

## DOD lists probationary workers for DOGE

*Bloomberg News*

The Pentagon is sending Trump administration officials the names of probationary workers who could be targeted in an upcoming round of federal employee cuts, according to people familiar with the matter.

It's not yet clear if the entire list submitted on Tuesday will be eliminated from the Pentagon's workforce or if the staff reductions will affect a smaller subset, said one of the people, who declined to speak publicly on personnel matters that were not yet final.

Military staff creating the list were also asked to list justifications for personnel they wanted exempted from termination, one person said, adding that the list only included civilian employees — not active-duty service members.

President Donald Trump has said the Defense Department will be among the next targets as Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency fans out across the federal workforce, cutting thousands of staff and identifying contracts and other expenses to eliminate.

Probationary employees — those within

their first year or two on the job — have been the focus of staff cuts at many agencies because they aren't subject to the same federal workforce protections as those who have been employed longer.

The Pentagon declined to comment. The White House and the Office of Personnel Management did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has been keen to emphasize that the Pentagon is eager to work with Musk's team, saying earlier this month "we welcome DOGE to the Pentagon."

Hegseth is also planning to seek reductions to forecasted military spending over the next five years and shift those dollars toward still-undefined defense priorities favored by the Trump administration, Bloomberg News has reported.

Trump, for his part, has suggested that he wants to increase military spending in the short term, but wants to decrease the costs of some weapons programs in the future, telling Fox News in an interview earlier this month that it was "crazy" to spend money on some bombs that may not be used.

Musk's role in auditing the Pentagon's expenses has also raised conflict-of-interest questions. His company SpaceX has received billions of dollars in federal contracts, including at DOD in recent years.

Military spending accounted for nearly half of the \$1.8 trillion worth of U.S. discretionary spending in fiscal year 2024, making it the largest pool of federal money outside of mandatory spending on entitlement programs like Social Security, Medicare and other benefits.

Cutting defense money and staff could spark a political firestorm in Congress, where several Republicans are seeking to increase military spending. The Defense Department's budget is politically resilient because military bases, other facilities and programs are located in so many states and districts that historically any suggestion of cutbacks has prompted members of Congress to defend their own parochial interests.

Earlier on Tuesday, a federal judge denied a request to temporarily bar DOGE teams from accessing internal systems and removing employees from U.S. agencies, handing a win to Trump over one of his signature initiatives.

## Panel asks military services to list potential funding cuts

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The leaders of the House Armed Services Committee are calling on the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Space Force to identify obsolete programs and weapons for potential cuts as Congress begins crafting its annual defense policy bill.

Rep. Mike Rogers of Alabama, the Republican chairman of the committee, and Rep. Adam Smith of Washington, the top Democrat on the panel, said they want the services to present a list by March 1 of infrastructure, weapon systems, programs or processes "that are no longer a priority" and "could be divested, right-sized or made more efficient."

"Identifying these will allow the committee to redirect resources to higher priority items that support the National Defense Strategy and achieve real deterrence," the lawmakers wrote in a letter.

The request comes as President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's government efficien-

cy team seek to purge federal government personnel and cut agency budgets. It also follows efforts started by congressional Republicans last week to add at least \$100 billion in defense spending in the next decade.

The House and Senate Armed Services committees are tasked each year with crafting the National Defense Authorization Act, a massive must-pass bill that sets expenditures and policies for the Defense Department. The Pentagon employs 3 million troops and civilians and has a budget of more than \$850 billion.

Rogers and Smith said service members and the American public deserved a defense budget that "deters our enemies at the greatest possible value."

"We are committed to eliminating waste, reforming our acquisition processes and ensuring each dollar within the defense budget is spent wisely," they wrote. "We have a unique opportunity at this time to make quantifiable progress toward these goals."

The letter was sent a day after the House Budget Committee signed off on a spending blueprint that, if approved by Congress, will ask the House Armed Services Committee to write a bill detailing up to \$100 billion in additional defense spending in the next 10 years.

The Senate is working on its own version of the budget resolution, which mandates \$150 billion in extra defense spending. The two chambers must agree on a compromise budget resolution before Congress can pursue legislation that would beef up spending on defense, security at the U.S.-Mexico border and energy independence while providing for trillions in tax cuts.

Lawmakers have at times balked at the Pentagon's efforts to retire weapon systems, vehicles and ships and added expenses the services did not request. In December, Congress approved two Virginia-class attack submarines despite the Navy only wanting one and authorized three Arleigh Burke-class destroyers instead of the two that the Navy had requested.

# USS Truman gets structural evaluation

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy—Navy inspectors are evaluating the structural integrity of the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman after a collision with a cargo ship last week left scrapes and gashes along its right backend, including the hull.

That assessment, which began Sunday at Naval Support Activity Souda Bay on the Greek island of Crete, will cover Truman's hull and bulkheads to ensure they can bear weight, U.S. 6th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Timothy Gorman said Wednesday.

Bulkheads are interior vertical walls that form compartments within a ship.

