

Hegseth: Europe security not top priority

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said Wednesday that the United States has ruled out NATO membership for Ukraine as part of any peace deal with Russia and that a return to the country's pre-war borders is an unrealistic objective.

"Chasing this illusionary goal will only prolong the war and cause more suffering," Hegseth told a gathering of allies in Brussels.

The new Pentagon chief, making his first trip to NATO headquarters, said any durable peace for Ukraine must include "robust security guarantees" to ensure that the war will not begin again.

However, U.S. troops will not play a role in any peacekeeping activity in Ukraine, Hegseth said. Instead, European countries and non-European troops should do the job, albeit not under NATO's auspices, he added.

"If these troops are deployed as peacekeepers to Ukraine, at

any point, they should be deployed as part of a non-NATO mission, and they should not be covered under Article Five," Hegseth said, referring to the alliance's provision that an attack on one demands a collective NATO response.

Hegseth's comments came at the start of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which was previously a U.S.-led effort but now is being headed by the United Kingdom.

The group, organized by former Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, was formed in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly three years ago.

Hegseth said the lion's share of the burden when it comes to supporting Ukraine now must shift to Europe.

"Members of this contact group must meet the moment," he said. "This means donating more ammunition and equipment, leveraging comparative advantages, expanding your defense industrial base, and importantly, leveling with your citizens

about the threat facing Europe."

Hegseth reiterated President Donald Trump's demand that member states spend 5% of gross domestic product as the minimum for defense spending, a sharp increase from the current 2% benchmarks.

"We're also here today to directly and unambiguously express that stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe," Hegseth said.

He said U.S. border security and the challenge posed by China in the Pacific are America's priorities.

"Deterrence cannot fail for all of our sakes," Hegseth said. "As the United States prioritizes its attention to these threats, European allies must lead from the front."

While the United States remains committed to the NATO alliance, it will "no longer tolerate an imbalanced relationship" that enables military dependency, he added.

Hegseth's remarks came

ahead of a meeting of NATO defense ministers Thursday, where military spending will be at the top of the agenda. Secretary-General Mark Rutte said allies are working on a plan that will call on member states to exceed the 2% GDP benchmark.

"This requires that many allies, especially in Europe and Canada, invest considerably more," Rutte said.

The NATO chief stopped short of issuing a precise amount, but said the new spending benchmark would be "north of 3%."

Some members have already balked at Trump's call for a benchmark of 5% of GDP. The U.S. spends about 3.4% of its GDP on defense, though in total spending that is still hundreds of billions of dollars more than any other country.

Hegseth deferred when asked during a news conference in Stuttgart on Tuesday whether U.S. defense spending would rise to the 5% level.

"Well, I think the U.S. needs to spend more than the Biden administration," he said.

Executive order vows large cuts to federal workforce

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump signed an executive order Tuesday that requires federal agencies to work with the U.S. DOGE Service to cut their existing workforce and limit future hiring — the most explicit statement yet by the president that he supports "large-scale" cuts to the federal workforce.

The executive order gives billionaire Elon Musk's DOGE, tasked with finding government inefficiencies, even more power than it has amassed in the first three weeks of the new adminis-

tration. The order installs a "DOGE Team Lead" at each agency and gives that person oversight over hiring decisions. DOGE stands for Department of Government Efficiency.

The directive instructs agency heads, after the hiring freeze expires, to recruit no more than one employee for every four who depart from the federal government, with exemptions for personnel and functions "related to public safety, immigration enforcement, or law enforcement." And it orders agency heads to "promptly under-

take preparations to initiate large-scale reductions in force, consistent with applicable law."

Eliminating 25% of federal employees would cut the overall budget by about 1%. Semafor first reported that Trump would sign the executive order.

"We are going to be signing a very important deal today," Trump said from the Oval Office. "It's DOGE." He said that his administration had found "billions and billions of dollars in waste, fraud and abuse."

Beside him was Musk, who said: "If the bureaucracy is in

charge, then what meaning does democracy actually have?"

"It does not match the will of the people, so it's just something we've got to fix," he added.

Neither Trump nor Musk provided specifics about the corruption they found or how they plan to address it.

The Tuesday directive builds on executive orders and corresponding memos aimed at reshaping the bureaucracy made up of 2.3 million civilian employees into a smaller workforce loyal to Trump and his vision.

DOD: Health travel stipend still available

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon announced troops and military families can still receive a travel stipend to seek reproductive health care, such as in vitro fertilization, for the purpose of getting pregnant.

The original policy allowed service members to take up to three weeks of leave and receive a travel stipend to cross state lines to seek reproductive health services, including abortions, in vitro fertilization, sperm collection, ovarian stimulations and egg retrieval.

The policy was revoked in a Jan. 29 memo to bring the Pentagon in line with an executive order signed by President Do-

nald Trump that bars the use of federal taxpayer dollars for abortion services. The policy was effective immediately.

