against Republican Sen. John Cornyn, setting up what is likely to become one of the GOP's most contentious and expensive contests of 2026.

Paxton, a close ally of President Donald Trump, made the announcement Tuesday. Paxton has sought to position himself as a national leader among the GOP's ascendant hard right.

Cornyn's campaign called his challenger a "fraud" and leaning into Paxton's historic impeachment in 2023 after eight of his closest aides accused him of corruption and reported him to the FBI. Paxton was later acquitted in a trial in the Texas Senate, where his wife is a state senator but was not allowed to cast a vote.

— From wire reports

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Doncic scores 45 in emotional Dallas return

Associated Press

DALLAS — Luka Doncic scored 45 points in his first game in Dallas since being traded to Los Angeles, helping the Lakers wrap up a playoff spot with a 112-97 victory over the Mavericks on Wednesday night.

Doncic's emotional return came two months after a seismic trade out of nowhere that sent the five-time All-Star to LA. The 26-year-old star from Slovenia spent his first 5½ seasons with Dallas, and still had two seasons left on his contract.

The 45 points matched Doncic's season high — he did that once for the Mavs and one other time for the Lakers. He also had eight rebounds, six assists and four steals.

LeBron James had 13 of his 27 points in the fourth quarter, when Los Angeles fell behind before a strong finish.

Anthony Davis, who went from the Lakers to Dallas in the Doncic deal, had 13 points and 11 rebounds. Naji Marshall led the Mavericks with 23 points and eight assists.

Magic 96, Celtics 76: Franz Wagner scored 23 points, Cole Anthony came off the bench with 18 points and host Orlando beat Boston to clinch seventh place in the Eastern Conference and the top spot in the play-in tournament.

Baylor Scheierman and Payton Pritchard scored 15 points each to lead the Celtics, who did not use their top six players and made 7 of 40 3-point shots.

Jayson Tatum, Jaylen Brown, Kristaps Porzingis, Derrick White, Jrue Holiday and Al Horford did not play for the Celtics.

Paolo Banchero had 15 points and six assists for the Magic. It was Wagner's 12th straight game of scoring 20 or more points.

Bulls 119, Heat 111: Josh Giddey dominated with 28 points, 16 rebounds and 11 assists and host Chicago beat Miami in a game with heavy seeding implications.

Giddey extended a career high with his seventh triple-double as

the ninth-place Bulls (37-43) moved a game ahead of the Heat in the Eastern Conference.

They also pulled within a half-game of Atlanta for the eighth seed. The ninth-place team gets a home game against the 10th seed in the play-in tournament. The winner then visits the loser of the game between the seventh and eighth seeds.

Kevin Huerter scored 22. Nikola Vucevic added 20 points and 11 rebounds. Coby White scored 18 and Matas Buzelis finished with 17 points, helping Chicago win for the eighth time in 11 games. They also completed a three-game season sweep of Miami.

Tyler Herro scored 30 for the Heat. Bam Adebayo added 18 points and Davion Mitchell scored 17.

Spurs 114, Warriors 111: Harrison Barnes made a 3-point shot at the buzzer after committing a foul moments earlier that could have cost his team, and visiting San Antonio stunned Golden State.

Draymond Green made two free throws with 3.1 seconds left to make it 111-all after Barnes fouled him, then the veteran guard let it fly over Jimmy Butler and was immediately swarmed by his teammates when the horn sounded.

Keldon Johnson made a go-ahead layup with 11 seconds left after tying the game with 32 seconds remaining and finished with 21 points.

Butler scored 13 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter and converted 16 of 17 free throws and Stephen Curry scored 30 with five 3-pointers and grabbed eight rebounds, but this loss could jeopardize the Warriors securing a top-six playoff seed and avoiding the play-in tournament.

Thunder 125, Suns 112: Jalen Williams scored 33 points, Chet Holmgren added 22 and short-handed Oklahoma City beat host Phoenix, eliminating the Suns from the playoff race.

