

IMPEACHMENT

Trial could begin on Inauguration Day

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's impeachment trial could begin on Inauguration Day, just as Democrat Joe Biden takes the oath of office in an extraordinary end to the defeated president's tenure in the White House.

The trial timeline and schedule are largely set by Senate procedures and will start as soon as the House delivers the article of impeachment. That could mean starting the trial at 1 p.m. on Inauguration Day. The ceremony at the Capitol starts at noon.

Trump was impeached Wednesday by the House over the deadly Capitol siege, the only president in U.S. history twice impeached, after a pro-Trump mob stormed the building. The attack has left the nation's capital, and other capital cities, under high security amid threats of more violence around the inauguration.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has not said when she will take the next step to transmit the impeachment article, a sole charge of incitement of insurrection. Some senior Democrats have proposed holding back the article to give Biden and Congress time to focus on his new administration's priorities.

Biden has said the Senate should be able to split its time and do both.

The impeachment trial will be the first for a president no longer in office. And, politically, it will force a reckoning among some Republicans who have stood by Trump throughout his presidency and largely allowed him to spread false attacks against the integrity of the 2020 election.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell is open to considering impeachment, having told associates he is done with Trump, but has not signaled how he would vote.

Convening the trial will be among his last acts as majority leader, as two new senators from Georgia, both Democrats, are to be sworn into office leaving the chamber divided 50-50. That tips the majority to the Democrats once Kamala Harris takes office, as the vice president is a tie-breaker.

In a note to colleagues Wednesday,

McConnell said he had "not made a final decision on how I will vote" in a Senate impeachment trial.

With the Capitol secured by armed National Guard troops inside and out, the House voted 232-197 on Wednesday to impeach Trump. The proceedings moved at lightning speed, with lawmakers voting just one week after violent pro-Trump loyalists stormed the Capitol, egged on by the president's calls for them to "fight like hell" against the election results.

Ten Republicans fled Trump, joining Democrats who said he needed to be held accountable and warned ominously of a "clear and present danger" if Congress should leave him unchecked before Biden's inauguration Jan. 20. It was the most bipartisan presidential impeachment in modern times, more so than against Bill Clinton in 1998.

The Capitol insurrection stunned and angered lawmakers, who were sent scrambling for safety as the mob descended, and it revealed the fragility of the nation's history of peaceful transfers of power.

Pelosi invoked Abraham Lincoln and the Bible, imploring lawmakers to uphold their oath to defend the Constitution from all enemies, foreign "and domestic."

She said of Trump: "He must go, he is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love."

Holed up at the White House, watching the proceedings on TV, Trump later released a video statement in which he made no mention at all of the impeachment but appealed to his supporters to refrain from any further violence or disruption of Biden's inauguration.

"Like all of you, I was shocked and deeply saddened by the calamity at the Capitol last week," he said, his first condemnation of the attack. He appealed for unity "to move forward" and said, "Mob violence goes against everything I believe in and everything our movement stands for. ... No true supporter of mine could ever disrespect law enforcement."

Trump was first impeached by the House in 2019 over his dealings with Ukraine, but the Senate voted in 2020 acquit.

No president has been convicted by the Senate, but Republicans have said that could change in the rapidly shifting political environment as officeholders, donors, big business and others peel away from the defeated president.

Conviction and removal of Trump would require a two-thirds vote in the Senate.

Biden said in a statement after the vote that it was his hope the Senate leadership "will find a way to deal with their Constitutional responsibilities on impeachment while also working on the other urgent business of this nation."

Unlike his first time, Trump faces this impeachment as a weakened leader, having lost his own reelection as well as the Senate Republican majority.

In making a case for the "high crimes and misdemeanors" demanded in the Constitution, the four-page impeachment resolution relies on Trump's own incendiary rhetoric and the falsehoods he spread about Biden's election victory, including at a rally near the White House on the day of the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

The impeachment resolution is also intended to prevent Trump from ever running for president again.

A Capitol Police officer died from injuries suffered in the riot, and police shot and killed a woman during the siege. Three other people died in what authorities said were medical emergencies. The riot delayed the tally of Electoral College votes, which was the last step in finalizing Biden's victory.

Ten Republican lawmakers, including third-ranking House GOP leader Liz Cheney, of Wyoming, voted to impeach Trump, cleaving the Republican leadership, and the party itself.

Cheney, whose father, Dick Cheney, is the former Republican vice president, said of Trump's actions summoning the mob that "there has never been a greater betrayal by a President" of his office.

The president's sturdy popularity with the GOP lawmakers' constituents still had some sway, and most House Republicans voted not to impeach.

Some in Guillen's command chain suspended

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Grinston told a group of soldiers last week at Fort Hood that all the military leaders in Spc. Vanessa Guillen's chain of command had been fired in the aftermath of her disappearance and death at the base.

On Wednesday, Grinston said some of those soldiers — the seven leaders from her battalion to her squad — have only been suspended until an investigation is completed. Under a suspension, some of them could return to the unit, according to an Army spokesman.