A small slash penetrated the ship's hull high above the water-

line, Gorman said, adding that it's too soon to say how long the inspection will take and when a comprehensive damage assessment will be available.

The evaluation won't include Truman's flight deck, said Gorman, noting that the carrier conducted flight operations Saturday, days after the Feb. 12 late-night collision with the Panama-flagged *Besiktas-M* near the Suez Canal.

There were no injuries or flooding in the collision, which damaged a line handling space, the fantail and a platform above a storage space. The exterior walls of two storage rooms and maintenance space also were included in initial damage assessments.

The ship's nuclear propulsion

plants were unaffected, and damage appeared to be above the waterline, the service said last week.

Those initial assessments, along with photographs showing mostly superficial damage to the ship's starboard quarter side, likely mean Truman could be patched up and soon resume its deployment, analysts told *Stars and Stripes*.

"The maintenance capabilities at Souda Bay should be able to (provide) temporary repairs that should carry the ship through the rest of its deployment to the point where permanent repairs can be made," said Steven Wills, a naval analyst with the Center for Maritime Strategy at the Navy League of the United

States.

Wills and other analysts also pointed out that there are other suitable locations for repairs in the region, such as Croatia, France or Italy.

Unless more significant problems are discovered, such as something involving Truman's propulsion system, the Navy likely will keep the carrier on station, said James Holmes, chair of the maritime strategy program at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I.

A shortened deployment and return to Norfolk, Va., could complicate a tight maintenance and deployment schedule for the service's other 10 carriers, something the Navy would be eager to avoid, he said.

## Houthi rebels have halted attacks on merchant ships

By LARA KORTE  
*Stars and Stripes*

Houthi rebels in Yemen are abiding by their pledge to halt attacks on Middle East commercial shipping a month after a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, according to a regional industry group.

The Joint Maritime Information Center, which operates in close coordination with the multinational Combined Maritime

Forces, said in a report this week that it has had no word of hostile activity from the Houthi rebels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since the Iran-backed group's Jan. 19 announcement of a pause.

After the outbreak of the Gaza war on Oct. 7, 2023, the Houthi targeted commercial vessels for supporting Israel, though many of the ships attacked by drones and missiles had no apparent

link to the country.

Attacks by the militants have resulted in a drastic slowdown in commercial traffic throughout the region.

The Navy has kept a nearly constant carrier strike group presence in the Middle East since the Hamas terrorist attacks in Gaza that began the conflict.

U.S. forces and allies seeking to protect vessels in the Red Sea

and nearby waterways launched counterstrikes at a tempo unseen since World War II, Navy officials have said.

The maritime center noted a slight uptick in traffic in the Suez Canal and Bab el Mandeb between Feb. 10 and Feb. 16, but it cautioned that shipping volume there is still well below normal.

Despite the pause, the shipping industry should remain vigilant, JMIC said in the report.

## US Coast Guard and Navy save crew of sinking ship

By LARA KORTE  
*Stars and Stripes*

A pair of American military vessels responding to a mayday call this week saved the crew of a sinking cargo ship in the Persian Gulf, according to U.S. Central Command.

The Navy mine countermeasures ship USS *Devastator* and Coast Guard cutter USCGC *Clarence Sutphin Jr.* came to the aid

of five Iranians and two Indians aboard the *Shayesteh* before their ship sank Tuesday, Naval Forces Central Command said in a statement Wednesday.

After receiving a distress call, the Coast Guardsmen boarded a rigid hull inflatable boat and brought the seven mariners back to their ship, CENTCOM said. The cargo ship crew members were aboard the Navy ship

and receiving medical care as of Tuesday.

"Providing assistance at sea to mariners in distress is a core Coast Guard mission," said Lt. Michael O'Dell, Clarence Sutphin Jr.'s commanding officer. "It is inherently dangerous, but the team executed without hesitation — without fear — to extend their compassion to people in a dire situation. I'm incredibly

proud of to be a part of this team."

CENTCOM did not specify the exact location of the rescue but said the ship was flying a Qatari flag, which is customary in territorial waters.

The *Shayesteh* had departed from the Iranian port city of Bushehr on Sunday, according to [marinetraffic.com](http://marinetraffic.com), a maritime tracker.

# Zelenskyy, Trump trade slights as relations go south

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Relations between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and U.S. President Donald Trump deteriorated rapidly Wednesday as Zelenskyy said Trump was living in a Russian-made “disinformation space” and Trump called Zelenskyy “a dictator without elections” in comments that were sure to complicate efforts to end the war.

Zelenskyy also said he would like Trump’s team “to be more truthful” as he offered his first response to a series of striking claims that Trump made a day earlier, including falsely suggesting that Kyiv was to blame for the war, which enters its fourth year next week.

Trump also warned Zelenskyy that he “better move fast” to negotiate an end to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or risk not having a nation to lead.

The comments from Trump and Zelenskyy were a staggering back-and-forth between leaders of two countries that have been staunch allies in recent years under Trump’s predecessor. While former President Joe Biden was in the White House, the U.S. provided crucial military equipment to Kyiv to fend off the invasion and used its political weight to defend Ukraine and isolate Russia on the world stage.

