

DOD orders DEI purge of social media sites

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Building lethality in the military may be the buzzword for the new Trump administration, but busywork and paperwork have become the reality at the Pentagon, as service members and civilian workers are facing a broad mandate to purge all of the department's social media sites and untangle confusing personnel reduction moves.

On Wednesday, the department's top public affairs official signed and sent out a new memo requiring all the military services to spend countless hours poring over years of website postings, photos, news articles and videos to remove any mentions that "promote diversity, equity and inclusion."

If they can't do that by March 5, they have been ordered to "temporarily remove from public display" all content published during the Biden administration's four years in office, according to a copy of the memo obtained by The Associated Press.

The new directive comes as the military services are also scrambling to identify proba-

tionary workers the administration has targeted for firing under its campaign to slash the government workforce.

They are also trying to figure out how many civilian workers have agreed to leave under the government-wide buyouts and whether they have been approved.

Among the firings were a dozen senior military leaders late last week, including Gen. CQ Brown Jr., who was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations; Gen. Jim Slife, vice chief of the Air Force; and the judge advocates general for the services.

Top leaders had been targeted as part of the campaign to rid the military of so-called "woke" leaders, but the firing of the JAGs didn't seem to fall into that category.

The latest social media directive hits just days after the department issued a separate memo to the services reminding forces to remain apolitical and focused on "the non-partisan execution of their duties."

"Given the intense focus on re-

cent changes within the department, maintaining the public trust is more important than ever," said the memo, signed Feb. 19 by Darin Selnick, who is temporarily working as the undersecretary for personnel.

The move to purge content on diversity is part of Trump's broader executive order ending the federal government's diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

But confusion has swirled among federal agencies, since Trump himself marked Black History Month at the White House with a reception that featured golf legend Tiger Woods.

U.S. officials said this week that military leaders were initially told they would have just days to scour their websites going back decades for stories on gains in the military by women and minorities or stories celebrating cultural heritage. When the leaders said they didn't have the manpower to meet the deadline, they got the option to simply wipe away all posts from the last four years.

Employees would then go through all that content to deter-

mine what must be publicly removed and archived and what can be reposted.

But officials said that given the expanse of the task, many may just remove all content from the last four years and start over with new sites — essentially erasing the Biden tenure from the department's online history. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to relay internal discussions.

Signed by Sean Parnell, the department's new chief spokesman, the memo provides a bit more detail on the DEI purge that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered. But it also has left the services and department sections scrambling to find workers to devote substantial time to the detail-intensive task.

Officials said they are concerned that the directive has added yet another distraction as they try to focus on meeting Trump's broader mandate to increase lethality. They worry there is little time to strip years of old military web pages of all DEI content — and to do so means pulling staff from other more critical war-fighting and security tasks.

Marine Corps revises reenlistments for senior NCOs

BY LYDIA GORDON

Stars and Stripes

Senior enlisted Marines will soon be able to apply for reenlistments that extend their service to the end of their rank's time limitations, eliminating the need for periodic extensions.

The Enlisted Career Designation Program for career Marines will begin accepting applications June 1.

Though it's currently designated as a pilot program, it appears to be structured as a permanent change.

Under the new policy, master sergeants

and first sergeants may serve up to 27 years on active duty, while master gunnery sergeants and sergeants major may remain on active duty for 30 years, without having to ask for periodic extensions.

To be eligible, Marines in those ranks must have at least 15 years of service or have spent at least two years in their current grade, with a contract set to expire before Sept. 30, 2026, according to an administrative message issued Saturday.

"The program offers career Marines a more streamlined retention process, reducing uncertainty and administrative burdens

by allowing them to voluntarily commit to long-term service," Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Carlos Ruiz said in a Feb. 21 service statement.

All ranks will still be able to request resignation or retirement six to 18 months in advance provided they fulfill their obligated service requirements, the statement said.

Ruiz added that the initiative supports the Marine Corps' talent management strategy, which prioritizes retaining experienced, highly skilled Marines.

A deadline for the first round of applications has not yet been announced.

DOD firings drew little pushback from GOP

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When the Senate unanimously confirmed Gen. ‘CQ’ Brown Jr. as Air Force chief of staff in 2020, President Donald Trump hailed a “historic day for America!” on social media and said he was “Excited to work even more closely with Gen. Brown, who is a Patriot and Great Leader!”

Trump’s Feb. 21 social media post firing Brown, who had since risen to the military’s top uniformed officer, was comparatively reserved.

The Republican president dismissed Brown, the second African American to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with five other Pentagon officials in a rare move that some critics fear pushes politics into an institution vaunted for its nonpartisanship and adherence to the Constitution.

On Capitol Hill, the move drew little criticism from many Republican senators who had

once hailed Brown’s service to the nation.

“My understanding is the president does have the ability to decide who he wants to be as chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Gen. Brown, I believe, has done an excellent job,” said Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., compared the firings to the way President Barack Obama, a Democrat, shook up military leadership as he pursued military gains in Afghanistan. He said he was still trying to understand whether Trump’s dismissals were really without precedent.

