

Mattresses, repairs in barracks upgrade

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

All Marines living in barracks can expect a new mattress and furniture, while sailors will see housing improvements at 50 Navy bases as the services invest \$615 million to improve housing for junior enlisted troops.

"Quality of service is inseparable from readiness," said Vice Adm. Scott Gray, commander of Navy Installations Command,

said in a news release.

"Providing safe, comfortable, and clean housing is not optional. It is a responsibility we owe to every sailor who volunteers to serve."

The new funding stemmed from a Defense Department-wide barracks task force stood up in October to overhaul the military's aging housing for junior enlisted and unaccompanied service members. Government reports and the military's

own assessments have found substandard conditions including mold, non-working appliances and air conditioning, plumbing issues and broken locks and windows.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth last month announced \$1.2 billion for barracks renovations across all service branches provided through the massive spending package signed into law earlier this year commonly referred to as the "One Big

Beautiful Bill."

The Navy will invest \$375 million into safety, comfort and cleanliness projects across the shore enterprise.

About \$75 million of that amount will support 95 prioritized projects across 50 installations and will meet the specific needs at each base.

This money will go toward kitchen updates, heating and

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Navy plans to build new frigate based on cutter

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

Less than a month after killing the bulk of the Constellation-class frigate program, the Navy announced late Thursday plans to build a replacement "FF(X) frigate" based on a Coast Guard cutter already in service.

"I have directed the acquisition of a new frigate class based on HII's Legend-class national security cutter design, a proven American built ship," Navy Secretary John Phelan said in a video announcement on X.

The Navy said in a statement, "The FF(X) will be a smaller, more agile surface combatant designed to complement the fleet's larger, multi-mission warships and enhance operational flexibility around the globe."

Phelan said President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have already "signed off" on the "smart, quick, affordable" build. His announcement did not include information on the number of ships to be purchased or the dollar amounts of the initial and

long-term contracts.

The FF(X) will be built at HII shipbuilders' Ingalls Shipbuilding 800-acre plant in Pascagoula, Miss., Phelan said.

Using the Coast Guard cutter design for the new Navy frigates would fast-track getting hulls into the water by 2028, Phelan said.

While HII would be the lead builder on the cutters-turned-frigates, Phelan said an open competition would likely be held to build in other American shipyards.

Phelan did not specifically say if Wisconsin-based Fincantieri Marinette Marine would be involved.

The company won the 2020 competition to build the Constellation-class frigates. Originally based on a slightly modified version of a frigate already in service with France and Italy, the program has been plagued by cost overruns, delays, worker shortages and dozens of design changes.

A Navy report last year said the project was 36 months behind schedule on its \$22 billion contract.

In canceling the program last month, the Navy said it would accept the first two ships already under construction, USS Constellation and USS Congress. But the program would be terminated for any additional ships. The Constellation is projected to be delivered in 2029.

At the time of the program cancellation, Fincantieri said it was counting on new work from the Navy to keep its Wisconsin plant open and its workforce in place. Phelan did not mention Fincantieri in the video.

"Shipyards will be measured across one outcome — delivering combat power to the fleet as fast as possible," Phelan said.

Adm. Daryl Caudle, Chief of Naval Operations, said in the same video that the program would follow what he said was the successful development and construction of the Arleigh Burke-class of destroyers.

"Building it smart from the start, then upgrading it in steps over time as the threats and technology evolve," Caudle said.

Caudle said the frigate pro-

gram was an attempt to build ships that were smaller than modern destroyers, which have increasingly taken on the role formerly played by cruisers in the "high-end fight" of naval warfare.

"The FF(X) is a highly adaptable vessel," the Navy said. "While its primary mission will be surface warfare," it has the "ability to carry modular payloads and command unmanned systems."

Phelan said the new ships would fit into the overall Navy strategy for "the Golden Fleet," a Trump administration initiative under development that would include larger ships, including a possible new generation of battleships, along with larger numbers of smaller surface ships. The ships would be augmented by uncrewed ships that would support the defense of the major warships.

Caudle said lessons learned in the Red Sea and in operations in the Caribbean showed an "undeniable" need to restructure Navy shipbuilding to faster, smaller, and more reliable models.

Repairs: \$300M to be spent across 6 bases

cooling systems, new floors and new furniture, the Navy said.

The remaining \$300 million is flagged for major work at six bases:

Naval Support Facility Indian Head in Maryland: \$22 million toward the Marine Corps barracks for the Joint Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force will modernize barracks with structural, mechanical, electrical and fire suppression upgrades.

Naval Air Station Oceana in Virginia: \$91.8 million toward the Center for Naval Aviation Technical Training Student Housing for a comprehensive renovation with roof replacement, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, fire system updates, mold remediation, cabinetry replacement, new flooring, closet upgrades and painting.

Oceana Dam Neck Annex: \$78.3 million toward Marine Corps Intelligence School Mardet Student Housing for a full restoration and modernization

of HVAC, plumbing, electrical system replacement, new flooring, closets, paint, updated bathrooms, new furniture and in-room refrigerators and microwaves.

Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam: \$30.3 million toward Building 1489 for repairs to plumbing, exterior, roofing, interior finishes, HVAC and electrical. Interior renovations include upgrading kitchens, lounges, flooring, windows and shower areas.

Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek-Fort Story in Virginia: \$13.5 million for Shields Hall will support major HVAC system work, dropped ceiling replacement and the installation of lockable access doors.

Naval Base Kitsap in Washington: \$12.1 million to Keppler Hall to repair damage from an August fire and sprinkler flooding, upgrade fire alarm system and interior restoration of flooring, new ceilings, updated bathrooms and electrical updates.

"This is not a one-time fix but a sustained commitment," Gray said in the release. "We are dedicated to continuous improvement and ensuring our sailors have the quality housing they deserve throughout their careers."

The Marine Corps said it will spend \$22 million across all installations to fund "self-help programs" and other minor repairs. Officials said this will empower commanders to act on local improvements.

Another \$55 million will purchase new barracks furniture and mattresses across all installations, and \$10 million will buy new door locks and a standardized barracks access control system.

The Marine Corps also designated \$218 million for improvements and renovations of 16 barracks across six installations: Camp Lejeune, N.C., Camp Pendleton, Calif., Marine Corps Air Station New River, N.C., 29 Palms, Calif., Quantico,

Va., and Camp Fuji in Japan.

Those renovations will cover HVAC repairs, mechanical repairs and work on major building systems.

The barracks task force also covers the Army and Air Force, though neither provided as granular a breakdown of the work to be done.

The Army will push \$50 million to local commanders for barracks improvements and another \$65 million to soldier self-help programs, the service said.

Another \$405 million will fund major renovations.

Officials said they are still inspecting barracks to find what work needs to be prioritized.

The Air Force will put \$41.5 million toward immediate dormitory fixes of door locks, sinks, exhaust fans, lights, toilets, HVAC components, mold remediation, roof, flooring and window repairs.

Another \$89 million will be used to help support larger projects.

Trump meets with Rubio, Hegseth about Venezuela

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump was gathering with top national security officials Monday, a meeting that comes as the U.S. Coast Guard steps up efforts to interdict oil tankers in the Caribbean Sea as part of the Republican administration's escalating pressure campaign on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's government.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Navy Secretary John Phelan were scheduled to join Trump, who is vacationing at his Mar-a-Lago resort, for what the White House called a "major announcement."

Trump plans to discuss a

shipbuilding initiative at the event, according to a White House official, who was not authorized to comment and spoke on condition of anonymity.

But Trump's gathering of key members of his national security team also comes at yet another inflection point in his four-month pressure campaign on the Maduro government, which began with the stated purpose of stemming the flow of illegal drugs from the South American nation but has developed into something more amorphous.

In the Caribbean, the Coast Guard on Monday continued for the second day to chase a sanctioned oil tanker that the Trump administration de-

scribes as part of a "dark fleet" Venezuela is using to evade U.S. sanctions. The tanker, the official added, is flying under a false flag and is under a U.S. judicial seizure order.

It is the third tanker pursued by the Coast Guard, which on Saturday seized a Panama-flagged vessel called Centuries that U.S. officials said was part of the Venezuelan shadow fleet.

The Coast Guard, with assistance from the Navy, seized a sanctioned tanker called Skipper on Dec. 10, also part of the shadow fleet of tankers that the United States has said operates on the fringes of the law to move sanctioned cargo. That ship was registered in Panama.

Trump, after that first sei-

zure, said the U.S. would carry out a "blockade" of Venezuela. He has repeatedly said Maduro's days in power are numbered.

Last week, Trump demanded that Venezuela return assets it seized from U.S. oil companies years ago, justifying anew his announcement of a "blockade" against sanctioned oil tankers traveling to or from the South American country.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said on "Fox & Friends" that the targeting of tankers is intended to send "a message around the world that the illegal activity that Maduro is participating in cannot stand, he needs to be gone and that we will stand up for our people."

IG: Oversight lacking on materiel for Israel

By LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

U.S. monitors haven't properly tracked or logged some of the \$13.4 billion worth of military support sent to Israel since the start of its war with Hamas two years ago, a Pentagon watchdog agency said in a new report.

The audit by the Defense Department Office of Inspector General, released last week, looked at how Pentagon agencies kept tabs on the defense equipment the U.S. sent following the Hamas attacks Oct. 7, 2023, that touched off the war.

The IG found that U.S. Central Command and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency didn't properly oversee some of the most sensitive technologies loaned to Israel to help it eradicate Hamas rule in Gaza and return hostages.

"Without effective accounta-

bility, these (sensitive) defense articles could be acquired by adversaries in the region," the audit said. "Adversaries who obtain (the) defense articles would have firsthand access and knowledge of sensitive U.S. weapon systems technology, decreasing the technological advantage in the battlefield and increasing the risk to the United States, partner nations, and allies."

The report didn't specify what kinds of munitions or weapons were involved, only that they qualified for "enhanced end-use monitoring," or EEUM, under federal law.

The designation is typically used for articles that use sensitive technologies and are vulnerable to misuse. Federal law lays out detailed inspection and reporting processes for tracking EEUM articles.

The Office of Defense Cooper-

ation-Israel, which is overseen by both CENTCOM and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, is tasked with conducting annual checks on the articles, including serial number inventories and physical security inspections.

But the audit found that as of November 2024, only 44% of articles that were available for inspection had up-to-date reviews, a significant drop from the 69% before the war began.

The remaining 56% were more than 30 days past due for a review, according to the audit.

