

Trump considers DeSantis for Pentagon

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pete Hegseth, Donald Trump's Pentagon pick, was fighting to hold on to his Cabinet nomination amid growing questions Wednesday about his personal conduct as the president-elect's team considers alternatives, including Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

The Trump transition team was increasingly concerned about Hegseth's path to Senate confirmation and was actively looking at potential replacements, a person familiar with the matter said. Hegseth is under pressure as senators weigh a series of allegations that have surfaced against him.

DeSantis, who competed against Trump for the Republican presidential nomination in 2024, is being discussed as a possible replacement if Hegseth's nomination does not move forward, according to three other people familiar with the matter. They were not authorized to pub-

licly discuss internal deliberations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Hegseth is the latest nominee-designate to be imperiled by personal baggage after the recent withdrawal of Trump's pick to be attorney general, former Rep. Matt Gaetz, whose vulnerabilities were well-documented. But Hegseth's past, including the revelation that he made a settlement payment after being accused of sexual assault, was not widely known.

Trump's transition team did not do fulsome screening of potential picks before he announced them, and only on Tuesday was an agreement signed with the Department of Justice to allow for formal background checks of those under consideration.

Beyond DeSantis, there have been discussions about shifting Michael Waltz, who was named by Trump as his national security adviser, to the Defense Department, according to a person fa-

miliar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity about private conversations. The Florida congressman is a retired Army National Guard officer and war veteran.

Trump aides do not want to be caught flat-footed in case Trump's initial picks fall through. Trump, for now, was standing by Hegseth.

Hegseth said he spoke to Trump on Wednesday morning and received a fresh message of support. "He said, 'Keep going, keep fighting. I'm behind you all the way,'" Hegseth told a CBS News reporter as he walked through the Capitol.

The Trump transition team didn't immediately comment. The Wall Street Journal, on Tuesday night, first reported that Trump was considering DeSantis.

Hegseth shared a series of messages of support from others on social media and a post of his own in which he said he would not

"back down."

"I'm doing this for the warfighters, not the warmongers. The Left is afraid of disrupters and change agents," he wrote.

He blamed the pushback on fear of him and Trump and said, "So they smear w/ fake, anonymous sources & BS stories. They don't want truth. Our warriors never back down, & neither will I."

Earlier, Hegseth's mother appeared on Fox News to address multiple allegations that have emerged in the media about Hegseth's alcohol intoxication at work events, sexual misconduct and potential financial mismanagement.

Penelope Hegseth, on "Fox & Friends," discussed her son and a 2018 email she wrote him that was obtained by The New York Times, in which she confronted him about mistreating women after he impregnated his current wife while he was married to his second wife.

GAO: Navy, Marines out of sync on ship schedules

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy's amphibious ship schedules and Marine Corps units that deploy on them are out of sync, and without change, the services will continue to deploy Marines late, according to a federal watchdog agency.

A driving factor is the Navy and Marine Corps are at odds about how many amphibious ships are needed to deploy Marines effectively, the Government Accountability Office wrote in a report released Tuesday. The report outlines recommendations for the services to work together to refine their availability goals for amphibious ships and establish

when a joint plan will be implemented to address ship availability concerns. The watchdog also recommended the Navy stop canceling maintenance on ships scheduled to be decommissioned without the required permission from congressional defense committees.

The Navy has 32 operational amphibious ships — just one more than the Congress-mandated minimum of 31 ships. The Navy's amphibious fleet, which includes amphibious assault ships, dock landing ships and amphibious transport docks, transports Marines and their equipment, including vehicles and aircraft, for assault and humanitarian mis-

sions.

But half the fleet is in poor condition, and some ships have been unavailable for years at a time, the GAO wrote.

"Historically, we have an example where the Navy had one amphibious ship that hadn't deployed in over 12 years because it ran into major challenges in modernization. But that ship is counted toward its number of available ships," said Shelby Oakley, director of contracting and national security acquisitions for the GAO.

On paper, a ship in maintenance was previously considered available. But ships in maintenance cannot always deploy and

conduct missions or exercises, making it useless to the Marine Corps, Oakley said.

"Agreeing on that number of how many of these do we need actually [not to be] in major maintenance and ready to conduct operations and training. That's one thing they are working through right now," Oakley said of the services.

In June, the Navy and Marine Corps agreed on what constitutes an available ship, specifying a ship in a maintenance phase is unavailable.

But the GAO found the definition failed to address the types of maintenance that would deem a ship to be unavailable.

S. Korean president faces impeachment

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's opposition parties Wednesday submitted a motion to impeach President Yoon Suk Yeol over the shocking and short-lived martial law that drew heavily armed troops to encircle parliament before lawmakers climbed walls to reenter the building and unanimously voted to lift his order.

Impeaching Yoon would require the support of two-thirds of parliament, and at least six justices of the nine-member Constitutional Court would have to endorse it to remove him from office. The motion, submitted jointly by the main liberal opposition Democratic Party and five smaller opposition parties, could be put to a vote as early as Friday.

Yoon's senior policy advisers and Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun offered to resign as the nation struggles to make

sense of what appeared to be a poorly-thought-out stunt. The Democratic Party on Wednesday submitted a separate motion to impeach Kim, who it alleged recommended the martial law declaration to Yoon.

