

House probes secret TOPGUN study

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A powerful congressional committee is probing a secret Navy program studying potential traumatic brain injuries suffered by the service's aviators, which may have led to the recent suicides of at least three Super Hornet pilots.

On Thursday, Rep. James Comer, chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, sent a letter to acting Secretary of the Navy Terence Emmert requesting information and documents related to Project Odin's Eye, an internal service review of traumatic brain injuries potentially sustained by pilots with the Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor program, popularly known as TOPGUN.

The secret project, "initiated without formal approval from Navy Medical and Air Commands, raises additional ques-

tions about the Navy's knowledge of potential issues and whether it is acting to mitigate these issues in a comprehensive and effective manner," said Comer, a Republican from Kentucky.

Comer noted that while the service's efforts to better understand the impacts of high-speed flight on the human brain are understandable, "it is concerning that Navy command may not be fully aware of (the program's) existence."

He also informed the Navy that the committee was investigating the service's efforts "to mitigate possible physiological and psychological effects inflicted on certain naval aviators and flight officers."

The letter was first reported by *The New York Times*.

At issue is the impact on the brain of catapults and arresting gear typically used on aircraft carriers to rapidly accelerate or

decelerate aircraft.

Catapults help F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jets go from zero to at least 190 mph in seconds as they launch from the runway of an aircraft carrier. Arresting gear brings an aircraft traveling at about 150 mph to a complete stop within 320 feet, also within seconds.

Other fixed-wing aircraft that take off from or land on Navy carriers include the E-2 Hawkeye, EA-18G Growler, F-35C Lightning II and C-2 Greyhound.

It's not clear how the gravitational forces experienced in repeated launches and landings affect the brain. The impact of G-force also is experienced by Navy aviators during missions and in combat.

The Navy has publicly denied the risk of TBI for pilots. But some aviators have reported sudden and unexplained mental health problems, including in-

somnia, anxiety, depression and PTSD-like symptoms, all of which can be a result of repeated subconcussive brain injuries, according to the *Times* report.

Three former Super Hornet pilots, all in their 40s, died by suicide within months of one another in 2023 and 2024. Their families said the pilots had symptoms consistent with brain injuries, the newspaper reported separately in December.

Project Odin's Eye was created in 2024 to look for brain injuries in Navy SEALs and expanded in November to include TOPGUN aviators, the newspaper said.

In the letter, Comer requests that the Navy schedule a briefing with committee staff no later than Thursday to better understand the extent the service has evaluated and addressed physiological and psychological injuries for naval aviators and flight officers.

Democrats warn federal job cuts threaten US security

By SVETLANA
SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Top Democrats overseeing national security policy are raising alarm that President Donald Trump's actions against federal employees are threatening and politicizing thousands of nonpartisan jobs in the Pentagon and intelligence community.

The lawmakers are asking that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Acting Director of National Intelligence Lora Shiao take "immediate steps" to insulate their employees from White House directives that

they say will erode the federal government's merit-based civil service system.

The directives include a federal hiring freeze and a deferred resignation offer, which was temporarily blocked by a federal judge last week. Lawmakers said the efforts appear intended to "politicize and demoralize" the federal workforce.

"The manner in which your departments and agencies have implemented these directives constitute a generational risk to the Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community," the lawmakers wrote in a letter to Hegseth and Shiao.

The letter was signed by Sens. Chris Coons of Delaware, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense; Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee; and Mark Warner of Virginia, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee; and Rep. Betty McCollum of Minnesota, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense.

The lawmakers said Trump's push to cut down the federal workforce will result in a mass exodus of highly skilled workers and create a brain drain that

would make the U.S. vulnerable to foreign threats.

More than one-third of the federal workforce is made up of national security personnel, including civilians who acquire military hardware for troops, provide medical care at military treatment facilities, maintain equipment at shipyards and depots and provide analysis and warning on threats to the U.S.

Civilians also constitute more than 80% of the Defense Department's financial management and audit staff. The department also employs an estimated 46,000 military spouses, according to the letter.

DODEA creates 'do not use' list about 8 topics

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

Elementary school reading assignments on immigration to America, Black History Month social studies material and chapters on sexuality and gender for high schoolers have been marked for now as “do not use” resources by the Pentagon’s school system.

The Department of Defense Education Activity memorandum names eight specific materials that are not to be used in classes pending a review in response to executive orders from

President Donald Trump. More lessons may be sidelined on further examination, according to school officials.

The directive, issued Wednesday, was addressed to DODEA administrators, educators and other school leaders. It came out as the school system also announced it was ending several cultural observances and reviewing clubs and extracurricular activities.

The two-page document states that DODEA is “conducting an operational compliance review to ensure alignment

with” the recent executive orders titled “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government” and “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling.”

DODEA schools last week began taking action to comply with the executive orders. Educators, students and parents told Stars and Stripes about books being removed from library shelves, student organizations such as the Pride club and Women in STEM being disbanded and instructions to remove bul-

letin boards with materials that could be flagged as violations.

Teachers must also review their classroom books, including personal collections, the instruction said. The schools have been given a compliance date of Feb. 18, according to the email.