The office also hadn't been accurately tracking articles that had been deployed or expended by Israel, the audit said.

Federal law requires monitors to keep track of the current positions of defense articles that aren't available for inventory, including obtaining official docu-

mentation explaining where they're located and why they were not available for inspection.

The office in Israel said it couldn't conduct checks in a timely manner or update the disposition statuses because of changes in the operational environment, according to the audit.

The conflict, combined with staffing shortages, made it difficult to conduct checks and obtain documentation on the status of the materials, according to the audit.

CENTCOM agreed to follow a suggestion in the audit to conduct an inspection or a remote inspection of the Office of Defense Coordination-Israel in the next fiscal year, and the Defense Security Cooperation Agency agreed it will conduct either a compliance visit or virtual compliance assessment in 2026.

Coast Guard will pay members \$2,000 'Devotion to Duty' bonus

By GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Coast Guard members will receive a one-time "Devotion to Duty" bonus at the end of 2025 as thanks for their service, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem announced Thursday.

The \$2,000 bonus will recognize the "exceptional service and success of U.S. Coast Guard members in 2025," according to a Coast Guard statement.

"We want to show our country's profound appreciation for their devotion to duty and the countless sacrifices they make to protect our nation," Noem said in a statement Thursday.

The Coast Guard currently has 40,757 active-duty personnel. The bonus will cost the service about \$80 million in one-time pay.

The bonus is the first specific plan for the \$1,776 "warrior dividend" that President Donald Trump said he wants to go out to

more than 1.45 million military and federal law enforcement personnel. The amount of money is meant to symbolically reflect the year of the Declaration of Independence, 1776.

"The checks are already on the way," Trump said Wednesday night. "Nobody deserves it more than our military."

Trump did not say where the money would come from or exactly who would receive it.

The Coast Guard statement on Thursday did not initially specify a dollar amount, but a later statement from the service said the "special duty pay" would be \$2,000 "pre-tax."

The Coast Guard said Thursday that the payments would be processed this month and would go to Coast Guard members in paygrades O-6 and below who are on active duty through Dec. 31.

Coast Guard members with the rank of captain and below would receive the bonus.

Merry Marines, cadets bring Christmas to Okinawa town

By RYAN M. BREEDEN
Stars and Stripes

KIN TOWN, Okinawa — Santa Claus, with an assist from U.S. Marines and high school cadets, handed out plushies, dolls, Lego sets and other toys to Japanese children over the weekend at the local community center.

Approximately 80 children and their parents were invited by the Kin Town Social Welfare Office to the Merry Marine Toy Drive on Saturday with Marines of the 3rd Intelligence Battalion and Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps cadets from Kubasaki High School.

This year more than 2,400 toy donations were collected from across the island, with more than 200 given away at the Kin Town Community Center, Marine Corps Installations Pacific spokeswoman Sidney Sullivan said at the event.

Miniature cars, Barbie dolls,

Pokémon plushies, sports balls, stuffed animals and action figures were among the toys given away. A large toy fire truck stood apart.

The Kubasaki JROTC program at Camp Foster launched the toy drive in 2022 as Toys from Cadets.

The following year, the Marine Corps merged existing programs and expanded it across Okinawa as the Merry Marine Toy Drive, with toys collected by Marines and their families.

Sgt. Andrew Campbell, of Traverse City, Mich., in a holiday sweater and elf ears, said he was happy to volunteer alongside 11 other Marines.

"I think it was a great time," he told Stars and Stripes at the event. "I think any time that you can give back to any kind of community in general is what we signed up for at the end of the day."

The JROTC cadets wrapped up the event with Christmas carols.

Greenland move spurs tension with Denmark

Associated Press

President Donald Trump on Sunday announced he is appointing Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry to serve as the U.S. special envoy to Greenland, the vast, semi-autonomous territory of Denmark that Trump has said the U.S. needs to take over.

The leaders of Denmark and Greenland responded Monday, insisting that the United States won't take over Greenland and demanded respect for their territorial integrity.

In announcing the appointment, Trump said, "Jeff understands how essential Greenland is to our National Security, and will strongly advance our Country's Interests for the Safety, Security, and Survival of our Allies, and indeed, the World."

Trump during his presidential transition and in the early

months of his return to the White House repeatedly called for U.S. jurisdiction over Greenland, and has not ruled out military force to take control of the mineral-rich, strategically located Arctic island.

On Monday, Denmark's foreign minister told Danish broadcasters that he would summon the U.S. ambassador.

"We have said it before. Now, we say it again. National borders and the sovereignty of states are rooted in international law," Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and her Greenlandic counterpart, Jens-Frederik Nielsen, said in a joint statement. "They are fundamental principles. You cannot annex another country. Not even with an argument about international security."

"Greenland belongs to the

Greenlanders and the U.S. shall not take over Greenland," they added in the statement from Frederiksen's office. "We expect respect for our joint territorial integrity."

The issue had drifted out of the headlines in recent months, but in August, Danish officials summoned the U.S. ambassador following a report that at least three people with connections to Trump had carried out covert influence operations in Greenland. Earlier this year, Vice President JD Vance visited a U.S. military base on the island and accused Denmark of underinvesting there.

Trump has said that Greenland is crucial for U.S. security and hasn't ruled out taking the island by military force, even though Denmark is a NATO ally of the U.S.