The Trump administration has started charting a new course, reaching out to Russia and pushing for a peace deal. Senior officials from both countries held talks Tuesday to discuss improving ties, negotiating an end to the war and potentially preparing a meeting between Trump and Putin after years of

frosty relations.

Trump lashed out at Zelenskyy in a social media post, calling him “a modestly successful comedian” who “talked the United States of America into spending \$350 Billion Dollars, to go into a War that couldn’t be won, that never had to start, but a War that he, without the U.S. and ‘TRUMP,’ will never be able to settle.”

Trump went on to say that the only thing Zelenskyy “was good at was playing Biden ‘like a fiddle.’” He advised Zelenskyy to “move fast or he is not going to have a Country left.”

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he would like to meet with Trump.

Russia’s army crossed the border on Feb. 24, 2022, in an all-out invasion that Putin sought to justify by saying it was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine and prevent the country from joining NATO. Ukraine and its allies denounced it as an unprovoked act of aggression.

“I would like to have a meeting, but it needs to be prepared so that it brings results,” Putin said Wednesday in televised remarks. He added that he would be “pleased” to meet Trump but noted that Trump has acknowledged that a Ukrainian settlement could take longer than he initially hoped.

The Russian leader hailed Tuesday’s talks between Russian and U.S. senior officials in the Saudi capital of Riyadh as “very positive.”

He brushed off Zelenskyy’s complaints about Ukraine being left out of the U.S.-Russian talks, saying that Kyiv’s reaction was “unfounded.”

## Judge questions motives for ban on trans troops

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Tuesday questioned President Donald Trump’s motives for issuing an executive order that calls for banning transgender troops from serving in the U.S. military, describing a portion of the directive as “frankly ridiculous.”

U.S. District Judge Ana Reyes indicated that she won’t rule before early March on whether to temporarily block the Trump administration from enforcing the order, which plaintiffs’ attorneys have said illegally discriminates against transgender troops.

But her questions and remarks during Tuesday’s hearing suggest she is deeply skeptical of the administration’s reasoning for ordering a policy change. Reyes also lauded the service of several active-duty troops who sued to block the order.

“If you were in a foxhole,

would you care about these individuals’ gender identity?” the judge asked a government attorney, who answered that it “would not be a primary concern of mine.”

Trump’s Jan. 27 order claims the sexual identity of transgender service members “conflicts with a soldier’s commitment to an honorable, truthful, and disciplined lifestyle, even in one’s personal life” and is harmful to military readiness. It requires Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to issue a revised policy.

Six transgender people who are active-duty service members and two others seeking to join the military sued to block the Trump administration from enforcing the order. In a court filing, plaintiffs’ lawyers argued that Trump’s order openly expresses “hostility” and constitutionally impermissible “animus” toward transgender people.

## Tricare: Download records before new system change

**BY CAITLYN BURCHETT**  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Military health care beneficiaries are being urged to download their digital health records from the Tricare online patient portal before April 1 to retain copies.

The Defense Department is decommissioning the Tricare patient portal as part of its transition to the new MHS Genesis records system. Patient records on the older, Tricare system will not transfer to MHS Genesis.

Health records must be downloaded by individual patients. Failure to do so could result in gaps in medical history, Tricare said.

“All military hospitals and clinics have transitioned to MHS Genesis. We encourage

you to take these important steps to save your personal health records before the [Tricare online] patient portal decommissions,” said Rear Adm. Tracy Farrill, an official for the Defense Health Agency.

To download the records, beneficiaries should log on to [www.TRICAREOnline.com](http://www.TRICAREOnline.com) and click the blue “Health Record” button to view and download personal health data. Beneficiaries can also choose the person, data types, date range and format for the records that they need to download.

Medical providers will have patient records, but after April 1 patients will need to request physical copies by completing a form in person and then return at a later designated time to pick up the records.



# Judge won't halt DOGE layoffs, data access

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge refused Tuesday to immediately block billionaire Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency from accessing government data systems or participating in worker layoffs.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan found that there are legitimate questions about Musk's authority but said there isn't enough evidence of grave legal harm to justify a temporary restraining order.

The decision came in a lawsuit filed by 14 Democratic states challenging DOGE's authority to access sensitive gov-

ernment data. The attorneys general argued that Musk is wielding the kind of power that the Constitution says can be held only by those elected or confirmed by the Senate.

The Trump administration has maintained that layoffs are coming from agency heads and asserted that despite his public cheering of the effort, Musk isn't running DOGE's day-to-day operations himself.

DOGE has tapped into computer systems across multiple agencies with the blessing of President Donald Trump, digging into budgets and searching for what he calls waste, fraud and abuse.

Chutkan recognized the concerns of the states.

"DOGE's unpredictable actions have resulted in considerable uncertainty and confusion," she wrote. Their questions about Musk's apparent "unchecked authority" and lack of congressional oversight for DOGE are legitimate and they may be able to successfully argue them later, she found.