Phoenix will miss the playoffs

for the first time since 2020 despite having a roster that included the high-priced All-Star trio of Kevin Durant, Devin Booker and Bradley Beal.

The Thunder have already wrapped up the No. 1 seed in the Western Conference playoffs and were without several key players on Wednesday, including All-Star guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, defensive star Luguentz Dort and center Isaiah Hartenstein.

That didn't stop them from topping the Suns, who have lost eight straight.

Nuggets 124, Kings 116: Nikola Jokic had his 32nd triple-double of the season with 20 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists and visiting Denver beat Sacramento in the Nuggets' first game since head coach Michael Malone was fired.

Christian Braun scored 25 points and Aaron Gordon and Michael Porter Jr. each had 21 points to help the Nuggets end a four-game losing streak and complete a season series sweep of the Kings.

With two regular-season games remaining, Denver (48-32) is tied with the Los Angeles Clippers for the No. 4 playoff seed in the Western Conference.

Clippers 134, Rockets 117: James Harden had 35 points and 10 assists and streaking Los Angeles beat playoff-bound Houston for its sixth straight win.

The Rockets had already locked up the No. 2 seed in the West and will be making their first playoff appearance since the 2020 bubble in Florida. They rested most of their starting lineup, including Dillon Brooks and Alperen Sengun.

Ivica Zubac had 20 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for the host Clippers, his first career triple-double and the third by a center for the team. Kawhi Leonard returned with 22 points and 10 rebounds after sitting out Tuesday to rest his surgically repaired right knee. Nicolas Batum added 15 points, including LA's first 12

of the second quarter, before leaving with a sore right groin.

Jazz 133, Trail Blazers 126 (OT): Kyle Filipowski scored 30 points including a dunk that sent the game into overtime and grabbed 18 rebounds as host Utah snapped a nine-game losing streak with a win over Portland.

Brice Sensabaugh added 22 points and Keyonte George had 18, including eight in overtime, for the Jazz.

Shaedon Sharpe had 37 to lead the Trail Blazers, but missed three critical free throws in the final minute of regulation.

76ers 122, Wizards 103: Jeff Dowtin Jr. scored a career-high 30 points and visiting Philadelphia snapped a 12-game losing streak with a victory over Washington.

Lonnie Walker IV had 24 points for the 76ers, who won despite a lengthy list of injured players that included Joel Embiid, Paul George, Eric Gordon, Kyle Lowry, Tyrese Maxey, Jared McCain and Andre Drummond.

Dowtin, a Washington, D.C.-area native on a two-way contract for Philadelphia, played for the Sixers for the first time this month. He went 11 of 15 from the field and made four 3-pointers, surpassing his previous career high of 24 points from March 14 against Indiana.

Raptors 126, Hornets 96: Jonathan Mogbo had 17 points, a career-high 11 assists and 10 rebounds for the first triple-double by a rookie in the NBA this season, helping host Toronto beat short-handed Charlotte.

Jared Rhoden scored 23 points in the Raptors' ninth straight home victory over the Hornets. Scottie Barnes added 17 points and 11 rebounds as Toronto finished 18-23 at home.

Nick Smith Jr. had 28 points and 10 rebounds and Jusuf Nurkic added 26 points for Charlotte. The Hornets have lost five straight and seven in a row in the road.

Caps now must shift focus to playoffs

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Va. — Alex Ovechkin finished practice by replicating his belly-flop celebration from scoring the record-breaking 895th goal of his NHL career, delighting the 895 schoolchildren and other Washington Capitals fans in attendance.

The previous 45 minutes — and the next several days — are all about getting back to work.

Ovechkin and the Capitals got back on the ice Wednesday, 72 hours after he broke Wayne Gretzky's record to end the "GR8 Chase" and set in motion several nights of celebrations. They had such a comfortable lead atop their division and the Eastern Conference that the past month has been all about getting Ovechkin the record, but that coincided with a dip in play that can't continue with the playoffs fast approaching.