The updated policy from the Defense Travel Management Office announced in a memo dated Feb. 4 states the revocation of the prior policy “should not be interpreted as the elimination of access to non-covered assisted reproductive technology, such as in vitro fertilization.”

If timely assisted reproductive health care for the purpose of conceiving a baby is not available within the local area of a service member’s duty station, the military family can receive money for lodging and meals to travel to the next closest and capable medical facility, accord-

ing to the memo.

The original policy was put in place in March 2023 by then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, which guaranteed a constitutional right to access abortion services. Following the ruling, states were able to establish their own abortion laws. The policy was meant to enable troops assigned to states with strict reproductive health care laws to travel to states with less restrictive laws.

The Pentagon said, from June 2023 to December 2023, the policy was used 12 times to cover leave and travel for reproductive services at a cost of \$40,791.20. For the privacy of the individuals, the Pentagon

did not provide a breakdown of the care each person received, but noted the policy could have been used to travel for abortion services, in vitro fertilization, sperm collection, ovarian stimulations or egg retrieval.

The department on Tuesday was unable to provide an updated count and cost on policy use.

The revised policy is effective immediately and will be in the March 1 edition of the Joint Travel Regulations, which implements policy to establish travel and transportation allowances for service members and Defense Department workers. The Defense Department’s personnel and readiness office initiated the revision, according to the memo.

Students walkout during Hegseth visit

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — More than 50 Patch Middle School students staged a walkout Tuesday to protest recent Pentagon moves that have targeted diversity initiatives at military schools.

In a memo to parents, the school said the protest was related to “recent events,” while stopping short of directly naming the Pentagon’s push to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs and educational material.

The protest coincided with a visit by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to Patch Barracks, who was in Stuttgart for meetings at U.S. Africa Command and U.S. European Command headquarters.

Patch Middle School assistant principal Alexis Small said

the school protest occurred at 1 p.m., with 55 students walking out of class.

The group gathered in the courtyard for about 50 minutes, Small said in the memo to parents Tuesday.

Hegseth has made the removal of diversity initiatives a focal point during the opening weeks of his tenure, canceling official identity events such as Black History Month. Hegseth says that diversity programs divide the military community and that he wants to emphasize unity.

The push also has prompted a review of curriculum at Pentagon K-12 schools.

A DODEA memorandum issued last week names eight specific materials that are not to be used in classes pending a review that could be expanded, according to school officials.

Navy, allies train in the South China Sea

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. warship recently joined its Australian and British counterparts for a two-day exercise in the South China Sea as the U.S. military continues multiple drills across the Indo-Pacific.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold on Feb. 5-6 joined the British offshore patrol vessel HMS Spey and the Australian guided-missile destroyer HMAS Hobart for coordinated maneuvering, tactical data transfers and “a variety of other combined operations,” U.S. 7th Fleet said in a news release Wednesday.

The exercise was at least the fourth for the U.S. military in the Indo-Pacific over the past week, including a major airpower demonstration by stealth fighters on Guam.

Before linking up with the Spey, the Benfold and Hobart trained on Feb. 5 with the Philippine guided-missile frigate BRP Jose Rizal, the Japanese destroyer JS Akizuki and a variety of aircraft near the Philippines, 7th Fleet announced on Feb. 6.

On Saturday, a flotilla of three carriers and eight escort warships from the U.S., France and Japan kicked off Pacific Steller, a 10-day exercise in the East Philippine Sea.

Pacific Steller encompassed “high-level training in all areas of combat,” the French Embassy in Washington, D.C., said Friday in a news release.

Farther east, the U.S., Australian and Japanese air forces are currently involved in Cope North, an annual exercise at Andersen Air Force Base on Guam.

Suit describes DOGE tactics at USAID

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Newly filed affidavits of U.S. Agency for International Development workers describe a lieutenant of Trump ally Elon Musk and other outsiders directing the immediate termination of hundreds of U.S. aid and foreign assistance programs abroad this week, without required documentation or justification.

The accounts of USAID employees were filed late Tuesday in support of a lawsuit by two associations for government employees. The groups are suing to roll back the dismantling of USAID by Trump's Republican administration and Musk's government-cutting teams.

The accounts offer some of the most detailed looks of the scenes inside the agency and confusion abroad and describe Musk's

teams at the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, at work overseeing the purge of long-standing U.S. aid and development programs abroad as recently as Monday.

When USAID contract officers on Monday emailed agency higher-ups asking for the required authorization and justification needed to cancel USAID programs abroad, a lieutenant of Musk responded to the email, one of the sworn accounts filed with the federal court.

The decisions on killing the programs came from the "most senior levels," the Musk associate wrote to the USAID staffers.

Other affidavits from staffers describe similar scenes from agency contract officers and tensions and uncertainty at home

and abroad as USAID workers dealt with the shutdown of their agency.

A federal court hearing Wednesday on the lawsuit was postponed because of heavy snow.

The Trump administration in its own filings in the case made clear it would present an unforgiving argument for dismantling USAID: The more than 60-year-old aid and development agency is rife with "insubordination" and must be shut down for the Republican administration to decide what pieces of it to salvage.