A Trump executive order defines “discriminatory equity ideology” as “ideology that treats individuals as members of preferred or disfavored groups, rather than as individuals, and minimizes agency, merit and capability in favor of immoral generalizations.”

Sailors carve stealth fighter at snow festival

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Navy sailors carved a replica of an F-35C Lightning II for the 75th annual Sapporo Snow Festival on Japan’s northernmost main island.

The C-model is the Navy’s carrier-capable variant and the fifth-generation fighter. Strike Fighter Squadron 147, the Argonauts, arrived last year at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, near Hiroshima, as part of Carrier Air Wing 5.

The eight-member sculpting team included sailors from Navy Air Facility Misawa, just across the Tsugaru Strait from Hokkaido, and from Yokosuka Naval Base, south of Tokyo.

“Everybody who stopped by the sculpture has been really enthusiastic,” lead designer and sculptor Petty Officer 1st Class Caroline Lui, of Arcadia, Calif., said. “They’ve been pointing their fingers at the sculpture and be like ‘sugoi’ and, like, some of them even know what it

is without reading the sign.”

In Japanese, “sugoi” can mean “amazing” or “excellent.”

Festival visitors are invited to wear the yellow coat and headgear of carrier “shooters” — the sailors who signal fighter pilots before catapult launches — for photos with the sculpture, said Lt. Cmdr. Seth Koenig, spokesman for Task Force 70.

The team used a miniature clay model of an F-35C as a reference while sculpting over five days, contending with accumu-

lating snow and warming temperatures, Lui said.

This marks the 40th year the Navy has participated in the world-renowned festival. Last year’s team sculpted the USS Gerald R. Ford, the first of its class and the world’s largest aircraft carrier.

The Sapporo Snow Festival began in 1950 and attracts sculptors from around the world. The works will be on display until the festival ends Tuesday.

USS Truman, USS Dunham, their sailors arrive in Greece

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A Navy carrier strike group that has battled Iranian-backed Houthi militants for months has left the Middle East and arrived in the Mediterranean Sea.

The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, along with embarked Carrier Air Wing 1 and the destroyer USS Jason Dunham, arrived at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek

island of Crete on Thursday.

The group’s visit follows nearly two months of combat operations in the Middle East, the Truman Carrier Strike Group said in a statement the same day.

The “working port visit” allows for maintenance activities while offering sailors a chance to take a break, the Navy said. It wasn’t clear Friday whether the ships will return to the Middle East.

The destroyer USS Stout and the cruiser USS Gettysburg, both part of the strike group, remained in the Red Sea. The destroyer USS The Sullivans was also in the Mediterranean Sea, USNI News reported Thursday.

The Navy has kept a near-constant carrier strike group presence in the Middle East since November 2023 in the aftermath of Hamas’ deadly attack Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Houthi militants began their

campaign against ships in the Red Sea weeks afterward.

The aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower spent nearly seven months in and around the Red Sea defending against Houthi attacks, returning to the United States in July after a historic nine-month deployment.

The stop in Crete marks the third port visit for the group since leaving the U.S. in September.

Small-plane crash kills 10 in Alaska

Associated Press

JUNEAU, Alaska — The remains of all 10 people killed when their small plane crashed into ice on the Bering Sea have been recovered, authorities said.

The Nome Volunteer Fire Department made the announcement on its Facebook page Saturday afternoon. Recovery crews had been racing to recover the bodies before a winter storm was expected to hit the region.

“All ten individuals aboard the Bering Air plane have been officially brought home,” the fire department wrote in the social media post at about 3 p.m.

Crews were still working on recovering the aircraft, the fire department said.

The Bering Air single-engine turboprop plane was traveling

from Unalakleet to the hub community of Nome when it disappeared Thursday afternoon. It was found the next day after an extensive search with all nine passengers and the pilot dead, making it one of the deadliest plane crashes in the state in 25 years.

The aircraft is on an ice floe that is drifting about 5 miles a day, creating difficult conditions for recovery crews, said National Transportation Safety Board chair Jennifer Homendy during a press conference Saturday afternoon.

“Please know that we’ll work diligently to determine how this happened with the ultimate goal of improving safety in Alaska and across the United States,” said Homendy.

As the community tried to process the deadly event, crews worked swiftly on unstable, slushy sea ice to recover the bodies and the wreckage. The National Weather Service issued a winter weather advisory, with snow and winds up to 45 mph expected to hit the region Saturday night, lasting into Sunday evening.

Among those killed in the crash were Rhone Baumgartner and Kameron Hartvigson. They had traveled to Unalakleet to service a heat recovery system vital to the community’s water plant, according to the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

The pilot, 34-year-old Chad Antill of Nome, was also killed. The other victims ranged in age from 30 to 58 years old.

The flight was a regularly scheduled commuter trip, according to Lt. Ben Endres of the Alaska State Troopers.

A photo provided by the Coast Guard showed the plane’s splintered body and debris lying on the sea ice. Two people in brightly colored emergency gear circled the wreckage.