Fired alongside Brown were five other top officials: Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the first woman to lead the Navy; Gen. James Slife, the vice chief of the Air Force; and the top judge advocate generals, who advise the military on how to legally conduct their actions, for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force.

But it was Brown’s dismissal

that attracted the most attention, given that Trump campaigned heavily on removing “woke” generals from the military.

Brown rose to the job after a career as one of the Air Force’s top aviators, but he drew conservative ire for speaking about his experiences as a Black man in the military after the murder of George Floyd.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., lambasted Brown’s firing. She said the message from the White House to rank-and-file troops is clear: “Your expertise and service is not what’s important. What’s important is your political loyalty to Donald Trump.”

Brown was only the second African American to serve as Joint Chiefs chairman, after the late Army Gen. Colin Powell. He was confirmed for the job in 2023 with significant bipartisan support, but few Republicans came to his defense after his firing.

Trump’s firings did draw some pushback, if muted. A bipartisan group of House members sent a letter to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth calling for “clear, transparent and apolitical” criteria for the removal of top military officials.

“An apolitical military is an essential component of our democracy and our national security,” wrote a group of six lawmakers that included Rep. Don Bacon, R-Neb., alongside moderate Democrats.

Others cheered Trump’s dismissals. Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Wis., a former Navy SEAL, slammed the Pentagon’s leadership under President Joe Biden, a Democrat, saying “the folks from that era just need to go away.”

Democratic senators say the firings are an ominous sign, given that Trump has long made clear his desire to involve the military in his domestic policy goals, including his crackdown on immigration.

Pentagon details transgender troop policy in court filing

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon revealed the specifics of its new transgender troop policy in a court filing Wednesday that says any service member or recruit who has been diagnosed with or treated for gender dysphoria is disqualified from serving — unless they can prove they meet a specific warfighting need and adhere to severe restrictions on their day-to-day behavior and medical care.

The policy memo was included in the latest court filing in a lawsuit challenging President Donald Trump’s executive order against transgender military service, one of many hot-button issues the president

made a priority to address on his first days in office.

Like the executive order, the policy filed Wednesday suggests that the lethality and integrity of the military “is inconsistent” with what transgender personnel go through as they transition to the gender they identify with and issues an edict that gender is “immutable, unchanging during a person’s life.”

The policy provides two exceptions — if transgender personnel who seek to enlist can prove on a case-by-case basis that they directly support warfighting activities or if an existing service member who was diagnosed with gender dysphoria can prove they support a specific

warfighting need and never transitioned to the gender they identify with and can additionally prove over 36 months they are stable in their biological sex “without clinically significant distress.”

If a waiver is issued in either case, the applicant would still face a situation where only their biological sex was recognized for bathroom facilities, sleeping quarters and even in official recognition, such as being called “Sir” or “Ma’am.”

Gender dysphoria occurs when a person’s biological sex doesn’t match with their gender identity.

While the number of transgender troops serving is small

compared to the size of the total force, it’s taken up a large amount of time and attention both at the White House and within the Pentagon.

The military services, due to medical privacy laws, do not provide an exact count of transgender troops, but a 2018 independent study by the Palm Center, which researched LGBTQ issues, assessed there were an estimated 14,000 transgender troops among the more than 2 million troops serving.

It was a policy Trump tried to overturn in his first term in office but the issue ended up mired in lawsuits until former President Joe Biden was elected and he overturned the ban.

Special ops facing technology challenges

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commanders of special operations forces told lawmakers Wednesday that they were worried about the speed of technological advancement among adversaries and feared the United States was not keeping up.

The advantage that the U.S. had for decades in being able to “sense the enemy before they sense us” has eroded with the proliferation of modern technologies among great powers and terrorist and criminal groups, said Maj. Gen. Peter Huntley, who leads the Marine Forces Special Operations Command.

“They’re moving fast in terms of upgrading. We need to be able to move just as fast,” he said in testimony to a House Armed Services Committee subpanel. “That’s our main challenge going forward.”

Huntley said he was “greatly” concerned about the ability of special forces to keep pace with modernization and rapidly evol-

ving technology such as artificial intelligence. Non-state actors, such as the Islamist militant group al-Shabab and drug cartels in South America, are evolving quickly, he said.

“What they bring to the tactical fight is, frankly, pretty impressive,” Huntley said.

Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga, commander of Army Special Operations Command, said his forces struggle with rapid innovation due to lengthy bureaucratic processes that can make the simple modification of commercial off-the-shelf drones take months or years.

Lt. Gen. Michael Conley, commander of Air Force Special Operations Command, said modifications to his aircraft fleet also take too long. By the time an aircraft fleet is updated to modern needs, the technology is already irrelevant, he said.

“It’s this constant loop of trying to catch up with the enemy threat,” Conley said.

To make up for the gap, Air Force Special Forces have been “training our way out of

it” by developing new tactics and procedures, he said.

“But that’s only a small piece of what we really need as far as advanced modifications,” Conley said.

Rear Adm. Milton Sands III, commander of Naval Special Warfare Command, said the challenge and priority for his command is rapidly getting equipment required for the modern battlefield into the hands of service members.