The argument was made in an affidavit by political appointee and deputy USAID administrator Pete Marocco.

USAID staffers deny insubordination and call the accusation a pretext to break up the agency, among the world's biggest do-

nors of humanitarian and development assistance.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols, an appointee of Trump, dealt the administration a setback Friday in its dismantling of the agency, temporarily halting plans to pull all but a fraction of USAID staffers off the job worldwide. Nichols is slated to hear arguments in a rescheduled hearing later this week on a request from the employee groups to keep blocking the move to put thousands of staffers on leave as well as broaden his order.

The American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees argue that Trump lacks the authority to shut down the agency without approval from Congress. Democratic lawmakers have made the same argument.

Russia releases imprisoned American teacher in swap

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Marc Fogel, an American history teacher who was deemed wrongfully detained by Russia, has been released and returned to the U.S. in what the White House described as a diplomatic thaw that could advance negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.

The Kremlin said Wednesday that a Russian citizen was freed in the United States in exchange for Moscow's release of Fogel, but it refused to identify him until he arrives in Russia "in the coming days."

Alexander Vinnik, a convicted Russian criminal, is being freed as part of a swap that saw Moscow's release of Fogel, two U.S. officials confirmed Wednesday. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the swap.

Steve Witkoff, a special en-

voy for President Donald Trump, left Russia with Fogel and brought him to the White House late Tuesday, and Trump welcomed him home.

"I feel like the luckiest man on Earth right now," Fogel said as he stood next to Trump with an American flag draped around his shoulders.

Fogel, who is from Pennsylvania, has spoken with his wife, his two children and his 95-year-old mother, Witkoff said at the White House on Wednesday. He declined to disclose Fogel's whereabouts.

Fogel was arrested in August 2021 and was serving a 14-year prison sentence. His family and supporters said he had been traveling with medically prescribed marijuana, and he was designated by President Joe Biden's administration as wrongfully detained in December.

'X' gender not valid for US passport applicants

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — U.S. State Department workers reviewing the passport applications of transgender people have been ordered to automatically categorize them as male or female based on evidence of their "biological sex at birth."

U.S. consular workers were ordered to disregard requests by transgender people and other gender non-conforming applicants to identify themselves on their passports with the "X" gender marker or with a sex other than what was assigned at birth, according to a Feb. 8 memo signed by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and seen by Bloomberg News. Instead of honoring the "X" gender, government workers themselves should determine the sex of a transgender applicant as male or female based on "all available evidence establishing biological sex at birth,"

and then note that determination on the person's application for their passport, the State Department memo states.

Some transgender, nonbinary and intersex people have reported issues receiving their passports in recent weeks. Since late January, Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has received "many" phone calls from trans people who have struggled to update their identification after President Donald Trump signed an executive order stating the U.S. government would only recognize two sexes, according to The San Francisco Standard.

The "X" marker was established by Joe Biden's administration in 2021 to recognize people who identify as nonbinary, intersex and gender non-conforming in federal documents. Few countries globally provide that option.

Trump's order is being contested in the courts.

Monty, giant schnauzer, best in show

Associated Press

NEW YORK — This time, the giant schnauzer was the top dog.

After coming close in the last two years, Monty the giant schnauzer won the top prize at the Westminster Kennel Club dog show Tuesday night, leaving handler and co-owner Katie Bernardin almost too emotional to speak.

“He always tries so hard, and we’re just proud of him,” she told the crowd at Madison Square Garden.

The spirited schnauzer be-

sted six other finalists to become the first of his breed tapped as Westminster’s best in show, the most prestigious prize in the U.S. dog show world.

The dog won the huge American Kennel Club championship in December, and he’d been at Westminster twice before.

A standout because of “everything from his attitude to his structure,” Monty is bold, cocky and fun, according to co-owner Sandy Nordstrom.

“He’s just a really cool dog,” she said in an interview before

his win, which will be his last. The 5-year-old is retiring.

The runner-up was, for the third time, a whippet known as Bourbon. Other finalists included a bichon frisé called Neal, a Skye terrier named Archer, and a shih tzu called Comet who’s been a finalist before.

Also in the mix was a German shepherd named Mercedes, who came in second last year, and an English springer spaniel called Freddie.

Each dog at Westminster is judged according to how closely

it matches the ideal for its breed. Winners get a trophy, ribbons and bragging rights but no cash prize.

During a break between semifinal rounds, security personnel surrounded and ousted someone along the sidelines of the ring.

The group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, which has protested at Westminster and other dog shows for years, said on X that a supporter was removed after holding a sign.

Winter weather hits Va.; Calif. preps for flooding

Associated Press

Heavy snow and freezing rain caused hundreds of traffic crashes in Virginia and left tens of thousands of residents in the dark as the central Appalachians and parts of the mid-Atlantic states braced for heavy rains on Wednesday. Meanwhile, California readied for a storm that could flood areas ravaged by the recent wildfires.