Still, at this point, it remains unclear exactly how DOGE's work will affect the states, and judges can only issue orders to block specific, immediate harms, she found.

Chutkan, who was nominated by Democratic President Ba-

rack Obama, previously oversaw the now-dismissed criminal election interference case against Trump in Washington, D.C.

The states' lawsuit seeks to bar DOGE from the federal Office of Personnel Management and the departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, Energy, Transportation and Commerce.

In other DOGE lawsuits, two other judges in Washington have similarly declined to immediately block DOGE from access to agency systems. A federal judge in New York has blocked DOGE's access to Treasury Department data for now.

## GOP pushes bill to fund deportations, border wall

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans pushed ahead late Tuesday on a \$340 billion package to give the Trump administration money for mass deportations and other priorities, as Democrats prepare a counter-campaign against the onslaught of actions coming from the White House.

On a party-line vote, 50-47, Republicans launched the process, skipping ahead of the House Republicans who prefer President Donald Trump's approach for a "big, beautiful bill" that includes \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts that are tops on the party agenda. Senate Republicans plan to deal with tax cuts later, in a second package.

"It's time to act," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., on social media, announcing the plan ahead as the House is on recess week. "Let's get it done."

This is the first step in unlocking Trump's campaign promises — tax cuts, energy production and border controls — and dominating the agenda in Con-

gress. While Republicans have majority control of both the House and Senate, giving a rare sweep of Washington power, they face big hurdles trying to put the president's agenda into law over steep Democratic objections.

The Senate GOP package would allow \$175 billion to be spent on border security, including funding for mass deportation operations and to build the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border; a \$150 billion boost to the Pentagon for defense spending; and \$20 billion for the Coast Guard.

The Senate Budget Committee said the package would cost about \$85.5 billion a year, for four years of Trump's presidency, paid for with new reductions and revenues elsewhere that other committees will draw up.

Eyeing ways to pay for the package, Senate Republicans are considering a rollback of the Biden administration's methane emissions fee and hoping to draw new revenue from energy leases as they aim to spur domestic energy production.

## Border arrests fell 39% in January to lowest since 2020

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Arrests for illegal border crossings from Mexico plummeted 39% in January from a month earlier, authorities said Tuesday, an early gauge of President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown.

The Border Patrol made 21,593 arrests during the month, down from 47,316 in December and the lowest mark since May 2020, near the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic, according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"Call it the Trump Effect," the White House said in a statement.

Border arrests fell sharply well before Trump took office from an all-time high of 250,000 in December 2023.

Mexican authorities increased enforcement within their own borders and then President Joe Biden introduced severe asylum restrictions in June.

Arrests sank even further after Trump was sworn in on Jan. 20 and issued a slew of executive orders on immigration, in-

cluding one to suspend asylum on grounds that the United States is under "invasion" at the southern border.

Border czar Tom Homan said Monday that there were 229 border arrests in a 24-hour period, the lowest he remembered since becoming a Border Patrol agent in 1984.

Homeland Security Department officials say they want to drive that to zero.

Border Patrol Chief Michael Banks said on Friday in Edinburg, Texas, that he will "not be satisfied that our border is secure until we have operational control of our border, which means anyone that crosses illegally is apprehended or no one crosses."

Homeland Security said on Tuesday that the department has launched a multimillion-dollar video ad campaign airing in the U.S. and internationally that features Secretary Kristi Noem warning people to leave the country or not to come. "If you are here illegally, we will find you and deport you. You will never return," she said in the video.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### High court: Official could not challenge voting van

**WI** MADISON — A divided Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled Tuesday that a Republican Party official lacked the standing to bring a lawsuit challenging the use of a mobile voting van in 2022.

The lawsuit sought to ban the use of mobile voting vans in any future election in the presidential battleground state. The court did not address the legality of mobile voting sites in its ruling, meaning mobile voting vans could be used in future elections.

A single van has been used only once — in Racine in a primary election in 2022. It allowed voters to cast absentee ballots in the two weeks leading up to the election. Racine, the Democratic National Committee and others argue that nothing in state law prohibits the use of voting vans.

But the court did not rule on the merits of the case. Instead, it ruled 4-3 to dismiss the case, ruling that Racine County Republican Party chairman Ken Brown, who brought the lawsuit, was not “aggrieved” under state law and therefore was not permitted to sue.

### Senator resigns before ethics panel decision

**CO** DENVER — Embattled Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis has resigned from the Colorado Senate, just days before an ethics committee was set to decide whether to pursue a formal investigation into her treatment of aides.

Jaquez Lewis, a Longmont Democrat, posted the announcement on her official

Facebook page about 5:45 a.m. after notifying the top Senate leader Monday night. As the reason for her resignation, she cited an opportunity to serve with a regional not-for-profit that develops women and LGBTQ+ people as leaders. Her announcement did not mention the ethics investigation.

Jaquez Lewis had faced escalating reprimands for her alleged mistreatment of legislative aides. Last year, Senate leadership quietly removed her as the chair of a senate committee — a powerful position for steering legislation through the chamber — over repeated complaints about her behavior toward aides and staff.