"They're gone," Grinston said Thursday about the leaders when asked by a junior enlisted soldier at the Texas base why soldiers and leaders who commit crimes or allow misconduct to persist are shuffled into new units where they can possibly harm others.

From the squad to battalion, those leaders

responsible for Guillen were not there anymore, Grinston said during a discussion with about two dozen soldiers that Stars and Stripes was permitted to attend under the condition that none of the soldiers participating were identified.

But Grinston clarified Wednesday that by saying "gone," he meant they were suspended. While those leaders have been removed from the unit, they could return to their previous job or other leadership roles in the Army pending the results of an ongoing Army Forces Command investigation. Three leaders from the brigade to corps level were previously announced as fired.

Gen. John Murray, commander of Army Futures Command, was tasked in September with leading that investigation, known in the Army as a 15-6. A public release of its findings hasn't been scheduled.

The findings of a separate investigation led

by civilians were released Dec. 8 and led Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy to take disciplinary action against 14 leaders at Fort Hood, including those Grinston referenced last week. The Fort Hood Independent Review Committee outlined in their report that the command climate and culture problems at the base were a result of poor leadership. Those problems at the base were evident as far back as 2014, according to the report.

Only five of the 14 leaders serving at the brigade-level and above were named in December's announcement of the disciplinary action, in accordance with Army policy. Maj. Gen. Scott Efflandt, the deputy commander of III Corps, who was the acting base commander at the time of Guillen's disappearance and death, Col. Ralph Overland and Command Sgt. Maj. Bradley Knapp, the commander and top enlisted soldier of Guillen's unit, the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, were fired.

Ex-Navy SEAL is questioned by FBI on Capitol riot involvement

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A retired Navy SEAL who described "breaching the Capitol" in a Facebook video is now being questioned by the FBI about his involvement in last week's violent riot, according to a news report.

Adam Newbold, 45, from Lisbon, Ohio, recorded a now-deleted video when he was returning from Washington, saying he was "proud" of the riot that happened at the Capitol building, ABC News reported. The news organization was able to obtain a copy of the video before it was deleted.

From the 30 seconds of video that ABC News posted, Newbold appears to reference lawmakers who returned to the Capitol after the riot ended to conclude the certification of the election.

"What did get destroyed — and they're obviously trying to overcome now — again maybe they're just — they just didn't get the message, unfortunately. I'm hoping the message was strong enough. Unfortunately, maybe it wasn't. I hate to see this escalate more," he said.

The Navy confirmed Wednesday that

Newbold is a retired senior chief petty officer, or E-8, who served more than 23 years. Most of his career, he was either training or based at an "East Coast naval special warfare unit" until he retired from the Navy Reserve in 2017, according to details of his service record provided by the Navy.

Newbold has deployed to Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, according to his military awards. Newbold has also received the Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Navy/Marine Corps Commendation Medals with Combat "V" for valor, the Army Commendation Medal and four Navy/Marine Corps Achievement Medals, according to his service record.

In a Facebook video by Newbold posted the night before the riot, he said there are "good people on all sides of this thing," but they "can no longer be quiet."

Newbold told ABC News that he had been questioned by the FBI about his activities at the Capitol building and a second interview had been requested. An FBI spokeswoman from the Washington, D.C. Field Office would not confirm Wednesday that he is being questioned, saying the bureau does not comment on specific investigations.

Redstone Arsenal to harbor HQ for Space Command

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force has chosen Alabama's Redstone Arsenal to house the 1,400-member U.S. Space Command Headquarters, service and state officials said Wednesday.

Outgoing Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett selected Redstone this month "as the preferred location" for SPACECOM, Air Force officials said. Service officials told Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey of their decision in a phone call Wednesday morning, Ivey's office said in a statement.

"I couldn't be more pleased to learn that Alabama will be the new home to the United States Space Command!" Ivey said in the statement. "The bottom line is simple, the Redstone region is the most natural choice to become home to such an important mission for our country."

Redstone, an Army installation just outside Huntsville, was named one of six finalists for the headquarters in November after the Air Force conducted two searches for a permanent home for the Pentagon's newest combatant command, which is charged with overseeing and controlling the U.S. military's myriad space-based infrastructure and operations.

US unemployment claims up to 965K

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people seeking unemployment aid soared last week to 965,000, the most since late August and evidence that the resurgent coronavirus has caused a spike in layoffs.

The latest figures for jobless claims, issued Thursday by the Labor Department, remain at levels never seen until the virus struck. Before the pandemic, weekly applications typically numbered around 225,000. Last spring, after nationwide shutdowns took effect, applications for jobless benefits spiked to nearly 7 million — 10 times the previous

record high. After declining over the summer, weekly claims have been stuck above 700,000 since September.

The high pace of layoffs coincides with an economy that has faltered as consumers avoid traveling, shopping and eating out in the face of soaring viral caseloads. Over 4,300 deaths were reported Tuesday, another record high. Shutdowns of restaurants, bars and other venues where people gather in California, New York and other states have likely forced up layoffs.