"Guys, whether they want to admit it or not, and whether I want to admit it and acknowledge it or not, as much as I want

to block it out, as much as I want to say, 'No, we're strictly focused on the Winnipeg Jets, the Minnesota Wild,' whatever the opponent was — it's impossible to block the record and what was going on inside of the games out," coach Spencer Carbery said.

"That's going to be our biggest challenge coming off of such a unique, thrilling experience celebrating that achievement and now having to completely reset mentally and focus on the task at hand of playing well as a team and making sure that we're putting ourselves in the best position possible to play well in the playoffs."

Washington was the league's first team to clinch a playoff berth this season, wrapped up first in the Metropolitan Division with Carolina's loss Tuesday night and is close to shoring up home-ice advantage until at least the Stanley Cup Final. But that is thanks more to what the team did in the first five-plus months of the season than re-

cent weeks.

The Caps ranked second in the NHL in goals allowed through 64 games, giving up an average of 2.54. Over the past 13, they're 24th at 3.38 a game.

"We just need to be really sharpen our details," defenseman Martin Fehervary said. "I think that's a key: Don't give up too many chances. We obviously can score the goals, but we need to be sharper in our D-zone."

"Our team game slid a little bit," veteran defenseman John Carlson said. "It's a good point of the year where we can refocus ourselves and what we know it's going to take. And whatever you want to say, I'm not blaming it on what we've been through and what we're striving for, too, but I think everybody in here is smart enough to know that we've got to play a better brand of hockey."

Going all out to help Ovechkin, the longtime captain and face of the franchise, break what was considered one of hockey's more untouchable rec-

ords was more than understandable.

But the Capitals have also not won a playoff series since hoisting the Cup in 2018, and making a long run this spring is the next goal after 895.

"O' even said it right after he scored that goal that the big games are still to come this year, and we've got a special group and you don't want to waste years like this when things are going well," defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk said.

"It happened at a perfect time to a perfect guy, and now we have time to kind of refocus. I think our last few games definitely haven't been our best, so it's a nice time to kind of reset, focus and get dialed in before playoffs are here."

After being in the spotlight for an individual achievement, Ovechkin is ready to get back to being team-first and winning.

"All that's happened during the year is one thing, but in the playoffs it's a total different season," Ovechkin said.

Eriksson Ek, Kaprizov return, lead Wild to OT win

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Joel Eriksson Ek scored a career-high four goals in his return from a lower-body injury, Kirill Kaprizov had his second of the game in overtime in his first game back and the Minnesota Wild outlasted the San Jose Sharks 8-7 on Wednesday night.

Minnesota moved into the first wild-card spot in the Western Conference when the St. Louis Blues lost at Edmonton in a late game. The Wild and Blues each have 93 points, with St. Louis having played one more game.

Eriksson Ek missed the previous 21 games. Kaprizov also returned from a lower-body injury after missing the last 28 games and 40 of the 43. He had

surgery in late January.

Kaprizov — who also had an assist — scored his 25th goal of the season at 1:01 of overtime to end it after Will Smith tied it for San Jose with 52 seconds left in regulation. Kaprizov scored in overtime on a one-timer from the right side after a give-and-go play with Mats Zuccarello.

Eriksson Ek gave Minnesota a 3-2 lead at 7:29 of the second, then scored three straight in a 2:18 span late in the second and early in the third to make it 7-4. His first three goals came on power plays.

Maple Leafs 4, Lightning 3 (OT): Matthew Knies scored a game-winning goal in overtime to record his second hat trick of the season, and visiting Toronto beat the Tampa Bay Lightning

4-3 on Wednesday night.

Toronto opened up a three-point lead on Tampa Bay for first place in the Atlantic Division with four games left for each team.