### Chief of staff takes attorney general post

**FL** TALLAHASSEE — Gov. Ron DeSantis on Monday named his former chief of staff, James Uthmeier, as Florida’s attorney general, handing the state’s top law enforcement role to a trusted aide who has helped orchestrate and defend some of his most divisive initiatives.

Uthmeier, 37, was sworn in Monday during a ceremony in Tallahassee. He becomes one of the youngest state attorneys general and the latest person to benefit from the political shuffle sparked by President Donald Trump’s drafting of Sunshine State Republicans for his new administration. Uthmeier is poised to spearhead Florida’s legal battles to bolster Trump’s sweeping conservative agenda.

Uthmeier succeeds former Attorney General Ashley Moody, whom the governor tapped to fill the U.S. Senate

seat of Marco Rubio, Trump’s pick to be U.S. secretary of state.

### Sheriff, a Republican, plans run for governor

**CA** RIVERSIDE — Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco said Monday he is running for governor of California in 2026, becoming the first major Republican to announce a bid for an election nearly two years away.

Bianco, an outspoken supporter of President Donald Trump and his policies, was first elected sheriff in 2018 and has been in law enforcement for more than 30 years. He is joining a growing number of candidates looking to replace Gov. Gavin Newsom, whose term is limited.

During his campaign announcement in downtown Riverside, Bianco criticized Democratic policies that he says have led to the homeless crisis on city streets and the state’s housing affordability problems.

The Democratic candidates include former Los Angeles Mayor and Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa, Lt. Gov. Eleni Kounalakis, former Senate President Pro Tem Toni Atkins, former state Controller Betty Yee and state Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond.

### Upgrades to Capitol could relocate lawmakers

**HI** HONOLULU — A major upgrade of the Hawaii State Capitol to refurbish core functions of the historic structure could cost as much as \$100 million and keep the building closed for a prolonged period of time.

State Comptroller Keith Regan said basic building infras-

tructure such as the electrical, water and wastewater systems in the Capitol are outdated and aging, and components of the air conditioning system also need to be replaced.

Regan said estimates of the total cost range from \$50 million to \$100 million, but it is not yet clear when construction will start or how long the work will take. The project will require the Legislature and the offices of the governor and lieutenant governor to relocate.

### Fewer gifts reported after ethics concerns

**NV** LAS VEGAS — Last year, Clark County commissioners did without the free tickets to Formula One racing, Las Vegas Raiders games and National Finals Rodeo that they’d accepted in previous years, according to their annual financial disclosure statements filed in January.

The commission’s seven members reported a total of just one trip and one gift for the year — and no tickets.

In June, the Nevada Commission on Ethics notified county commissioners they were under investigation for accepting tickets to the inaugural Formula One Las Vegas Grand Prix. Five commissioners each accepted a \$10,900 ticket, with some incorrectly disclosing the ticket and one failing to disclose all together until the Review-Journal reported on the matter.

State law requires elected officials to file annual disclosure forms reporting gifts “in excess of an aggregate value of \$200 for a donor” as well as meetings, trips or events sponsored by third parties.

— From wire reports

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# Unranked BYU routs No. 23 Kansas

*Associated Press*

PROVO, Utah — Kansas has reached a low point with its uncharacteristic struggles in Big 12 play.

The No. 23 Jayhawks lost 91-57 to BYU on Tuesday night, matching their largest margin of defeat in Bill Self's tenure, after previously losing 85-51 to USC in the second round of the 2021 NCAA Tournament. It also marked the first time Kansas — the preseason No. 1 in the AP Top 25 — lost by 30-plus points against an unranked team since the poll began in 1948.

The Jayhawks have not led through their last 80 minutes of basketball after also falling to Utah 74-67 on Saturday. They have lost four of six games since the start of February.

"Obviously we're going to catch a lot of flak, whether it's fans or national media, and rightfully so because we just lost by damn near 40," said senior center Hunter Dickinson, who finished with 12 points and 14 rebounds. "Nobody is going to feel bad for us now that NIL is the thing, and players are getting paid and everything like that. Nobody is going to feel bad for you. They're going to expect you to perform like a paid player."

Richie Saunders led BYU with 22 points.

Trevin Knell added 15 points and Mawot Mag had 13 as the Cougars (18-8, 9-6 Big 12) won their third straight. Saunders, Knell and Mag combined to make 11 of the Cougars' 14 3-

pointers.

Kansas never came close to threatening BYU, which shot 52% from the field.

"We were one foot in and one foot out in how we guarded and a lot of other things right from the jump," Self said. "It was crystal clear how we wanted to try to guard them and right from the jump we doubted and ended up hurting ourselves."

BYU finished with 24 assists and 14 steals. It marked the first game against a ranked opponent over the past 25 seasons where the Cougars totaled more than 20 assists and 10 steals.

"I think BYU could have beat anyone tonight," Self said. "They were great and then we didn't do anything to make

them play less than great."

The Cougars looked impressive on both ends of the court en route to moving into fifth place in the Big 12 standings.