Some states and cities are resisting shutdowns, partly out of fear of the economic conse-

quences but raising the risk of further infections. Minnesota allowed in-person dining to resume this week, and Michigan is poised to do the same. Some bars and restaurants in Kansas City are extending their hours.

In addition to the first-time applications for unemployment aid last week, the government said 5.3 million Americans are still receiving state jobless benefits, up from 5.1 million in the previous week.

Many more Americans are receiving jobless aid from two federal programs — one that provides extended benefits to people who exhausted their

state aid and another that supplies benefits to self-employed and contract workers.

Those two programs had expired near the end of December. They were belatedly renewed, through mid-March, in a \$900 billion rescue aid package that Congress approved and President Donald Trump signed into law. That package also includes \$600 relief checks for most adults and a supplemental unemployment benefit payment of \$300 a week. Congressional Democrats favor boosting the checks to \$2,000 and extending federal aid beyond March, as does President-elect Joe Biden.

Unruly flyers are focus of new FAA program

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal officials said they are taking aggressive aim at security concerns that have surfaced in the wake of violence at the U.S. Capitol last week, including cracking down on unruly airplane passengers and potentially placing those who participated in the riot on the no-fly list.

Federal Aviation Administration chief Steve Dickson signed an order Wednesday that creates an “enforcement program” targeted at passengers who “assault, threaten, intimidate or interfere” with crew members while flying.

“The FAA has recently observed a proliferation of such conduct, including conduct stemming from the failure to wear masks in response to the COVID-19 pandemic-related health measures in place on board aircraft or conduct following the January 6, 2021 violence at the U.S. Capitol,” the agency said. “This bulletin announces an FAA special emphasis enforcement program to more effectively address and deter such

conduct by passengers.”

The order comes one day after Steven D’Antuono, head of the FBI’s Washington Field Office, said the agency was “actively looking at” placing the rioters on the federal no-fly list. It was the first time FBI officials acknowledged publicly they were considering that step.

In recent days, lawmakers have questioned whether enough is being done to prevent a repeat of the violence that shook the Capitol. Among the measures being considered is using the no-fly list to block people from returning to Washington in the days leading to the inauguration.

That issue will likely be raised by law enforcement officials during a Thursday briefing for members of the House Homeland Security Committee.

Committee Chairman Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., was among the first lawmakers to demand that rioters be placed on the no-fly list — a call echoed Tuesday by Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y.

Northwest US storm kills 1, knocks out power for 500K

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — A powerful wind storm rolled through the Pacific Northwest, killing one person and leaving a trail of damage — including a highway shut down after a landslide and a tractor-trailer that was nearly blown off a bridge. More than 500,000 people lost power.

The death happened in Spokane, when a woman in her 40s died after a tree fell on her car and trapped her inside, city Fire Chief Brian Schaeffer said. In Oregon, authorities said Jennifer Camus Moore, 50, was driving a vehicle believed to be swept away after a landslide hit Interstate 84, authorities said.

Winds reached gusts 50 to 70 mph in parts of the Puget Sound region as the storm blew through on the tail end of several inches of rain that left the ground saturated and conditions ripe for trees to fall, KOMO-TV reported.

As of early Wednesday, Seattle had received 20% of its normal annual rainfall, according to the National Weather Service.

High winds blew down trees

across the greater Spokane region. Avista, a Spokane-based utility, reported that more than 70,000 customers were without power Wednesday morning. About 430,000 customers elsewhere in Washington state and in Oregon also lost electrical service, officials said.

In Oregon, residents of the small community of Dodson were told to evacuate after the National Weather Service issued a flash flood warning Wednesday morning, KOIN-TV reported.

The weather service told residents to call friends in the area to wake them up and tweeted that the situation has been “deemed too dangerous to send in rescue crews.”

Near Dodson, part of Interstate 84 was closed after the landslide spilled onto the freeway.

A tractor-trailer in Washington state blew over amid heavy wind gusts as it attempted to travel over the Deception Pass Bridge north of Seattle, officials said. Part of the truck was left dangling over the edge of the bridge, but the driver escaped unharmed.

Some Ore. restaurants defy dining ban

Associated Press

BORING, Ore. — A line formed out the door during the lunch rush at the Carver Hangar, a family-owned restaurant and sports bar, and waitresses zipped in and out of the kitchen trying to keep up with orders as customers backed up in the lobby.

Indoor dining has been banned in much of Oregon for nearly two months, but the eatery 20 miles southeast of Portland was doing a booming business — and an illegal one. The restaurant's owners, Bryan and Liz Mitchell, fully reopened Jan. 1 in defiance of Democratic Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 indoor dining ban in their county despite the risk of heavy fines and surging coronavirus cases.

"We're not going to back down because our employees still need to eat, they still need that income," said Bryan Mitchell, as customers ate at tables spaced 6 feet apart. "The statement that we're making is, 'Every life is essential. You have the right to survive. Nobody should tell you what you can and cannot do to provide for your family.'"

Health officials in Oregon and other states with bans say they are necessary because people can't wear masks when they eat, are in close proximity in smaller and often poorly ventilated spaces, and are prone to talk more loudly in a crowded dining room — all known contributors to viral spread. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists indoor dining as a "particularly high-risk" activity.