The Cessna Caravan left Unalakleet at 2:37 p.m. Thursday, and officials lost contact with it less than an hour later, according to David Olson, director of operations for Bering Air. There was light snow and fog, with a temperature of 17 degrees Fahrenheit, according to the National Weather Service.

The Coast Guard said the aircraft went missing about 30 miles southeast of Nome.

Overall spending bill talks bog down on Capitol Hill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Before President Donald Trump and Republicans in Congress can enact much of their legislative agenda, they have to deal with some unfinished business — completing work on the current budget year’s spending bills. It’s a task that by all accounts is not going well.

The current stopgap measure lasts through March 14. After that, without congressional action, there would be a partial government shutdown.

Five weeks is an eternity when it comes to resolving spending bills in Washington. But Trump’s first weeks in office have escalated tensions between the two parties as the new administration reshapes agency priorities and dismantles existing programs without congressional approval.

Republican and Democratic leaders of the two appropriations committees in Congress were holding spending bill talks in late January; aides said the two sides

were committed to getting a deal done. But optimism has faded in recent days.

“Obviously, the Democrats are not in a good place right now, so they walked away from talks. But it’ll have to resume,” House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., said Thursday.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., gave a similar assessment, contending that comments by House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York and some of his colleagues made it seem as though they are “trying to set up some sort of government shutdown, which I think is very unfortunate.”

Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, lead Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, said “that is false” in response to the assertion that Democrats have withdrawn from negotiations.

“The Democrats have made their offer. We have not walked away from the table,” DeLauro said.

Trump cuts effort to fight US election interference

The Washington Post

The Trump administration last week eliminated much of the federal government’s front line of defense against foreign interference in U.S. elections.

The move, which follows years of Donald Trump and his allies disputing the role that Russian influence campaigns played in his first successful bid for president, alarmed state election officials and election security experts, who warned that safeguarding Americans from foreign disinformation campaigns will be difficult if no one at the federal level is doing that work.

On Wednesday, Attorney General Pam Bondi dissolved an FBI task force formed in response to Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections that worked to uncover covert efforts by China, Iran and other foreign adversaries to manipulate U.S. voters. Separately, the Department of Homeland Security sent a letter Wednesday placing at least

seven federal employees who work on teams combating foreign disinformation within the election security arm of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, or CISA, on administrative leave, according to a recipient who shared a copy of the letter with The Washington Post.

“This is an invitation for more foreign interference,” said Lawrence Norden, vice president of the Elections and Government Program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University.

Bondi announced the shuttering of the FBI’s Foreign Influence Task Force in a policy memo outlining a shift in Justice Department priorities that said the team was being shut down “to free resources to address more pressing priorities, and end risks of further weaponization and abuses of prosecutorial discretion.”

The White House and CISA didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Israeli forces withdraw from key Gaza corridor in ceasefire

Associated Press

MUGHRAQA, Gaza Strip — Israeli forces withdrew from a key corridor in Gaza on Sunday, Israeli officials and Hamas said, the latest commitment under a tenuous ceasefire that faces a major test over whether the sides can negotiate its planned extension.

Israelis' shock at the sight of three emaciated hostages released Saturday has added pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to extend the truce instead of returning to fighting when the ceasefire's first phase ends three weeks from now, in early March.

Israel and Hamas appear to have made little progress on negotiating the deal's second phase, which is also meant to see more hostages released. Talks had been due to start on Feb. 3.

Netanyahu was sending a delegation to Qatar, a key mediator, but it included low-level officials, sparking speculation that it won't lead to a breakthrough. Netanyahu, who returned to Israel on Sunday after a U.S. visit to meet with President Donald Trump, is expected to convene security Cabinet ministers on Tuesday.

The 4-mile Netzarim corridor separating northern and southern Gaza had been used by Israel as a military zone during the 16-month war, but no troops were seen in the vicinity Sunday. As the ceasefire began last month, Israel began allowing hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians to cross Netzarim and return to the north.

Separately on Sunday, the Palestinian Health Ministry said two women, one of them

eight months pregnant, were killed by Israeli gunfire in the occupied West Bank, where Israeli troops have been carrying out an operation.

The ceasefire that began Jan. 19 has held, raising hopes that the war that led to seismic shifts in the Middle East may be headed toward an end.

But it remains fragile. On Sunday, civil defense first responders in Gaza said three people were killed by Israeli fire east of Gaza City. Israel's military noted "several hits" after warning shots were fired and again warned Palestinians from approaching its forces.

Israel has said it won't agree to a complete withdrawal from Gaza until Hamas' military and political capabilities are eliminated. Hamas has said it won't hand over the last hostages until Israel removes all troops from the territory.

Caribbean hit by major earthquake

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY — A magnitude-7.6 earthquake shook the Caribbean Sea south of the Cayman Islands on Saturday, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. Several islands and countries urged people near the coastline to move inland, but authorities in most places later lifted the tsunami alerts.

The quake struck at 6:23 p.m. local time in the middle of the sea and had a depth of about 6.2 miles, the USGS said. Its epicenter was located 130 miles south-southwest of George Town in the Cayman Islands.

