

Trump announces \$1,776 bonus for troops

The Washington Post

The Trump administration will repurpose \$2.6 billion in military housing assistance to pay \$1,776 “warrior dividend” bonuses to service members, according to a senior administration official.

In a prime-time address Wednesday night, President Donald Trump announced the Christmastime bonuses “in honor of our nation’s founding in 1776.”

“Nobody deserves it more than our military. And I say congratulations to everybody,” Trump said.

The president said the money for the bonuses came from revenue from import taxes he’s imposed on trading partners worldwide.

That was incorrect, however, and Trump does not have the authority to spend the money

from tariffs without authorization from Congress.

But lawmakers this summer did approve \$2.9 billion to supplement the military’s basic allowance for housing as part of Trump and the GOP’s mammoth tax and immigration law, the “One Big Beautiful Bill.”

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the Pentagon to spend most of that money as a one-time payout on the bonuses, said the senior administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter.

Roughly 1.45 million service members, including 174,000 reservists, will receive the bonuses, which Hegseth said in a video Thursday would be tax-free.

“This warrior dividend serves as yet another example of how the War Department is

working to improve the quality of life for our military personnel and their families,” Hegseth said.

Trump renamed the Department of Defense as the Department of War in September, designating that as the department’s “secondary title” and authorizing its use. It’s unclear whether Trump has the authority to permanently rename Cabinet departments without congressional approval.

“I can think of no better Americans to receive this check right before Christmas, whether it’s for pay, housing, faith, support, all elements of what we’re doing are to rebuild our military,” Hegseth said.

The defense secretary called the payment “a direct investment in the brave men and women who carry on the legacy of our armed forces every single

day,” and said military members in pay grades E-1 to O-6 would be eligible. The top pay grade eligible includes the ranks of colonel in the Air Force, Army, Marines and Space Force, and captain in the Navy and Coast Guard.

The Trump administration has a track record of aggressively shifting resources around the Pentagon to goose service members’ compensation.

During the government shutdown, the administration twice moved money around from other parts of the Pentagon budget to keep paying troops. Doing so without the approval of lawmakers — who normally have a say over large changes in federal spending — was controversial in Congress, where aides from both parties acknowledged that the move was likely illegal.

Trump: Economy stronger than many voters believe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump delivered a politically charged speech Wednesday carried live in prime time on network television, seeking to pin the blame for economic challenges on Democrats while announcing he is sending a \$1,776 bonus check to U.S. troops for Christmas.

The remarks came as the nation is preparing to settle down to celebrate the holidays, yet Trump was focused more on divisions within the country than a sense of unity. His speech was a rehash of his recent messaging that has so far been unable to calm public anxiety about the cost of groceries, housing, util-

ities and other basic goods.

Trump has promised an economic boom, yet inflation has stayed elevated and the job market has weakened sharply in the wake of his import taxes. Trump suggested that his tariffs — which are partly responsible for boosting consumer prices — would fund a new “warrior dividend” for 1.45 million military members, a payment that could ease some of the financial strains for many households.

Presidential addresses to the nation are traditionally less partisan than rally speeches, but Trump gave a condensed version of his usual political remarks.

Flanked by Christmas trees with a portrait of George Wash-

ington behind him in the White House’s Diplomatic Reception Room, Trump sought to pin any worries about the economy on his predecessor, Joe Biden.

His holiday wishes came at a crucial time as he tries to rebuild his steadily eroding popularity. Public polling shows most U.S. adults are frustrated with his handling of the economy as inflation picked up after his tariffs raised prices and hiring slowed.

Trump brought charts with him to make the case that the economy is on an upward trajectory. He made claims about incomes growing, inflation easing and investment dollars pouring into the country as foreign leaders, he claimed, have

assured him that “we’re the hottest country anywhere in the world,” a statement he has frequently repeated at public events.

The hard math internalized by the public paints a more complicated picture of an economy that has some stability but few reasons to inspire much public confidence.

The stock market is up, gasoline prices are down and tech companies are placing large bets on the development of artificial intelligence.

But inflation that had been descending after spiking to a four-decade high in 2022 under Biden has reaccelerated after Trump announced his tariffs in April.

House rejects limits on action against Venezuela

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The House on Wednesday rejected two measures aimed at stopping President Donald Trump from carrying out additional strikes on suspected drug boats or attacking Venezuela without congressional approval as lawmakers remained divided over the administration's military actions in South America.

The votes — 210-216 for the drug boat measure and 211-213 for the Venezuela resolution — marked the latest attempt by mostly Democrats and a handful of Republicans to assert Congress' constitutional authority to declare war after two recent failed efforts in the Senate.

The flurry of congressional activity comes as the Trump administration escalates its pressure campaign against Venezuela, seizing an oil tanker carrying Venezuelan oil, ordering a blockade of sanctioned oil tankers into and out of the country and continuing to attack boats suspected of smuggling drugs.

Trump warned on social media Tuesday that the massive buildup of military assets near Venezuela — the largest in decades — “will only get bigger, and the shock to them will be like nothing they have ever seen before.”