They had 15 assists on 15 baskets in the first half and forced eight turnovers on their way to a 20-point halftime lead. BYU led by 38 in the second half.

It was a statement win for the Cougars as much as a statement loss for the Jayhawks. BYU started 2-4 in Big 12 play but has won seven of nine since.

"We've been waiting for a win against a really storied program and a team that's good," BYU coach Kevin Young said. "Tonight was impressive by how our guys carried out the game plan on both ends of the floor."

## No. 2 Florida dominates in big win over Oklahoma

*Associated Press*

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Walter Clayton Jr. scored 18 points, Will Richard added 14 and No. 2 Florida steamrolled Oklahoma 85-63 on Tuesday night for its fifth consecutive victory.

Alijah Martin chipped in 14 points off the bench for the Gators (23-3, 10-3 Southeastern Conference), who tied a season-low with six turnovers and improved to 13-1 at home.

Clayton, Richard and Martin — Florida's top three scorers — combined to make 15 of 31 shots, including nine 3-pointers. They scored 25 of the team's first 37 points as the Gators opened a double-digit lead and never looked back.

**No. 5 Houston 80, Arizona State 65:** L.J. Cryer scored 18 points, Emanuel Sharp added 17 and the visiting Cougars dominated the Sun Devils.

Houston (22-4, 14-1 Big 12) moved up a spot in the latest AP Top 25 after grinding out a 62-58 victory over No. 19 Arizona on Saturday.

The Cougars had a much easier time on the second leg of their desert trip, building a 16-point halftime lead and stretching it to 23. Houston has won 18 of 19 and has the nation's longest active road winning streak at 12.

Alston Mason had 26 points and B.J. Freeman added 17 to lead Arizona State (12-14, 3-12), which has lost six straight.

**No. 21 Mississippi State 70, No. 7 Texas A&M 54:** Josh Hubbard scored 25 points, reserve Claudell Harris Jr. added 12 of his 15 in the second half, and the Bulldogs (19-7, 7-6 Southeastern Conference) beat the visiting Aggies.

Zhuric Phelps scored 13 points for Texas A&M (20-6, 9-4). Wade Taylor IV and C.J. Wilcher each had 11, but Wilcher was scoreless after halftime.

**No. 8 Iowa State 79, Colorado 65:** Milan Momcilovic and Dishon Jackson scored 13 points each as the host Cyclones (21-5, 11-4 Big 12) beat the Buffaloes for the third time this

season.

Bangot Dak scored a career-high 20 points to lead the Buffaloes (10-16, 1-14) and Harrison Carrington added 11.

**TCU 69, No. 9 Texas Tech 66:** Noah Reynolds scored 16 points, including the last seven for the Horned Frogs (15-11, 8-7 Big 12) in a victory over the visiting Red Raiders.

Reynolds' turnaround jumper with 11.6 seconds left was the first field goal in more than four minutes for TCU, and it put the Horned Frogs ahead 68-63 before Chance McMillian hit a long 3 for Texas Tech.

After Reynolds made the second of his two free throws with four seconds left, the Red Raiders (20-6, 11-4) had a chance to tie it. But JT Toppin, the reigning Associated Press player of the week, had his 3-pointer blocked by David Punch and rebounded by Reynolds.

**No. 11 Wisconsin 95, Illinois 74:** John Tonje scored 31 points as the Badgers (21-5, 11-4 Big Ten) beat the visiting Illini to

earn their fifth straight victory.

Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn had 17 points, Ben Humrichous 13 and Will Riley 11 for Illinois (17-10, 9-8).

**No. 14 Michigan State 75, No. 13 Purdue 66:** Jase Richardson had 12 points and Frankie Fidler scored 11, leading the Spartans (21-5, 12-3 Big Ten) past the visiting Boilermakers.

Trey Kaufmann-Renn scored 24 and Braden Smith added 17 for the defending Big Ten champion Boilermakers (19-8, 11-5), who have lost three straight for the first time in five years.

**No. 16 Marquette 80, Seton Hall 56:** Kam Jones scored 14 points, Chase Ross added 11 points and the host Golden Eagles cruised to a win over the Pirates.

Ben Gold had 10 points for Marquette (20-6, 11-4 Big East).

Seton Hall (7-19, 2-13) was led by Isaiah Coleman with 13 points and Scotty Middleton with nine.



# Pirates' Skenes looks for more tools in Year 2

Associated Press

BRADENTON, Fla. — Paul Skenes spent his rookie season dutifully following the Pittsburgh Pirates' plan to bring their young ace along as slowly and safely as possible.

It worked. Maybe better than all involved imagined during an electrifying 2024 in which the towering right-hander started the All-Star Game and captured the National League Rookie of the Year award while becoming perhaps the game's hottest young star in a decade.

It was an incredible ride to be sure. Yet when Skenes arrived this week for his second spring training, he did it with the kind of freedom he lacked a year ago.

Oh and a couple of new pitches, too.

The 22-year-old is tinkering with adding a cutter and a run-

ning two-seam fastball to an arsenal that already includes a four-seamer that tops out north of 100 mph and a "splinker" that was one of the best put-away pitches in the majors in 2024.