Knies finished off his hat trick with 1:04 left in the overtime.

Ducks 4, Flames 3 (OT): Cutter Gauthier teamed with Frank Vatrano to tie it with a late burst, then scored at 1:11 of overtime to give host Anaheim a victory over Calgary.

Soon after Yegor Sharangovich and Matt Coronato scored in a 1:42 span to give Calgary a 3-1 lead, Vatrano started the rally with 3:57 left. Gauthier tied it eight seconds later.

In overtime, Gauthier took a centering pass from Leo Carls-

son and beat goalie Dustin Wolf with a wrist shot from the high slot to the top, right corner.

Oilers 4, Blues 3: Connor Brown scored twice, Connor McDavid had three assists in his return to the lineup and injury-riddled Edmonton moved within a hair of wrapping up a playoff spot, beating visiting St. Louis.

The Oilers would have clinched a postseason berth if the Calgary Flames lost in regulation rather than overtime in Anaheim.

Flyers 8, Rangers 5: Tyson Foerster scored a hat trick and rookie Aleksei Kolosov made 24 saves as visiting Philadelphia downed New York to put the Rangers on the brink of elimination from the playoff race.

Meyer gives up no-no in sixth, Marlins top Mets

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Max Meyer carried a no-hitter into the sixth inning and the Miami Marlins salvaged the finale of a three-game series by beating the New York Mets 5-0 on Wednesday.

Matt Mervis homered and finished with three RBIs for the Marlins, who snapped the Mets' six-game winning streak. Nick Fortes and Jonah Bride each had a run-scoring single.

New York hit just two balls out of the infield against Meyer (1-1) before Francisco Lindor's single up the middle with one out in the sixth. The right-hander immediately induced Juan Soto to hit into a double play.

Soto finished 0 for 4 as his season-opening on-base streak ended at 11 games.

Meyer gave up a leadoff single to Pete Alonso in the seventh and exited after retiring Brandon Nimmo. The 6½ innings tied a career high for Meyer, who walked two and struck out four.

Pirates 2, Cardinals 1 (13): Joey Bart singled in the winning run with the bases loaded in the 13th inning to give host Pittsburgh a win over St. Louis, despite six hitless innings from Erick Fedde.

The Pirates loaded the bases against Chris Roycroft (0-2) with no outs as Alexander Canario and Bryan Reynolds drew walks. Andrew McCutchen hit into a force out at home plate, but Bart hit a drive to deep left field that bounced into the stands and scored automatic runner Isiah Kiner-Falefa.

The Cardinals took a no-hitter into the seventh inning before Endy Rodriguez ended it with a two-out single off Phil Maton.

Fedde was pulled after throwing 88 pitches, 51 for strikes. He walked four batters, but none of the baserunners got past first base. He had just two strikeouts.

Rangers 6, Cubs 2: Texas shortstop Corey Seager homered twice as the Rangers

avoided a sweep in Chicago, beating the Cubs.

The two-time World Series MVP opened the game with a solo shot to left-center, and then lined another solo home run to right field in the seventh to put Texas up five. It was Seager's 18th career game with multiple home runs and his first since Aug. 19, 2024.

Rangers pitcher Tyler Mahle (2-0) held Chicago to just two hits in seven innings. The right-hander allowed one earned run and lowered his season ERA to 1.32.

Yankees 4, Tigers 3: Max Fried threw seven scoreless innings to outduel high school teammate Jack Flaherty, Ben Rice hit a two-run homer in the seventh and AL MVP Aaron Judge drove in two more runs to help visiting New York hold off Detroit.

Fried (1-1) gave up five hits and had 11 strikeouts, two short of the career high he set last June at Boston.

Flaherty, who attended Harvard-Westlake High School in Los Angeles with Fried, struck out nine and gave up three hits and three walks in 5½ innings.

Guardians 3, White Sox 2: Carlos Santana homered and host Cleveland held off Chicago in a game that ended on a bizarre play.