Alarmed lawmakers on Wednesday said it was imperative for Congress to weigh in as Trump threatens land strikes inside Venezuela and uses the military to bomb alleged drug-trafficking boats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific, many near Venezuela.

The Constitution gives Congress, not the president, the authority to declare war, and the 1973 War Powers Resolution requires the president to seek approval from Congress before introducing armed forces “into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances.”

Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., who introduced the measure prohibiting military action against Venezuela without congressional authorization, said service members

were already being put at risk.

“American troops take an oath to protect and defend this country — it is our duty in Congress to debate and vote before they are put into harm's way,” said McGovern. “Right now, by placing U.S. military assets off the coast of Venezuela, this administration has them in harm's way.”

White House chief of staff Susie Wiles conceded in an interview published Tuesday that “activity on land” in Venezuela would need congressional authorization. But the Trump administration has suggested it does not need lawmaker approval for the boat strikes because the vessels are mostly being hit by drones far from U.S. naval forces.

Lawmakers this week received several classified briefings on the boat bombing campaign, which has killed at least 99 people in 26 attacks. Democrats are continuing to push for the public release of unedited videos showing the initial Sept. 2 strike and a controversial follow-up strike that killed two survivors.

Navy lauds launch of LUCAS attack drone from warship

BY SHANNON RENFROE
Stars and Stripes

A Navy warship's successful launch of a one-way attack drone this week was a watershed in the Defense Department push to get hundreds of thousands of the transformational aircraft into the field, according to the service.

The LUCAS drone was deployed Tuesday from the littoral combat ship USS Santa Barbara in the Persian Gulf in what was the first launch of the unmanned system from a ship at sea, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command said in a statement Wednesday.

U.S. Central Command assigned the drone to Task Force Scorpion Strike, a unit created to develop and deploy one-way attack drones at scale. The task force, based in the Middle East, works to deliver autonomous

strike capabilities to deployed forces.

“This achievement demonstrates the power of innovation and joint collaboration in this critical region,” Vice Adm. Curt Renshaw, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. 5th Fleet, said in the statement.

LUCAS is an abbreviation for low-cost unmanned combat attack system. The drones have an extensive range and are designed to operate autonomously, CENTCOM said. They can be launched in various ways, including ship-based means, catapults and platforms mounted on the ground or a vehicle.

The one-way attack drones recently deployed by U.S. forces are meant to act as a foil to an Iranian model known as the Shahed.

Coast Guard admiral's promotion frozen over symbol downgrades

The Washington Post

At least two U.S. senators have placed holds on the nomination of Adm. Kevin Lunday to serve as the Coast Guard's commandant after the service enacted a new workplace harassment policy that downgrades the definition of swastikas and nooses from hate symbols to “potentially divisive.”

The action by Sens. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., and Jacky Rosen, D-Nev., follows a Washington Post report on Tuesday revealing that, despite Lunday's forceful denunciation of such symbols and a separate directive he issued prohibiting them, the service allowed the policy to take effect with the “potentially divisive” language included.

A spokesperson for Lunday, who has been the service's acting commandant for several months, did not immediately re-

spond to a request for comment.

Neither did a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, which oversees the Coast Guard.

The “potentially divisive” language was adopted as part of a policy manual overhaul initiated soon after the Trump administration took office and ousted Lunday's predecessor, Adm. Linda Fagan. Officials cited Fagan's “excessive focus” on diversity and inclusion initiatives.

The new workplace harassment manual changed how items such as swastikas and nooses were described, softening their definition from symbols of hate to “potentially divisive.” The new manual also would allow for a supervisor to review how the symbols were used or displayed in the workplace instead of immediately prohibiting them.

US announces sale of arms to Taiwan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration has announced a massive package of arms sales to Taiwan valued at more than \$10 billion that includes medium-range missiles, howitzers and drones, drawing an angry response from China.

The State Department announced the sales late Wednesday during a nationally televised address by President Donald Trump, who made scant mention of foreign policy issues and did not speak about China or Taiwan at all. U.S.-Chinese tensions have ebbed and flowed during

Trump's second term, largely over trade and tariffs but also over China's increasing aggressiveness toward Taiwan, which Beijing has said must reunify with the mainland.

If approved by Congress, it would be the largest-ever U.S. weapons package to Taiwan, exceeding the total amount of \$8.4 billion in U.S. arms sales to Taiwan during the Biden administration.

The eight arms sales agreements announced Wednesday cover 82 high-mobility artillery rocket systems, or HIMARS, and 420 Army Tactical Missile Sys-

tems, or ATACMS — similar to what the U.S. had been providing Ukraine during the Biden administration to defend itself from Russia — worth more than \$4 billion. They also include 60 self-propelled howitzer systems and related equipment worth more than \$4 billion and drones valued at more than \$1 billion.

Other sales in the package include military software valued at more than \$1 billion, Javelin and TOW missiles worth more than \$700 million, helicopter spare parts worth \$96 million and refurbishment kits for Harpoon missiles worth \$91 million.