But even as coronavirus deaths soar, a growing number of restaurants in states across the country are reopening in defiance of strict COVID-19 rules that have shut them down for indoor dining for weeks, or even months. Restaurants can serve people outside or offer carry-out, but winter weather has crippled revenues from patio dining.

Illinois

CHICAGO — Chicago teachers punished for refusing to show up for the start of in-person classes over COVID-19 concerns demonstrated Wednesday outside the school board president's home.

Roughly 150 employees were docked pay and locked out of Chicago Public Schools systems earlier this week, meaning they can't teach remotely either as classes began this week for thousands of pre-kindergarten and special education students. District officials said late Wednesday that the number had dropped to 100 as staff mem-

bers either returned to work or presented a valid excuse, such as a quarantine.

Dozens bundled up in winter gear for a "teach in" outside Chicago Board of Education President Miguel del Valle's home. Those who've lost access to school email and teaching platforms recorded videos or Facebook Live streams for their students. Others protested in solidarity and continued remote lessons from the lawn.

Maine

PORTLAND — The number of COVID-19 infections continues to soar in Maine, reaching a new daily record on Wednesday, as the state made plans to update its vaccine plan to prioritize older residents.

The daily number of confirmed infections reported by the Maine Center for Disease Control grew to more than 820 on Wednesday, surpassing the previous high of at least 780 on Friday. There also were four more deaths.

Maine's seven-day average for new infections was at more than 580, an increase from at least 510 a week ago and from nearly 365 a month ago.

Democratic Gov. Janet Mills announced that Maine's coronavirus vaccination plan has been updated to follow new federal guidelines recommending that states prioritize older residents. She said the state will start by dedicating a considerable amount of the state's vaccine supply to residents 70 years of age and older.

New York

NEW YORK — The federal government must speed the delivery of COVID-19 vaccine doses to New York as appointments are snapped up as quickly as they go online, Gov. Andrew Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio said Wednesday.

"At the end of the day, this is a supply issue and we need the federal government to provide us with more vaccine as quickly as possible because there is simply not enough and this is the weapon that will win the war," Cuomo said.

The Democratic governor said more than 7 million people statewide are now eligible to be vaccinated but the state is receiving just 300,000 vaccine doses a week from the federal government. "We are making the vaccine available based on federal guidance and are continuing to push it out the door quickly and efficiently, but due to the federal government's limited allocation, appointments are filling up fast," Cu-

mo said in a statement.

North Carolina

CHAPEL HILL — The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill reported a COVID-19 cluster on Wednesday that it said involved students who stayed on the campus during winter break.

The school said the cases were found through surveillance testing of students who lived at Carmichael Residence Hall.

A "cluster" is defined by the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services as five or more cases in close proximity. The people identified in the cluster have been identified and are isolating and receiving medical monitoring at a different residence hall set aside for quarantine and isolation, and their close contacts have also been tested and moved into quarantine, the school said.

Oregon

SALEM — Oregon has fined a Salem gym nearly \$127,000 for remaining open in defiance of COVID-19 restrictions.

Oregon Occupational Safety and Health announced Tuesday it had issued the fine to Capitol Racquet Sports for willfully refusing to comply with state health orders at one of its Courthouse Club Fitness locations in Salem, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

The gym will have 30 days to decide whether to appeal. It appealed prior sanctions.

Gyms in counties deemed "extreme risk" for COVID-19 spread have not been allowed to conduct indoor operations since late November under Gov. Kate Brown's framework for COVID-19 restrictions. The regulations came after Brown mandated that gyms close entirely for two weeks in early November.

Vermont

BURLINGTON — The University of Vermont is hoping to give students more room to study when they return to campus for the spring session.

The Burlington school has erected two large tents at different locations that can be used, as UVM spokesperson Enrique Correda puts it, for "appropriately distanced auxiliary space, including for studying."

The Burlington Free Press reports both of the steel-framed structures have solid floors, are fully lit and will be fully wired for studying. They also will be warmed with industrial-sized propane heaters.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Profile in magazine brings probe, which leads to man's conviction

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Minnesota man whose profile in Popular Science magazine about making homemade explosives for the NFL and others initiated a federal investigation was sentenced Tuesday to nearly two years in prison for possessing illegal materials.

Agents raided the Brownsville home of Kenneth Miller in March, after the magazine article showed photographs of Miller shooting red flares off the hood of his pickup truck and packing powdered chemicals in a nearby shack he used as a makeshift laboratory.

Miller told the magazine he built special effects for the NFL, air shows and Hollywood movies, including the blockbuster Transformers franchise.

Investigators said Miller had previous felony convictions that precluded him from touching the highly combustible material used to create these devices. Miller admitted to manufacturing and selling smoke-generating devices and a chlorate explosive mixture to customers across the country.

Police officer suspended over social media posts

MD UPPER MARLBORO — A Maryland police officer was suspended on Tuesday over two social media posts, including one showing him wearing what was described as a political T-shirt as he displayed his badge and service weapon.