Landry took office as governor in January 2024. His term ends in January 2028.

"It's an honor to serve you in this volunteer position to make Greenland a part of the U.S.," Landry wrote in a posting on X in which he thanked Trump for the appointment. He added, "This in no way affects my position as Governor of Louisiana!"

The Trump administration did not offer any warning ahead of the announcement, according to a Danish government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Denmark and Greenland have said the island is not for sale and condemned reports of the U.S. gathering intelligence there. The U.S. push for Greenland is also opposed by Russia and much of Europe.

Official defends partial release of Epstein files

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche on Sunday defended the Justice Department's decision to release just a fraction of the Jeffrey Epstein files by the congressionally mandated deadline as necessary to protect survivors of sexual abuse by the disgraced financier.

Blanche pledged that the Trump administration eventually would meet its obligation required by law.

But he stressed that the department was obligated to act with caution as it goes about making public thousands of documents that can include sensitive information.

Friday's partial release of the Epstein files has led to a new crush of criticism from Democrats who have accused the Republican administration of trying to hide information.

Blanche called that pushback

disingenuous as President Donald Trump's administration continues to struggle with calls for greater transparency, including from members of his political base, about the government's investigations into Epstein, who once counted Trump as well as several political leaders and business titans among his peers.

"The reason why we are still reviewing documents and still continuing our process is simply that to protect victims," Blanche told NBC's "Meet the Press."

But Democratic lawmakers on Sunday hammered Trump and the Justice Department for a partial release.

Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., argued that the Justice Department is obstructing the implementation of the law mandating the release of the documents not because it wants to protect the Epstein victims.

White House threatens Smithsonian over content

The Washington Post

The Trump administration escalated pressure on the Smithsonian last week, threatening to withhold federal funds if it does not submit extensive documentation for a sweeping content review. President Donald Trump earlier this year set out to purge what he called "improper ideology" from the nation's most prestigious museum system, efforts that are expected to intensify as his administration tries to shape the country's 250th anniversary celebrations next year.

In a staff email obtained by The Washington Post, sent Friday evening after the funding threat, Smithsonian Secretary Lonnie G. Bunch III said the Smithsonian had sent information to the White House in September and intended to submit more that day. He asserted that "all content, programming, and curatorial decisions are made

by the Smithsonian."

The previous day, Domestic Policy Council director Vince Haley and White House budget director Russell Vought wrote to Bunch that the Smithsonian's initial submissions "fell far short of what was requested." Among the solicited documents are current exhibition descriptions, comprehensive America 250 programming files, draft plans for upcoming shows and internal guidelines used in exhibition development. The White House gave the Smithsonian until Jan. 13 to meet the request.

Responding to the Trump administration, Bunch wrote in a letter Friday that was also reviewed by The Post, that the institution remains "committed to sharing information and data" and asked them to "please understand that this work has been time consuming, involving many staff and departments throughout the Smithsonian."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Muddy eruption at park's Black Diamond Pool

MT YELLOWSTONE — “Kablooey!”

That’s the word U.S. Geological Survey volcanic experts used to describe a muddy eruption at Black Diamond Pool in Yellowstone National Park on Saturday morning.

Video shared by the USGS on social media shows mud spraying up and out from the pool just before 9:23 a.m. in Biscuit Basin about midway between park favorites Old Faithful and Grand Prismatic.

So-called dirty eruptions reaching up to 40 feet have occurred sporadically since then.

“We got a nice clear view of one of these dirty eruptions under bright blue skies with the surroundings covered in snow (ah, winter in Yellowstone!),” USGS Volcanoes said on social media.

Free Christmas trees help liven holidays for airmen

WA BELLEVILLE — Hundreds of soldiers at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., and airmen at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., are enjoying the holidays with a free Christmas tree.

It’s part of a national program to help service members and their families who are far from home. Trees for Troops is run by the Christmas Spirit Foundation and connects private donations to tree farms around the country. FedEx ships the trees to dozens of military installations.

“It’s great getting a free tree. It helps with the holiday spirit,” said Cpl. Noah Rodriguez, stationed at Fort Leonard Wood.

He; his wife, Cheyenne; toddler Braxton and infant Paisley got one of the free trees.

This year, Fort Leonard Wood gave away about 400 trees, and Scott Air Force Base had about 300 trees for airmen and their families.

Four siblings charged for illegal game rooms

HI HONOLULU — Four adult siblings are the first under a state law enacted to target people who knowingly let illegal game room operators set up their businesses.

Kelfred Chang, 59; Gifford Chang, 57; and Amelia Chang, also known as Amelia Watanabe, 63; were arrested Dec. 13 at the main police station.

The fourth Chang sibling, Hubert Chang, 65, was arrested Dec. 12 at his home in East Honolulu.

Each Chang is facing four counts of promotion of gambling in the second degree.

On July 9, 2024, Gov. Josh Green signed into law Act 249, which broadened the scope of “advancing” gambling activity to include forms of material aid such as maintaining equipment and managing financial operations.

Man who stole police car at Quik Trip led chase

SC ROCK HILL — A man who stole a patrol vehicle Saturday night led law enforcement officers on a long, multi-county chase that included one deputy getting injured in a crash before the pursuit ended, according to the Spartanburg County Sheriff’s

Office.

