

## 2 Marines get religious vax exemptions

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Two Marines are the first service members to receive waivers to the Defense Department's coronavirus vaccine mandate for religious reasons, the Marine Corps announced Thursday.

The Marine Corps has received 3,350 requests for religious exemptions to the vaccine, the service said in a statement. The service declined to comment on the nature of the requests or why the two were granted after 3,212 were denied, citing privacy considerations. The remaining 138 requests have yet to be adjudicated.

"At every step, each accommodation request is given full consideration with respect to the facts and circumstances submitted in the request," the Marine Corps said in its statement. "In each case, every reviewer weighs the compelling government interest against the individual's request and the circumstances of their situation."

The lack of religious exemptions across the services has drawn scrutiny in recent weeks. On Jan. 3, a U.S. District Court judge

in Texas granted a temporary injunction stopping the Navy from applying its vaccine mandate on 35 Navy special operators, citing the First Amendment.

"The Navy servicemembers in this case seek to vindicate the very freedoms they have sacrificed so much to protect," Judge Reed O'Connor wrote in his ruling. "The [coronavirus] pandemic provides the government no license to abrogate those freedoms."

Chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby has not said how the Pentagon plans to respond to the injunction, but defense officials are working with the Department of Justice to discuss legal options moving forward.

The Defense Department allows all troops to apply for waivers to the mandate for medical, religious or other administrative reasons, but no service branch had approved any religious waivers until Thursday.

As of Tuesday, the Army has issued 5,921 temporary exemptions, which include 653 pending medical exemption requests and 2,128 religious exemption requests. So far, the service has issued five permanent med-

ical exemptions and declined 595 permanent medical exemption requests and 162 religious accommodation requests.

The Air Force has approved 808 medical exemptions, 84 administrative exemptions and no religious accommodation requests as of Tuesday. It has denied 2,387 religious accommodation exemptions and has another 2,158 pending decisions.

Some airmen who were denied religious exemptions have appealed the decision. So far, 148 appeals are awaiting decisions and 248 appeals have been denied, according to the most recent service data.

The Marine Corps has approved 943 medical and other administrative requests in addition to its two religious exemptions as of Thursday, according to its most recent data.

The Navy has approved eight active-duty permanent medical exemptions, 244 temporary medical exemptions and none of its 3,038 religious exemption requests.

To date, the Army is the only service not to have kicked out active-duty troops from its ranks for refusing the coronavirus vaccine, according to the latest data provided by the service.

## US: Russia prepping pretext for invasion of Ukraine

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — U.S. intelligence officials have determined a Russian effort is underway to create a pretext for its troops to further invade Ukraine, and Moscow has already prepositioned operatives to conduct "a false-flag operation" in eastern Ukraine, according to the White House.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said on Friday the intelligence findings show Russia is also laying the groundwork through a social media disinformation campaign that frames Ukraine as an aggressor that has been preparing an imminent attack against Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine.

Psaki charged that Russia has already dispatched operatives trained in urban warfare who could use explosives to carry out acts of sabotage against Russia's own proxy forces — blaming the acts on Ukraine — if Russian President Vladimir Putin decides he wants to

move forward with an invasion.

"We are concerned that the Russian government is preparing for an invasion in Ukraine that may result in widespread human rights violations and war crimes should diplomacy fail to meet their objectives," Psaki said.

The White House did not provide details about how much confidence it has in the assessment. A U.S. official, who was not authorized to comment on the intelligence and spoke on condition of anonymity, said much of the intelligence was gleaned from intercepted communications and observations of the movements of people.

Ukraine is also monitoring the potential use of disinformation by Russia. Separately, Ukrainian media on Friday reported that authorities believed Russian special services were planning a possible false flag incident to provoke additional conflict.

The new U.S. intelligence was unveiled af-

ter a series of talks between Russia and the U.S. and its Western allies this week in Europe aimed at heading off the escalating crisis made little progress.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan on Thursday said the U.S. intelligence community has not made an assessment that the Russians, who have massed some 100,000 troops on Ukraine's border, have definitively decided to take a military course of action.

But Sullivan said Russia is laying the groundwork to invade under false pretenses. He said the Russians have been planning "sabotage activities and information operations" that accuse Ukraine of prepping for its own imminent attack against Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.