The Prince George's County Police Department said in a news release that its internal affairs division opened an investigation which discovered a second media post that raised concern and led to the suspension by Interim Chief Hector Velez. The officer wasn't identified and the specific nature of the posts wasn't disclosed.

"I fully support an officer's First Amendment rights, however these posts are in violation of the department's social media policy," Velez said. "When I was shown the

post that is circulating online, I was concerned and ordered a thorough review of his social media platforms."

Ex-Crimestoppers board member indicted

MS JACKSON — A former board member of a Mississippi Crimestoppers' group has been arrested following her indictment for embezzlement.

State Auditor Shad White, in a news release Tuesday, said Michelle McBride surrendered Monday to special agents from his office at the Pearl River County Sheriff's Office. Her bond was set at \$20,000. It was unknown if she has an attorney who could speak on her behalf.

McBride allegedly used her position as Secretary/Treasurer of the Pearl River County Crimestoppers to embezzle over \$52,000 from January 2014 to April 2019. Investigators believe McBride used the group's debit card for personal rodeo expenses and transferred PRCCS funds to fraudulent nonprofit accounts she owned.

200-foot-wide Avalanche sweeps skiers down mountain

MT BILLINGS — An avalanche swept three skiers down a Montana mountain, seriously injuring one who was evacuated by helicopter.

Authorities said the avalanche last Friday on Republic Mountain south of Cooke City left a second skier temporarily unconscious and not breathing, The Billings Gazette reported.

Six skiers involved were carrying avalanche beacons and rescue gear as they climbed up the slope at an elevation of 9,700 feet. The avalanche started about 250 feet above the skiers in an area known as The Fin.

The three skiers were swept downhill as the avalanche expanded to 200 feet wide and snow rumbled 700 feet down the mountain.

"It's super serious avalanche terrain," said Doug Chabot, director of the Gallatin National Forest Avalanche Center.

Man gets 6 months for trying to smuggle drugs into jail

MA LAWRENCE — A man released from a Massachusetts jail after testing positive for the coronavirus has been sentenced to an extra six months behind bars after trying to smuggle drugs back inside the facility.

A judge ruled Monday that Eric Jalbert, of Salem, will serve the extra time after completing a two- to three-year sentence on fentanyl distribution charges, The Salem News reported.

Jalbert was awaiting trial when he tested positive for COVID-19 in April, according to authorities. He was released by a judge in April with the condition that he stay under home confinement at his mother's Beverly home. But prosecutors say Jalbert failed to comply with the conditions of his release, and was ordered back to jail.

When Jalbert reported to the Middleton jail, officers found 15 Suboxone strips, marijuana and tobacco hidden in a body cavity, the district attorney's office said.

He was convicted of the fentanyl charges in July.

Man sentenced for letting more than 200 cattle die

NE GENEVA — A southeast Nebraska man has been sentenced to 15 to 20 years in prison after more than 200 cattle he was supposed to be caring for died.

Aaron E. Ogren, 31, of Exeter, was sentenced Tuesday on seven charges. He initially faced 43 charges after Fillmore County sheriff's deputies found the dead cattle last April on property near Exeter.

Prosecutors said Ogren also sold cattle he didn't own, The York News-Times reported.

A horse also died on the property and more livestock died later because they were in such poor condition when they were removed from the farm, authorities said.

— From wire reports

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Nets have pieces, now they must fit

Associated Press

Having a Big Three is great.

That is, if those players want it to be great.

And that's the challenge in Brooklyn now, after agreeing to the trade that landed three-time reigning scoring champion James Harden from Houston: Getting Harden, Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving, all individually great, to want to be great together.

A lot of futures and a lot of legacies depend on what happens.

Durant found a way to make it happen in Golden State when he played alongside Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson on the way to a pair of NBA titles. It worked there because Curry and Thompson, more than happily, checked their egos at the door and made it seem like a seamless incorporation.

Harden never made the NBA Finals in Houston with big-time backcourt partners like Chris Paul and Russell Westbrook, plus didn't even give it a chance this season

alongside John Wall. He wanted a trade, stars who want trades almost always get their way, and after what amounted to a resignation speech on Tuesday night after a loss to the reigning champion Los Angeles Lakers it was clear that he was never wearing a Rockets jersey again.

Irving won a title in Cleveland with LeBron James, but that relationship never was what it could have been — and nobody knows where Irving's mind is at after now a week and counting of personal leave away from the Nets. He reportedly left for family birthday parties and a Zoom call to help organize a candidate's campaign for district attorney in Manhattan. Oh, and that Zoom happened on a night that the Nets were playing.

At this point, it's unclear when — or if — Irving will return to the Nets.

But give the Nets credit. They went all-in with this trade. They dealt away a rising standout in Caris LeVert and bet most of

their foreseeable draft future — three first-round picks, at minimum — on the hope that Harden is the last piece needed on the way to a championship. He's now reunited with not just Durant, another former teammate in Oklahoma City when they were starting out and still found their way to the 2012 NBA Finals, but also former Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni as well.

That said, turning a Big Three into the big trophy isn't automatic.