The incident began at about 9 p.m., when deputies responded to a call about a man, later identified as 34-year-old William Waters, experiencing a mental health episode at the Quik Trip gas station/convenience store in Inman, the sheriff’s office said in a news release.

At about 9:45 p.m., Waters got behind the wheel of a deputy’s patrol vehicle, and despite attempts to stop him, drove away, according to the release.

A pursuit ensued through Spartanburg County, Laurens County and into Newberry County, according to the release.

The pursuit ended when Waters finally surrendered about 50 miles from the Quik Trip where the patrol vehicle was stolen.

Fentanyl dealer given 5 years in federal prison

CA OAKLAND — A 31-year-old man was sentenced to five years in federal prison for trafficking fentanyl throughout the Bay Area, in a case where authorities say he was arrested inside a home that contained 54 pounds of the deadly drug.

Darwin Licona, of Oakland, pleaded guilty to a federal fentanyl trafficking charge, stemming from a traffic stop in 2023, in Oakland, where more than two pounds were recovered, according to court records. Licona was arrested in January 2024, in a San Francisco home where authorities allegedly found 54 pounds of fentanyl, 3.7 pounds of methamphetamine, more than 16,000 counterfeit Xanax pills and other suspected drugs,

as well as more than \$13,000 in currency, in a “common area” of the home, according to the criminal complaint.

Licona’s attorney argued for a 29-month sentence, saying Licona accepted responsibility and that it would be an “understatement” to say his life has been difficult to this point.

Affidavit: Man interrupted crime, later shot to death

NC CHARLOTTE — A Charlotte, N.C., man found shot multiple times outside a city child care facility last week was killed after he had interrupted a crime in progress hours earlier, a police affidavit reports.

The shooting happened around 3 a.m. Monday, Dec. 15, in the parking lot of Tender Hearts Child Care on North Sharon Amity Road, and two men have been charged, Charlotte-Mecklenburg police said in a Dec. 19 case update.

Investigators believe 44-year-old Albert Lowery was targeted for confronting a suspected thief at the 24-hour child care operation a couple of hours earlier.

The shooting happened more than two hours after he caught a man trying to take the catalytic converter off an SUV in the parking lot, police said. Surveillance footage confirmed Lowery was armed when he confronted a man who is seen under an SUV in the parking lot, the affidavit reports.

The suspects have been identified as Rethanachantra Em, 33, and Borein Ngien, 32, CMPD said in a news release. Both live in Charlotte.

— From wire reports

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Panthers top Bucs for division lead

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The playoff-starved Carolina Panthers left the locker room Sunday happy, but not yet satisfied.

The Panthers finally figured out a way to beat Baker Mayfield and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, a 23-20 victory that gave them sole possession of first place in the NFC South with two games remaining. But they are well aware they may need to do it again in Week 18 to earn their first division title in a decade and snap a seven-year playoff drought.

Carolina (8-7) could wrap up with the NFC South next Sunday with a win over Seattle and a Tampa Bay (7-8) loss to Miami. However, if the Bucs beat the Dolphins, Carolina would need to beat Tampa Bay in the regular-season finale to end the Bucs' four-year reign as division champions.

Panthers coach Dave Canales said the team's locker room is filled with "hope and belief" that the franchise's fortunes could be about to change.

And third-year quarterback Bryce Young continues to make big plays when it matters most.

Young threw for 191 yards and two touchdowns, and rookie safety Lathan Ransom intercepted Mayfield with 42 seconds left. Of Young's 14 wins as an NFL starter, 12 have come on game-winning drives in the fourth quarter or overtime.

"We have the utmost confidence in Bryce," said tight end Ja'Tavion Sanders, who caught a 6-yard touchdown pass late in the third quarter after Young eluded three defenders in the pocket. "He isn't our quarterback for no reason. Everything he has gone through to get to this point today, the resilience and the mental toughness and the way he carries himself, it all plays a part in that."

It was the third straight loss for the reeling Buccaneers, who were hoping the return of injured wide receivers Mike Evans and

Jalen McMillan might spark a playoff run.

With the Bucs down 23-20 and driving for the go-ahead score — or at least the tying field goal — there was a miscommunication on a second-and-9 pass play at the Carolina 42 between Mayfield and Evans, and Ransom made a sliding catch for the interception.

Chargers 34, Cowboys 17: Justin Herbert threw two touchdown passes and ran for a score and Los Angeles closed in on a playoff spot with a road victory over Dallas.

The Cowboys (6-8-1) have lost three in a row since a three-game winning streak that put them over .500 for the only time in coach Brian Schottenheimer's first season. In his third full game with his broken non-throwing (left) hand heavily protected, Herbert led the Chargers to touchdowns on all three drives in the first half. Omarion Hampton scored on a 5-yard run in the second half.

Vikings 16, Giants 13: J.J. McCarthy ran for a touchdown before leaving with an injury to his right, throwing hand, and backup quarterback Max Brosmer helped visiting Minnesota win its third game in a row, beating New York in a matchup of teams eliminated from playoff contention.

McCarthy was injured on a strip sack by Brian Burns in the final minute of the first half, when it appeared the Vikings (7-8) were going to let the clock run out. Instead, Burns forced McCarthy to fumble with a crushing hit and Tyler Nubin returned it 27 yards for a touchdown.

Before getting hurt, McCarthy completed 9 of 14 passes for 108 yards and had a would-be pick-6 negated by an offside penalty on Abdul Carter.