The National Weather Service reported that 14.5 inches of snow fell over a 24-hour period in Iron Gate, Va., as of Tuesday.

In California, an atmospheric river — a long band of water vapor that can transport moisture from the tropics to more northern areas — was expected to move in late Wednesday, likely flooding urban areas across central and Southern California, according to the weather service.

The snowstorm that blew into the mid-Atlantic states on Tuesday caused accidents on icy roads and prompted school closures. By Wednesday morning, about 160,000 customers in Virginia and 10,000 in North Carolina had lost power, according to PowerOutage.us.

Most school systems in the

Baltimore and Washington areas were closed Wednesday due to the weather.

Appalachian Power, which serves 1 million customers in West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee, said Tuesday it had 5,400 workers dedicated to restoring power.

In Virginia, where Gov. Glenn Youngkin declared a state of emergency, state police reported about 850 crashes statewide Tuesday and up to Wednesday morning with dozens of injuries. Matt Demlein, a spokesperson for the Virginia State Police, said they can’t say definitively that all were weather related. No deaths were reported.

As parts of the state saw heavy snowfall Tuesday night and into early Wednesday morning, Maryland State Police reported 235 crashes and 185 inoperable or unattended vehicles.

The atmospheric river was expected to arrive in California starting late Wednesday and to peak Thursday, according to Miles Bliss, a meteorologist with the weather service.

Along with flooding, heavy snowfall was expected in the Sierra Nevada.

Google changes its maps to say Gulf of America

The Washington Post

“Gulf of America” is now in official use on a U.S. government database of geographic names and on Google Maps after President Donald Trump last month issued an executive order to rename the Gulf of Mexico.

Interior Secretary Doug Burgum shared the news Sunday on social media, saying the department had implemented the change.

“It’s official,” he wrote.

Trump the same day signed a proclamation aboard Air Force One declaring Feb. 9 “Gulf of America Day,” as he flew over the gulf on his way to the Super Bowl in New Orleans.

Over the intercom, the pilot used the new name for the body of water as he announced the flight path, according to video shared on social media by Ivanka Trump, the president’s daughter.

Google also updated its maps for users in the United States. People in Mexico will still see the name Gulf of Mexico, while those outside the two countries will see both names, Google said Monday.

Some users of Google’s cal-

endar also criticized the company in social media posts Tuesday for no longer by default showing events including Black History Month, Pride Month and Holocaust Remembrance Day.

It could take a while for the name “Gulf of America” to be added to all government communications and websites.

A notice on the U.S. Geological Survey website Tuesday said its display map was “in the process of being updated to reflect this name change.”

A search for the words “Gulf of America” in the USGS map viewer Tuesday pointed to Alaska.

Elsewhere on the website, the USGS variously referred to the body of water as the Gulf of America and the Gulf of Mexico.

Burgum shared what appeared to be an official USGS map on social media, overlaid with text saying “GULF OF AMERICA.” Other maps on the USGS website tend to use all capital letters for the names of states and countries, and a mix of uppercase and lowercase text for cities, rivers and bodies of water.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

1714 Stradivari violin sold at auction for \$11.3M

NY NEW YORK — A violin made in 1714 by the legendary luthier Antonio Stradivari sold for \$11.3 million at an auction in New York on Friday, short of estimates that would have made it the most expensive instrument ever sold.

Sotheby's auction house had estimated that the "Joachim-Ma Stradivarius" violin could sell for between \$12 million and \$18 million, with the higher end of the range potentially eclipsing the record-breaking \$15.9 million someone paid for another Stradivari violin at auction more than a decade ago.

The "Joachim-Ma Stradivarius" is regarded as one of Stradivari's best works, built during his "Golden Period" at the height of his craftsmanship and acoustic mastery, according to the auction house.

The violin is believed to have influenced legendary composer Johannes Brahms when he wrote the famed "Violin Concerto in D Major" and was actually played during the concert's 1879 premiere.

The name of the instrument comes from two of its famous violin virtuoso owners, Joseph Joachim of Hungary and Si-Hon Ma of China. Ma's estate gifted the violin to the New England Conservatory in Boston after his death. The conservatory will use the proceeds to fund student scholarships.

Measles outbreak grows, crosses state line

NM SANTA FE — Public health authorities said Tuesday that an outbreak of measles in western

Texas has expanded, while a new case was confirmed nearby across state lines in New Mexico.

The Texas Department of State Health Services has identified 24 measles cases in connection with the onset of symptoms within the last two weeks. Gaines County, a small county in West Texas, has one of the highest rates of vaccine exemptions in the state.

In neighboring Lea County, N.M., residents were alerted Tuesday to the measles infection of an unvaccinated teenager, as well as the possible exposure of more people in Lovington at a hospital emergency room and sixth grade school gymnasium.

"The New Mexico youth had no recent travel or exposure to known cases from the Texas outbreak," the New Mexico Department of Health said in a news release.

Nine of the measles patients in Texas have been hospitalized. All of the confirmed cases in Gaines County involve unvaccinated residents.