Braga suggested that could be achieved through better streamlining of innovation, funding and oversight processes. Huntley said Special Forces must move quickly to remove barriers to modernization as technology continues to transform warfare.

“That’s just kind of where the tactical world is right now and that’s where it’s going,” he said. “We can identify that, we know what we have to do, but to be able to get those capabilities into the hands of our operators, or our small tactical units, I would describe as critical.”

N. Korea reportedly sends more troops over to Russia

By DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea appears to have deployed additional troops to Russia this month to reinforce Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, South Korean media outlets reported Thursday, citing the South’s National Intelligence Service.

The Seoul-based spy agency is assessing how many North Korean forces were sent to the Kursk region of Russia in the first week of February after a monthlong pause in deployments, according to an agency statement cited Thursday by Yonhap News.

Between 1,000 and 3,000 North Korean troops were sent on Russian cargo ships and military aircraft between January and February, multiple unnamed sources told the Joon-gAng Ilbo in a separate report Thursday.

The newspaper, citing uni-

identified sources, also reported that Russia’s military has repeatedly asked North Korea to accept the remains of its service members killed on the battlefield, but it has so far refused.

The South Korean military continues to track North Korea’s troop deployments, South Korean army Col. Lee Sung-jun, a Joint Chiefs spokesman, said during a news conference Thursday at the Ministry of National Defense. He declined to comment on the reports.

Between 10,000 and 12,000 North Korean troops are estimated to have deployed to Russia as early as October to fight in the three-year conflict, according to the U.S. and Ukrainian militaries.

Of those, roughly 3,000 were killed or wounded during the fighting, South Korean lawmakers said in January, citing a closed-door briefing by the intelligence service.

Senator troubled by ‘failures’ after new moving overhaul

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner is urging U.S. Transportation Command to take immediate action over “failures” in pickup and delivery of household goods for hundreds of relocating military families under a sweeping overhaul of how items are shipped and stored.

“As the military community enters the permanent change of station peak season, it is essential that our servicemembers and their families have the logistical support they need to meet the mission,” the Virginia Democrat said in the letter Wednesday to Gen. Randall Reed, who heads the command.

The Defense Department is transferring oversight of the roughly 300,000 annual moves for the military and Coast Guard to HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture between Tier One Relocation and KBR, formerly Kellogg Brown & Root.

The Transportation Com-

mand awarded HomeSafe a \$20 billion contract in late 2021 to implement the Global Household Goods Contract, or GHC.

Under GHC, HomeSafe is replacing about 900 companies that until now managed military moves by contracting with movers and trucking, shipping and warehousing companies.

During a media roundtable in late January, Transportation Command officials said that roughly 1,000 service members had faced late pickups or deliveries of household goods under the ramp-up phase of GHC.

In an emailed statement Wednesday, HomeSafe said that logistical challenges have caused delays for some moves in the “early and developmental stages” of GHC.

“We apologize to every affected family,” the email states. “Over the last few weeks, we have made significant progress in working through challenges and strengthening our network of service providers.”

Democrats warn of DOGE access to intel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers are demanding answers from Elon Musk about whether staffers at his Department of Government Efficiency have shared national security secrets over insecure communication channels.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Rep. Gerry Connolly of Virginia were joined by several other Democrats on a letter Thursday that asserts that reckless actions by Musk and Republican President Donald Trump's cost-cutting initiatives present a threat to national security by exposing secrets about America's defense and intelligence agencies.

Such information would present huge advantages to U.S. ad-

versaries by giving them critical information about Washington's defense priorities and the resources assigned to various missions and objectives, the lawmakers said.

Without going through the normal security procedures, staffers hired by Musk have gained access to a variety of sensitive government databases that contain private information about many Americans and their businesses, along with employment and operational information used by the government.

In many cases that includes classified information, such as the precise number of employees working for various intelligence agencies.

According to the letter, DOGE staffers in recent weeks

have used unauthorized servers and unknown artificial intelligence programs to analyze and store the data, and shared the information over unsecure channels, raising the risk that a foreign nation, criminal group or inside threat could gain access or misuse the material.

The lawmakers also noted that despite assurances the DOGE website will not reveal information from intelligence agencies, material from the National Reconnaissance Office was easily found, the lawmakers said.

They expressed concerns that DOGE may be cutting spending and personnel without understanding the national security implications until it is too late.

They pointed to a recent incident in which the government tried to bring back workers it had fired who worked on nuclear weapon programs.

"DOGE employees do not appear to fully understand much of the information to which they have been given unfettered access and given the cavalier and incompetent ways that they have handled this data, these individuals represent a clear threat to national security and the nation's economy," the lawmakers wrote.

In their letter, the Democrats demanded information about DOGE staffing and security protocols and how the data has been used, and potentially misused, since DOGE began operations earlier this year.

Justices warm to straight woman's job bias claim

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court seemed likely Wednesday to side with an Ohio woman who claims she suffered sex discrimination from her employer because she is straight.