The U.S. National Tsunami Warning Center said there was no tsunami alert for the U.S. mainland but issued a tsunami advisory for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which was later canceled.

Hazard Management Cayman Islands urged residents near the coast to move inland and to higher ground, warning that wave heights of about 1 to 3.3 feet were expected.

The Cayman Islands government later issued an "all clear" on its Facebook site.

The sounding of alarms in Puerto Rico's northwest region had caused people to leave coastal areas and caused heavy traffic, according to local media.

The Dominican government also issued a tsunami alert and recommended residents on the coast move to high areas "of more than 20 meters (65.6 feet) of altitude and 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) inland." But it later canceled the alert.

Honduran authorities said there are no immediate reports of damages, but urged its residents to stay away from beaches.

The U.S. government's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said "tsunami waves reaching 1 to 3 meters (3.3 to 9.8 feet) above the tide level are possible along some coasts of Cuba."

3 Baltic states leave Soviet-era grid, merge with European energy system

Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania — The flow of electricity between the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and Russia was officially severed Saturday morning after officials switched off the Soviet-era grid's transmission lines and prepared to join the rest of Europe on Sunday.

This came more than three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ending the Baltics' final ties to oil- and gas-rich Russia.

For the three countries, as well as the rest of Europe, the move was steeped in geopolitical and symbolic significance.

"The Baltic energy system is finally in our hands, we are

in full control," Lithuania Energy minister Zygimantas Vaiciunas told reporters.

On Saturday, all remaining transmission lines between them and Russia, Belarus and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad, wedged between EU members Poland and Lithuania and the sea, were switched off one by one. Lithuania first — where a specially-made 29-foot tall clock in downtown Vilnius counted down the final seconds — then Latvia a few minutes later, followed by Estonia.

For 24 hours after detaching from the Soviet-era grid, the Baltic Power System will operate independently.

If all goes as planned, the

power system will merge with the European energy networks through several links with Finland, Sweden and Poland.

The Baltic countries, which are all NATO members, have often had chilly ties with Russia since declaring independence from the USSR in 1990 — and relations soured further following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Sixteen power lines that used to connect the Baltic states with Russia and Belarus were dismantled over in recent years as a new grid linking them with the rest of the EU was created, including underwater cables in the Baltic Sea.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Chicago sued in latest 'sanctuary' crackdown

IL CHICAGO — The Trump administration sued Chicago on Thursday alleging that "sanctuary" laws in the nation's third-largest city "thwart" federal efforts to enforce immigration laws.

The lawsuit, which also names the state of Illinois, is the latest effort to crack down on places that limit cooperation between federal immigration agents and local police. It follows the federal government's threats of criminal charges and funding cuts to what are known as sanctuary cities.

President Donald Trump has often singled out Chicago and Illinois because they have some of the nation's strongest protections for immigrants. Top administration officials last month visited the city to launch stepped up immigration enforcement.

Hours after new Attorney General Pam Bondi was sworn in Wednesday, she ordered an end to Department of Justice grants for jurisdictions that "unlawfully interfere with federal law enforcement."

NH man is 2nd person living with pig kidney

MA BOSTON — A New Hampshire man fought for the chance at a pig kidney transplant, spending months getting into good enough shape to be part of a small pilot study of a highly experimental treatment.

His effort paid off: Tim Andrews, 66, is only the second person known to be living with a pig kidney. Andrews is free from dialysis, Massachusetts General Hospital announced Friday, and recovering so well from the Jan.

25 transplant that he left the hospital a week later.

"When I woke up in the recovery room, I was a new man," Andrews said.

Andrews' surgery comes at a turning point in the quest to tell if animal-to-human transplants could help ease the shortage of donated human organs. The first four pig organ transplants — two hearts and two kidneys — were short-lived. But the fifth xenotransplant recipient, an Alabama woman not nearly as sick as prior patients, boosted the field — thriving for now 2½ months after a pig kidney transplant at NYU Langone Health in November.

Utility: Equipment may have started small blaze

CA LOS ANGELES — A California utility said Thursday that its equipment may have sparked a small wildfire in Los Angeles that broke out the same day as two massive blazes in the area which killed at least 29 people and destroyed thousands of homes.

Southern California Edison said the Los Angeles Fire Department is investigating the cause of the Hurst Fire and believes the utility's equipment caused the blaze, which did not destroy any structures or cause any deaths. In a required filing with state utility regulators, SCE said "absent additional evidence, SCE believes its equipment may be associated with ignition of the Hurst Fire."

In a second filing, the utility said it is looking into whether an idle transmission line became energized and possibly sparked the deadly Eaton Fire, which also sparked Jan. 7 and devastated Altadena. But it still maintains there's no evidence that its equip-

ment was responsible for starting that blaze.

3 people rush defendant during homicide hearing

NM ALBUQUERQUE — A hearing in a New Mexico courtroom devolved into chaos when three people rushed the defendant in a homicide case, setting off a brawl with flying fists and kicks.

Courtroom video cameras recorded the Jan. 31 melee, which subsided as a law enforcement officer drew a stun gun and protected the defendant from further attack.