"Just trying to create more swing decisions," Skenes said.

Or nondecisions.

Veteran second baseman Adam Frazier, who reunited with the Pirates last month, volunteered to be the first batter to face Skenes during a live batting practice Saturday. The first pitch the left-handed hitting Frazier saw was a splinker that darted down and away while catching the outside corner of the strike zone.

Frazier's bat never moved as the ball whizzed by, a pitch "nobody is going to do anything with," as the former All-Star put it.

"If you hit it, you're hitting it

straight in the ground," Frazier added. "So it's like, 'All right, strap it on and get ready.'"

Frazier, second baseman Nick Gonzales and first baseman Darick Hall all failed to make solid contact off Skenes during a 25-pitch session in which a few dozen fans surrounded one of the practice fields at Pirates City, many of them with their phones raised to capture the first glimpse of Skenes in 2025.

Skenes called the attention he commands "a privilege." It's also, however, not a priority. The admitted perfectionist is too consumed with his craft to cultivate his celebrity. And for as dominant as he was at times last summer, Skenes knows he's hardly a finished product after 23 major league starts.

Yes, his numbers as a rookie — an 11-3 record with a 1.96

ERA and 170 strikeouts in 133 innings — were dazzling. They were also just the beginning.

While Skenes stressed he is not looking to get away from his identity as a strikeout pitcher, he is trying to find a way to get to strike three a little more quickly.

"Getting ahead, winning the 0-0, 0-1, 1-1 (pitches), winning those counts, that stuff is important," he said.

That's where adding a couple of more options to a repertoire that already includes six different pitches comes in.

"Anything that looks like a fastball and doesn't end up being a fastball (helps)," pitching coach Oscar Marin said. "I think we all know how special his fastballs are. (More options are) just something that is going to really open up the zone for him as well."

# Knicks hit ground running after All-Star break

New York Daily News

NEW YORK — The Knicks won't exactly be able to ease back into action after the NBA All-Star break.

Three of New York's next five games are against the NBA's elite, including the only two teams in the Eastern Conference with a better record than theirs.

The Knicks (36-18) are set to resume play Thursday with a soft spot on their schedule as the Chicago Bulls visit Madison Square Garden.

At 22-33, the 10th-seeded Bulls are clinging to the East's final spot in the play-in tournament, but they traded away their leading scorer, Zach LaVine, this month and entered the break on a four-game losing streak.

After that, it gets much more difficult.

New York is scheduled to visit the Eastern Conference-best Cleveland Cavaliers (44-10) on Friday, followed by a trip to Boston to face the second-seeded Celtics (39-16) on Sunday.

The Knicks' lone meeting with the Cavaliers came back in October, when Cleveland eked out a 110-104 victory at the Garden.

That was only the third game of the sea-

son, and new-look New York was still finding its chemistry after swinging offseason trades for Mikal Bridges and Karl-Anthony Towns.

But the Cavs are a different team now, too.

In one of the biggest deals before this month's trade deadline, Cleveland acquired sharp-shooting forward De'Andre Hunter from the Atlanta Hawks, bolstering what was already one of the NBA's best offenses.

Hunter, who is averaging 18.8 points per game, joined a group led by Donovan Mitchell (23.9 points per game), Darius Garland (21.6) and Evan Mobley (18.5).

Boston, meanwhile, pummeled the Knicks in both of this season's previous matchups.

Those included a 132-109 win on opening day in which the Celtics tied an NBA record with 29 made 3-pointers and this month's similarly decisive 131-104 victory at TD Garden.

New York forward OG Anunoby (right foot strain) missed the latter of those meetings but so did Boston starters Jrue Holiday and Kristaps Porzingis.

The Knicks wrap up this month with a

Feb. 28 trip to Memphis to face a Grizzlies team boasting the NBA's highest-scoring offense at 123.3 points per game.

Buoyed by a career-best season from Jaren Jackson Jr. and the return of Ja Morant, Memphis is 36-18, tying it with New York for the NBA's fourth-best record.

That trip kicks off an 11-game stretch in which the Knicks will play on the road nine times. That includes games against the Lakers (32-20) and Clippers (31-23) in Los Angeles during the first week of March.

Overall, New York has the eighth-hardest remaining schedule in terms of opponent win percentage, according to Tankathon.

The returns of Anunoby, who has missed the last five games, and rim-protecting center Mitchell Robinson, who is nearing his long-awaited debut after May's left ankle surgery, should give the Knicks their deepest and most-balanced team of the season.

"It's a tremendous group," head coach Tom Thibodeau said going into the break. "I tell them all the time I'm fortunate to be coaching them. You enjoy the effort they put forth. They're together. They're committed. They're all sacrificing something for the team."

# McAvoy ruled out for 4 Nations final

*Associated Press*

BOSTON — The United States didn't have to sacrifice much when looking for a replacement for injured defenseman Charlie McAvoy in the 4 Nations Face-Off final: Reigning Norris Trophy winner Quinn Hughes was ready to step in.