He said this is similar to what the Kremlin did in the lead-up to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

# N. Korea fires 2 short-range projectiles

By **SETH ROBSON**  
*Stars and Stripes*

North Korea fired a projectile eastward on Friday, its third such launch in just over a week, according to the South Korean military. The Joint Chiefs of Staff did not offer further details in a message to reporters on Friday afternoon.

North Korea fired two more projectiles into the sea off its eastern coast on Friday, its third and fourth launches of the new year, according to the South Korean military.

The projectiles, fired at 2:41 p.m. from Uiju in North Pyongan province, are presumed to be short-range ballistic missiles, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a series of messages to reporters Friday afternoon.

They reached a peak altitude of 22 miles and flew over 267

miles, according to the joint chiefs. U.S. and South Korean intelligence authorities were "conducting a detailed analysis" on the missiles' specifications, they said.

"Our troops are maintaining their readiness posture and tracking and monitoring relevant moves in preparation for the North's additional launch," the joint chiefs said.

Meanwhile, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida ordered officials to analyze launch reports so they could provide information to Japanese citizens, secure the safety of aircraft and ships and be prepared for unexpected situations, according to a post on his office's website.

Days earlier, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un was present when his country test-fired a "hypersonic" ballistic missile

off the eastern coast, according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

That missile, launched at 7:27 a.m. Tuesday, reached speeds of Mach 10, or 10 times the speed of sound, and was more advanced than one test-fired Jan. 5, South Korea's Defense Ministry said. Tuesday's missile reached a peak altitude of 37 miles and flew over 435 miles.

President Joe Biden's administration sanctioned five North Korean officials in response to those launches. The Treasury Department announced Wednesday it was penalizing the officials for helping to obtain equipment and technology for Pyongyang's missile programs.

The recent launches are a message to the Biden administration, according to Kim Hyun-wook, an American studies pro-

fessor at Korea National Diplomatic Academy in Seoul.

North Korea wants sanctions relief and a halt to U.S.-South Korean military exercises on the peninsula, he told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday.

Kim Jong Un "wants to change the Biden administration's posture to North Korea," he said.

The North Koreans are taking advantage of strategic competition between the U.S. and China and assume China will back them up, Kim said, noting that Beijing did not condemn the North's recent missile tests.

The launches are also a display of the regime's power to the North Korean people, who are facing economic hardship due to flooding and the impact of sanctions and the coronavirus, Kim said.

## Tenants in Hawaii sue landlord over tap water

*Associated Press*

HONOLULU — Residents of a Hawaii housing complex are asking a judge to stop their landlord from charging them rent until their tap water is safe from contamination.

Kapilina Beach Homes in Ewa Beach used to be Navy housing.

The Navy entered into a partnership with a private entity that also allows civilians to be tenants.

Attorney Jim Bickerton says residents continue to be charged rent and utilities except for water while their homes are "unfit for human habitation."

A fuel storage tank facility owned by the Navy is blamed for petroleum-tainted water in and around Pearl Harbor.

"We are not charging any termination fees for lease breaks or asking residents to release any claims during this disruption," Kapilina Beach Homes said in a statement Wednesday.

"Until the Navy remediates the water supply, treatment and distribution system, we are assisting our residents with delivery of large water bottles, credits for offsite laundry, access to shower facilities and continuing to waive all water charges," the statement said.

Bickerton said a court hearing was scheduled for Friday on an emergency motion asking a judge to block the landlord from charging the residents an exit fee of two months' rent or requiring them to release Kapilina from injury claims if residents want to end their leases.

## Investigation into mission along border is launched

By **ROSE L. THAYER**

*Stars and Stripes*

Military commanders on Thursday initiated an investigation into troops ordered to the U.S.-Mexico border by the president as House lawmakers called for a separate investigation into National Guard troops sent to the border by the Texas governor.

U.S. Northern Command announced its investigation is to examine a "wide range of alleged issues" that have occurred among troops deployed on a federal mission along the southwest border.

About 2,400 service members — a combination of active-duty and National Guard troops from 20 states — are now deployed along the border with Mexico, according to NORTHCOM offi-

cials.