The eight sales agreements amount to \$11.15 billion, according to Taiwan's Defense Ministry.

The State Department said the sales serve "U.S. national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability."

China's Foreign Ministry attacked the move, saying it would violate diplomatic agreements between China and the U.S.; gravely harm China's sovereignty, security and territorial integrity; and undermine regional stability.

Russia trying to overwhelm Europe with sabotage

Associated Press

In November, a train carrying almost 500 people came to a sudden halt in eastern Poland. A broken overhead line had smashed several windows, and the track ahead was damaged. Elsewhere on the line, explosives detonated under a passing freight train.

No one was hurt in either case and the damage was limited, but Poland, which blamed the attack on Russia's intelligence services, responded forcefully: It deployed 10,000 troops to protect critical infrastructure.

The sabotage in Poland is one of 145 incidents in an Associated Press database that Western officials say are part of a campaign of disruption across Europe masterminded by Russia. Officials say the campaign — waged since

President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 — aims to deprive Kyiv of support, create divisions among Europeans and identify the Continent's security weak spots.

So far in this hybrid war, most known acts of sabotage have resulted in minimal damage — nothing compared to the tens of thousands of lives lost and cities decimated across Ukraine.

But officials say each act — from vandalism of monuments to cyberattacks to warehouse fires — sucks up valuable security resources. The head of one large European intelligence service said investigations into Russian interference now swallow up as much of the agency's time as terrorism.

While the campaign places a

heavy burden on European security services, it costs Russia next to nothing, officials say. That's because Moscow is carrying out cross-border operations that require European countries to cooperate extensively on investigations — while often using foreigners with criminal backgrounds as cheap proxies for Russian intelligence operatives. That means Moscow notches up a win just by tying up resources — even when plots aren't successful.

"It's a 24/7 operation between all the services to stop it," said a senior European intelligence official.

Over the course of the year, AP spoke to more than 40 European and NATO officials from 13 countries to document the scope of

this hybrid war, including incidents on its map only when linked by Western officials to Russia, its proxies or its ally Belarus.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told AP that Russia doesn't have "any connection" with the campaign.

AP's database shows a spike in arson and explosives plots from one in 2023 to 26 in 2024. Six have been documented so far in 2025. Three vandalism cases were recorded last year, meanwhile, and one this year.

The data is incomplete since not all incidents are made public, and it can take officials months to establish a link to Moscow. But the spike matches what officials have warned: The campaign is growing more dangerous.

Kremlin envoy slated to visit Miami for peace talks

Associated Press

A Kremlin envoy will travel to Florida to discuss a U.S.-proposed plan to end the war in Ukraine, a U.S. official said Thursday as European Union leaders weighed a major loan to help the Ukrainian government.

Kirill Dmitriev, who heads

Russia's sovereign wealth fund, is set to meet with President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, in Miami on Saturday, according to an American official who spoke on condition of anonymity to preview a meeting that hasn't yet been publicly an-

nounced.

The official said that Witkoff and Kushner will sit down with Dmitriev, after meetings with Ukrainian and European officials in Berlin earlier this week, in which they discussed U.S. security guarantees for Kyiv, territorial concessions and other aspects of the

American-authored plan aimed at ending the war.

Asked about the meeting in Miami, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that Moscow was preparing for contacts with the U.S. to learn about the results of the meetings in Berlin, but didn't give further details.

Four Republicans force vote on ACA subsidies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Four centrist Republicans broke with Speaker Mike Johnson on Wednesday and signed onto a Democratic-led petition that will force a House vote on extending for three years an enhanced pandemic-era subsidy that lowers health insurance costs for millions of Americans.

The stunning move came the same day that House Republican leaders pushed to passage a health care bill that does not address the soaring monthly premiums that millions of people will soon endure. Those premium hikes will occur because the tax credits for those who buy insurance through the Affordable Care Act expire at year's end.

The developments set the stage for a renewed intraparty

clash over health care in January, something Republican leaders had been working hard to avoid.

The moderate Republicans were able to force the issue by signing a petition, led by Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, to vote on a bill that would extend the ACA subsidies for three years.

Republican Reps. Brian Fitzpatrick, Robert Bresnahan and Ryan Mackenzie, all from Pennsylvania, and Mike Lawler of New York signed on Wednesday morning, pushing it to the magic number of 218. A vote on the subsidy bill could come as soon as January under House rules.

"Unfortunately, it is House leadership themselves that have forced this outcome," Fitz-

patrick said in a statement.

Johnson told reporters Wednesday that "I have not lost control of the House" and he noted that Republicans have a razor-thin majority that allows a small number of members to employ procedures that would not usually be successful in getting around leadership.

"These are not normal times," said Johnson, R-La.

The revolt against GOP leadership came after days of talks centered on the health care subsidies.

Johnson had discussed allowing more politically vulnerable GOP lawmakers a chance to vote on bills that would temporarily extend the subsidies while also adding changes such as income caps for beneficiaries. But after days of discus-

sions, the leadership sided with the more conservative wing of the party's conference, which has assailed the subsidies as propping up a failed ACA program, which is widely known as "Obamacare."