Felony charges were filed against two men: battery and assault on a public official. They apparently rushed the defendant in a fit of rage over the killing of a relative.

A woman was also arrested on the same charges, Albuquerque TV station KRQE reported Thursday. The courtroom video showed her hitting the defendant and an officer with a chair.

Jury finds Tampa dog park shooter not guilty

FL TAMPA — The man accused of murder in the shooting death of a gay man at a Tampa dog park last year was acquitted Thursday.

After deliberating for about 2½ hours, a six-person jury found that Gerald Declan Radford did not commit second-degree murder when he shot John Walter Lay at the West Dog Park last year.

Prosecutors had also sought a hate crime enhancement, arguing Radford was motivated to shoot Lay because he was gay.

Prosecutors argued that Rad-

ford shot Lay during a fight without the legal justification to use deadly force and was motivated by the fact that Lay was gay. They had to build a case without any eyewitnesses or video surveillance of what unfolded on Feb. 2, 2024.

Much of the case and Radford's defense strategy focused on what happened in the years, months and hours before the shooting, building up tension between the two men which exploded that morning.

Bird markets closed after avian flu detected

NY NEW YORK — New York on Friday ordered a weeklong shutdown of all live bird markets in New York City, Westchester and Long Island after seven cases of avian flu were detected at bird markets in the city.

Gov. Kathy Hochul said there is no immediate threat to public health and that the temporary closure of bird markets comes out of an abundance of caution. No cases of avian flu have been detected among humans in New York, officials said.

The order came after seven cases of bird flu were found in poultry during routine inspections of live bird markets in the New York City boroughs of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said the virus poses low risk to the general public. The agency said there have been 67 confirmed cases of bird flu in humans in the United States, with illnesses mild and mostly detected among farmworkers who were exposed to sick poultry or dairy cows.

—From wire reports

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Florida stops Auburn's 14-game win streak

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Sixth-ranked Florida made program history with its victory over No. 1 Auburn on Saturday.

It wasn't the Gators' 90-81 win over the Tigers that'll find its way into the program's record books. Florida had already taken down a top-ranked team this season, beating then-No. 1 Tennessee 73-43 on Jan. 7.

Saturday's win marked the first time the Gators have beaten a No. 1 team in a true road game. It was also the first home loss and the first SEC loss of the season for Auburn (21-2, 9-1 Southeastern Conference), which had won 14 consecutive games.

"This is probably the toughest place to play in America right now, against the best team in America, and we showed out for

40 minutes," Florida head coach Todd Golden said. "I thought we were the mentally and physically tougher team."

The Gators (20-3, 7-3) notched the win without No. 2 scorer Alijah Martin, who was ruled out with a hip injury.

Instead, Florida leaned heavily on leading scorer Walter Clayton Jr., who played the entire game. After missing the Gators' win at Vanderbilt this week with an ankle injury, Clayton finished with 19 points and nine assists.

"I looked over at him and said I was going to run him for all 40 minutes," Golden said.

Clayton's response? "No problem."

The Tigers raced out to a 10-point lead in the first six minutes of the game. Florida then dominated the rest of the first half,

outscored Auburn 43-23. The Gators then scored 20 of the first 29 points of the second half.

"I mean, they just came in here like they had to win it," Tigers head coach Bruce Pearl said of Florida. "That's how they played their possessions. And they played harder. They played better. They played more desperately."

"We did not look like the No. 1 team in the country. We didn't act like the No. 1 team in the country. We didn't prepare like it. And, as a result, we got beat."

Entering Saturday, Auburn hadn't allowed more than 70 points in a home game this season. The Gators got to that mark with 12:31 left on the clock.

"It's definitely tough to get a win on the road in the SEC in general, especially against a No. 1

team," Clayton said. "Auburn, they're a great team. They do a lot of things well. But we prepared well, and we came out, and we executed."

Florida was able to hold up well against the Tigers' frontcourt, which was led by Johni Broome, a fifth-year senior and preseason Associated Press All-American who is considered a contender for national player of the year. While Broome finished with 18 points, 11 rebounds and six assists, he missed 11 of 19 shot attempts.

Golden praised his team for consistently defending Broome's dominant left hand on his inside touches. Alex Condon had 17 points and 10 rebounds for the Gators up front, while Thomas Haugh added 16 points, nine rebounds and three blocks off the bench.

Clemson keeps Flagg in check, hands Duke 1st ACC loss

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — Viktor Lakhin scored 22 points, Clemson held player of the year candidate Cooper Flagg in check for most of the game and the Tigers defeated No. 2 Duke 77-71 on Saturday night to snap the Blue Devils' 16-game winning streak.

Chase Hunter scored 14 points and Ian Schieffelin added 12 points and 10 rebounds for Clemson (19-5, 11-2 ACC). The Tigers ended Duke's chances of an unbeaten regular season in the Atlantic Coast Conference and denied the Blue Devils (20-3, 12-1) an opportunity to take over the top ranking in the country for the first time in the coach Jon Scheyer era.