Their work includes monitoring security cameras and sensors to alert U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents of activity along the border. Troops also have administrative and support duties.

Military officials would not say Thursday what issues are being investigated, what triggered the NORTHCOM investigation, what exactly it would cover or how long it could last. Officials also did not confirm whether the investigation was related to a series of criminal incidents that involved troops serving along the border.

News reports have highlighted some incidents, including a drunken driving accident in Texas that resulted in the death of a service member.

# Court blocks vax mandate for businesses

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has stopped a major push by the Biden administration to boost the nation's COVID-19 vaccination rate, a requirement that employees at large businesses get a vaccine or test regularly and wear a mask on the job.

At the same time, the court is allowing the administration to proceed with a vaccine mandate for most health care workers in the U.S. The court's orders Thursday came during a spike in coronavirus cases caused by the omicron variant.

The court's conservative majority concluded the administration overstepped its authority by seeking to impose the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's vaccine-or-test rule on U.S. businesses with

at least 100 employees. More than 80 million people would have been affected and OSHA had estimated that the rule would save 6,500 lives and prevent 250,000 hospitalizations over six months.

"OSHA has never before imposed such a mandate. Nor has Congress. Indeed, although Congress has enacted significant legislation addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, it has declined to enact any measure similar to what OSHA has promulgated here," the conservatives wrote in an unsigned opinion.

The vaccine mandate that the court will allow to be enforced nationwide scraped by on a 5-4 vote, with Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh joining the liberals to form a majority.

The mandate covers virtually all health care workers in the country, applying to providers that receive federal Medicare or Medicaid funding.

It affects 10.4 million workers at 76,000 health care facilities as well as home health care providers. The rule has medical and religious exemptions.

In an unsigned opinion, the court wrote: "The challenges posed by a global pandemic do not allow a federal agency to exercise power that Congress has not conferred upon it. At the same time, such unprecedented circumstances provide no grounds for limiting the exercise of authorities the agency has long been recognized to have."

It said the "latter principle governs" in the health care arena.

## Biden now doubtful on voting, election bills

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — All but conceding defeat, President Joe Biden said Thursday he's now unsure the Democrats' major elections and voting rights legislation can pass Congress this year. He spoke at the Capitol after a key fellow Democrat, Sen. Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, dramatically announced her refusal to go along with changing Senate rules to muscle the bill past a Republican filibuster.

Biden had come to the Capitol to prod Democratic senators in a closed-door meeting, but he was not optimistic when he

emerged. He vowed to keep fighting for the sweeping legislation that advocates say is vital to protecting elections.

"The honest to God answer is I don't know whether we can get this done," Biden said. He told reporters, his voice rising, "As long as I'm in the White House, as long as I'm engaged at all, I'm going to be fighting."

Sinema all but dashed the bill's chances minutes earlier, declaring just before Biden arrived on Capitol Hill that she could not support a "short sighted" rules change.

She said in a speech on the Senate floor

that the answer to divisiveness in the Senate and in the country is not to change filibuster rules so one party, even hers, can pass controversial bills. "We must address the disease itself, the disease of division, to protect our democracy," she said.

The moment once again leaves Biden empty-handed after a high-profile visit to Congress. Earlier forays did little to advance his other big priority, the "Build Back Better Act" of social and climate change initiatives. Instead, Biden returned to the White House with his agenda languishing in Congress.

## December retail sales fall 1.9% after early holiday rush

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Americans, beset by product shortages, rising prices and the arrival of omicron, sharply cut their spending in December after a burst of early spending in the fall boosted this year's holiday shopping season.

Retail sales fell a seasonally adjusted 1.9% in December from November when sales increased 0.3%, the U.S. Commerce Department said Friday. Sales rose 1.8% in October. Still, retail sales surged 16.9% compared with those of December 2020, the Commerce Department said Friday.

Spending declines were spread across numerous sectors. Department store sales fell 7%, restaurant sales slipped 0.8% and online sales fell 8.7% compared with those

of the previous month, according to the report.

Omicron was identified by the World Health Organization in late November, and the December report from the Commerce Department is the first to capture some of its effect on consumer behavior.