In his speech announcing the abrupt order Tuesday night, Yoon vowed to eliminate "anti-state" forces and continued to criticize the Democratic Party's attempts to impeach key government officials and senior prosecutors. But martial law lasted only about six hours, as the National Assembly voted to overrule Yoon before his Cabinet formally lifted it around 4:30 a.m.

The Democratic Party, which holds a majority in the 300-seat parliament, said Wednesday that its lawmakers decided to call on Yoon to quit immediately or they would take steps to impeach him.

"President Yoon Suk Yeol's martial law declaration was a

clear violation of the constitution. It didn't abide by any requirements to declare it," a party statement said. "His martial law declaration was originally invalid and a grave violation of the constitution. It was a grave act of rebellion and provides perfect grounds for his impeachment."

Impeaching Yoon would require support from 200 of the National Assembly's 300 members. The Democratic Party and other small opposition parties together have 192 seats. But the rejection of Yoon's martial law declaration in a 190-0 vote included the votes of 18 lawmakers from Yoon's ruling People Power Party, according to National Assembly officials.

If Yoon is impeached, he'll be stripped of his constitutional powers until the Constitutional Court rules. Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the No. 2 position in the South Korean

government, would take over his presidential responsibilities. Han issued a public message pleading for patience and calling for Cabinet members to "fulfill your duties even after this moment."

The Constitutional Court has only six incumbent justices following three retirements. That means all six must approve Yoon's possible impeachment motion for it to succeed. They include those appointed after Yoon took office, so the Democratic Party is expected to speed up the process of exercising its rights to recommend two of the three new justices.

Yoon's martial law declaration harkened to South Korea's past military-backed governments when authorities occasionally proclaimed martial law and other decrees that allowed them to station combat soldiers, tanks and armored vehicles on streets or at public places.

Philippines: Chinese ships harassed patrol vessel

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Chinese coast guard vessels backed by navy ships fired powerful water cannons and blocked and sideswiped a Philippine patrol vessel on Wednesday in renewed aggression at a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, Philippine officials said.

Three Philippine coast guard and bureau of fisheries vessels were on routine patrol to protect Filipino fishermen at Scarborough Shoal when several Chinese coast guard and navy ships approached and staged "aggressive actions" after dawn, the Philippine coast guard said.

There was no immediate

comment from Chinese officials. In the past, they have repeatedly cited claims of Chinese sovereignty in the contested offshore region and their determination to defend what they say is their territory despite a 2016 international arbitration decision that invalidated Beijing's historical claims.

The United States condemned China's "unlawful use of water cannons and dangerous maneuvers." U.S. Ambassador to Manila MaryKay Carlson said on the social media platform X that the Chinese maneuvers disrupted a Philippine maritime operation and "put lives at risk."

Navy fires commanding officer of Reserve center

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy fired the commanding officer of a Reserve center in Wyoming, the service announced Tuesday.

Lt. Cmdr. Christopher Bourque was fired from the Navy Reserve Center Cheyenne due to a loss of confidence in his ability to command.

Naval Reserve Command Cheyenne is a subordinate command of the Navy Reserve Region Readiness and Mobilization Command Everett in Washington state.

The Wyoming-based command trains and manages Re-

serve sailors, preparing them to mobilize.

"The Navy maintains the highest standards for commanding officers and holds them accountable when those standards are not met," the Navy said in a statement.

Lt. Cmdr. Margaret Nichols has been temporarily assigned as the commanding officer of the reserve center until a permanent replacement is assigned.

Bourque has been temporarily reassigned to Navy Reserve Forces Command.

Bourque assumed command of the Reserve training unit in April 2023.

Senate GOP talks 30-day strategy in call with Trump

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump dialed in to what was described as a “love fest” Tuesday with Senate Republicans as they begin laying the groundwork for control of government in the new year, and a potential first-30-days agenda.

Trump’s brief call was more celebratory than a prescriptive policy agenda, according to those attending the private GOP retreat, encouraging the senators to confirm his Cabinet nominees as they launch an agenda of tax cuts, deportations and other priorities.

“It was a love fest,” said Sen. Eric Schmitt, R-Mo. “There was a real sense of unity in the room.”

The virtual visit comes as Congress is finishing up the final weeks of what, by most measures, has been among the more chaotic sessions in modern times. With the full sweep of party control, Republicans are eager to do better next year with Trump’s return to the White

House.

Republicans want to notch an early accomplishment in the first 30 days after Trump’s inauguration Jan. 20.

Incoming Senate Republican leader John Thune of South Dakota outlined a potential roadmap ahead during the private retreat at the Library of Congress.

Thune detailed a potential two-part strategy that would have senators working on an initial legislative package — energy, border security and defense priorities — that could be approved in the first 30 days of the new administration.

Next, Thune explained that the senators would turn to tax cuts — reviving the expiring tax cuts from Trump’s first term — which is expected to take longer, dragging into the year.

The new Congress convenes Jan. 3, when lawmakers are sworn into office, and the Senate expects to quickly begin holding confirmation hearings for Trump’s top Cabinet nominees — some of whom are already

running into resistance.

Trump’s choice of Fox News anchor Pete Hegseth as defense secretary and hard-right FBI critic Kash Patel to lead the Federal Bureau of Investigation face potentially difficult confirmation hearings ahead. Hegseth, who met with senators late into Monday evening, was on Capitol Hill for a second day Tuesday.