Tyrese Proctor had 23 points and Flagg had 18 points on 6-for-17 shooting for Duke (20-3, 12-1).

No. 3 Alabama 85, Arkansas 81: Grant Nelson and Chris Youngblood each scored 15 points and the visiting Crimson Tide held off a late run to deal the Razorbacks' NCAA Tournament hopes a serious blow.

No. 4 Tennessee 70, Oklahoma 52: Chaz Lanier scored 21 points and Zakai Zeigler added 17 as the visiting Volunteers beat the Sooners in the teams' first meeting in 56 years.

No. 5 Houston 69, Colorado 59: J'Wan Roberts scored 20 points, Terrance Arce-

neaux added 13 of his 15 points in the second half and the visiting Cougars handed the Buffaloes their 12th straight loss.

No. 8 Iowa State 82, TCU 52: Curtis Jones scored 24 points and Milan Momcilovic returned from injury to add 14 as the host Cyclones ended a three-game losing streak with a win over the Horned Frogs.

No. 9 Michigan State 86, Oregon 74: Jase Richardson scored 18 of his career-high 29 points in the second half, lifting the host Spartans to a comeback win over the Ducks that gave coach Tom Izzo 353 Big Ten wins to tie Bob Knight's record.

No. 10 Texas A&M 67, No. 15 Missouri 64: Wade Taylor IV made a 3-pointer with 2.1 seconds remaining to lift the visiting Aggies over the Tigers.

Creighton 77, No. 11 Marquette 67: Steven Ashworth scored 22 points and made a season-high six 3-pointers, including one in the last minute to help the host Bluejays put away the Golden Eagles.

No. 20 Arizona 82, No. 13 Texas Tech 73: Jaden Bradley and Caleb Love each scored 16 points and the host Wildcats avenged their only Big 12 loss with a victory over the Red Raiders.

No. 14 Kentucky 80, South Carolina 57: Otega Oweh scored 15 of his 17 points

in the second half and the host Wildcats snapped a two-game skid with a win over the Gamecocks.

Kansas State 81, No. 16 Kansas 73: David N'Guessan scored 20 points and the host Wildcats upset the Jayhawks for their fifth straight win, including three against ranked opponents.

No. 21 Wisconsin 74, Iowa 63: John Tonje scored 22 points and John Blackwell added 19 to lead the visiting Badgers to a victory over the Hawkeyes.

No. 22 Mississippi State 76, Georgia 75: Josh Hubbard scored 16 points and visiting Mississippi State held off Georgia to end a two-game losing streak.

No. 23 Illinois 95, Minnesota 74: Will Riley had 27 points, nine rebounds and seven assists off the bench and Kasparas Jakucionis had 24 points to help the visiting Illini get back on track with a victory over the Gophers.

No. 24 Michigan 70, Indiana 67: Danny Wolf had 20 points and nine rebounds, and Tre Donaldson and Vladislav Goldin each had 18 points to help the visiting Wolverines hold off the Hoosiers.

No. 25 Mississippi 72, LSU 70: Dre Davis tipped in Sean Pedulla's missed lay-up with 0.1 seconds left to cap the visiting Rebels' comeback victory over the Tigers.

Davis leads Mavericks to win in debut

Associated Press

DALLAS — Anthony Davis had 26 points, 16 rebounds, seven assists and three blocks in his Mavericks debut, but left the game late in the third quarter with a lower-body injury as Dallas beat the Houston Rockets 116-105 on Saturday.

Max Christie, who was acquired with Davis from the Lakers a week ago in the trade that sent superstar Luka Doncic to LA, added 23 points for the Mavericks after playing twice for Dallas on the road this week.

Davis, who had not played since Jan. 28 because of an abdominal strain, assisted on the Mavs' first field goal four seconds in, scored six of Dallas' first 14 points and had a double-double before halftime. He played 31 minutes before being listed as doubtful to return and not playing again in his first home game for the Mavericks since the trade.

"Leg got tight, like a little spasm," Davis said. "Came back and tried to get it loose and everything, obviously dealing with the ab, strained still. It wouldn't loosen up and let go. But it's nothing serious."

Alperen Sengun scored 30 points and Jalen Green 24 for Houston, which has a season-long six-game losing streak. Sengun scored 15 in the third

quarter, when the Rockets opened on a 21-4 run and cut a 21-point second-quarter deficit to two.

Warriors 132, Bulls 111: Stephen Curry scored 34 points and tied a season high with eight 3-pointers, and Jimmy Butler added 25 points in his Golden State debut as the Warriors rallied at Chicago.

Curry scored 24 of his points and made five 3s in the third quarter as Golden State went from trailing by 24 to leading by three.

Butler, who played his first six seasons with the Bulls, made a big impact in his first game since a trade-deadline deal from Miami following a messy split with the Heat.

Lakers 124, Pacers 117: Austin Reaves scored a career-high 45 points and streaking Los Angeles beat visiting Indiana without LeBron James or Luka Doncic.

James sat with left ankle soreness, while Doncic watched his third straight game from LA's bench as he nears a return from the strained left calf that has sidelined him since Christmas.