The White Sox had the bases loaded with two outs in the ninth inning when Miguel Vargas singled through the hole at shortstop. Jacob Amaya scored and it seemed Mike Tauchman was going to tie the game before he appeared to injure himself while rounding third base.

Tauchman, who just came off the injured list after a right hamstring strain, was tagged out by catcher Austin Hedges for the final out after the throw from left fielder Steven Kwan.

Padres 2, Athletics 1: Randy Vásquez gave up one hit over five innings and Xander Bogaerts had three hits and scored both of visiting San Diego's

runs in a victory over the Athletics.

Vásquez (1-1) gave up the Athletics' run with Adrian Morejon, Jeremiah Estrada, Jason Adam and Robert Suarez each pitching a scoreless inning of relief. Suarez got his third save.

Diamondbacks 9, Orioles 0: Corbin Carroll homered for the second straight game, Pavin Smith added a two-run shot and host Arizona beat Baltimore.

Brandon Pfaadt (2-1) threw six scoreless innings, giving up four hits and two walks while striking out three. The Diamondbacks won two of three games in the series.

Giants 8, Reds 6 (10): Mike Yastrzemski hit a two-run homer in the bottom of the 10th inning, Jung Hoo Lee had three hits including a triple and a double, and host San Francisco rallied from a five-run deficit for a victory over Cincinnati.

Wilmer Flores had three hits including a home run for San Francisco, which avoided a three-game series sweep.

Dodgers 6, Nationals 5: Teoscar Hernández homered and drove in three, including the go-ahead run in the seventh inning, and visiting Los Angeles beat Washington to avoid a three-game sweep.

The Dodgers, who went 2-4 on their road trip that started in Philadelphia, snapped the Nationals' four-game winning streak.

Mariners 7, Astros 6: Randy Arozarena hit a grand slam in the eighth and drew the game-winning walk in the ninth as host Seattle rallied for seven runs over the final two innings to beat Houston.

Julio Rodríguez delivered a two-run double in the bottom half of the ninth to tie it, and a walk to Mitch Garver loaded the bases. Houston got a force-out at home before Bryan Abreu (0-1) walked Arozarena on a full count.

Blue Jays 2, Red Sox 1 (11): Bo Bichette's sacrifice fly in the

11th inning scored Ernie Clement and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. celebrated his contract extension with three hits as visiting Toronto beat Boston.

Guerrero and the Blue Jays finalized a 14-year, \$500 million contract that starts in 2026, a deal with a record \$325 million signing bonus. Later, the slugger went 3 for 5 and scored the team's first run.

Rays 5, Angels 4: José Caballero slugged his first career grand slam and host Tampa Bay held on for a win over Los Angeles to snap a five-game losing streak.

Caballero gave the Rays a 4-0 lead in the first inning before the Angels hit solo homers in the second, fourth and fifth to cut the margin to one. Yandy Díaz added a solo homer in the seventh for a two-run cushion before Los Angeles' Kyren Paris hit his second solo shot of the game in the eighth.

Phillies 4, Braves 3: Trea Turner hit a tiebreaking homer off closer Raisel Iglesias in the ninth inning and visiting Philadelphia held on to beat Atlanta.

Turner's first homer of the season came off a slider from Iglesias (0-2). The NL East rivals have split the first two games of their three-game series.

Twins 4, Royals 0: Joe Ryan continued his mastery over Kansas City, giving up just two hits over seven scoreless innings in visiting Minnesota's victory over the Royals.

Ryan (1-1), who struck out four and did not give up a walk, is now 7-0 in nine career starts against Kansas City with a 1.30 ERA in 55½ innings.

Brewers 17, Rockies 2: Jackson Chourio homered and doubled to drive in five runs as visiting Milwaukee cruised to a win over slumping Colorado.

The Brewers have taken the opening two games against the Rockies to secure their first series win at Coors Field since 2018.