House Republicans pushed ahead Wednesday on a 100-plus-page health care package without the subsidies. Instead, the measure focused on long-sought GOP proposals designed to expand insurance coverage options for small businesses and the self-employed. The bill passed on a mostly party-line vote of 216-211. Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., joined with Democrats in voting against the measure. Fitzpatrick and Lawler tried to add a temporary extension of the subsidies but were denied.

US says inflation slowed, but data may be distorted

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. inflation slowed unexpectedly last month according to data that was delayed, and likely distorted, by the shutdown.

The Labor Department reported Thursday that its consumer price index rose 2.7% in November from a year earlier. Yet, year-over-year inflation remains well above the Federal Reserve's 2% target, and Americans are dismayed by the high cost of living.

The report was delayed eight days by the federal government's 43-day shutdown, which also prevented the Labor Department from compiling overall numbers for consumer prices and core inflation in October. Thursday's report gave investors, businesses and policymakers their first look at CPI since the September numbers.

Consumer prices had risen 3% in September from a year earlier, and forecasters had ex-

pected the November CPI to match that increase.

"It's likely a bit distorted," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at the tax and consulting firm KPMG. "The good news is that it's cooling."

Still, Swonk added: "The data is truncated, and we just don't know how much of it to trust." By disrupting the economy — especially government contracting — the shutdown may have contributed to a cooling in prices, she said.

U.S. inflation remains stubbornly high, partly because of President Donald Trump's decision to impose double-digit taxes on imports from almost every country along with targeted tariffs on products like steel, aluminum and autos.

The vast majority of U.S. adults say they've noticed higher than usual prices for groceries, electricity and holiday gifts in recent months, according to a recent survey.

Officials target hospitals over kids' transgender care

Bloomberg News

Hospitals that offer gender-affirming care to minors will be forced to forgo federal insurance funding under a rule proposed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, part of an effort by the Trump administration to curtail the practice.

The agency said Thursday it will roll out a two-part plan to curb access. Medicaid reimbursements for treatment through the Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP, will no longer be offered for those under the age of 19. Hospitals that receive funding through Medicaid and Medicare, the government's programs for the poor and elderly, also must stop offering the care.

The proposed rules were posted on a federal website and now face a public comment period.

CMS's move is the latest turn in the Trump administration's

myriad efforts to curb support and care for transgender people in the U.S. The strategy — largely led by the Department of Justice and the White House — has been immediately met by lawsuits.

In January, Trump signed an executive order to halt funds for hospitals and medical schools that provide transgender care to people under the age of 19. Washington, Oregon and Minnesota sued in February over the order. A judge then issued an injunction, effectively blocking it from being implemented.

The order also directed HHS to release a report on gender dysphoria and gender-affirming care in kids. That report was released in May and met with intense criticism over its contradictory data. The administration has canceled hundreds of thousands of dollars in LGBTQ+ research and a federal suicide prevention hotline for transgender youth.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Review vowed after 15 injured in cable car stop

CA SAN FRANCISCO — More than a dozen people were hurt when a San Francisco cable car abruptly stopped Monday afternoon.

Fifteen people had injuries ranging from minor to moderate, the San Francisco Fire Department posted on social media. Two of them were immediately taken to hospitals and 11 others were treated for what the department described as “minor aches and pains.”

The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, which runs the cable cars, said it was actively investigating the incident and gave no reason for the stop. Passengers on cable cars do not wear seat belts and often hang off the cars, which are partly open-air.

“Safety for our passengers on all Muni vehicles continues to be our top priority. We’ll be conducting a full review of incident details to ensure continued safety on the cable cars,” SFMTA said in a statement.

Statue of teen civil rights leader takes Lee’s place

DC WASHINGTON — The U.S. Capitol on Tuesday began displaying a statue of a teenaged Barbara Rose Johns as she protested poor conditions at her segregated Virginia high school, a pointed replacement for a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee that was removed in 2020.

An unveiling ceremony of the statue representing Virginia in the Capitol took place in Emancipation Hall, featuring Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, Democratic Minority

Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Republican Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin, Virginia’s congressional delegation and Democratic Gov.-elect Abigail Spanberger. Johnson said more than 200 members of Johns’ family were on hand.

Johns was 16 years old in 1951 when she led a student strike for equal education at R.R. Moton High School in Farmville, Va. The students’ cause gained the support of NAACP lawyers, who filed a lawsuit that would become one of the five cases that the U.S. Supreme Court reviewed in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The high court’s landmark 1954 decision declared “separate but equal” public schools unconstitutional.

The statue replaces one of Lee that was removed in December 2020 from the Capitol, where it had represented Virginia for 111 years. The Lee statue was relocated to the Virginia Museum of History & Culture.

The Johns piece is part of the National Statuary Hall Collection at the Capitol, in which each state can contribute two statues. The other statue representing Virginia is of George Washington.