The outcome of the case could remove an additional requirement that some courts apply when members of a majority group, including those who are white and heterosexual, sue for discrimination under federal law.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh stated a way of resolving the case, that seemed to enjoy broad support among his colleagues.

"Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, whether you are gay or straight, is prohibited. The rules are the same whichever way it goes," Kavanaugh said.

The justices heard arguments in an appeal from Marlean Ames, who has worked for the Ohio Department of Youth Services for more than 20 years.

Ames contends she was passed over for a promotion and then demoted because she is heterosexual. Both the job she sought and the one she had held were given to LGBTQ+ people.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bars sex discrimination in the workplace. A trial court and the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Ames.

The question for the justices is that the Cincinnati-based 6th Circuit and several other appeals courts covering 20 states and the District of Columbia apply a higher standard when members of a majority group make discrimination claims. People alleging workplace bias have to show "background circumstances," including that LGBTQ+ people made the decisions affecting Ames or statistical evidence showing a pattern of discrimination against members of the majority group.

The appeals court noted that Ames didn't provide any such circumstances.

EPA head urges revise of finding on climate change

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a potential landmark action, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency has privately urged the Trump administration to reconsider a scientific finding that has long been the central basis for U.S. action against climate change.

In a report to the White House, EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin called for a rewrite of the agency's finding that determined planet-warming greenhouse gases endanger public health and welfare, according to four people who were briefed on the matter and spoke condition of anonymity because the recommendation is not public.

The 2009 finding under the Clean Air Act is the legal underpinning of a host of climate regulations for motor vehicles, power plants and other pollution sources.

A spokesperson for the EPA on Wednesday declined to reveal Zeldin's recommendation, which

was made last week under an executive order from Republican President Donald Trump. The order, issued on Trump's first day in office, directed the EPA to submit a report "on the legality and continuing applicability" of the endangerment finding.

The Obama-era finding "is the linchpin of the federal government's policies for what the president and I call the climate hoax," said Steve Milloy, a former Trump transition adviser who disputes mainstream science on climate change.

"If you pull this (finding) out, everything EPA does on climate goes away," Milloy told the AP.

Environmental groups and legal experts said any attempt to repeal or roll back the endangerment finding would be an uphill task with a slim chance of success.

"This would be a fool's errand," said David Doniger, a climate expert at the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

First measles death is reported in vast outbreak

TX LUBBOCK — A person who was hospitalized has died from measles in West Texas, the first death in an outbreak that began late last month.

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center spokesperson Melissa Whitfield confirmed the death Wednesday. It wasn't clear the age of the patient, who died overnight. Covenant Children's Hospital in Lubbock didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The measles outbreak in rural West Texas has grown to 124 cases across nine counties, the state health department said Tuesday. There are also nine cases in eastern New Mexico.

The outbreak is largely spreading in the Mennonite community in an area where small towns are separated by vast stretches of oil rig-dotted open land. Gaines County, which has 80 cases, has one of the highest rates in Texas of school-aged children who opt out of at least one required vaccine, with nearly 14% of K-12 children in the 2023-24 school year.

Tribe institutes curfew in response to violent crime

AZ PHOENIX — A tribe in Arizona instituted a temporary curfew for members under 18 on Tuesday because of a recent increase in violent crime within the community.

Stephen Roe Lewis, governor of the Gila River Indian Community south of Phoenix, declared a public safety emergency and instituted the nearly two-week curfew, which will run

from 7 p.m. until 5 a.m. every night until March 9.

"I will always take action whenever necessary to protect the Community's youth, and I encourage all Community members to report any suspicious or criminal activity to the Gila River Police Department," Lewis said in the statement posted on Instagram.

The announcement came the same day there was a shooting within the community, according to a Facebook post by the Gila River Police Department.

Republicans seek to alter universal mail-in voting

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Utah's universal mail-in voting system could be the first casualty of a Republican overhaul of the state's election operations as lawmakers look to improve efficiency and trust in the system.

The state's Republican-controlled House passed a bill in a 57-15 vote Tuesday that would require voters to opt in to receive their ballots in the mail, meaning they would no longer get them automatically. Starting next year, voters who want to return their ballots by mail or to a drop box would need to include the last four digits of their driver's license or state ID number.

The proposal would dramatically change the voting system in one of just eight states — and the only one led by Republicans — that allows all elections to be conducted by mail without a need to opt in. An earlier version required voters to make an in-person appearance and show ID if they wanted to return their ballots in the mail. Senate leaders said they would not support a pro-

positional making mail-in voting that difficult.

Report of campus danger was a misunderstanding

OH NEW CONCORD — A sheriff's office investigating a report of a possible shooting that prompted a lockdown at Ohio's Muskingum University determined Monday night that no shooting occurred.

Muskingum County Sheriff Matt Lutz said the report of a possible shooting was due to a staff member misunderstanding students who were talking about a loud domestic dispute that had happened earlier.

"It was relayed to law enforcement that there was a person with a hostage or something to the effect of a person with a gun," he said in a statement.

After interviewing students and checking buildings officials found no evidence of a shooting, so the shelter in place was lifted, according to Lutz.