State considers bill to address egg prices

NV CARSON CITY — A bill in the Nevada Legislature could address egg shortages and rising egg costs by allowing the state to temporarily suspend a law requiring the sale of cage-free eggs.

An avian flu outbreak that began in 2022 has wreaked havoc on the national egg supply chain, leading to the killing of more than 156 million birds and causing egg prices to rise 36.8% from December 2023 to December 2024, according to the U.S.

Department of Agriculture.

Nevada has another layer that is contributing to the rising costs. Existing law, passed in 2021, only allows for the sale of cage-free eggs and egg products.

The bill would only allow a 120-day, or roughly four months, suspension at a time. It also requires no more than two temporary suspensions in a calendar year and requires the state quarantine officer to give no less than 14 days' notice of the suspension's ending.

School system: \$60M will help prevent budget cuts

WA SEATTLE — Seattle Public Schools is grappling with a budget deficit of more than \$94 million, which could impact the quality of students' education and lead to job cuts.

The district is actively seeking up to \$60 million from lawmakers in Olympia to help bridge the budget gap.

Both of the budget scenarios that SPS is currently considering anticipate deep cuts to align spending with expected revenues.

District officials say additional state contributions don't have to be all new appropriations. If the Legislature lifts a levy cap, the bulk of the \$30 million to \$60 million the district hopes to get could come from local taxes.

Bill restricts dorm options for transgender students

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Transgender college students in Utah will be prohibited from living in dorms consistent with their gender identity, under a bill that cleared its final legislative hurdle Monday.

The state House, which had already passed the measure, again approved it with small tweaks following a heated Senate debate in which one Republican told trans people, "If you don't fit in, then that's your own fault."

It now heads to the desk of Republican Gov. Spencer Cox, who has expressed support for the restrictions.

Under the bill, students at the state's public colleges and universities can only enter or live in a gendered space, such as a dorm building, locker room or bathroom, that corresponds with their sex assigned at birth. Transgender students can otherwise live in single rooms in coed dorm buildings.

Dairy worker infected with new strain of bird flu

NY NEW YORK — A dairy worker in Nevada was infected with a new type of bird flu that's different from the version that has been spreading in U.S. herds since last year, federal health officials said Monday.

The illness was considered mild. The person's main symptom was eye redness and irritation, similar to most bird flu cases associated with dairy cows. The person wasn't hospitalized and has recovered, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The newer strain had been seen before in more than a dozen people exposed to poultry, but this is the first time an infection was traced to a cow.

CDC officials said there is no evidence the virus has spread from this person to any other people.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Saints name Eagles OC Moore head coach

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Kellen Moore, who oversaw the Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles' offense this season, has agreed to return to the site of his latest triumph as the next coach of the New Orleans Saints.

The 36-year-old Moore will join an organization that has been floundering since the retirement of quarterback Drew Brees and departure of Super Bowl-winning coach Sean Payton. The Saints haven't made the playoffs since the 2020 season — the last of Brees' career.

Their interest in Moore became increasingly evident as the club waited longer to fill its vacancy than any other NFL team seeking a new coach this year.

Moore was the only assistant coach on either Super Bowl

team to be interviewed by New Orleans and thus the only candidate who, under league rules, could not be hired until after Sunday's title game. The Saints announced their agreement with Moore on Tuesday.

Their decision mirrors that of several teams that have found success after hiring relatively young offensive coaches. They included the Los Angeles Rams with Sean McVay, Green Bay with Matt LaFleur, Miami with Mike McDaniel and Minnesota with 2024 AP Coach of the Year Kevin O'Connell. All four of those coaches were hired while in their 30s.

"I look forward to embracing the challenges ahead and am eager to get started," Moore, whose formal introduction is scheduled for Thursday, said in a statement released by the club.

A standout college quarterback at Boise State, Moore had a six-year career as a practice squad or reserve QB with Detroit (2012-2014) and Dallas (2015-2017). He played in just three regular-season games, all with the Cowboys in 2015.

He moved into coaching in 2018 as a quarterbacks coach and was promoted to offensive coordinator in 2019. He left the Cowboys to join the Los Angeles Chargers in 2023 before moving to Philadelphia in 2024.

The Eagles rushed for a franchise-record 3,048 yards this past season, with Barkley gaining 2,005 of that before adding an additional 499 yards in four playoff games. And when the Chiefs limited Barkley to 57 yards rushing in the Super Bowl, Moore responded with well-timed passing plays

that included touchdowns of 46 yards to DeVonta Smith and 12 yards to A.J. Brown.

Moore takes over an offense featuring versatile running back Alvin Kamara and receiver Chris Olave.

While in New Orleans for the Super Bowl this past week, Moore discussed how he tries featuring the strengths of available personnel in his play-calling.

"You have certain things that you have strong feelings about from a coaching perspective — certain philosophies — but I think it's important to do what your players do best," Moore said. "Going from Dallas to LA to Philadelphia, we've certainly played three different styles, and it's fun when you team up with people just building it however we want to."