Hawks 125, Wizards 111: Trae Young scored 35 points and had 14 assists to help visiting Atlanta to a victory over Washington.

Bub Carrington scored a career-high 23 points for the Wizards.

Magic 112, Spurs 111: Paolo Banchero's 15-foot shot put host Orlando ahead with 24.7 seconds left in a game it played mostly from behind, and Victor Wembanyama missed a mid-range jumper in the final seconds as the Magic held on for a victory over San Antonio.

Franz Wagner had 33 points and 12 rebounds, and Anthony Black scored 20 points off Orlando's bench. Banchero finished with 17 points, seven rebounds and six assists.

Thunder 125, Grizzlies 112: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 32 points and Aaron Wiggins added 26 and 11 rebounds as visiting Oklahoma City beat Memphis in a showdown of the top two teams in the Western Conference.

The Thunder dominated the Grizzlies on the boards, outrebounding them 55-40.

Timberwolves 114, Trail Blazers 98: Jaden McDaniels had 30 points, 10 rebounds and four assists, Naz Reid scored 11 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter and short-handed Minnesota overcame a 15-point deficit to beat visiting Portland.

Minnesota played without All-Star guard Anthony Edwards for the second time this season after he was held out as a precaution because of soreness in his right hip. Minnesota was also missing Mike Conley (sprained right index), Julius Randle (strained right groin) and Donte DiVincenzo (sprained left big toe).

Celtics 131, Knicks 104: Jayson Tatum scored 40 points and visiting Boston easily handled New York for the second time this season.

Payton Pritchard added 25 off the bench for the Celtics, who rebounded from their loss to Dallas on Thursday in an NBA Finals rematch to win for the fifth time in six games.

Nuggets 122, Suns 105: Nikola Jokic had 28 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists to just miss a triple-double before sitting out the fourth quarter and visiting Denver won its season-best sixth straight game, beating Phoenix.

Kings 123, Pelicans 118: Domantas Sabonis had 27 points and 16 rebounds for his NBA-leading 46th double-double of the season as host Sacramento overcame a 20-point deficit and extended New Orleans' losing streak to eight.

Clippers 130, Jazz 110: Norman Powell and Ivica Zubac scored 26 points apiece, James Harden added 23 and host Los Angeles beat Utah to snap a three-game losing streak.

Source: Lakers' trade for Hornets' Williams rescinded

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Lakers rescinded their trade to acquire Mark Williams from the Hornets because the center failed his physical, a person with knowledge of the circumstances told The Associated Press on Saturday night.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the Lakers didn't plan to make a public announcement of their reason for scrapping the deal.

Los Angeles agreed to trade rookie Dalton Knecht and Cam Reddish along with draft considerations Wednesday night to get the 23-year-old Williams, a third-year pro and a former first-round draft pick. The Lakers need a quality big man to replace Anthony Davis, who was traded to Dallas along with Max Christie for superstar Luka Doncic.

Charlotte was also supposed to receive LA's first-round pick

in 2031 and a first-round pick swap in 2030.

Instead, the Lakers took the drastic step of nixing the trade after learning more about Williams, who has a lengthy injury history. He has played in just 84 of a possible 212 NBA games over his three seasons due to back problems and other ailments.

"We are excited to welcome Mark back to our Hornets organization," Charlotte wrote in a

statement on social media. "After the other team aggressively pursued Mark, we made the difficult decision to move him. We have always held great respect for Mark's talent, work ethic and character. We are thrilled to see him rejoin our roster as a dynamic presence at the starting center position. His return strengthens our team, and we look forward to the impact he will make on and off the court."

Hertl's late goal lifts Golden Knights

Associated Press

BOSTON — Tomas Hertl scored with 70 seconds left — less than a minute after Vegas had a goal waived off for goaltender interference — and the Golden Knights rallied for a 4-3 victory over the Boston Bruins on Saturday.

Mark Stone had a power-play goal for the Golden Knights, and Pavel Dorofeyev and Zach Whitecloud also scored. It was their second straight victory after a four-game skid.

Boston captain Brad Marchand reached the 20-goal mark for his 12th straight season. Nikita Zadorov and Morgan Geekie also scored for the Bruins, and Jeremy Swayman made 34 saves.

Bruins star David Pastrnak extended his point streak to 13 games with an assist.

Boston opened a 3-1 lead on Geekie's 17th goal with 4:53 left in the second period. But Whitecloud scored in the closing seconds of the second, and Dorofeyev beat Swayman with a wrist shot from the right circle 4:45 into the third.

Marchand scored 3:17 into the opening period, banging in a shot from the edge of the crease off a nice feed from Zadorov.

Devils 4, Canadiens 0: Jake Allen made 34 saves and shut out his former team as New Jersey won at Montreal.

Allen, traded from Montreal to New Jersey at last season's deadline, denied Montreal's Owen Beck on a penalty shot with 15 seconds left to secure his fourth shutout of the season in his 20th start.

Jesper Bratt and Jack Hughes each had a goal and an assist, and Paul Cotter and Luke Hughes also scored for New Jersey.