“It’s important that we thoroughly vet the nominees for these very important positions,” said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

House Speaker Mike Johnson also addressed the GOP senators — noting his slim majority in the House, which leaves him little room for party detractors.

Johnson “emphasized the need for unity heading into the first 100 days agenda,” his spokesman Taylor Haulsee said.

Asked later about the details of the legislative package, Johnson said lawmakers would be making those decisions in the next couple days.

Women with cats favored Harris, survey finds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The lead-up to the 2024 election was all about cat owners. But in the end, the dogs had their day.

President-elect Donald Trump won slightly more than half of voters who own either cats or dogs, with a big assist from dog owners, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 120,000 voters. Dog owners were much more likely to support the Republican over Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris. Cat owners were split between the two candidates.

About two-thirds of voters said they own a dog or cat, but pet owners don’t usually get much attention from politicians. This year, however, past comments by Trump’s running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, about “childless cat ladies” briefly became a campaign issue — and Taylor Swift signed her Instagram endorsement of Harris in September as “Taylor Swift Childless Cat Lady.”

Harris did end up decisively winning support from women who owned a cat but not a dog. Still, those voters were a relatively small slice of the electorate, and pet owners as a whole did not seem to hold Vance’s remarks against the GOP ticket.

Childless or not, women who only owned a cat were more likely to support Harris than were dog owners, or voters who had a cat and a dog. About 6 in 10 women who owned a cat but not a dog supported Harris, according to AP VoteCast. She did similarly well among women who did not own either kind of pet.

Her success with women who were cat owners didn’t translate to men. Trump narrowly won the backing of men who only owned cats; slightly more than half of these voters supported him.

Trump lawyers cite Hunter Biden pardon in move to toss hush money conviction

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump’s lawyers formally asked a judge Monday to throw out his hush money criminal conviction, arguing that continuing the case would present unconstitutional “disruptions to the institution of the Presidency.”

In a filing made public Tuesday, Trump’s lawyers told Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan that anything short of immediate dismissal would undermine the transition of pow-

er, as well as the “overwhelming national mandate” granted to Trump by voters last month.

They also cited President Joe Biden’s recent pardon of his son, Hunter Biden, who had been convicted of tax and gun charges.

“President Biden asserted that his son was ‘selectively, and unfairly, prosecuted,’ and ‘treated differently,’” Trump’s legal team wrote. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, they claimed, had engaged in the type of political theater

“that President Biden condemned.”

Prosecutors will have until Monday to respond. They have said they will fight any efforts to dismiss the case but have indicated a willingness to delay the sentencing until after Trump’s second term ends in 2029.

Following Trump’s election victory last month, Merchan halted proceedings and indefinitely postponed his sentencing. He also delayed a decision on Trump’s prior bid to dismiss the case on immunity grounds.

Rutte: NATO must prep for hybrid warfare

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Countries in the U.S.-led NATO alliance must find new ways of countering the stepped-up efforts by Russia and China to destabilize Europe with sabotage campaigns, the bloc's top official said Wednesday.

Cybercrime, attacks on infrastructure and the weaponization of energy are among their tactics, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said during a meeting of allied foreign ministers.

"We have to discuss how we will defend ourselves," Rutte said. "And that means that you will look at ways to have better intelligence sharing, but also making sure that we can protect our critical infrastructure."

Foreign ministers agreed Wednesday to a set of "proactive measures," including more exercises, Rutte said.

Allies also will get tough on Russia's shadow fleet of oil-exporting ships, said Rutte, who did not offer specifics on the various plans in the works.

Rutte, who hosted the two-day meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels, emphasized that increased cooperation between China and Russia poses challenges on a variety of fronts.

The military and financial support Russia has received from Beijing for Moscow's war effort point to the increasingly global nature of the battle in Ukraine, Rutte said.

Iran and North Korea's separate contributions to Russia's military campaign also raise broader security risks for the West, he said.

Meanwhile, U.S. and European military officials for months have been alarmed by increasingly brazen acts of sabotage that are

believed to have been carried out by Russian agents. China also has been suspected of recent mischief.

"Both Russia and China have tried to destabilize our countries and divide our societies with acts of sabotage, cyberattacks and energy blackmail," he said.

Two weeks ago, Swedish officials launched an investigation into a Chinese cargo ship that was navigating in the vicinity of two Baltic Sea communications cables connecting Germany and Finland and Lithuania and Sweden, respectively, that were severed. The vessel is suspected of having dragged its anchor over the cables, severing them.

In the U.S., corporations were urged to strengthen communication networks following news of a sprawling hacking campaign that authorities say gave China access to private phone conversations of

an unknown number of Americans.

Allies also have complained about acts of arson, an assassination attempt on an industrial leader in Germany and instances of sabotage at various logistics centers.

In June, U.S. military bases in Europe were put on heightened alert in connection with potential threats to installations across the Continent. While the Pentagon never specified the nature of the threat, CNN reported in July that the move came in response to information that Russia-backed actors were considering sabotage attacks against American military personnel and facilities.

Gen. Darryl Williams, the U.S. Army's top commander in Europe, said during an October meeting in Washington that the risks of broader military escalation are growing.