The monthly retail report covers only about a third of overall consumer spending and doesn't include money spent on things like haircuts, hotel stays or plane tickets, all which tend to see business tail off when anxiety about COVID-19 ticks higher. In November, restaurant sales posted a 1% gain — the sector's best performance since July.

And it's been a strong year for retailers as spending patterns shifted, but remained

elevated.

The National Retail Federation, the nation's largest retail trade group, is crunching last month's sales figures and was expected to release the actual holiday sales results Friday. It was expecting a record breaking growth of anywhere from 8.5% and 10.5% compared to that of the year-earlier period, despite the challenges facing shoppers and stores.

The omicron variant has led to widespread worker shortages with so people calling out sick, including the retail sector, and supply shortages have curtailed what makes it to store shelves. Stores and restaurants have slashed operating hours or remained closed on days they had previously been open.

# 11 Oath Keepers charged in Capitol riot

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Stewart Rhodes, the founder and leader of the far-right Oath Keepers militia group, and 10 other members or associates have been charged with seditious conspiracy in the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol, authorities said Thursday.

Despite hundreds of charges already brought in the year since pro-Trump rioters stormed the Capitol in an effort to stop the certification of President Joe Biden's 2020 election victory, these were the first seditious conspiracy charges levied in connection with the attack on Jan. 6, 2021.

It marked a serious escalation in the

largest investigation in the Justice Department's history — more than 700 people have been arrested and charged with federal crimes — and highlighted the work that has gone into piecing together the most complicated cases. The charges rebut, in part, the growing chorus of Republican lawmakers who have publicly challenged the seriousness of the insurrection, arguing that since no one had been charged yet with sedition or treason, it could not have been so violent.

The indictment alleges Oath Keepers for weeks discussed trying to overturn the election results and preparing for a siege by purchasing weapons and setting up bat-

tle plans. They repeatedly wrote in chats about the prospect of violence and the need, as Rhodes allegedly wrote in one text, "to scare the s—out of" Congress. And on Jan. 6, the indictment alleges, they entered the Capitol building with the large crowds of rioters who stormed past police barriers and smashed windows, injuring dozens of officers and sending lawmakers running.

Authorities have said the Oath Keepers and their associates worked as if they were going to war, discussing weapons and training. Days before the attack, one defendant suggested in a text message getting a boat to ferry weapons across the Potomac River to their "waiting arms," prosecutors say.

# RFK assassin to remain in prison

*Associated Press*

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Sirhan Sirhan, who assassinated presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, was denied parole Thursday by California's governor, who said the killer remains a threat to the public and hasn't taken responsibility for a crime that altered American history.

Kennedy, a U.S. senator from New York, was shot moments after he claimed victory in California's Democratic presidential primary. Five others were wounded during the shooting at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has

cited RFK as his political hero, rejected a recommendation from a two-person panel of parole commissioners who said Sirhan, 77, should be freed. The panel's recommendation in August had divided the Kennedy family, with two of RFK's sons — Douglas Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. — supporting his release, and their siblings and mother vehemently opposing it.

In his decision, Newsom said the assassination was "among the most notorious crimes in American history," Aside from causing Kennedy's then-pregnant wife and 10 children "immeasurable suffering," Newsom said the killing "also caused great harm to the Amer-

ican people."

It "upended the 1968 presidential election, leaving millions in the United States and beyond mourning the promise of his candidacy," Newsom wrote. "Mr. Sirhan killed Senator Kennedy during a dark season of political assassinations, just nine weeks after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder and four and a half years after the murder of Senator Kennedy's brother, President John F. Kennedy."

He said Sirhan still lacks insight, refuses to accept responsibility and has failed to disclaim violence committed in his name. That adds "to his current risk of inciting further political violence," Newsom wrote.

# Ukraine hack targets government websites

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — A huge cyberattack left a number of Ukrainian government websites temporarily unavailable on Friday, officials said.

While it wasn't immediately clear who was behind the cyberattack, the disruption came amid heightened tensions with Russia and after talks between Moscow and the West failed to yield any significant progress this week.

Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesman Oleg Nikolenko said it was too soon to tell who could have been behind the attack.

"But there is a long record of Russian cyber assaults against Ukraine in the past," he said.