The Giants (2-13) lost their ninth consecutive game and fifth since Mike Kafka took over as interim coach when Brian Daboll was fired on Nov. 10. They have

not won since Oct. 9.

Bengals 45, Dolphins 21: Joe Burrow rebounded from his first time being shut out to throw for 309 yards and four touchdowns as visiting Cincinnati routed Miami.

Miami (6-9) and Cincinnati (5-10) were both eliminated from playoff contention last week, but the teams insisted they were still motivated for the final three games of the season.

It appeared that way in the first half. Cincinnati held a 17-14 halftime lead before blowing the game open with 28 points off four straight Dolphins turnovers.

Bills 23, Browns 20: James Cook rushed for 117 yards and two touchdowns, Josh Allen played through a foot injury and Buffalo drew closer to a playoff berth with a road victory over Cleveland.

Allen played the second half despite injuring his right foot during the second quarter. He favored the foot after being sacked by Cleveland's Myles Garrett and Alex Wright. Allen was 12-for-19 for 130 yards and also rushed for 17 yards on seven carries.

Shedeur Sanders completed 20 of 29 passes for 157 yards and a touchdown. He also was the Browns' leading rusher with four carries for 49 yards.

Titans 26, Chiefs 9: Cam Ward threw for 228 yards and two touchdowns, and Tennessee snapped an 11-game home skid by beating Kansas City.

The Titans (3-12) improved to 1-7 at home this season with their first win at Nissan Stadium since Nov. 3, 2024.

With two games left, the Chiefs (6-9) are assured of their first losing record since 2012 — their most recent season without Andy Reid as their coach. Kansas City has lost four straight and six of seven.

Saints 29, Jets 6: Chris Olave caught touchdown passes from Tyler Shough and Taysom Hill, Charlie Smyth tied a Saints record with five field goals and New

Orleans extended its winning streak to three with a home victory over reeling New York.

Cameron Jordan had two sacks for New Orleans (5-10), giving him 130 for his career and moving the 15th-year defensive end two ahead of Hall of Famer Ricky Jackson for 17th most in NFL history.

Falcons 26, Cardinals 19: Bijan Robinson gained 171 yards from scrimmage and had a touchdown catch, Kirk Cousins threw two TD passes and ran for a score, and visiting Atlanta held on to beat Arizona.

The Falcons (6-9) won for the second straight week, with both coming on the road.

Arizona (3-12) has lost seven straight and 12 of 13 since starting the season 2-0.

Texans 23, Raiders 21: C.J. Stroud threw a touchdown pass, Derek Stingley returned an interception for a score and host Houston beat Las Vegas for its seventh straight victory and the Raiders' ninth loss in a row.

Houston (10-5) has its longest winning streak since a nine-game run in 2018.

The Texans remain a game behind first-place Jacksonville — a winner in Denver on Sunday — in the AFC South. The Raiders are 2-13.

Steelers 29, Lions 24: Pittsburgh pushed Detroit to the brink of elimination from the playoffs, holding on for a road win when Jared Goff's touchdown on the final play was negated by an offensive pass-interference penalty on Amon-Ra St. Brown.

Goff threw a fourth-down pass to St. Brown just short of the goal line. The receiver pushed off cornerback Jalen Ramsey to get free, and before the Steelers could bring St. Brown to the ground, he threw the quarterback a lateral to set up an apparent score.

Officials huddled for some time on the field before announcing the decision to the dismay of the crowd.

Smith, No. 7 Gonzaga power past Oregon

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Braeden Smith scored 21 points, Braden Huff had 20 points and No. 7 Gonzaga beat Oregon 91-82 on Sunday at Moda Center.

Graham Ike added 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Bulldogs (12-1). Steele Venters scored 14 points, and Tyon Grant-Foster had 10.

Nate Bittle had 28 points and nine rebounds for Oregon (6-6). Kwame Evans Jr. added 14 points, Takai Simpkins had 13 and Jackson Shelstad 12.

Oregon played Gonzaga tough in a back-and-forth first half, led by 16 points from Bittle, and it was tied in the final seconds before Grant-Foster's buzzer-beating 3-pointer put the Bulldogs up 42-39.

Gonzaga pulled away in the second half, leading by 15.

No. 2 Michigan 102, La Salle 50: Freshman Trey McKenney led a balanced attack with 17 points and host Michigan overwhelmed La Salle.

The Wolverines also had four other players in double figures as they reached the 100-point mark for the sixth time this season and the fifth time in the last six games.

No. 4 Iowa St. 91, Long Beach St. 60: Milan Momcilovic made seven 3-pointers and scored 27 points and host Iowa State routed Long Beach State to improve to 12-0.

Iowa State held Long Beach State (3-10) to six points in the opening 10 minutes and led 45-9 with 5½ minutes left in the first half.

No. 5 UConn 72, DePaul 54: Alex Karaban scored 21 points and visiting UConn shut down DePaul for a rugged victory.

Playing without Solo Ball, UConn (12-1, 2-0 Big East) posted its eighth consecutive win. It also improved to 22-1 against DePaul.

No. 13 Vanderbilt 98, Wake Forest 67: Tyler Nickel hit eight 3-pointers on his way to 26 points and Vanderbilt continued its surprise season as one of a handful of schools in the country that are

still undefeated with a road win over Wake Forest.