Justices hear case on ban on some gender treatments

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Hearing a high-profile culture-war clash, a majority of the Supreme Court seemed reluctant Wednesday to block Tennessee's ban on gender treatments for minors.

The justices' decision, not expected for several months, could affect similar laws enacted by another 25 states and a range of other efforts to regulate the lives of transgender people, including which sports competitions they can join and which bathrooms they can use.

The case is coming before a conservative-dominated court after a presidential election in which Donald Trump and his allies promised to roll back protections for transgender people.

In arguments that passed the two-hour mark Wednesday, five conservative justices voiced varying degrees of skepticism of arguments made by the Biden ad-

ministration and lawyers for Tennessee families challenging the ban.

Chief Justice John Roberts, who voted in the majority in a 2020 case in favor of transgender rights, questioned whether judges, rather than lawmakers, should be weighing in on a question of regulating medical procedures, an area usually left to the states.

"The Constitution leaves that question to the people's representatives, rather than to nine people, none of whom is a doctor," Roberts said in an exchange with ACLU lawyer Chase Strangio.

The court's three liberal justices seem firmly on the side of the challengers. But it's not clear that any of the court's six conservatives will go along. Justice Neil Gorsuch, who wrote the majority opinion in 2020, hasn't spoken.

Strangio is the first openly transgender person to argue in front of the justices.

US destroys weapons that fired at troops' base in Syria

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — American forces on Tuesday morning attacked and destroyed several weapons including rocket launchers and a tank operating near a U.S.-led coalition base in eastern Syria, the Pentagon said.

The U.S. strikes took place near Military Support Site Euphrates and destroyed three truck-mounted rocket launchers, a T-64 tank and mortars that presented a threat to U.S. and coalition forces, said Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the top Pentagon spokesman.

"The self-defense strike occurred after multiple rocket launchers fired rockets that landed in the vicinity of MSS Euphrates and mortars were fired toward U.S. forces," Ryder told reporters at the Pentagon. "We're still assessing who is operating these weapons but do know that there are Iranian-backed militia groups in the area."

Ryder told reporters Monday that there was a rocket attack against "one of our facilities in Syria," though no U.S. personnel were injured and no infrastructure damage was reported. U.S. forces also conducted a self-defense strike near MSS Euphrates on Nov. 29, taking out a potential threat to the U.S. base, he added. No U.S. injuries or infrastructure damage were reported in that incident.

Last week, the 13-year civil war in Syria reignited with a surprise attack by rebel forces who seized the city of Aleppo.

American forces in Syria are part of a U.S.-led coalition in that country and Iraq working to prevent a resurgence of Islamic State. About 900 U.S. service members and an undisclosed number of contractors are operating in Syria, where they support local Kurdish forces. An additional 2,500 American troops are in Iraq.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Coast Guard suspends search for boat crew

AK ANCHORAGE — The search for five people believed to be aboard a fishing vessel that capsized in rough seas in the Gulf of Alaska has been suspended, the Coast Guard said Monday.

The search lasted nearly a day and covered more than 108 square nautical miles.

The Coast Guard began the search after the Wind Walker's crew sent a Mayday call at 12:10 a.m. Sunday that the 50-foot boat was overturning off Point Couverden, southwest of Juneau.

The state ferry Hubbard overheard the broadcast and reached the scene first, followed by a Coast Guard MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter and a response boat, according to a news release.

Two Coast Guard cutters — the Healy and the Douglas Denman — joined the search. Responders found seven empty cold-water immersion suits and two strobe lights but no other sign of the boat or its crew. The Healy used underwater sonar but found no signs of the ship.

Grand jury indicts pair for alleged voucher fraud

AZ PHOENIX — An Arizona grand jury has indicted two out-of-state residents for allegedly applying to the state's private school voucher program as parents to 50 children — 43 of whom did not exist — and receiving more than \$110,000.

The duo collected the money by submitting false, forged or fraudulent documents and spent it on personal living ex-

penses in Colorado, according to an indictment released Monday by Attorney General Kris Mayes.

The grand jury in Maricopa County handed down the indictment Nov. 12, charging Johnny Lee Bowers and Ashley Meredith Hewitt each with 60 felony counts, including conspiracy, fraud and forgery.

According to the indictment, the two received the money by submitting applications for school vouchers between December 2022 and May 2024, using the names of both real and fictitious children, purportedly as parents and by using "ghost" names of parents.

Police: Hawaii woman disappeared voluntarily

CA LOS ANGELES — A Hawaii woman who vanished after landing in Los Angeles three weeks ago disappeared voluntarily as she sought to "step away from modern connectivity" and was last seen crossing into Mexico with her luggage, police said at a news conference where they urged her to contact her distraught family.

Hannah Kobayashi, 30, appeared unharmed as she walked alone into a tunnel at the San Ysidro crossing around noon on Nov. 12, the day after her family reported her missing, LA police said Monday. Authorities made the discovery after reviewing surveillance video from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection late Sunday.

Los Angeles Police Chief Jim McDonnell said there is no evidence Kobayashi was being trafficked or was otherwise a victim of a crime. Her disap-

pearance is now classified as a "voluntary missing person."

Kobayashi went missing after the budding photographer from Maui didn't make a connecting flight to New York on Nov. 8 to travel for a new job and to visit relatives.