Officer fires gun at driver on airport access road

NY NEW YORK — An off-duty Customs and Border Protection officer fired his gun several times during a confrontation with another motorist Tuesday on an access road for New York’s Kennedy Airport, police said.

The CBP officer told authorities that he pulled his weapon after the other driver attacked him over a minor traffic crash, Port Authority police said.

It wasn’t clear if the shots hit anything. The other driver fled the scene after the shooting, according to the CBP officer, who was unhurt.

The two-vehicle crash happened shortly before 5 a.m. near the airport’s main car rental facilities on the tangle of roads and ramps that lead to the airport’s terminals, administration buildings and cargo areas. JFK’s roadways are currently undergoing a major construction overhaul and navigating the thicket of detours and traffic changes has been a source of frustration and confusion for many drivers.

The officer’s name has not been released.

Razor blades found in bread; woman arrested

MS BILOXI — A woman who allegedly pushed razor blades into loaves of bread at two Biloxi, Miss., Walmart stores was arrested on Tuesday.

Camille Benson, 33, of Texas, has been charged with attempted mayhem. Her bond is set at \$100,000.

Customers reported finding the razor blades at a Walmart Supercenter and a Walmart Neighborhood Market, said Lt. Candace Young, a public information officer for the Biloxi Police Department.

Walmart employees told police a customer first reported finding a razor blade in a loaf purchased from the Walmart Supercenter on Dec. 5. On Dec. 8, a customer who bought a loaf at the Walmart Neighborhood Market also reported finding a razor blade.

After another customer complained to the Walmart Super-

center on Sunday, employees inspected the merchandise and found several more loaves had been tampered with, law enforcement officials said.

The Biloxi Police Department said it does not believe any other stores have been targeted.

If customers purchase a product that has been tampered with, they should immediately throw it out and visit their local Walmart for a full refund, the company said.

‘Iconic’ home dating to 1728 goes up in flames

NC BEAUFORT — A revered coastal home that predates the American Revolution has been destroyed by fire, according to officials in Beaufort, N.C.

Known as the Duncan House, the two-story structure dates to 1728 and was part of a 12-block historic district listed on the National Register of Historic Places, town officials said.

“This is a heartbreaking moment for Beaufort,” Mayor Sharon Harker said in a news release. “The Duncan House is part of our historic fabric, and while we are grateful no lives were lost, the emotional toll of damage to a home — especially one with deep family and historic meaning — is significant.”

The initial fire call came around 6:30 a.m. Monday, and the cause remains under investigation. No one was inside at the time, officials said.

Duncan House “is one of only 11 properties in North Carolina designated as Statewide Properties of Significance,” town officials noted. It last sold in 2020, for \$2.5 million, according to Realtor.com.

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Dolphins bench Tagovailoa for rookie Ewers

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Miami Dolphins quarterback Tua Tagovailoa was unsure what his future with the team will look like following Wednesday's benching for rookie Quinn Ewers.

For now, the former first-round draft pick said he will contribute in whatever way he can despite his disappointment with how this season has gone.

"Disappointed," Tagovailoa said at his locker about coach Mike McDaniel's decision to demote him for Ewers. "I mean, I'm not happy about it, but it's something out of my control."

The decision came after Tagovailoa struggled in a loss to Pittsburgh, which eliminated Miami (6-8) from postseason contention. Ewers, a seventh-round pick by the Dolphins ear-

lier this year, will make his first career start Sunday against the Cincinnati Bengals, McDaniel said Wednesday.

McDaniel said the decision came down to who he felt gave Miami the best chance to win. The Dolphins fell 28-15 at the Steelers on Monday night, closing the door on their playoff hopes with three games left in the season.

Tagovailoa threw for just 65 yards through three quarters Monday, and the areas in which he has appeared to regress were evident again, from questionable decision-making to a lack of mobility that has hampered him throughout the season. He leads the NFL with 15 interceptions and hasn't played up to his contract after signing a four-year, \$212.4 million extension in July 2024.

Ewers was 5 for 8 for 53 yards in his only action this season in a lopsided loss to Cleveland in October. He was the 231st player selected in the draft last April after starting three seasons at Texas.

"I'm super thankful that the staff believes in me to go out there and give us an opportunity to go win an NFL football game," Ewers said.

The 27-year-old Tagovailoa had started every game this season but has a history of concussions. He missed six games last season because of a concussion and hip injury after playing 17 games in 2023.

Tagovailoa said he didn't think his injury history contributed to his regression this season. His 15 interceptions are a career high, he is on pace to finish the season with his worst

passer rate (88.5) since his rookie season, and he has failed to throw for more than 200 yards in eight of his 14 starts.

Before this year, he hadn't had more than three such games in a season since 2021, his first year as a starter.

"I would say the biggest thing, and it's being honest with myself as well, had been my performance," Tagovailoa said. "I haven't been performing up to the level and the capabilities that I have in the past."

It's unclear if Miami will stick with Ewers beyond Sunday. It closes the season at home against Tampa Bay and at New England.