Advocates seek Medicaid increase in holdout state

AL MONTGOMERY — Advocates gathered at the Alabama Statehouse on Tuesday urging lawmakers to reconsider their long-held reluctance to expand Medicaid, saying the decision is hurting both working families and health care providers. But the push comes at a time there is gathering uncertainty about possible cuts and changes in Washington to Medicaid, the safety net program that provides health care to 80 million U.S. adults and children.

The Affordable Care Act called for states to expand Medicaid programs to cover adults ages 19

to 64 with incomes up to 138% of the federal poverty level, about \$21,597 for a single person or \$29,187 for a family of two. But a U.S. Supreme Court decision made expansion optional. People earning more than that are eligible for federal health insurance subsidies through an online marketplace.

The uninsured rates in states without Medicaid expansion are nearly twice as high as those in expansion states, or 14% to 7.6%, according to numbers released Tuesday by KFF, a health policy research organization.

Walz to mull 3rd run for governor, not Senate seat

MN ST. PAUL — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz won't seek Minnesota's open U.S. Senate seat next year and is instead considering a run for a third term as governor, the Democrat's spokesman announced Wednesday.

The former vice presidential candidate announced his decision nearly two weeks after U.S. Sen. Tina Smith, a Democrat, announced she would not seek reelection in 2026.

Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan said soon after Smith's announcement that she was running. Other Democrats considering runs include U.S. Reps. Ilhan Omar and Angie Craig, Attorney General Keith Ellison and Secretary of State Steve Simon.

Republican Royce White, a former NBA player, had already said he would challenge Smith in 2026 and is staying in the race. Retired Navy SEAL and former congressional candidate Adam Schwarze has also said he's running.

—From wire reports

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Heave keeps Spartans atop Big Ten

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md.—Tre Holloman hadn't even reached the "M" logo at midcourt when he jumped off one foot and let the ball fly.

The buzzer sounded as the ball was airborne and somehow it stayed on line before dropping through the hoop with a swish that reverberated across the Big Ten.

If Michigan State and coach Tom Izzo win yet another conference title, Holloman's buzzer-beater might be the reason.

"Every day at home, the night before a game, that last practice, we have the guys go around. Everybody gets a shot at a half-court shot. The last two games, Tre has made two of them. He's made one (before) each game," Izzo said. "I thought that thing was in when it left. I really did."

The Spartans may practice shooting from midcourt, but when Holloman left the ground on this game-winner, he was closer to his own 3-point line — some 65 feet from the hoop. The shot gave No. 8 Michigan State a 58-55 win over No. 16 Maryland, plus a half-game lead over Michigan atop the Big Ten. It was a sensational finish to a game that was high on intensity but low on artistry.

"I felt we deserved to win the game," Izzo said. "I don't think it was a lucky shot at the end. I thought we played inspired basketball."

If the game had gone to overtime, Holloman would have been largely to blame. With the Spartans up by two, his pass in the backcourt was intercepted, and then he quickly fouled Ja'Kobi Gillespie, whose two free throws with 42.1 seconds left tied it at 55. Then Jaxon Kohler missed for Michigan State, giving the Terrapins a chance to win with the shot clock off.

Gillespie missed a 3-pointer, and there was just enough time for Kohler to rebound and flip

the ball to Holloman, who was 2-for-11 from the field at that point.

"Holloman hadn't made a shot all night, so once he released it, I knew the thing was going in," Maryland coach Kevin Willard said.

For Holloman, it was a chance to prove that shooting from midcourt isn't just a way to goof around at practice.

"I knew that it was good," Holloman said. "We practice those."

And when it did go in?

"I just remember zeroes and that we up."

No. 1 Auburn 106, Mississippi 76: Johni Broome scored 24 points, Chad Baker-Mazara added 22 and the host Tigers routed the Rebels.

After several weeks of cold shooting in home games, Auburn (26-2, 14-1 Southeastern Conference) made 11 of 21 attempts from 3-point range. The game started with a 3 from Baker-Mazara, a game-time decision due to an undisclosed issue.

No. 7 St. John's 76, Butler 70: RJ Luis Jr. scored 24 points and the visiting Red Storm clinched a share of its first Big East regular-season title in 33 years by beating the Bulldogs.

Kadary Richmond had 13 points, six rebounds, five assists and three steals for St. John's (25-4, 16-2), who set a school record for conference wins.

They can wrap up an outright league crown Saturday with a victory over Seton Hall at Madison Square Garden or a Creighton loss at Xavier.

Vanderbilt 86, No. 12 Texas A&M 84: Tyler Nickel scored 21 points on a career-best seven 3-pointers and the visiting Commodores held on for an upset over the Aggies.

The Commodores (19-9, 7-8 Southeastern Conference) were ahead by seven with 12 seconds to go when Zhuric Phelps made a layup before Texas A&M got the ball back on a turnover by

Tyler Tanner. Phelps then sank a 3-pointer to cut the lead to 86-84 with 1.5 seconds remaining.

Vanderbilt's Jason Edwards turned the ball over and it went out of bounds on the A&M end of the court, giving the Aggies the ball back with 0.2 seconds left. But the inbounds pass was grabbed by the Commodores to secure the victory.