Duke Miles had 17 points and nine assists, Tyler Harris scored 14 off the bench and Devin McGlockton and Tyler Tanner scored 11 each for Vanderbilt (12-0), which holds its highest in-season ranking since 1992-93.

No. 15 Nebraska 78, North Dakota 55: Berke Buyuktuncel had 12 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists for a triple-double and host Nebraska overcame first-half shooting woes to beat North Dakota.

At 12-0, Nebraska is off to the best start in school history. Braden Frager came off the bench to lead the Huskers with 17 points. Sam Hoiberg finished with 15 points, and Jamarques Lawrence added 13.

No. 16 Alabama 92, Kennesaw State 81: Aiden Sherrell scored a career-high 21 points to lead Alabama to a home victory over Kennesaw State.

The neutral-site game in northern Alabama included a

pro-Crimson Tide crowd and hosted a coming-out party for Sherrell. The sophomore from Detroit scored 15 points in the first half and helped Alabama (9-3) build a 26-point lead.

No. 20 Tennessee 94, Gardner-Webb 52: Ja'Kobi Gillespie had 15 points and nine assists, Amaree Abrams scored 15 points and host Tennessee beat Gardner-Webb.

Jaylen Carey added 12 points for Tennessee (9-3). J.P. Estrella had 10 points, and DeWayne Brown II finished with 14 rebounds.

No. 23 Florida 90, Colgate 60: Xaivian Lee scored 19 points, Thomas Haugh added 17 and Florida pulled away late to beat Colgate and extend its home-winning streak against nonconference opponents to 18.

The Gators (8-4) won their third in a row since dropping back-to-back games to Duke and UConn. Rueben Chinyelu finished with 16 points and 12 rebounds.

Schroder shoots 3 pointer in OT to lift Kings past Rockets

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Dennis Schroder made a 3-pointer with 2.2 seconds remaining in overtime, lifting the Sacramento Kings to a 125-124 victory over the Houston Rockets on Sunday night.

Schroder finished with 24 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists off the bench to help Sacramento rally after trailing by five in the final two minutes of regulation.

DeMar DeRozan had 27 points and nine assists, and Russell Westbrook added 21 points and 13 rebounds to help the Kings end a five-game skid. Keegan Murray scored 26 points while Maxime Raynaud had 12 points and 14 rebounds.

Schroder's game-winner came 8 seconds after Houston's Jabari Smith Jr. made two of three free

throws for a two-point lead.

Sacramento forced overtime after a late surge in the fourth quarter.

After Kevin Durant's two free throws gave the Rockets a 112-107 lead with 2:16 remaining, DeRozan scored on a dunk and Westbrook made a corner 3-pointer to tie it.

There were multiple lead changes in overtime, and Westbrook missed a go-ahead 3-pointer with 30 seconds left to play.

Houston grabbed the rebound and went ahead 124-122 on Smith's free throws before DeRozan drove the lane then dished to Schroder wide open in the left corner.

The Rockets got off to a sluggish start and trailed by 10 less than four minutes into the first quarter before finding their stride in the second quarter. Durant and

Alperen Sengun combined for more than half of their team's points in the second quarter, rallying Houston to a 68-57 lead.

Spurs 124, Wizards 113: De'Aaron Fox scored 27 points and sank five 3-pointers to help visiting San Antonio ease to a victory over Washington.

Bub Carrington scored 21 points for Washington, which rested starters Alex Sarr (adductor) and Khrist Middleton (knee) after they both played in Saturday's 130-122 win at Memphis.

Timberwolves 103, Bucks 100: Anthony Edwards scored 24 points despite a poor night shooting and host Minnesota rode timely 3-pointers from Donte DiVincenzo and Terrence Shannon Jr. to a victory over Milwaukee.

DiVincenzo made 4 of 8 3-point attempts for 18 points, and Rudy Gobert had 11 points and 18 re-

bounds, becoming the 45th NBA player with 10,000 rebounds.

Nets 96, Raptors 81: Michael Porter Jr. scored 24 points, Noah Clowney added 19 and host Brooklyn beat Toronto.

Rookie Egor Demin had 16 points and Nic Claxton finished with 12 for the Nets, who led by 15 points in the third quarter, fell behind early in the fourth and then surged ahead again.

Knicks 132, Heat 125: Jalen Brunson scored a season-high 47 points and host New York overcame Karl-Anthony Towns' quiet night to beat Miami.

While Towns had just two points and six rebounds in 29 minutes, Mikal Bridges scored 24 points on 6-of-7 3-point shooting and Josh Hart added 13 points and 10 rebounds. The Knicks improved to 20-8 overall and 14-2 at home.

Crosby sets Penguins scoring record in win

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — As far as Sidney Crosby is concerned, Mario Lemieux is still No. 1 in his book.

But after Sunday night, Lemieux is now officially No. 2.

Crosby broke Lemieux's franchise scoring record with a goal and an assist in the first period of the Pittsburgh Penguins' 4-3 shootout win against the Montreal Canadiens on Sunday night.

"I don't think you can put a stat line or a number on what he means to this team and to hockey, so yeah, in my mind, he's still No. 1," Crosby said.

Crosby, who began the night one point behind Lemieux, now has 645 goals and 1,079 assists for 1,724 points in 1,387 games. It also moved him past Lemieux for the eighth-most points in NHL history.