NASCAR drivers divided on 'world-class driver' rule

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — A controversial new NASCAR rule designed for "world-class drivers" could give Helio Castroneves an automatic berth into the Daytona 500, and, should the four-time Indianapolis 500 winner use the provisional, it would make for the largest field in a decade.

It's a complicated rule that was written into the charter agreement that 13 teams signed last September and is similar to a "promoters provisional" in that it gives NASCAR the ability to designate one driver as a guaranteed 41st entry.

Three-time Daytona 500 winner Denny Hamlin said the rule "reeks of desperation" by NASCAR, calling it nothing but a gimmick to attract big stars to stock car racing. Others wondered why the provisional went to Castroneves, who at 49 will be making his NASCAR debut, instead of seven-time NASCAR

champion Jimmie Johnson, a two-time Daytona 500 winner.

The rule is designed for drivers who don't currently race full time in NASCAR, so Johnson and 2017 Cup Series champion Martin Truex Jr. would have been eligible for consideration for the provisional.

But their teams never put in the request, which must be done 90 days before the event. Only Trackhouse Racing requested the provisional for Castroneves, who is the only driver eligible for the 41st spot.

"It's an interesting rule for sure," Alex Bowman said. "There's a lot of hype and importance to the sport to have people like (Castroneves) that come in and, if they miss the race, it kind of hurts the whole thing."

"So I get it, but I also wish some of our past champions were respected in the same way in some sense."

Castroneves will use the provisional only if he fails in tradi-

tional qualifying to claim one of the four open spots in what was supposed to be a 40-car field.

Two spots go to the drivers who turn the fastest laps in qualifying Wednesday and two more spots being determined through qualifying races Thursday.

"When you look through the affiliations and how those cars play out, it's going to be a very stressful qualifying," Johnson said.

Trackhouse and Castroneves also won't receive any points or payouts if he's the 41st driver, and all drivers who finish behind him will be moved up one position in the standings.

"Aside from the Daytona 500, we don't get in a spot very often where drivers of that caliber are going home," Tyler Reddick said. "I don't know where to fall on this. On one hand, I would hate for a guy like Lewis Hamilton to come over here and attempt to start the 500... (and) something keeps him from run-

ning the race. We also don't just want to let them have a spot in the race — like, they have to earn it."

If NASCAR does receive multiple requests, NASCAR will decide who the designated "world-class driver" is ahead of the event. The criteria listed in the charter for the rule states the "Open Exemption" position is intended for a driver who will significantly impact the promotion of the event.

In a briefing held for media last month, a hypothetical scenario was posed about what NASCAR would do if seven-time Formula 1 champion Hamilton, four-time F1 champion Max Verstappen, six-time IndyCar champion Scott Dixon and Johnson, who is also a NASCAR Hall of Famer, all put in a request for the same race.

"I'd love to have that problem," said John Probst, NASCAR senior vice president of racing development.

McNeeley scores 38, puts UConn over Creighton

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — UConn freshman star Liam McNeeley hadn't played in front of a crowd as hostile as the one the Huskies faced in Omaha on Tuesday night. He found the environment inspiring.

In what coach Dan Hurley called one of the best performances all season in college basketball, McNeeley scored a career-high 38 points while willing UConn to a 70-66 victory over No. 24 Creighton.

"I had a blast," McNeeley said. "Energy feeds energy, and I was feeling it."

Some of his motivation was drawn from the Bluejays students, who have heckled Hurley

unmercifully since the Huskies started making annual trips to Omaha when the school rejoined the Big East in 2020.

"A lot of student sections have started chanting a three-word chant before the game, during the game, during timeouts," McNeeley said, referring to vulgarities directed at Hurley. "A shot at Coach is a shot at the team, so it gets me fired up."

The 6-foot-7 McNeeley, playing his second game since returning from an ankle injury that sidelined him for eight games, is having to adjust to playing a point-forward role with point guard Hassan Diarra battling a knee injury that limited him to seven minutes against Creighton.

McNeeley opened UConn's scoring with the first of his season-high five 3-pointers on 10 attempts. He was 12 of 22 from the field and grabbed 10 rebounds.

"I was pretty confident once I got my first shot off," he said.

Hurley said McNeeley makes the Huskies a top-10-or-12 team in the nation when he's healthy and in rhythm. UConn went 5-3 without McNeeley and this week dropped out of the AP Top 25 for the first time since the start of the 2022-23 season.

"He's going to be a top-10 (NBA draft) pick," Hurley said. "No freshman has had a more impressive performance in this type of environment against a team like that."

McNeeley was at his animated best when he hit back-to-back 3s and dunked off a steal as the Huskies took their first lead midway through the second half. When the Bluejays called a timeout, McNeeley pumped his right fist and screamed at fans behind the UConn bench. Then he turned to the Creighton student section and waved his arms.

The night ended with McNeeley pulling down the rebound, getting fouled and making two free throws with 4 seconds left. Fans were heading to the exits by then.