Pharrel Payne had 23 points for Texas A&M (20-8, 9-6), which lost a season-high third straight game after winning its previous five.

No. 13 Clemson 83, Notre Dame 68: Ian Schieffelin had a career high 24 points as the host Tigers won a single-season program-record 15th Atlantic Coast Conference game with a victory over the Irish.

Schieffelin, who also had nine rebounds, rescued Clemson down the stretch of the first half with four straight baskets — his teammates had missed their previous 12 attempts — for a 41-31 halftime lead that Notre Dame (12-16, 6-11) could not overcome.

Clemson (23-5, 15-2) surpassed its previous mark for conference victories of 14, set two seasons ago when the team missed out on the NCAA's.

No. 17 Kentucky 83, Oklahoma 82: Otega Oweh scored a career-high 28 points and banked in an off-balance floater with six seconds remaining for the winner against his former team as the visiting Wildcats beat the Sooners.

Oweh was booed loudly during introductions and throughout the game. At one point, Oklahoma students chanted "He's a traitor" while Oweh stood at the free-throw line. It didn't matter — the guard scored Kentucky's final 18 points.

Oklahoma went for the win after Oweh's shot, but Kentucky's Brandon Garrison blocked Jeremiah Fears' floater. Garrison, an Oklahoma State transfer from Oklahoma City, had 12

points and three blocks for the Wildcats (19-9, 8-7 Southeastern Conference).

Jalon Moore scored 20 points and Fears added 18 points and eight rebounds for the Sooners (17-11, 4-11).

No. 18 Memphis 84, Rice 72: Dain Dainja scored a career-best 25 points and had 10 rebounds, and the host Tigers used a late 10-0 run to beat the Owls.

PJ Haggerty added 21 points for Memphis (23-5, 13-2 American Athletic Conference), and Nicholas Jourdan finished with 19 points and nine rebounds. The Tigers have won 10 of 11.

Caden Powell led Rice (13-16, 4-12) with 19 points and seven rebounds. Denver Anglin scored 14 points and Andrew Akuchie had 12.

Memphis stayed atop the AAC standings, 1 1/2 games ahead of North Texas and UAB, both of which play Thursday night.

No. 22 Arizona 83, Utah 66: Caleb Love hit six 3-pointers and scored 23 points, leading the host Wildcats to a blowout in the Utes' first game since coach Craig Smith was fired.

Utah (15-13, 7-10 Big 12) fired Smith on Monday and named assistant Josh Eilert as interim coach. The change did little good against the Wildcats (19-9, 13-4).

Arizona jumped on the Utes early, building a 14-point half-time lead and rolling from there to keep Utah winless in Tucson since 1986.

No. 25 BYU 91, Arizona St. 81: Richie Saunders scored 26 points, Trevin Knell added 18 and the visiting Cougars beat the short-handed Sun Devils to extend their winning streak to five games.

BYU (20-8, 11-6 Big 12) never trailed after the first few minutes, making 10 3-pointers in the first half and 17 in the game. Saunders shot 6-for-11 from beyond the arc.

Canucks get Hughes back in time to top Kings

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Quinn Hughes returned just in time for the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday night.

The star defenseman had the primary assist on Conor Garland's overtime goal as the Canucks defeated the Los Angeles Kings 3-2.

"He's the leader in the room and on the ice. Obviously a big, big boost for us when we saw he was playing," Garland said.

Last year's Norris Trophy winner as the NHL's top defenseman, Hughes returned after missing six games because of an undisclosed injury that also prevented him from playing for the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off tournament.

"I can say I didn't feel my best tonight, but I got through the game and hopefully can build off that," he said.

Hughes, who played for the first time since Jan. 31, went through a strenuous morning skate to see if he was ready to go. He was back on the ice for pregame warmups, but did not take line rushes and stayed on

the ice after the horn.

Hughes was initially listed as out on the roster report, but he convinced coach Rick Tocchet he could play. Hughes was changed to active eight minutes before the opening faceoff and was the last player to take the ice, with Vancouver going with seven defensemen.

"With 11 minutes left, we had a little bit of a talk and he persuaded me. He said he wanted to play and the doctors thought it was safe," Tocchet said.

Tocchet said the original plan was for Hughes to play 16 to 17 minutes. With the game going to overtime, though, it ended up being 21:38.

"I think with the back-to-back games and coming off the injury, I have got to be a little bit careful. I think I just felt good enough in warmups where I felt like I could play smart and get through the game," Hughes said.

Hughes leads the Canucks in scoring with 60 points, and his 46 assists are the most among NHL defensemen. His return comes as Vancouver is fighting

for a playoff spot. Wednesday night's win put it one point ahead of Calgary for the second wild card in the Western Conference.

Nils Hoglander also scored and Kevin Lankinen stopped 24 shots for the Canucks.

Adrian Kempe and Warren Foegele scored in the third period for the Kings, who trailed 2-0 after two periods. David Rittich made 14 saves.

Jets 4, Senators 1: Connor Hellebuyck made 24 saves and NHL-leading Winnipeg ran its franchise-record winning streak to 11 games, beating host Ottawa.