"In Tua's shoes, it's tough," Ewers said. "I was benched in the middle of a game last year. So I mean, I know how he feels, and it's a bad feeling."

Oklahoma, Alabama meeting again with Rose Bowl at stake

Associated Press

Tide quarterback Ty SimpsonTide quarterback Ty SimpsonNORMAN, Okla. — Oklahoma and Alabama will meet Friday for the third time in 13 months in the most significant game of their budding rivalry.

Last year, the underdog Sooners stunned the Crimson Tide 24-3 and cost Alabama a spot in the College Football Playoff. Last month, Oklahoma won 23-21 at the Tide in a matchup of highly ranked teams that put the Sooners in position to reach the playoff.

Now, their seasons will be on the line in a playoff game, with the winner facing No. 1 seed Indiana in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

Oklahoma coach Brent Venables, as usual, showed great respect for Alabama.

"They've been very, very disruptive all year long, very, very well-coached in all three phases," he said. "We've got a lot of familiarity, don't want to be real redundant. We just played these guys a couple weeks ago and had

a lot of great things to say."

The Sooners caught several breaks to win the first meeting. They got an 87-yard interception return for a touchdown from Eli Bowen, and quarterback John Mateer made just enough plays at critical times to save them. Oklahoma won the turnover battle 3-0 and Tate Sandell made three field goals to offset the Crimson Tide's 406-212 advantage in total yardage.

Venables said the Sooners will have to be better in the rematch against a program that has won six national championships since the start of the 2009 season.

Alabama (10-3) likes the chance to make things right.

Running games

The team that finds its running game could be in position to advance.

In the first matchup, Alabama rushed for 80 yards on 33 attempts and Oklahoma gained just 74 yards on 28 carries.

The Crimson Tide have struggled with their ground game at

times, rushing for minus-3 yards in a 28-7 loss to Georgia in the Southeastern Conference championship game.

Series history

Oklahoma considered the Tide a rival long before leaving the Big 12 for the SEC.

It goes back to former Sooners coach Bob Stoops, who voiced his disagreement with the notion that the SEC was better than the Big 12. Stoops backed up his talk when Oklahoma beat Alabama in the Sugar Bowl after the 2013 season. He had a 3-0 career record against the Crimson Tide.

Alabama beat the Sooners 45-34 in the playoff in 2018, but Oklahoma has won both meetings since. Despite the Tide's overall success, the Sooners have won five of the past six meetings and hold a 5-2-1 overall record in the series.

Thomas returns

Oklahoma's R Mason Thomas is off the injury report after mis-

sing more than a month.

The dominant edge rusher's right hamstring was injured while he returned a fumble 71 yards for a touchdown against Tennessee. He was named second-team AP All-SEC despite missing the final three games of the regular season, including the first matchup with Alabama.

Despite the missed time, he leads the team with 6½ sacks and is third with 9½ tackles for loss. He anchors a defense that leads the nation in sacks and tackles for loss.

Oklahoma had the first-team All-SEC kicker and punter, weapons that could be critical in a tight game.

Sandell made his final 23 field goal attempts of the regular season, setting SEC and school records. He has made all 10 of his tries from at least 45 yards and has made four from 55 yards.

Grayson Miller, a transfer from Central Oklahoma, ranks 12th nationally with 46.1 yards per punt and has had 24 downed inside the 20-yard line.

Brett notches SO game-winner for Devils

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Jesper Brett's scored the winning goal in a shootout and the New Jersey Devils defeated the Vegas Golden Knights 2-1 on Tuesday night.

Pavel Dorofeyev, Mark Stone and Mitch Marner missed opportunities in the shootout for Vegas. Marner's attempt appeared to go in, but it was deemed a no-goal because the puck went off his skate after the initial shot.

Connor Brown scored in regulation for New Jersey. Jake Allen made 37 saves.

Dorofeyev scored for Vegas, and Carter Hart made 32 saves.

Panthers 3, Kings 2: Sam Bennett scored 10 seconds into the third period, Brad Marchand had two assists and host Florida beat Los Angeles to sweep the two-game season series.

Anton Lundell and Carter Verhaeghe also scored for the

Panthers, who have won six of their last seven games. Daniil Tarasov made 27 saves for Florida, including a breakaway stop against the Kings' Trevor Moore with just under five minutes left to preserve a one-goal lead.

Joel Armia and Kevin Fiala had the goals for Los Angeles, which fell to 0-2-2 in its last four contests. The four-game winless streak matches a season-long slide for the Kings, who were 0-2-2 from Oct. 11 through Oct. 18 as well.

Anton Forsberg stopped 25 shots for LA. Armia had the only goal in the first period, and Fiala made it 3-2 when a clearing attempt by the Panthers deflected off his shin and past Tarasov with 15:12 left.

Blues 1, Jets 0: Justin Faulk scored and Joel Hofer made 24 saves to lift host St. Louis over stumbling Winnipeg.

Hofer earned his third shut-

out of the season and the fifth in his career in the first meeting between the Blues and Jets since Winnipeg beat St. Louis in double overtime on May 4 in game seven of their first-round Stanley Cup playoff series.