And doing it during a pandemic with limited practices and seemingly inevitable breaks, makes it a stiff challenge.

James, Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh were the trio that led Miami past those Thunder in the 2012 finals, getting a ring in their second year together (and one the next year, too). They lost the finals to Dallas in 2011 and needed to win two elimination games against Boston just to get out of the Eastern Conference on the way to that 2012 title.

Lakers, James drop Thunder, jump to 7-0 road start

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — LeBron James scored 26 points and the Los Angeles Lakers routed the Oklahoma City Thunder 128-99 on Wednesday night for their franchise-record seventh straight road victory to start the season.

Montrezl Harrell added 21 points, and Anthony Davis had 18 points and seven rebounds. The defending champion Lakers have won four straight to improve to an NBA-best 10-3. They surpassed the 1985-86 squad with the 7-0 road start.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 17 points to lead the Thunder. The Lakers led by 24 in the second quarter before the Thunder cut it to 58-46 at half-time. James scored 15 points in the half.

Los Angeles' biggest lead was 31 points in the fourth quarter. Oklahoma City never led.

"We just have a bunker mentality on the road — just us," James said. "But obviously, it's even more just us because of the

restrictions, COVID, everything that's going on. So we've come together even closer."

Mavericks 104, Hornets 93: Luka Doncic had 34 points, 13 rebounds, nine assists and a career-high four blocks, Kristaps Porzingis scored 16 points in his return from a knee injury and Dallas won at Charlotte.

Tim Hardaway Jr. added 18 points to help Rick Carlisle become the 16th coach in NBA history to win 800 games. The Mavericks have won four straight after opening 2-4.

Trail Blazers 132, Kings 126: Damian Lillard scored eight of his season-high 40 points in the final four minutes and visiting Portland tied a franchise record with 23 three-pointers to win at Sacramento.

Lillard and CJ McCollum each hit six threes to lead the Trail Blazers to their fourth straight victory. Lillard added 13 assists, and McCollum had 28 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds. Jusuf Nurkic had a season-best 18 points and 13 re-

bounds.

Nets 116, Knicks 109: Kevin Durant scored 26 points as the solo superstar before soon centering a Big Three, leading Brooklyn — short-handed after agreeing to a trade for James Harden — past host New York.

Durant was already scheduled to play on both nights of a back-to-back for the first time since surgery to repair his Achilles tendon. He maybe had to do a little more than planned after the Nets shook up their roster earlier in the day with a four-team blockbuster highlighted by the acquisition of Harden.

Bucks 110, Pistons 101: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his 20th triple-double and Milwaukee beat host Detroit for the third time this month.

The Bucks built a big early lead with a flurry of three-pointers. Brook Lopez connected three times from beyond the arc in the first quarter, when Mil-

waukee was 7-for-11 from long distance. The Pistons were 4-for-20 overall in the period and trailed 27-13 after one.

Jrue Holiday added 21 points for the Bucks. Jerami Grant had 22 for Detroit.

Clippers 111, Pelicans 106: Kawhi Leonard scored 28 points, Paul George added 27 and host Los Angeles beat short-handed New Orleans.

The Pelicans were without starters Zion Williamson, Lonzo Ball and Eric Bledsoe. New Orleans coach Stan Van Gundy said Williamson was ruled out because of inconclusive coronavirus test results.

Grizzlies 118, Timberwolves 107: Jonas Valanciunas had 24 points and 16 rebounds, Grayson Allen scored a season-high 20 off the bench and Memphis won at Minnesota. Brandon Clarke added 19 points. Malik Beasley had 28 points for Minnesota. D'Angelo Russell added 25, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 25 points and 14 rebounds.

Stamkos' return sparks Bolts in opener

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Steven Stamkos had a goal and two assists in his return to the Tampa Bay Lightning lineup, and the defending Stanley Cup champions opened the season with a 5-1 victory against the Chicago Blackhawks on Wednesday night.

Stamkos underwent surgery in early March that kept him out of all but one game in the playoffs before undergoing surgery again in October to repair the same core muscle. Wednesday's game was the first full game Stamkos played since Feb. 22.

"It's the best I've felt in a long time," Stamkos said. "It's tough sometimes in camp and those scrimmages; you only have 10 days to get ready. Then you get into real action the instincts take over and you want to be out there making plays. But I felt good, I feel like I'm just going to build off of that and continue to get stronger."

The Lightning captain has points in 17 consecutive games — including 14 goals.

Brayden Point, Anthony Cirelli, Ondrej Palat and Mathieu Joseph also scored to help Tampa Bay win its seventh consecutive season opener. Victor Hedman and Alex Killorn each finished with two assists. Andrei Vasilevskiy had 23 saves.

Dylan Strome scored for Chicago, and Malcolm Subban stopped 28 shots.

Maple Leafs 5, Canadiens 4 (OT): Morgan Rielly scored at 3:24 of overtime to lift host Toronto.

Rielly took a feed from Maple Leafs captain John Tavares on a 2-on-1 to beat Montreal goalie Carey Price and end a chaotic extra period where both teams had chances to get the victory.