Moscow had previously denied involvement in cyberattacks against Ukraine.

The websites of the country's Cabinet, seven ministries, the Treasury, the National Emergency Service and the state services website, where Ukrainians' electronic passports and vaccination certificates are stored, were temporarily unavailable Friday as a result of the hack.

The websites contained a message in Ukrainian, Russian and Polish, saying that Ukrainians' personal data has been leaked into the public domain. "Be afraid and expect the worst. This is for your past, present and future," the message read, in part.

Ukraine's State Service of Communication and Information Protection said that no

personal data has been leaked.

The minister for digital transformation, Mykhailo Fedorov, insisted that personal data was safe, since "the operability of the websites, not the registries," was affected by the hack. Fedorov said that some of the attacked websites were blocked by their administrators in order to contain the damage and investigate the attacks.

He added that "a large part" of the websites have been restored.

European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said Friday that the 27-nation bloc is ready to mobilize all its resources to provide technical assistance to Ukraine and help it improve its capacity to weather cyberattacks.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Famous spinning ice disk forming again

**ME** WESTBROOK — Maine's famous rotating ice disk is back.

The disk has begun to form in the Presumpscot River, where it partially formed in 2020 but failed to draw a worldwide audience like in its first appearance in 2019.

Westbrook city officials shared photos of the formation on Facebook, encouraging residents to share more images of the disk while it's still around.

Ice disks form as a result of a current and vortex under the ice. Ice sheets begin to spin and then form into circles. But ice disks this large rarely form in locations like Westbrook.

City officials discouraged anyone from attempting to go out on the ice: "It is not safe."

### Yet another mountain lion is spotted in state

**NE** DENTON — Another mountain lion sighting in eastern Nebraska has some people wondering if the animal's population is on the rise and moving beyond known populations in the western part of the state.

So far, state game officials aren't convinced.

The Lincoln Journal Star reported a deceased female was found last month near Denton, south of Lincoln. The animal had been shot. Also last month, a mountain lion was struck and killed by a car near Arlington, and a game camera captured images of a mountain lion near Lincoln.

Sam Wilson, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission's

furbearer and carnivore manager, isn't convinced that the number of at-large lions is increasing. His office fields multiple reports annually that don't make the news.

### Injured serval cat to go to sanctuary

**MA** BOSTON — An African serval cat found injured in a Boston suburb will go to a wild cat sanctuary in Minnesota.

The male cat, dubbed Bruno, will go to The Wildcat Sanctuary in Sandstone, Minn., where he will join 15 other serval cats, according to MSPCA, a humane society, The Springfield Republican reported.

The cat was found in a backyard in Lincoln, Mass., with a back limb broken in two places, and a team from the MSPCA successfully captured it, the organization reported.

Serval cats are not allowed to be owned in Massachusetts except by zoos with a permit, the organization said.

Before going on to the sanctuary, the cat will undergo an operation to amputate its back leg, which the MSPCA said will give it the best chance of living without pain.

### State wildlife manager accused of poaching

**WA** SPOKANE — A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife employee has been accused of poaching.

The Ferry County prosecutor last month charged Fish and Wildlife north-central region director Brock Hoenes with second-degree unlawful

hunting of big game, The Spokesman-Review reported.

If convicted, there is a maximum penalty of one year in jail, a \$5,000 fine or both.

Hoenes "on or about" Nov. 13 illegally killed an animal in Ferry County, according to court documents provided to the newspaper by environmental advocacy groups Washington Wildlife First and the Kettle Range Conservation Group.

What kind of animal, what kind of weapon used and a more detailed explanation of what happened were not included in court documents.

### Police: Assault, arson at tattoo school

**LA** SHREVEPORT — Someone broke into a Louisiana tattoo school, cut the 74-year-old owner and then set fire to the business, Shreveport police reported.

A man whose last known address was the Salvation Army is wanted on a warrant accusing him of attempted first-degree murder, Cpl. Chris Bordelon said. It happened at a half-century-old business named the World's Only Tattoo School.

Owner Leonard Pogue's head was cut in several places, said Bordelon, a police spokesman.

Officers responded to a call saying an elderly man was staggering down the street about 7 a.m., The Shreveport Times reported.