Woman driving drunk who killed bride gets 25 years

SC CHARLESTON — A woman who admitted to drinking and who was driving well over twice the speed limit when she smashed into a golf cart, killing a bride who had just got married at a South Carolina beach, was sentenced Monday to 25 years in prison.

Jamie Lee Komoroski, 27, pleaded guilty at the Charleston County courthouse to reckless homicide, felony DUI causing death and two counts of felony DUI causing great bodily injury before her sentencing.

Also hurt in the 2023 crash was the groom, Aric Hutchinson, who cried in court as he recalled the last moments he spent with Samantha Miller — some of their only moments as husband and wife.

"On the golf cart, she told me she didn't want the night to end and I kissed her on the forehead and then the next thing I remember is waking up in the hospital," Hutchinson said.

Woman gets life sentence for man's suitcase death

FL ORLANDO — A Florida woman was sentenced Monday to life in prison for zipping her boyfriend into a suitcase and leaving him to die of suffocation amid a history of domestic and alcohol abuse.

Circuit Judge Michael

Kraynick imposed the sentence in Orlando on Sarah Boone, 47, for the 2020 killing of 42-year-old Jorge Torres.

A jury deliberated only 90 minutes Oct. 25 before convicting Boone of second-degree murder after a 10-day trial. Boone had insisted she was herself a victim of domestic violence at the hands of Torres and had rejected a plea deal offer of a 15-year sentence.

Torres' family members testified at the hearing that his death has torn them apart.

"Sarah deserves to rot in jail," said a sister, Victoria Torres. "Sarah has caused a lifetime of pain."

In her own statement, Boone went through a litany of abuse by Torres she said occurred over many years, decried the way her trial was handled and covered by the media, yet asked forgiveness for her actions.

Aquarium team helps cold-stunned sea turtles

MA BOSTON — After a rash of stranded turtles on Massachusetts shores in the last week, the New England Aquarium is now treating over 200 cold-stunned sea turtles in critical condition.

"With winds increasing and temperatures dropping, we have started to see more sea turtles enter the hospital in the last week," said Adam Kennedy, aquarium Director of Rescue and Rehabilitation.

The aquarium said in a release Monday they have now treated a total of 257 sea turtles this season: 214 critically endangered Kemp's ridley turtles, 39 green turtles, and four loggerheads.

— From wire reports

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Miami's CFP hopes fade, Tide rises

Associated Press

Miami's playoff hopes took an all-but-final nosedive while Alabama's got a boost Tuesday night in the last rankings before the 12-team College Football Playoff bracket is set next weekend.

The Hurricanes (10-2) dropped six spots to No. 12 — the first team out of the projected bracket after suffering their second loss. They are one spot behind the Crimson Tide (9-3), who won last week and moved up two spots to No. 11, where they are projected as the last team in and the fourth from the Southeastern Conference.

To make things worse for the Miami, selection committee chair and Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel said there was no way for them to leapfrog Alabama since neither team plays next weekend. The odds of them moving up based on lopsided results in the weekend's conference title games are virtually zero.

The Miami-Alabama sorting was the strongest indication yet that the selection committee is

looking at more than mere wins and losses, but also at strength of schedule and other factors that appear to give the SEC an edge.

"We still think Miami is a very strong team," Manuel said. "It came down to a difference in their body of work ... not just wins, not just losses but the totality of the season and how those teams performed."

He mentioned three data points: Alabama was 3-1 against current Top 25 teams and Miami is 0-1; Alabama is 6-1 against winning teams while Miami is 4-2; and Miami has lost two of its last three games.

Oregon stayed at No. 1 for the fifth straight week and will head into Saturday's Big Ten title game against Penn State as the only undefeated team in big-time college football.

The pairings for college football's first 12-team playoff will be set Sunday, the day after the conference title games. The playoffs start Dec. 20, with the title game set for Jan. 20.

Ohio State moved down four spots to No. 6 after its loss to

Michigan. That bumped Texas up a spot to No. 2, Penn State to No. 3, Notre Dame to No. 4 and Georgia to No. 5.

The selection committee all but designated the Big 12 as a one-bid league, moving Arizona State and Iowa State up only one spot each to Nos. 15 and 16.

The top five ranked conference champions are guaranteed bids, which means the winner of the Big 12 title game is in even it doesn't reach the top 12 — another factor in Miami's likely ouster.

SMU, on a nine-game winning streak, moved up a notch to No. 8 and is the Atlantic Coast Conference's highest-ranked team, but is potentially vulnerable if it loses the title game to No. 17 Clemson.

The crux of this week's drama comes from — where else? — the SEC.

Alabama is only two weeks removed from an ugly 24-3 loss at Oklahoma. The Tide still got better treatment than Miami, which fell 42-38 at Syracuse last week with a spot in the ACC title game at stake.

Also in the SEC, Mississippi was ranked 13th and South Carolina 14th — answering a question of just how deep into the SEC pool the committee was willing to go. Neither team has another chance to build its resume.

Other rankings: No. 7 Tennessee, No. 9 Indiana and No. 10 Boise State. The projected bracket includes four teams each from the Big Ten and SEC and one each from the ACC, Mountain West and Big 12, plus independent Notre Dame.