"I thought the gym was really quiet," he said. "You couldn't hear a peep. They were loud when it was going well, but the crowd died down pretty fast."

No. 1 Auburn snaps back with win over Vanderbilt

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Denver Jones scored 21 points as No. 1 Auburn held off Vanderbilt 80-68 on Tuesday night to avoid the Tigers' first losing skid of the season.

Now Auburn (22-2, 10-1) goes into Saturday's big showdown for the top of the Southeastern Conference standings, supremacy in the state of Alabama and the top of the AP Top 25. The Tigers came into Tuesday night tied with the No. 2 Crimson Tide in league play.

Chaney Johnson finished with 20 points for Auburn, and Johni Broome had 17.

Jason Edwards finished with 13 points for the Commodores. AJ Hoggard and Devin McGlockton each added 10. McGlockton also grabbed a game-high 13 rebounds.

No. 2 Alabama 103, Texas 80: Jarin Stevenson scored 22 points and the visiting Crimson Tide used a hot-shooting first half and a barrage of 3-pointers to cruise to a win over the Longhorns.

Alabama shot 65% in the first half to seize control, then buried timely 3-pointers in the second to snuff out any hopes of a comeback. The Tide (21-3, 10-1) made 17 3-pointers.

No. 3 Florida 81, No. 22 Mississippi St. 68: Denzel Aberdeen had a game-high 20 points and Walter Clayton Jr. added 19 points to lead the visiting Gators to a victory over the Bulldogs.

Thomas Haugh scored 16 points for Florida (21-3, 8-3 Southeastern Conference), and Will Richard and Rueben Chinyelu each added 10.

No. 15 Kentucky 75, No. 5 Tennessee 64:

Ansley Almonor and Otega Oweh scored 13 points each and the host Wildcats beat the Volunteers.

Kentucky (17-7, 6-5 Southeastern Conference) completed a regular season sweep of Tennessee. The Wildcats also beat the Vols 78-73 on Jan. 28 in Knoxville, and are now 7-1 against teams ranked in the Top 15 this season.

No. 20 Michigan 75, No. 7 Purdue 73:

Danny Wolf scored 15 points, including a pair of free throws in the final seconds, to lead the host Wolverines to their fifth straight win, over the Boilermakers.

Roddy Gayle Jr. scored 14 for Michigan (19-5, 11-2 Big Ten) while Tre Donaldson and Vladimir Goldin scored 12 apiece.

No. 8 Texas A&M 69, Georgia 53: Solomon Washington scored 17 points and the host Aggies used a huge second half run to cruise to a win over the Bulldogs.

Henry Coleman III added 13 points for Texas A&M (19-5, 8-3 Southeastern Conference), which extended its winning streak to four games.

No. 10 Iowa St. 77, UCF 65: Keshon Gilbert scored 15 points and Joshua Jefferson had 13 points and eight rebounds to lead the visiting Cyclones to a win over the Knights.

Tamin Lipsey scored 11 points and Curtis Jones scored 10 off the bench for Iowa State (19-5, 9-4 Big 12).

Indiana 71, No. 11 Michigan St. 67: Malik Renea scored 16 of his 19 points in the second

half to help the visiting Hoosiers beat the Spartans, leaving Tom Izzo on the brink of breaking Bob Knight's Big Ten wins record.

Michigan State (19-5, 10-3) lost for the third time in four games, leaving Izzo with 353 Big Ten wins that match the mark Knight set at Indiana while winning three NCAA titles.

Kansas St. 73, No. 13 Arizona 70: Dug McDaniel scored a season-high 24 points and host Kansas State beat Arizona for its sixth straight victory — four against ranked opponents.

David N'Guessan had 16 points and seven rebounds for resurgent Kansas State (13-11, 7-6 Big 12), which lost six in a row right before this winning streak. C.J. Jones added 10 points, and McDaniel finished with five steals, four rebounds and three assists.

No. 17 Kansas 71, Colorado 59: Hunter Dickinson scored 19 points to help the host Jayhawks beat the Buffaloes, handing Colorado its 13th straight loss.

Besides Dickinson, Kansas (16-7, 7-5 Big 12) had three other players in double figures. Zeke Mayo added 13 points and Dajuan Harris and KJ Adams had 10 each.

No. 18 Marquette 68, DePaul 58: Kam Jones had 19 points and moved into third place on the Golden Eagles' career scoring list as host Marquette snapped a three-game skid by beating the Blue Demons.

Jones increased his total to 1,870 points and passed Lazar Hayward, who scored 1,859 points for the Golden Eagles from 2006-10.

Durant becomes 8th with 30K points

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Kevin Durant became the eighth player in NBA history to score 30,000 points, hitting the mark against the Memphis Grizzlies on Tuesday night with a free throw late in the third quarter.

The 36-year-old Phoenix Suns forward, who recently was voted to his 15th All-Star team, joins LeBron James, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Karl Malone, Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, Dirk Nowitzki and Wilt Chamberlain in the 30,000-point club. Julius Erving also hit the mark when combining his points scored in the NBA and ABA.