Sam Montembeault stopped 18 shots for Montreal, which lost for the seventh time in eight games.

Hurricanes 7, Utah 3: Seth Jarvis had two goals and two as-

sists as Carolina beat visiting Utah to stop a three-game losing streak.

Sebastian Aho added two goals and an assist for Carolina, which scored a total of three times during its losing streak.

Clayton Keller scored twice and Josh Doan had a goal for Utah, which won its previous two games in overtime.

Lightning 6, Red Wings 3: Brandon Hagel had two goals and two assists as Tampa Bay snapped host Detroit's seven-game winning streak.

Erik Cernak had a goal and two assists for the Lightning. Brayden Point scored his 30th goal of the season and Nikita Kucherov had three assists.

Dylan Duke also scored for Tampa Bay in his NHL debut. Duke, who played for the University of Michigan last season, was called up from Syracuse of the American Hockey League on Friday.

The Red Wings' Vladimir Tarasenko scored his 300th career goal during the first period.

Panthers 5, Senators 1: Matthew Tkachuk scored for a sixth consecutive game and added two assists, sparking a four-goal second period that lifted Florida over visiting Ottawa.

Brady Tkachuk scored for Ottawa, which got 43 saves from Linus Ullmark. It was the third time the Tkachuk brothers — soon to be USA Hockey teammates in the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament — scored goals in the same game.

Rangers 4, Blue Jackets 3: Will Cuyll scored the go-ahead goal with 1:39 left as New York rallied past host Columbus.

Mika Zibanejad had a goal and an assist, Arthur Kaliyev and Urho Vaakanainen also scored — a goal originally credited to Cuyll, who got the assist — and Vincent Trocheck had two assists to help the Rangers win for the third time in four games.

Kent Johnson, Justin Dan-

forth, and James van Riemsdyk scored for Columbus in its fourth straight loss.

Elvis Merzlikins made 36 saves and the Blue Jackets remained one point behind Detroit for the final Eastern Conference wild-card spot.

Flyers 3, Penguins 2: Travis Konecny had a goal and an assist to help Philadelphia snap a five-game losing streak with a win over visiting Pittsburgh.

Scott Laughton and Garnet Hathaway also scored for Philadelphia. Samuel Ersson made 32 saves.

Erik Karlsson and Kevin Hayes scored for Pittsburgh.

Canucks 2, Maple Leafs 1: Brock Boeser broke a tie on a power play at 8:56 of the third period as Vancouver held on to beat visiting Toronto.

Defenseman Filip Hronek had a goal and an assist for Vancouver. The Canucks have won three straight and six of eight.

Morgan Rielly scored for Toronto.

Blues 6, Blackhawks 5 (SO): Radek Faksa scored in the 10th round of the shootout to give St. Louis a victory over visiting Chicago.

The Blackhawks got third-period goals from Alec Martinez, Teuvo Teravainen and Ilya Mikheyev to take a 5-4 lead, but the Blues' Robert Thomas tied it at 5 with less than five minutes in regulation.

Cam Fowler, Philip Broberg, Nathan Walker and Mathieu Joseph also scored for St. Louis and Jordan Binnington saved 15 shots.

Wild 6, Islanders 3: Matt Boldy had two goals and an assist and host Minnesota scored the final five goals to beat New York.

Marco Rossi, Frederick Gaudreau, Yakov Trenin and Marcus Foligno also scored for Minnesota, which has won five of seven. Jared Spurgeon had two assists and Filip Gustavsson made 30 saves.

Kyle Palmieri and Brock Nelson each had a goal and an assist, Anders Lee also scored and Maxim Tsyplakov had two assists for the Islanders, who have lost three of four after winning seven straight. Ilya Sorokin stopped 27 shots.

Predators 6, Sabres 4: Brady Skjei and Filip Forsberg each scored twice as host Nashville snapped a six-game losing streak with a victory over Buffalo.

Alex Tuch had a goal and two assists, Bowen Byram and Rasmus Dahlin both had a goal and an assist and Dylan Cozens also scored for the Sabres, whose season-best four-game winning streak came to an end.

Stars 8, Sharks 3: Matt Duchene scored twice and visiting Dallas routed San Jose after falling behind when the Sharks scored on their first two shots.

Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci returned to San Jose just a week after the Sharks traded them to the Stars. Granlund, had two assists.

Kraken 3, Flames 2 (OT): Matty Beniers scored on a power play at 2:58 of overtime after Seattle overcame a late two-goal deficit in a victory at Calgary.

Nazem Kadri and Morgan Frost scored for Calgary. Dustin Wolf stopped 25 shots.

Ducks 2, Kings 1 (SO): Lukas Dostal made 43 saves, Trevor Zegras and Leo Carlsson scored in the shootout and Anaheim won at Los Angeles for its sixth victory in seven games.

Brian Dumoulin scored his first goal of the season early in the third period for the Ducks, who are rolling into the two-week international break amid their most successful stretch since November 2023.

The 166th Freeway Faceoff began with two dull periods before Dumoulin scored in his 54th game for Anaheim, walking in from the point and beating Rittich.