### Woman dies after crash, fall from cliff

**CA** SANTA CRUZ — A woman rear-ended a

pickup truck on Highway 1 in Santa Cruz after both vehicles pulled over to the shoulder.

The woman then got out of her car, crossed the highway, walked toward a cliff overlooking the ocean and plunged 300 feet to her death, authorities said.

The 40-year-old Santa Cruz woman, whose name has not been released, was traveling north when she hit the pickup truck, the California Highway Patrol said.

CHP investigators said they haven't determined if the woman fell or jumped.

The woman's body was recovered by a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter and water rescue team, officials said.

### Off-duty cop charged in bowling alley shooting

**IL** CHICAGO — An off-duty Chicago police officer was arrested after he allegedly shot and wounded three people during an argument at a suburban Chicago bowling alley, authorities said.

The probationary police officer fired his gun shortly before midnight at Burr Oak Bowl in the Cook County city of Blue Island, said Civilian Office of Police Accountability spokesman Ephraim Eaddy.

Eaddy said the conditions of the three people who were shot were not available, but there were no reported fatalities. COPA was notified of the shooting at 2 a.m. the next day.

The officer was arrested by Blue Island police and relieved of his police powers, the Chicago Police Department said in a statement.

— From Associated Press

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# Australia revokes Djokovic's visa

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Novak Djokovic faces deportation again after the Australian government revoked his visa for a second time, the latest twist in the ongoing saga over whether the No. 1-ranked tennis player will be allowed to compete in the Australian Open despite being unvaccinated for COVID-19.

Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said Friday he used his ministerial discretion to cancel the 34-year-old Serb's visa on public interest grounds — just three days before play begins at the Australian Open, where Djokovic has won a record nine of his 20 Grand Slam titles.

Djokovic's lawyers were expected to appeal at the Federal Circuit and Family Court, which they already successfully did last week on procedural grounds after his visa was first canceled when he landed at a Melbourne airport.

Deportation from Australia usually leads to a three-year ban on returning to the country. That would make Djokovic 37 the next time he would be allowed to com-

pete at the Australian Open.

Hawke said he canceled the visa on "health and good order grounds, on the basis that it was in the public interest to do so." His statement added that Prime Minister Scott Morrison's government "is firmly committed to protecting Australia's borders, particularly in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic."

Morrison and Hawke are part of a conservative government which prides itself on being tough on border control.

Morrison welcomed Djokovic's pending deportation, saying Australia had achieved one of the lowest pandemic death rates, strongest economies and highest vaccination rates in the world.

"This pandemic has been incredibly difficult for every Australian but we have stuck together and saved lives and livelihoods. ... Australians have made many sacrifices during this pandemic, and they rightly expect the result of those sacrifices to be protected," Morrison said in a statement. "This is what the Minister is doing in taking this action today."

Everyone at the Australian Open — including players, their support teams and spectators — is required to be vaccinated for the illness caused by the coronavirus. Djokovic is not inoculated and had sought a medical exemption on the grounds that he had COVID-19 in December.

That exemption was approved by the Victoria state government and Tennis Australia, apparently allowing him to obtain a visa to travel. But the Australian Border Force rejected the exemption and canceled his visa when he landed in Melbourne on Jan. 5.

Djokovic spent four nights in an immigration detention hotel before a judge on Monday overturned that decision. That ruling allowed Djokovic to move freely around Australia and he has been practicing at Melbourne Park to prepare to play in a tournament he has won each of the past three years.

Djokovic has held practice sessions every day since he was released from detention, posting a photo on social media late Monday of himself with his team on Rod Laver Arena.

He had a scheduled mid-afternoon practice booked for Friday on the tournament's main show court, but switched his times to start and finish early.

Media started gathering at the vehicular entry to the building where Djokovic was reported to be meeting with his lawyers after the minister's decision was handed down.

With his legal situation still in limbo, Djokovic was placed in the tournament bracket in Thursday's draw, slated to face Miomir Kecmanovic in an all-Serbian matchup in the first round.

Melbourne-based immigration lawyer Kian Bone said Djokovic's lawyers face an "extremely difficult" task to get court orders over the weekend to allow their client to play next week.