Projected first-round

First-round games will take place on the campus of the better-seeded team Dec. 20-21. Here's what the matchups would look like based on this week's rankings (teams are listed by seed, not ranking):

No. 12 Arizona State at No. 5 Penn State
No. 9 Tennessee at No. 8 Ohio State
No. 11 Alabama at No. 6 Notre Dame
No. 10 Indiana at No. 7 Georgia

Wiggins, Clemson defense knock off No. 4 Kentucky

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Chauncey Wiggins scored 12 points and Ian Schieffelin had 11 points and a career-high 20 rebounds as Clemson shut down No. 4 Kentucky for a 70-66 victory Tuesday night in the SEC/ACC Challenge.

The Tigers (8-1) held the Wildcats (7-1) to 30 points fewer than their average of 96.7 per game coming in, which led the country.

Clemson took the lead for good, 53-52, with 10:08 remaining on Del Jones' layup that started a 10-2 run. Kentucky got to 68-66 on Lamont Butler's 3-pointer with 2.4 seconds left, but Chase Hunter followed with two

foul shots to seal it.

Otega Oweh had 17 points to lead Kentucky. Amari Williams added nine points and 10 rebounds.

No. 3 Tennessee 96, Syracuse 70: Chaz Lanier scored 26 points to lead the Volunteers to a victory in the SEC/ACC Challenge.

Tennessee (8-0) got a double-double from Igor Milicic with 11 points and 10 rebounds, and Zakai Zeigler had 14 points and eight assists.

Michigan 67, No. 11 Wisconsin 64: Vladislav Goldin scored a career-high 24 points — including three straight baskets inside down the stretch — and the visiting Wolverines defeat-

ed the Badgers in the Big Ten opener for both teams.

Michigan (7-1) won its sixth straight and handed Wisconsin (8-1) its first loss of the season.

Goldin, a 7-foot-1 graduate student who followed new Michigan coach Dusty May from Florida Atlantic, scored 17 points after halftime and put the Wolverines ahead for good on a layup with 1:35 remaining.

Villanova 68, No. 14 Cincinnati 60: Eric Dixon scored 31 points, Wooga Poplar had 12 points and 10 rebounds and the host Wildcats handed the Bearcats their first loss of the season.

Villanova (5-4) got a needed win for third-year coach Kyle Neptune, who has yet to lead the

program to the NCAA Tournament in his first two seasons.

No. 21 Oklahoma 76, Georgia Tech 61: Jeremiah Fears scored 18 points to lead the host Sooners in the SEC/ACC Challenge.

No. 22 Texas A&M 57, Wake Forest 44: Wade Taylor IV scored 15 points and Pharrel Payne and Henry Coleman III each added 10 as the host Aggies beat the Demon Deacons.

Hunter Sallis led Wake Forest with a game-high 19 points.

No. 23 Ole Miss 86, Louisville 63: Dre Davis scored 20 points, Sean Pedulla added 16 and the visiting Rebels shot 63% in the second half to beat the short-handed Cardinals.

Knicks go 4-0 in NBA Cup group play

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Karl-Anthony Towns had 23 points and 15 rebounds, Jalen Brunson scored 21 points and the New York Knicks beat the Orlando Magic 121-106 on Tuesday to reach the quarterfinals of the NBA Cup.

New York went 4-0 in East Group A and will host Atlanta on Dec. 11. Orlando (3-1) advanced as the East wild card and will travel to Milwaukee.

Mikal Bridges had 19 points and Josh Hart added 11 points and 10 rebounds for the Knicks, who have won their last three games and eight of their last 10.

Franz Wagner finished with 30 points while Moritz Wagner had 20 off the bench for the Magic, who had their six-game winning streak snapped.

The Magic needed only to lose by no more than 37 points to advance via tiebreaker.

Bucks 128, Pistons 107: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 28 points and Damian Lillard had 27, lifting surging Milwaukee to a win over host Detroit and into the NBA Cup quarterfinals.

The Bucks, who won East Group B with a 4-0 record, have won seven straight and nine of 10.

Detroit was eliminated, dropping to 3-1 in the tournament. Cade Cunningham scored 23 points, Tobias Harris had 16, Tim Hardaway scored 15 and Jalen Duren added 11 for the Pistons.

Antetokounmpo rested in the fourth quarter, after making 10 of 11 shots in 28 minutes. He also had eight assists and seven rebounds after having a triple-double in three of his previous six games.

Mavericks 121, Dallas 116: Luka Dončić had 37 points and 12 rebounds, Spencer Dinwiddie and P.J. Washington Jr. hit clutch 3-pointers in the final two minutes, as host Dallas overcame a 15-point deficit to beat Memphis and earn the West

wild-card spot in the NBA Cup quarterfinals.

Dallas trailed 111-103 with 3:34 to play and went on a 16-3 run capped by two 3-pointers from Dinwiddie and one from Washington.

Ja Morant scored a season-high 31 points, 15 in the fourth quarter, for the Grizzlies. They had a season-high six-game winning streak snapped and were eliminated from the Cup race.

Nuggets 119, Warriors 115: Nikola Jokić had 38 points, 10 rebounds and five steals to rally Denver to a victory over visiting Golden State.

Jokić fell four assists shy of his NBA-leading ninth triple-double of the season. The reigning league MVP remained tied with Magic Johnson for the third-most triple-doubles in NBA history with 138.