William Nylander had two goals and an assist for Toronto, while Tavares added a goal and two assists. Jimmy Vesey chipped in with his first goal for the Maple Leafs, and Frederik

Andersen had 28 saves.

Josh Anderson scored twice in his debut for the Canadiens, while Nick Suzuki had a goal and an assist, and Tomas Tatar also scored. Jonathan Drouin and Jeff Petry each added two assists. Price finished with 29 saves.

Blues 4, Avalanche 1: Oskar Sundqvist scored twice and blocked four shots, and Jordan Binnington made 26 saves to lead St. Louis to a win at Colorado.

Jordan Kyrou also found the net after being recalled from the taxi squad, and new addition Kyle Clifford added another goal as the Blues scored four unanswered.

Andre Burakovsky scored early in the first period for the Avalanche, whose streak of season-opening wins was halted at four.

Canucks 5, Oilers 3: Brock Boeser scored twice, including the winner, as Vancouver won at Edmonton.

Bo Horvat, Adam Gaudette, and rookie Nils Hoglander also scored for the Canucks in the first of two games in two nights between the teams. Braden Holtby made 28 saves for his first win for Vancouver.

Flyers 6, Penguins 3: Joel Farabee had a goal and three assists, Michael Raffl, James van Riemsdyk and Nolan Patrick also scored to lead host Philadelphia over Pittsburgh in the first game of the NHL season.

The unconventional opener was decided when Raffl scored from the slot and beat Tristan Jarry 5:37 into the third for a 4-3 lead and the only cheers for the go-ahead goal came from Flyers fans watching at home.

The Flyers pounced from there -- Oskar Lindblom and Kevin Hayes scored 20 seconds apart to turn this one into a rout.

Mark Jankowski, Sidney Crosby and Braden Tanev scored for the Penguins.

McClung's jumper lifts Texas Tech over No. 4 Texas

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Mac McClung made a long jumper with 3 seconds left and No. 15 Texas Tech rallied to beat No. 4 Texas 79-77 on Wednesday night, ending the Longhorns' perfect start in the Big 12.

Texas (10-2, 4-1) led almost the entire game and a blistering start against one of the top defensive teams in the country had the Longhorns in control before a sloppy finish and some late Texas Tech three-pointers snatched the win for the Red Raiders (11-3, 4-2).

McClung's shot was originally ruled a three-pointer before a video review. Texas had a final chance, but Matt Coleman's desperation three-pointer never came close to the basket. Coleman also missed a shot in traffic for the lead with 17 seconds left.

"I've got a lot of confidence in Mac," Texas Tech coach Chris Beard said. "He has the courage to take those shots."

McClung finished with 22 points. Andrew Jones had 20 for the Longhorns, but scored just two points after halftime as the Red Raiders shut him down. Jericho Sims added 16 for Texas, but was just 6-for-14 on free throws, with two key misses late.

No. 16 Louisville 77, Wake Forest 65: Carlík Jones scored a season-high 23 points to help the visiting Cardinals beat the Demon Deacons and extend their best start in Atlantic Coast Conference play.

Samuell Williamson added 15 points and 11 rebounds for Louisville (9-1, 4-0 ACC), which blew nearly all of a 16-point second-half lead before finally putting this one away in the final 6

minutes as Wake Forest went cold.

The Cardinals shot 51% for the game to reach 4-0 in the league, marking the program's best start since joining the ACC before the 2014-15 season. It marked the best start in any league since for Louisville since winning its first eight Big East games during the 2008-09 season.

Daivien Williamson scored 19 points for the Demon Deacons (3-4, 0-4),

No. 18 Virginia 80, Notre Dame 68: Jay Huff scored 18 points and Sam Hauser had 15 points and nine rebounds as the host Cavaliers beat the Fighting Irish for their fourth consecutive victory.

Huff, who is 7-foot-1, made a career-best four three-pointers in the first half as Virginia (8-2,

4-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) opened an 18-10 lead and built it to 37-25 by halftime. Cormac Ryan scored 16 and Trey Wertz 13 for Notre Dame (3-8, 0-5), which lost its fourth in a row and fell to 0-11 against the Cavs in conference games.

No. 21 Ohio State 81, Northwestern 71: Duane Washington Jr. scored a career-high 23 points to lead the host Buckeyes to a win over the Wildcats.

Ohio State (10-3, 4-3) avenged a one-point loss to Northwestern on Dec. 26.

Justin Ahrens added 12 points, hitting four three-pointers, including a timely one late in the second half to help preserve the Buckeyes' lead.

Chase Audige kept the Wildcats (6-5, 3-4) in the game, scoring 21 of his career-best 25 points in the first half.

Rams' Akers heats up before cold game

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Cam Akers grew up in Mississippi, and his football journey has taken him to Tallahassee and Los Angeles.

So the Rams' rookie running back hasn't spent a whole lot of time in the type of frigid weather he's about to experience in Green Bay, where it's expected to be below 25 degrees at kickoff Saturday before the sun goes down and it really gets cold.

Akers does have one prominent memory of freezing football, however: Florida State lost at Notre Dame two years ago on one of the coldest gamedays in South Bend in decades.