Connor Hellebuyck made 25 saves for the Jets, who have lost five of their last six contests.

Faulk scored his eighth goal of the season on a feed from Robert Thomas with 6:43 remaining in the second period to give the Blues the lead.

Hurricanes 4, Predators 1: Sebastian Aho scored two goals and added an assist as visiting Carolina defeated Nashville.

Jackson Blake had a goal and an assist, Seth Jarvis also scored and Pyotr Kochetkov made 25 saves for the Hurricanes, who have won five straight, equaling a season high.

Filip Forsberg scored and Juuse Saros made 33 saves for the Predators, losers of two of three.

Andrei Svechnikov had a pair of assists for Carolina. The Hurricanes completed the sweep of the two-game series against Nashville. They are now 6-1-1 against Central Division opponents this season.

Mammoth 4, Red Wings 1: Clayton Keller had a goal and an assist as visiting Utah pulled away from Atlantic Division-leading Detroit.

Dylan Guenther scored his sixth goal in the last six games, while Jack McBain and Kevin Stenlund also scored for the Mammoth. Nick Schmaltz had his 300th career assist on Keller's goal.

Karel Vejmelka made 27 saves as Utah won for the third time in its last four games.

Emmitt Finnie scored for the Red Wings, who had won five of six games. Andrew Copp notched his 200th career assist and Cam Talbot stopped 23 shots.

Miles scores 22, No. 13 Vanderbilt tops Memphis in OT

Associated Press

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Duke Miles scored 22 points as No. 13 Vanderbilt weathered a second-half Memphis rally to remain undefeated with a 77-70 overtime win on Wednesday night.

After the game was tied at 66-all in the extra period, Jalen Washington scored inside and Miles converted four straight free throws. Washington hit two free throws with 57 seconds left that gave the Commodores (11-0) a 74-66 lead.

Miles and Washington, who finished with 14 points, made 9 of 10 free throws in the final 2½ minutes. Tyler Tanner had 16 points.

Dug McDaniel and Sincere Parker led the Tigers (4-6) with 18 points each. Hasan Abdul Hakim finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds as Memphis lost its second straight.

Vanderbilt, which went into the game No. 5 nationally in scoring (95.4 per game), continued its best start since the 2007-08 season when the Commodores won their first 16 games. But poor shooting early led to Vandy's lowest-scoring game of the season.

No. 7 Gonzaga 98, Campbell 70: Braden

Huff scored a career-high 37 points on 16-for-18 shooting as the host Bulldogs beat the Fighting Camels.

Graham Ike added 14 points and 11 rebounds, while Steele Venters had 13 points for Gonzaga (11-1).

Dovydas Butka had 19 points and DJ Smith added 18 for Campbell (5-6), which shot just 5 for 23 from 3-point range and was also outscored 64-38 in the paint.

The Fighting Camels had no answer for Huff, a 6-foot-10 junior who leads the Zags with 17 points per game. Huff scored 26 points in the first half, exceeding his previous high of 24 for a full game, on 12-of-12 shooting.

No. 16 Alabama 104, South Florida 93: Labaron Philon tied a career-high 29 points, Aden Holloway added 24 and the host Crimson Tide handled the Bulls.

Alabama (8-3) went on a 17-4 run early in the second half that made it 69-53 with 12:44 left in the game, and the Tide led by double figures the rest of the way. During the decisive stretch, Philon made two 3-pointers and had eight points with Holloway adding seven.

Alabama scored at least 100 points for the fourth time this season. The Crimson Tide went into the game No. 8 nationally in scoring at 93.1 per game.

South Florida (6-5) was led by trio of 20-point scorers: Izaiyah Nelson (25), Wes Enis (20) and Josh Omojafa (20).

No. 23 Florida 102, Saint Francis 61: Xaivian Lee scored 18 points, Alex Condon added 14 and the host Gators got a break from one of the toughest nonconference schedules in the country with a victory against the Red Flash.

Florida (7-4) never trailed while dominating every aspect of its first home game in nearly a month.

The Gators made 15 of their first 20 shots while building a 20-point lead and enjoyed enough of a cushion that coach Todd Golden was able to get his bench extended minutes.

Students started chanting for 7-foot-9 center Olivier Rioux with more than six minutes to play. The world's tallest teenager — standing 15 inches taller than any of his opponents — entered in the final minutes and got a dunk for his first collegiate field goal.

Bucks not considering big changes amid slide

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Milwaukee Bucks coach Doc Rivers remains confident in his team and doesn't plan on making any major changes in the wake of a 45-point loss to Brooklyn that matched the Nets' most lopsided victory in franchise history.

Milwaukee (11-16) hasn't won two straight games since Oct. 28-30 as it struggles to deal with the absence of two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo, who has been out for the past two weeks with a right calf strain.

"We like our team," Rivers said Wednesday after practice. "I really like this team. We're not playing well. We're not playing well for a lot of reasons. You don't recreate the wheel. You just don't. Teams that do that, then they fail. I'm just being honest. I've been around this long enough."