"It's a true honor to be in the same category as those players who helped shape the game and pushed the game forward," Durant said. "That's always been my goal is to get the most out of myself every day, get the most out of my career. To be mentioned with those guys, I must be doing something right."

Durant is a four-time NBA scoring champion and remains one of the league's elite shot makers in his 17th NBA season. He's averaging about 27 points per game while shooting 52% from the field.

"It's special for everyone who's around him every day," Suns coach Mike Budenholzer said. "I think we're amazed by him, the way he comes to work,

the time he puts in, the attention to detail, the effort. It's translated to 30,000 points. He's just a special player and a special human being."

Durant scored 17,566 points over his first nine seasons with the Oklahoma City Thunder, who were the Seattle SuperSonics during his first season in 2007-08. He's also played for the Golden State Warriors (5,374 points), Brooklyn Nets (3,744) and the Suns (3,324).

Durant finished with 34 points on 12-of-18 shooting in the Suns' 119-112 loss.

Ja Morant scored 26 points to lead the Grizzlies, and Desmond Bane added 20.

Jaren Jackson Jr. added 17 for Memphis, which led by as many as 19 before Phoenix cut the margin to three on Bol Bol's 3-pointer with 2:34 left. Morant's layup on the ensuing possession turned back the threat.

The Grizzlies had a 60-42 rebounding edge and got 44 points from bench players.

Knicks 128, Pacers 115: Karl-Anthony Towns had 40 points and 12 rebounds, Josh Hart added 30 points and 10 rebounds and visiting New York beat Indiana.

New York won in Indianapolis for the first time since April 2023. The Knicks lost all three road games in last season's seven-game Eastern Conference

Pistons set franchise mark with 42-point halftime lead vs. Bulls

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Malik Beasley made seven 3-pointers and finished with 24 points as the Detroit Pistons built a franchise-record, 42-point halftime lead on the way to a 132-92 romp over the Chicago Bulls on Tuesday night.

Detroit outscored the Bulls 71-29 in the first half, eclipsing the previous mark of 34 points against Chicago on March 23, 1969.

Beasley set a Detroit record for 3-pointers in a season with 212 after making 7 of 10. The previous mark was 211

by Saddiq Bey in 2021-22. Cade Cunningham added 20 points, seven assists and six rebounds as the Pistons came away with their most lopsided win of the season.

Tobias Harris scored 18 and Ausar Thompson finished with 16 points as the Pistons rolled to their third win in a row.

The Bulls set a team record by missing their first 20 3-pointers before Ayo Dosunmu hit one near the end of the second quarter. They were 10 of 47 from beyond the arc and shot 35% overall in the game.

semifinal series against the Pacers.

Towns scored 24 points in the first half, making 9 of 12 from the field. Hart did most of his damage in the second half and wound up 12-for-16 from the field.

Three-time All-Star Pascal Siakam had 24 points for Indiana. Thomas Bryant started in place of the injured Myles Turner (strained neck) and had 18 points and nine rebounds. Benedict Mathurin also had 18 points.

Raptors 106, 76ers 103:

Scottie Barnes scored 33 points, Immanuel Quickley added 23 and Toronto snapped a four-game losing streak with a victory over host Philadelphia.

Gradey Dick added 17 points, including a clutch late 3-pointer. Barnes fed Ochai Agbaji for a layup with 1:32 left to put the Raptors up for good.

Joel Embiid had 27 points and 12 rebounds, but the 76ers (20-33) fell a season-worst 13 games under .500. Jared Butler had 15 points off the bench, and Paul George added 12.

Simmons eager for new start with Clippers

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Ben Simmons opened a new chapter with the Los Angeles Clippers on Tuesday, practicing with the team for the first time after being waived by the Brooklyn Nets last weekend.

The No. 1 pick in the 2016 draft is expected to make his debut Wednesday at home against Memphis or Thursday at Utah. He hasn't played since Feb. 1.

"I feel great, ready to go," Simmons said. "I just want to play basketball at a high level and I feel like that's going to happen here."

He left the Nets, who are 19-34 and 12th in the East, for the Clippers, who are 29-23 and sixth in the West.

"It's easier when teams are transparent and understand who you are and what you need and how the team can help and

how I can help them," Simmons said. "I feel comfortable. I know most of the guys on the team."

Simmons, 28, joins a veteran squad led by Kawhi Leonard, James Harden and Norman Powell.

"Defensively, it's a lot different when you're on the court with a lot of vets. It will be unique having a lot of guys like that on the court," Simmons said. "It's not going to take too long to get a

feel for each other on the floor."

One of his new teammates is fellow Australian Patty Mills, who recently joined the Clippers.

Simmons played in 33 of the Nets' 52 games this season and averaged 6.2 points and 6.9 assists. He was waived last Saturday, with the sides agreeing to a buyout. He is making \$40 million this season and is set to be a free agent afterward.