Michael Porter Jr. added 22 points and Aaron Gordon had 15 and nine rebounds for Denver.

The loss was the fifth in a row for Golden State following a 12-3 start and means the Warriors will travel to Houston next week for the NBA Cup quarterfinals.

Steph Curry had 24 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds for the Warriors. Jonathan Kuminga added 19 points.

Golden State was without defensive anchor Draymond Green, who was sidelined with left calf tightness.

Kings 120, Rockets 111: Domantas Sabonis scored 27 points and host Sacramento made 15 consecutive shots from the field to deny Houston the top seed in the NBA Cup quarterfinals.

The shooting spree by the Kings turned an eight-point deficit late in the second quarter into a 12-point lead midway through the third to give the Kings their only win in four NBA Cup games.

De'Aaron Fox added 22 points, Malik Monk had 17 and a career-high 12 assists, and De-

Mar DeRozan scored 16.

Jalen Green scored 28 to lead Houston and Alperen Şengün added 24.

Cavaliers 118, Wizards 87: Donovan Mitchell scored 19 points and Evan Mobley had 19 points and 10 rebounds as host Cleveland beat Washington, extending its losing streak to 15.

Sam Merrill and Georges Niang each scored 14 off the bench for Cleveland, which has the best record in the NBA at 19-3 and is 12-1 at home. The 31-point win was the Cavaliers' largest of the season.

Washington's Jonas Valanciunas, Jordan Poole and Bub Carrington each scored 13 points. Valanciunas grabbed 11 rebounds.

76ers 110, Hornets 104: Paul George scored 29 points, Tyrese Maxey had eight of his 21 points in the final 30 seconds and Philadelphia won back-to-back games for the first time this season with a victory over host Charlotte.

Brandon Miller had 34 points, and Nick Richards had a strong outing in his second game back from injury with 22 points and 14 rebounds. Charlotte (6-15) finished its homestand 0-5.

The Hornets got solid performances from both rookie draft picks as Tidjane Salaun recorded his first double-double with 10 points and 10 rebounds and K.J. Simpson added eight points, nine assists and six rebounds.

Philadelphia led by double digits most of the game, but Charlotte rallied to take the lead with 1:32 left on Miller's seventh 3-pointer of the second half. But it was short-lived as Maxey's layup with 29.7 seconds put the 76ers ahead.

Maxey sealed the win with four more free throws and a transition layup.

Raptors 122, Pacers 111: Scottie Barnes scored a career-high 35 points, RJ Barrett added 29 and Toronto extended Indi-

ana's road losing streak to seven.

Jakob Poeltl had 17 points and 10 rebounds, and Ochai Agbaji scored 13 points for the Raptors, who led by 24 points in the third quarter.

Tyrese Haliburton scored 30 points for the Pacers. Bennedict Mathurin had 17 points, Myles Turner scored 16 and Obi Toppin added 15.

Thunder 133, Jazz 106: Jalen Williams scored 28 points, Shai Gilgeous-Alexander added 26 points, seven assists and six rebounds, and Oklahoma City beat visiting Utah.

Isaiah Joe had 19 points and fellow reserve Aaron Wiggins finished with 16 as the Thunder closed out West Group B play at 3-1.

Alexander, selected as Western Conference player of the month earlier Tuesday, scored 15 points after halftime.

Oklahoma City twice led by as many as 30 points in the second half.

Collin Sexton scored 17 points while Walker Kessler and John Collins added 15 apiece for the Jazz, who fell to 4-17.

Suns 104, Spurs 93: Devin Booker scored 29 points and host Phoenix weathered the loss of Kevin Durant to an ankle injury to beat San Antonio.

Durant left the game with 3:51 to play in the second quarter and did not return. He headed to the locker room under his own power, and the Suns later said he hurt an ankle without providing any specifics. He finished with 13 points.

Devin Vassell led the Spurs with 25 points off the bench.

Clippers 127, Trail Blazers 105: Norman Powell scored 30 points, James Harden had 23 and Los Angeles beat visiting Portland.

DeAndre Ayton scored 16 points and Shaedon Sharpe and Deni Avdija each had 15 for the Trail Blazers.

Avs score 5 straight to edge Sabres

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Artturi Lehkonen scored with 4:22 left, and the Colorado Avalanche overcame a four-goal deficit in a 5-4 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

Nathan MacKinnon scored twice and added an assist as the Avalanche scored four third-period goals. Joel Kiviranta and Logan O'Connor also scored. Backup goalie Scott Wedgewood stopped all 22 shots he faced taking over after starter Alexander Georgiev allowed four goals on eight shots in the first 11:49.

It was Wedgewood's debut for Colorado after being acquired in a trade of backup goalies with the Nashville Predators last weekend.

The Avalanche overcame a four-or-more goal deficit for the fourth time in team history, and first since rallying from four goals down in a 5-4 OT win over Pittsburgh in March.

Colorado became the first team this season to overcome such a deficit, while marking the 90th time that's happened in league history.

Tage Thompson scored twice for Buffalo, which is 0-3-1 in its past four.

Lehkonen's winner came after Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen stopped Calvin de Haan's shot from the left point. Parked in front, Lehkonen scored the rebound through the goalie's legs.