What does he remember about that chilling experience?

"I scored two touchdowns," Akers said Tuesday with a grin.

Akers has plenty of reasons to be confident heading to the frozen tundra, particularly after what's happened during the second half of his increasingly impressive NFL debut season.

After his breakout 171-yard game against New England last

month, a high ankle sprain incredibly sidelined him for only one week. And in his first NFL playoff game last weekend, Akers racked up 131 yards rushing and 45 more receiving against Seattle in the Rams' 30-20 victory — played in the chilly 30s, no less.

"I'm still learning," Akers said. "I'm still taking everything day by day. Just putting them in my pocket and just trying to learn and grow. The biggest one is, don't get comfortable. Last week was a big game, but the next one is even bigger."

The top-seeded Packers (13-3) are the next big thing in Akers' way, but the rookie appears to be peaking at the ideal time for Los Angeles (11-6). Although his growth into a role as Todd Gurley's replacement began slowly, it's picking up speed like one of his downfield runs.

In Seattle, Akers became the first Rams rookie to rush for 100 yards in the postseason for a franchise born in 1936. His 176 combined rushing/receiving yards were the third-most by

any player in a postseason game in team history, trailing only efforts by Eric Dickerson in 1986 and Lawrence McCutcheon in 1974 — and more than Hall of Famer Marshall Faulk ever managed in his famed tenure with the Greatest Show on Turf.

Left tackle Andrew Whitworth put it succinctly in Seattle: "He's made of the right junk. His heart, his passion for the game is special."

When Robert Woods made his first career playoff touchdown catch to clinch Los Angeles' win in the fourth quarter, the veteran receiver thanked Akers for it: Woods got wide open on a play-action because the Seahawks were so concerned about the rookie's running ability.

"For him to bounce back how he did and take over that running back room and then lead it, really for a rookie to come in and make the right cuts and the right runs in critical situations, I think that's super huge," Woods said. "It really opens up

this offense. But the biggest thing is just getting him in space, seeing him make moves and make guys fall and hit the ground."

Akers has come on quickly for a rookie who played sparingly — and didn't even touch the football in two games — over the first 12 weeks of the regular season, instead sharing carries with Darrell Henderson and Malcolm Brown.

When he got a prominent role in early December, Akers capitalized with 340 yards in the Rams' final four regular-season games before his stellar work in Seattle.

The Green Bay defense has noticed.

"He puts a foot in the ground and he cuts back and he's explosive," Packers defensive line coach Jerry Montgomery said. "He's got twitch. He's a little bit of a jump-cutter at times, and then there's times when he puts one foot in the ground and hits it and gets it. Just explosive. Can take it to the house on any snap."

Wolfe rediscovers love for game with winning Ravens

Associated Press

Derek Wolfe signed as a free agent with the Baltimore Ravens last March because he missed the joy of competing in the NFL playoffs.

Wolfe, an energetic and talented defensive end, lost his passion for the game during a miserable four-year stretch in Denver that featured three head coaches, 37 defeats and not a single trip to the postseason.

"I started playing this game when I was 7 years old because I liked to win," Wolfe said. "Unfortunately, I had the rough four years in Denver. It made me really not love the game anymore."

So he took a one-year deal with Baltimore, and now Wolfe and the Ravens are right where they want to be in the middle of Janu-

ary: still alive in the playoffs and very much in the running for a trip to the Super Bowl.

After defeating Tennessee last Sunday, Baltimore faces Buffalo on Saturday night with a berth in the AFC title game on the line.

The Ravens got the 30-year-old Wolfe because he's a run-stopper, can pressure the quarterback and provides leadership in the locker room and on the field. Before that dry spell in Denver, Wolfe was part of a team that reached the playoffs four years in a row. The Broncos compiled a 50-14 regular-season record during that span and reached the Super Bowl twice, winning one and losing one.

So, in spite of his troubling final four years in Denver, Wolfe

knows what it takes to win.

"I really have so much experience that I know what a winning team looks like and the kinds of things you have to do," he said. "I really just try to lead by example, and I try to speak up when I feel like I need to say something."

Wolfe had 51 tackles, a sack, a fumble recovery and knocked away two passes this season. Then he helped the team limit NFL rushing leader Derrick Henry to 40 yards in a 20-13 victory at Tennessee.

Wolfe tied for the team lead with six tackles against the Titans and had Baltimore's lone sack. Just as important, he rallied his teammates after Tennessee bolted to a 10-0 lead.

"He's one of the best leaders

I've ever seen," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "Guys like that, in a sideline situation like that when you go down 10, that's what holds a team together. That's what keeps guys fighting."

Harbaugh was hoping to get Wolfe in Baltimore after watching him star with the University of Cincinnati, but the Broncos snagged him in the second round of the 2012 draft. Still, Harbaugh never lost sight of the 6-foot-5, 285-pound lineman.

"I came here because I wanted to get back to winning football games. That's why you play the game," Wolfe said. "When that opportunity really isn't there, and you know you don't have the team that can really do it, it's heartbreaking."