American coach Mike Sullivan said Tuesday "Quinn Hughes is coming" when asked about reinforcements for the championship game against Canada. But Hughes was at the Canucks' practice in Vancouver on Tuesday afternoon, according to videos posted on social media.

Hughes, who has missed the Canucks' last four games and was a last-minute scratch from the United States' 4 Nations roster, was wearing a non-contact jersey. Vancouver plays the Golden Knights in Las Vegas on Saturday night, when the NHL returns after the tournament

that brought the world's best players back to the international stage after they missed the past two Winter Olympics.

Hughes, 25, was a first-round draft choice who joined the Canucks after two years at Michigan, where he was a finalist for the Hobey Baker Award as a sophomore. He had career highs of 17 goals and 75 assists for Vancouver last season, when he was the runaway winner of the award for the NHL's top defenseman and finished seventh in voting for the Hart Trophy that goes to the league MVP.

According to the 4 Nations rules, the Americans can only add him to the roster if they drop below six "able-bodied" defensemen; that would mean one more U.S. defenseman would have to be ruled out. The rules allow them to apply for emergency relief on an "as-needed" basis, an application that would be considered by tournament chairs Bill Daly and Rob Zepp.

"Right now, we're just taking each day as it comes," Sullivan said. "We'll see what potential options might be available for us for the championship game and then we'll make decisions accordingly from there."

A 27-year-old Boston University product and top Bruins defenseman who has twice finished in the top five of the Norris Trophy voting, McAvoy had been a key contributor to the American team whose big hits on Canadian stars Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby were credited with setting a tone in the round-robin matchup between the North American rivals.

The Bruins announced on Tuesday that McAvoy was admitted to Massachusetts General Hospital on Monday night with an unspecified upper-body injury.

McAvoy remains in the hospital with a "significant injury" to his right shoulder that devel-

oped an infection, the Bruins said on Wednesday.

The statement from head team physician Peter Asnis said McAvoy injured his AC joint in the American round-robin game against Finland on Thursday in Montreal and was treated by the Team USA medical staff.

The pain increased after he returned to Boston, and further testing revealed the infection. Doctors treated the infection and McAvoy is improving, Asnis said.

"He's obviously disappointed that he won't have the ability to participate in the championship game. This tournament means a lot to him," said Sullivan, who is also McAvoy's father-in-law. "I'm disappointed for him because first and foremost, he's a great kid and he's a terrific hockey player, and I know this meant a lot to him."

Thursday's championship will be at the TD Garden, the Bruins' home ice.

## Spectator incident during loss has Raducanu in tears

*Associated Press*

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Emma Raducanu lost to Karolina Muchova after an emotional first set in which a spectator was ejected at the Dubai Championships.

The 2021 U.S. Open champion appeared to be in tears as she went to the umpire's chair after the second game Tuesday and her second-round match was briefly paused on Court 2.

After speaking to the umpire, who immediately called tournament organizers, Raducanu stood in a small space between the official's chair and court-side screening before Muchova moved over to console her.

Raducanu then picked up a towel, wiped her face, nodded and continued the match.

The British player rallied from 4-0 down to force a tie-

breaker but eventually lost 7-6 (6), 6-4 to Muchova.

Organizers of the women's tour issued a statement later saying Raducanu was approached in a public space Monday "by a man who exhibited fixated behavior" and "this same individual was identified in the first few rows during Emma's match on Tuesday ... and subsequently ejected."

"He will be banned from all WTA events pending a threat assessment."

The WTA said it was working with Raducanu and her team "to ensure her well-being and provide any necessary support."

On Wednesday, the 22-year-old British player responded with a statement on her Instagram account.

"Thank you for the messages of support. Difficult experience

yesterday but I'll be okay and proud of how I came back and competed despite what happened at the start of the match," Raducanu wrote. "Thank you to Karolina for being a great sport and best of luck to her for the rest of the tournament."

A man who stalked Raducanu while she was still a teenager was sentenced to an 18-month community service order and given a five-year restraining order after appearing in a British court in 2022.

Amrit Magar, a former delivery driver from London, went to Raducanu's home on three separate dates, loitered outside, left unwanted gifts and cards, and stole property.

Raducanu rose to fame in 2021 by winning the U.S. Open as a qualifier, one of the most unlikely achievements in ten-

nis. She hasn't been past the third round at a major since then and has spent long stints recovering from injuries.

The 14th-seeded Muchova advanced to a meeting against No. 53-ranked McCartney Kessler, who upset 2023 U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff 6-4, 7-5.

Third-ranked Gauff hadn't fallen to an opponent ranked outside the top 50 since a loss to Sofia Kenin (128th) at Wimbledon in 2023.

Earlier, second-seeded Iga Swiatek beat Victoria Azarenka 6-0, 6-2 and will next face Dayana Yastremska for a spot in the quarterfinals.

Top-seeded Aryna Sabalenka eliminated Veronika Kudermetova 6-3, 6-4, and defending champion Jasmine Paolini defeated Eva Lys 6-2, 7-5.