Crosby tipped Erik Karlsson's point shot at 7:58 of the first period for a goal to tie the record. He then broke the mark with 7:20 left in the period when his shot on a power play hit

Bryan Rust and Rickard Rakell tapped the rebound behind Jakub Dobes.

Crosby, Rust and Rakell embraced behind the net after the goal and the Penguins spilled over the bench to congratulate their captain. Later in the period, a 30-second video message recorded by Lemieux congratulating Crosby on the accomplishment was played.

"I knew when we played together in 2005 that you were going to be a very special player and accomplish a lot of great things in your career," Lemieux said in the message. "Here we are 20 years later, you're now one of the best to ever play the game."

A hush fell over the arena as fans intently listened to Lemieux's message.

"Seeing the crowd go quiet when Mario's message come on, that was pretty special," Crosby said. "If you don't understand the impact he's had here and you were here tonight, I think you understand it a little bit better given how quiet it got."

Lemieux, the Hall of Famer, who also owned the franchise following his second retirement, became Pittsburgh's all-time points leader, surpassing then-assistant coach Rick Kehoe on Jan. 20, 1989, when Crosby was 17 months old. Lemieux, who was in the Penguins' lineup when Crosby recorded his first NHL point, finished his career with 1,723 points in 915 games.

"I have so much appreciation for having the opportunity to play with him, live with him and learn from him," said Crosby, who also lived with Lemieux and his family early on in his career. "You grow up watching him, you never expect you're going to make it to the NHL let alone play with him. He was a big part of helping me out and a huge influence on me."

Crosby is now third on the NHL's all-time points list with a single franchise, behind only Steve Yzerman (1,755) and Gordie Howe (1,809), both with Detroit.

The biggest number Sunday was Lemieux's franchise scoring record.

"Having an opportunity to play on the same line and connect on a few goals ... those are things that I'll always remember," Crosby said. "The impact he's had on me, this team and hockey in general is pretty amazing."

Rakell had a goal and an assist in regulation and Noel Acciari also scored for Pittsburgh. Arturs Silovs had 23 saves for his first win since Nov. 6 against Washington.

Oliver Kapanen, Ivan Demidov and Noah Dobson scored for Montreal, which saw a brief two-game win streak end. The Canadiens are 4-1-2 since a 6-1 loss against Tampa Bay on Dec. 9. Dobes had 28 saves.

Kevin Hayes also scored for the Penguins in the shootout and Cole Caulfield tallied for Montreal. After Rakell gave Pittsburgh the lead in the third round, Silovs denied Nick Suzuki on the Canadiens' last attempt.

Keller scores quick in OT to give Mammoth win vs. Jets

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Clayton Keller scored 13 seconds into overtime and the Utah Mammoth beat the Winnipeg Jets 4-3 on Sunday.

Lawson Crouse, JJ Peterka and Alexander Kerfoot also scored for Utah, and Karel Vejmelka stopped 22 shots. The Mammoth won for the second time in three games.

Kyle Connor had two goals and Morgan Barron also scored for Winnipeg, which lost its fourth straight (0-2-2) and has just three wins in its last 16 games (3-10-3). Connor Hellebuyck had 18 saves.

Avalanche 5, Wild 1: Nathan MacKinnon scored twice, Cale Makar and Brock Nelson each had a goal and two assists, and visiting Colorado beat Minnesota.

Martin Necas also scored and Gabriel Landeskog had two assists for the Avalanche, winners of five straight. Mackenzie Blackwood made 28 saves.

Oilers 4, Golden Knights 3: Connor

McDavid opened the scoring midway through the first period and set up Ryan Nugent-Hopkins' two power-play goals in host Edmonton's victory over Vegas.

Connor Ingram stopped 26 shots in his Oilers debut and first NHL game of the season. Ingram played for Utah last season before entering the NHL/NHLPA Players Assistance Program in March. He has been with Edmonton's AHL affiliate in Bakersfield, where he was 4-5-2 with a 4.04 GAA and .856 save percentage.

Red Wings 3, Capitals 2 (OT): Moritz Seider scored at 4:36 of overtime and host Detroit beat Washington to sweep a home-and-home series.

John Leonard and Lucas Raymond also scored for the Red Wings, and Cam Talbot made 31 saves.

Senators 6, Bruins 2: Fabian Zetterlund scored two goals, Tim Stutzle and Dylan Cozens scored 19 seconds apart in the second period and visiting Ottawa beat Boston for

its fourth straight victory.

Drake Batherson and Claude Giroux each had a goal in the first when the Senators opened a quick 3-0 edge. Batherson and Cozens each had two assists and former Bruins goalie Linus Ullmark made 17 saves.

Sabres 3, Devils 1: Josh Norris and Zach Benson scored in the second period and visiting Buffalo beat New Jersey for its sixth straight victory.

Peyton Krebs also scored and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 17 saves to help the Sabres get their eighth win in 11 games.

Predators 2, Rangers 1: Filip Forsberg and Steven Stamkos scored, Justus Annunen made 16 saves and host Nashville beat New York.

Stars 5, Maple Leafs 1: Jason Robertson scored his first goal in 10 career games against Toronto, the last team he had not scored against, and Jake Oettinger made 27 saves for his 16th win as host Dallas beat the Maple Leafs.