Sharks 2, Capitals 1 (OT): William Eklund scored 39 seconds into overtime, Mackenzie Blackwood made 27 saves and San Jose ended host Washington's winning streak at four.

The Capitals fell to 4-2-1 since captain and leading goal-scorer Alex Ovechkin was sidelined by a broken left fibula. They fell behind early and failed to make it five comeback wins in a row, despite Logan Thompson making 29 saves and Nic Dowd scoring his seventh goal of the season.

Rookie Macklin Celebrini picked up the secondary assist on Eklund's OT winner to extend his point streak to five games. The top pick in the draft has four goals and four assists during this stretch.

Canadiens 2, Islanders 1 (OT): Patrik Laine scored in his highly anticipated debut, Nick Suzuki scored in overtime, and Montreal beat visiting New York.

Laine, playing his first regular-season game in nearly a year, opened the scoring on the power play 7:23 into the second period.

Suzuki scored at 2:39 of overtime, following up his own rebound. Sam Montembeault stopped 30 shots.

Anders Lee scored for New York, which lost for the fourth time in its past five games. Ilya Sorokin made 25 saves.

Laine missed the first 24 games of the regular season after sustaining a left knee sprain during preseason play against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Sept. 28.

Laine, who the Canadiens acquired before the season, hadn't played since last Dec. 14 with the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Kraken 4, Hurricanes 2: Yanni Gourde and Jaden Schwartz had a goal and an assist each and visiting Seattle snapped a three-game skid.

Gourde's wrist shot at 10:48 in the third period broke a 2-2 tie. Brandon Tanev and Eeli Tolvanen also scored for Seattle and Matty Beniers added two assists. Joey Daccord stopped 15 shots.

Eric Robinson and Martin Necas scored for Carolina, which lost its third straight. Necas added an assist to improve his team-leading point total to 39. The Hurricanes finished with a season-low 16 shots. Pyotr Kochetkov made 24 saves in his first start after missing four games with a concussion.

Penguins 5, Panthers 4 (OT):

Bryan Rust scored 1:31 into overtime and host Pittsburgh avoided another late collapse.

The Penguins let a three-goal third-period lead evaporate when Florida's Sam Bennett, Adam Boqvist and Matthew Tkachuk scored in a 4:32 span to pull the Panthers even at 4.

Rust, however, extended Pittsburgh's winning streak to four by flipping a wrist shot from the right by Spencer Knight for his eighth goal of the season.

Tkachuk scored twice for Florida, but the Panthers saw their three-game winning streak snapped as Knight stopped just 11 of the 16 shots he faced.

Bruins 3, Red Wings 2 (OT): Pavel Zacha scored 2:15 into overtime and Boston rallied to beat visiting Detroit.

Zacha one-timed a pass from David Pastrnak past Ville Husso for the winner. Justin Brazeau and Nikita Zadorov also scored for the Bruins, and Joonas Korpisalo finished with 25 saves.

Lucas Raymond scored twice for Detroit and surpassed 200 career points. Simon Edvinsson had two assists and Husso stopped 32 shots as the Red Wings lost their third straight.

Blues 4, Jets 1: Jordan Kyrou scored twice and Dylan Holloway had a goal and assist to help lift St. Louis over host Winnipeg.

Robert Thomas had an empty-net goal for the Blues, who are on a four-game point streak.

Holloway extended his point streak to four games (four goals and three assists).

Joel Hofer made 22 saves for St. Louis, and Connor Hellebuyck stopped 28 of the 31 shots he faced for the Jets.

Mark Scheifele scored for the Jets, who have lost four consecutive games and are 1-5-0 in their past six.

Wild 3, Canucks 2 (OT): Kirill Kaprizov scored with 23.4 sec-

onds left in overtime and Minnesota rallied to beat visiting Vancouver for its sixth victory in eight games.

Frederick Gaudreau and Jake Middleton also scored for Minnesota, and Filip Gustavsson made 30 saves. The Wild improved to 17-4-4, giving them an NHL-best 38 points.

Brock Boeser nearly won it for Vancouver on a two-on-none break, but his shot hit the right post. A lively bounce went out to Marco Rossi, who carried the puck into the Canucks zone and fed Kaprizov for a one-timer at the end of a lengthy shift. His 16th goal of the season was his ninth career OT winner.

Quinn Hughes and Jake DeBrusk scored for Vancouver.

Flames 3, Blue Jackets 0: Rasmus Andersson and Kevin Bahl scored power-play goals and host Calgary beat Columbus after they honored the late Johnny Gaudreau with a pregame tribute.

Dan Vladar had a 16-save shutout, Yegor Sharangovich scored into an empty net and Mikael Backlund had two assists for Calgary.

Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau were honored before the game with the Gaudreau family in attendance. Players on both teams had the name Gaudreau and Johnny's No. 13 on their pregame jerseys.

The brothers were struck by a vehicle and killed while cycling Aug. 29 in New Jersey.

Johnny Gaudreau played eight seasons with the Flames before playing two seasons with Columbus.

Golden Knights 1, Oilers 0: Ivan Barbashev scored on a rush midway through the second period and Adin Hill made 28 saves as Vegas shut out visiting Edmonton.

Hill recorded his second shutout this season and the ninth of his career. The Golden Knights are 5-0-1 in their past six games, and Hill has started all of them.