Speaking hours before Hawke's decision was announced, Bone said: "If you left it any later than he has done now, I think from a strategic standpoint, he's really hamstringing Djokovic's legal team, in terms of what sort of options or remedies he could obtain."

## Texans fire Culley, leaving 1 Black head coach in NFL

Associated Press

HOUSTON — David Culley spent 43 years as a college and NFL assistant before finally getting his first head coaching job with the Houston Texans.

He lasted just one season before being fired Thursday, a move that leaves the NFL with one Black head coach: Pittsburgh's Mike Tomlin. Miami's Brian Flores was fired this week after leading his team to a 9-8 record.

The Texans announced the firings of Culley and offensive coordinator Tim Kelly on Thursday. General manager Nick Caserio saying he met with both men earlier to inform them of what was a "dif-

ficult but necessary decision."

"While a change after one season is unusual, we had philosophical differences over the long-term direction and vision for our program moving forward," Caserio said in a statement. "We appreciate coach Culley for helping us navigate through a difficult season, but it is my responsibility to make decisions that I feel are best for our organization."

Houston finished 4-13 this season, concluding with a 28-25 loss to Tennessee, the AFC's top seed.

Culley said Monday he expected to return, but Caserio was said to still be evaluating

the coach at that time. Three days later, Culley was out of a job.

"I loved every minute of being the head coach of the Houston Texans," Culley said in a statement. "I appreciate the players and coaches for staying the course with me through the ups and downs of our season. I'm disappointed we didn't win more games and I won't have a chance to improve on the lessons I've learned, but I fully understand this is a bottom-line business and I didn't do enough."

The 66-year-old Culley was hired last January to replace Bill O'Brien after working as an NFL assistant since 1994.

He took over a team that went 4-12 in the 2020 season with Deshaun Watson at quarterback.

Watson requested a trade around the time Culley was hired, and before 22 women filed lawsuits against the QB alleging sexual harassment or assault. Those issues kept Watson sidelined all season and precipitated a rebuild in Houston that left Culley at the helm of a depleted team.

Culley didn't have much of a chance without Watson and with a roster where most of the few remaining quality starters were traded or released as the season progressed.

# Oregon outlasts No. 3 UCLA in OT

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Jacob Young scored a season-high 23 points and Oregon beat No. 3 UCLA 84-81 in overtime Thursday night to give coach Dana Altman his 700th career victory.

Will Richardson added 12 points as one of three Ducks in foul trouble. Oregon (10-6, 3-2 Pac-12) won its fourth in a row. The Ducks swarmed the court and their loud celebration in the locker room echoed throughout a mostly empty Pauley Pavilion.

Johnny Juzang scored 23 points for the Bruins (10-2, 2-1). Their second loss of the season ended a five-game winning streak.

The teams traded baskets early in overtime. Young scored to put Oregon ahead by two. Jaime Jaquez Jr. missed a pair of free throws that would have tied it. Young scored again to give the Ducks an 83-79 lead.

Myles Johnson scored for UCLA before Richardson made one of two free throws for an 84-81 lead. Juzang's potential tying three-pointer missed. Jules Bernard got the rebound and put up a jumper that Da'Vion Harmon got his hand on as time expired.

UCLA forced overtime on Jaylen Clark's steal and baseline layup that tied it at 73 with 16 seconds left.

**No. 2 Gonzaga 110, BYU 84:** Drew Timme scored 30 points on 13-for-14 shooting and the host Bulldogs beat the rival Cougars to extend the nation's longest home winning streak to 61 games.

Andrew Nembhard had 22 points and 12 assists, and Julian Strawther added 20 points for Gonzaga (13-2, 2-0 West Coast), which shot 69% in the game and made 11 three-pointers.

**No. 5 Southern California 81, Oregon State 71:** Chavez Goodwin had his second dou-

ble-double of the season (20 points, 12 rebounds), Drew Peterson added 15 points and the Trojans rallied in the second half to defeat the visiting Beavers.

**No. 6 Arizona 76, Colorado 55:** Azoulas Tubelis and Justin Kier scored 14 points, and the host Wildcats overwhelmed the Buffaloes in the second half.