Hellebuyck made his second straight straight since starring for the United States in the 4 Nations Face-Off. The NHL victory leader improved to 36-7-2, helping the Jets get to 42-14-3 overall and 19-9-0 on the road.

Cole Perfetti and Mason Appleton opened the scoring for Winnipeg, Kyle Connor added his 31st goal of the season and Mark Scheifele had an empty-netter for his 33rd. Connor and

Scheifele also had assists.

Thomas Chabot scored for the Senators, and Linus Ullmark stopped 36 shots. Ottawa has lost five straight.

Avalanche 5, Devils 1: Nathan MacKinnon had two power-play goals and an assist, Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 22 shots against his former team and host Colorado beat New Jersey.

Artturi Lehkonen, Casey Mittelstadt and Logan O'Connor added goals to help the Avalanche snap a two-game skid. Colorado scored three times in a 4:04 span in the third period to crack open a tight game.

Blackwood continues to come up big when he faces the Devils, improving to 2-0 over three starts and allowing just one goal. He was selected by New Jersey in the second round of the 2015 draft.

Jake Allen finished with 31 saves as the Devils fell to 1-1 on their five-game trip. Jack Hughes cut it to 2-1 with 11:32 remaining before the Avalanche's goal eruption.

Penn St. DE Carter says he's best player in draft

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Former Penn State star Abdul Carter made one thing clear Wednesday: He should be the No. 1 overall pick in this year's NFL draft.

Carter was in the first group of players to speak with reporters at the NFL's annual scouting combine in Indianapolis, and he wasted no time declaring himself the top player in the 2025 draft class.

"I feel like I'm the best player in the country and the best player should be picked first," he said. "It's the work I put in with my dad, who trained me, and all the sacrifices I made, I know I'm the best."

Of course, such pronouncements have come to be expected during combine week.

Still, Carter certainly has a case after finishing last season with 68 tackles, a Football Bowl Subdivision-leading 23½ tackles for loss and 12 sacks.

He was the Big Ten's top defensive player

in 2024 and finished his three-year career with 39½ tackles for loss, 23 sacks and 14 passes defended.

The question is whether the 6-foot-3, 259-pound Carter is a better fit at defensive end or outside linebacker. Either way, he's likely to be the first or second defensive player selected April 24.

ESPN reported Wednesday that tests revealed Carter has a stress reaction in his right foot.

"There are mixed opinions on whether he needs surgery, and we will figure that out in the near future," agent Drew Rosenhaus told ESPN, adding he still believes Carter will be the top pick.

Regardless, going No. 1 overall remains a challenge.

Since 2007 only three defensive players have been chosen No. 1 overall — Jadeveon Clowney in 2014, Myles Garrett in 2017 and Travon Walker in 2022. Each was chosen pri-

marily because of their pass-rushing ability.

And leapfrogging the top two quarterbacks, Cam Ward of Miami and Shedeur Sanders of Colorado, or Heisman Trophy winner Travis Hunter will be difficult.

"I think quarterbacks have kind of a lock on that or maybe a great pass rusher," Cincinnati Bengals director of player personnel Duke Tobin said Tuesday when asked about a non-quarterback being the top overall selection. "Or maybe a guy that plays six positions like the one from my alma mater. We'll see."

Tobin, who attended Colorado, was referring to Hunter, who is listed as a cornerback but hopes to also play receiver.

Yet Carter believes he can defy the odds.

"Defensive players impact the game just as much as the quarterback," the 21-year-old Carter said. "All the teams that have won Super Bowls, they have that one standout player. I feel like I'm that."

Pistons rout Celtics for 8th straight win

Associated Press

DETROIT — Malik Beasley scored 26 points, Cade Cunningham had 21 points and 11 assists and the Detroit Pistons beat the Boston Celtics 117-97 on Wednesday night in a matchup of two of the NBA's hottest teams.

The Pistons (33-26) won their eighth straight and ended a 12-game losing streak against the Celtics, two nights after stopping a 10-game skid against the Los Angeles Clippers.

Jayson Tatum scored 27 points for Boston, and Derrick White and Payton Pritchard each had 18. The Celtics (42-17) had won six straight and 10 of 11.

Jalen Duren added 13 points and 11 rebounds for Detroit. The Pistons had a 49-33 rebounding edge.

Tied at 55 at halftime, Detroit took control by outscoring Boston 35-24 in the third quarter. The Pistons led 90-79 going into the fourth, then scored the first eight points of the quarter to take a 19-point advantage.

The Celtics' winning streak against Detroit dated to Feb. 16, 2022. It was their longest active streak against any opponent.

Pacers 111, Raptors 91: Tyrese Haliburton had 33 points and 11 assists to help host Indiana beat Toronto.

Haliburton was 12 of 15 from the field, going 7 of 9 from 3-point range. Myles Turner added 18 points and 10 rebounds and Pascal Siakam had 15 points.

Immanuel Quickley scored 18 points for the Raptors. RJ Barrett and Jonathan Mogbo each had 16.