The Bucks won four of their first five games but have gone 7-15 since. They had three days off after their blowout loss to Brooklyn before hosting Toronto on Thursday.

"It was just an embarrassing game for us, at the end of the

day," guard Ryan Rollins said.

The time off has given Milwaukee an opportunity to practice on back-to-back days, a rarity during an NBA regular season. The Bucks said they used that time to try to make sure they correct what went wrong against the Nets.

"I don't think there's many losses in NBA history like the one we just had last game," guard Kevin Porter Jr. said. "I think a loss like that wakes you up, and you don't ever want to be on the end of that stick. Having those days (off) and having to sit on that loss definitely makes it worse. I think we all had an eye opener."

They apparently haven't spent this time off pondering wholesale changes to the scheme or lineup.

"Yeah, we want to do things better," Rivers said. "We want to tweak things. We like what we run. We like our defensive package overall. We've just got to do it better. We've got to take care of the ball. But we like the parts of this team, and that has not changed. This is not, 'OK, guys, we're five games under .500,

let's blow it all up.' This is not where we're at. We're not even thinking in those terms."

Milwaukee's slow start has led to increased league-wide speculation about Antetokounmpo's future, though Rivers has disputed an ESPN report that the nine-time All-NBA selection was talking with Bucks officials about whether he's best suited to stay in Milwaukee or get traded.

The Bucks have gone 2-8 when they don't have Antetokounmpo, who was out with a left adductor strain before injuring his calf.

Milwaukee can take comfort in the fact that it has some impressive wins. The Bucks beat Boston three nights before the debacle in Brooklyn. They defeated Golden State without Antetokounmpo early in the season. They beat Detroit on Dec. 3 even after Antetokounmpo left with his calf injury just three minutes into the game.

But they have also fallen to Washington, Charlotte, Brooklyn and Sacramento, all of whom have lost more than twice as many games as they've won.

Myles Turner said this has become a "play-hard league" and noted Milwaukee must consistently show the same effort and energy that was apparent in the NBA Cup games that took place the past few days. He believes the Bucks must recapture the joy they showed when they were playing well early in the season.

"When you start to lose, obviously it knocks your spirit a bit," Turner said. "Again, it's just really no time for excuses at this point. You have to go out there and perform."

Rivers noted that it's easy to simply say a team isn't playing hard enough when it's struggling, but he pointed out there are generally plenty of variables that are contributing to that. He said a team that's executing properly naturally looks as though it's playing harder.

"It's like the chicken and egg: Something has to go first," Rivers said. "Something has to give you confidence to do it over and over again. Put it like this: I'm far more focused on execution than I am about feelings and head space and all that stuff. That's just my opinion."

Jackson scores 28 as Grizzlies beat Timberwolves

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Jaren Jackson Jr. had 28 points and 12 rebounds to lead a balanced scoring attack and the Memphis Grizzlies beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 116-110 on Wednesday night.

Jock Landale added 20 points and 10 rebounds for Memphis, which has won four of five and seven of nine. Jaylen Wells had 17 points, Cedric Coward 13, and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope 12. Santi Aldama grabbed 11 rebounds.

Julius Randle scored 21 points for Minnesota. Donte DiVincenzo had 19 points and 11 rebounds and Rudy Gobert added 16 points and 16 boards, but the Timberwolves lost for just the second time in nine games. Naz Reid also had 16 points.

Both teams played without their top scorer. Minnesota's Anthony Edwards missed his third straight game with a right foot in-

jury, and Ja Morant was out for the Grizzlies with a left ankle sprain sustained in Monday's 121-103 win at the Clippers.

Memphis was also without Cam Spencer, who missed the game for personal reasons. The guard had a career-high 27 points during the win in Los Angeles.

Grizzlies forward Brandon Clarke scored six points and had three rebounds in his first game since March 19 due to knee injuries, including arthroscopic surgery in September to relieve right knee synovitis.

Bulls 127, Cavaliers 111: Josh Giddey scored 23 points as part of his sixth triple-double this season, Coby White added 25 and hot-shooting Chicago beat visiting Cleveland.

Giddey had 11 rebounds and 11 assists. He also matched a career high with five 3-pointers. Nikola Vucevic added 20 points and nine rebounds in the opener of the

home-and-home series.

The Bulls shot 56.2% overall and made 14 of 36 3-pointers to secure a rather convincing win after losing eight of nine. They led by 15 in the third quarter and went on a run in the fourth to break the game back open on the way to a rare win over the Cavaliers. They had dropped 12 of 13 against Cleveland.

Donovan Mitchell led the Cavs with 32 points, but they fell to 15-13 with their seventh loss in 10 games, the latest troubling performance for a team considered a favorite in the Eastern Conference. They didn't sustain their 13th loss last season until March 19.

Chicago guard Ayo Dosunmu missed his third consecutive game because of a sprained right thumb. The hometown product is fourth on the team in scoring at 15.2 points per game.