Toronto played without Scottie Barnes because of a left hip contusion. He played Tuesday night against Boston.

Knicks 110, 76ers 105: Jalen Brunson had 34 points and seven assists, Mikal Bridges scored 28 points and host New York held off Philadelphia.

OG Anunoby had 16 points

and nine rebounds, and Josh Hart added seven points, 17 rebounds and four assists for the Knicks, who won for the fourth time in six games and 11th in their last 15.

Tyrese Maxey scored 30 points for the Sixers, who lost their ninth straight game. Paul George had 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and Kelly Oubre Jr added 27 points.

Bridges' 19 first-quarter points were the most he scored in any quarter this season and nearly as many as Philadelphia scored in the frame (21).

Trail Blazers 129, Wizards 121: Shaedon Sharpe threw down a vicious one-handed slam that was immediately hailed as one of the best dunks of the season, part of a career-best 36-point performance that carried visiting Portland to a win over Washington.

Sharpe shot 13 of 26 from the floor and converted all four of his free throws inside the final minute as the Trail Blazers maintained a lead of at least three throughout the fourth quarter.

Anfernee Simons and Scoot Henderson each added 16 points for Portland, which began the night 4½ games back of Sacramento for the Western Conference's final play-in spot.

Jordan Poole scored 24 points for the NBA-worst Wizards, who were attempting to win back-to-back games for the first time since winning three in a row to begin the month. Richaun Holmes added a career-high 20 points and Corey Kispert also scored 20.

Thunder 129, Nets 121: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 27 points, Chet Holmgren had 22 points and 17 rebounds, and visiting Oklahoma City rebounded from a stunning collapse with a game-changing blitz in the fourth quarter to beat Brooklyn.

Aaron Wiggins added 24 points and Jalen Williams had 22 for the Thunder, who were playing for the first time since

their 131-128 loss to Minnesota on Monday, when they led by 24 points in the fourth quarter and were still ahead by 16 with under 4 minutes remaining in regulation.

They had some of the same defensive woes in this one, when they allowed a season-high 76 points in the first half and trailed by 18. But then they unleashed an 18-0 run in the fourth quarter, turning a 103-99 deficit into a 117-103 lead. They outscored the Nets 27-7 to begin the period.

Day'Ron Sharpe scored a career-high 25 points in his first start of the season for Brooklyn, adding 15 rebounds and five assists. Killian Hayes had a season-best 19 points and Cam Johnson also scored 19.

Heat 131, Hawks 109: Tyler Herro scored 24 points and added 10 assists, Duncan Robinson scored 24 points off the bench and host Miami shot a season-best 59% in a win over Atlanta.

Davion Mitchell made all five of his 3-point tries and scored 20 for the Heat, who got 20 points and nine rebounds from Bam Adebayo.

Miami made 23 3-pointers, one shy of the franchise record. The Heat had 39 assists on 45 field goals.

Dyson Daniels scored 18 points and Trae Young and Caris LeVert each had 17 for the Hawks, who gave up 65 points in the first half then 66 more in the second half.

Clippers 122, Bulls 117: James Harden made seven 3-pointers and scored 30 points, and visiting Los Angeles beat Chicago.

Kawhi Leonard had 17 points and eight rebounds after missing back-to-back games because of a sore left foot. Amir Coffey scored 20, and the Clippers got back to winning after losing three in a row.

Derrick Jones Jr. added 16 points. Bogdan Bogdanovic made 4 of 5 3s and finished with 14 points, helping sixth-place

LA move a half-game ahead of Minnesota in the Western Conference.

Zach Collins set season highs with 21 points and a career-best 17 rebounds for the Bulls, and Josh Giddey had 21 points and 12 assists. Coby White scored 19, but Chicago lost for the seventh time in eight games.

Kings 118, Jazz 101: Keegan Murray scored a season-high 26 points and Zach Levine added 22 to lift hot-shooting Sacramento to a win over host Utah.

Murray made five 3-pointers, Levine had four and Keon Ellis returned to the court to make three 3s as the Kings made 15 of 36 from beyond the arc. Sacramento was equally potent inside the paint with 50 points and shot 52.9% overall to start their four-game road swing.

Murray scored on a mix of dunks, drives and his trademark long jumpers while topping 20 points for the first time since he had 21 on Nov. 24 in a loss to Brooklyn.

Walker Kessler had a season-high 25 points and 14 rebounds for the Jazz and KJ Martin had his best game since arriving in Utah at the trade deadline with 16 points. The Jazz have lost four of their last five.

Rockets 118, Spurs 106: Amen Thompson had 25 points and eight rebounds, Jalen Green added 21 points and seven rebounds and host Houston beat San Antonio.

Green scored 16 points in the first half to help the Rockets take a 64-46 lead. Thompson was ejected Tuesday night against Milwaukee for pulling down Giannis Antetokounmpo by the head and neck.

Dillon Brooks had 19 points on 5-of-8 shooting from 3-point range for Houston. The Rockets have won three of four since the All-Star break.

Keldon Johnson scored 22 points, and Stephon Castle added 22 points and seven rebounds for the Spurs, who have lost four straight.