**No. 13 Wisconsin 78, No. 16 Ohio State 68:** Brad Davison scored 25 points and the host Badgers beat the Buckeyes for their sixth straight victory.

**No. 19 Texas Tech 78, Oklahoma State 57:** Kevin Obanor had 17 points and the Red Raiders backed up consecutive wins over Top 10 teams with a victory over the visiting Cowboys in a makeup game.

**DePaul 96, No. 20 Seton Hall 92:** Jalen Terry scored 28 points, David Jones added 24 and the host Blue Demons beat the Pirates.

**Army 73, Boston University 63:** Josh Caldwell registered 16 points as the Black Knights beat the visiting Terriers.

Jalen Rucker had 12 points for Army (10-7, 4-1 Patriot League). Aaron Duhart and Nolan Naess each added 11 points.

Javante McCoy had 23 points for the Terriers (11-7, 2-3). Walter Whyte added 14 points and Sukhmail Mathon had 11 rebounds.

**Colgate 69, Navy 50:** Keegan Records had a career-high 25 points as the Raiders ended a seven-game road losing streak, beating the Midshipmen.

Nelly Cummings had 16 points for Colgate (6-10, 2-1 Patriot League).

Navy scored 24 first-half points, a season low for the team.

Tyler Nelson had 9 points for the Midshipmen (11-5, 4-1), whose four-game winning streak came to an end. Sean Yoder also had 9 points.

# Antetokounmpo, Bucks start fast, blow out Golden State

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 30 points and had his third triple-double of the season to help Milwaukee rout the Golden State Warriors 118-99 on Thursday night in Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer's return from the NBA's COVID-19 protocols.

Antetokounmpo had 12 rebounds and 11 assists for his 28th career triple-double.

Budenholzer missed four games while in the health and safety protocols, with assistant Darwin Ham taking over as acting head coach. The Bucks went 1-3.

Khris Middleton added 23 points, Bobby Portis 20 and Grayson Allen 15.

Milwaukee never trailed and raced to a 77-38 halftime advantage. Antetokounmpo had 23 points, seven rebounds and seven assists in the first half.

The Bucks were just two points shy of their largest halftime lead in franchise history, a record they set this season. Milwaukee led 77-36 at the half in a 123-92 victory over Orlando on Nov. 22.

Andrew Wiggins led the Warriors with 16 points.

**Grizzlies 116, Timberwolves 108:** Desmond Bane scored 21 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. added 20 and host Memphis pulled away from Minnesota in the final minutes for its 11th straight victory.

Ja Morant had 16 points, nine assists and eight rebounds, and John Konchar added 15 points and a career-best 17 rebounds.

Anthony Edwards led the Timberwolves with 30 points. D'Angelo Russell had 29 points and six assists, and Karl-Anthony Towns added 25 points and nine rebounds.

**Thunder 130, Nets 109:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 33 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists, Lu Dort scored 27 points and visiting Oklahoma City beat Brooklyn.

Rookie guard Josh Giddey

added 19 points for the Thunder, who jumped on a weary Nets team to snap a five-game losing streak with their first victory in 2022. They hadn't won since beating New York at home on New Year's Eve.

But with NBA scoring leader Kevin Durant resting, the Thunder led comfortably for most of the last three quarters and improved to 14-27 at the midpoint of their schedule.

James Harden had 26 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Nets, who couldn't muster enough energy after their 138-112 rout of the East-leading Bulls in Chicago on Wednesday night. They had Kyrie Irving for that game but not Thursday, as he remains ineligible to play in New York City while unvaccinated against the coronavirus.

**Nuggets 140, Trail Blazers 108:** Will Barton had 21 points before leaving in the third quarter with a strained neck, Nikola Jokic added 20 and host Denver beat depleted Portland.

The Nuggets built their lead to 26 points in the third quarter — and this time didn't let it slip away. Two nights ago, Denver blew a 25-point lead in Los Angeles against the Clippers.

Ben McLemore had 18 points for Portland. The Trail Blazers were without their top four scorers in Damian Lillard (abdominal tendinopathy), CJ McCollum (right lung pneumothorax), Norman Powell (health and safety protocols) and Anfernee Simons (personal reasons).

**Pelicans 113, Clippers 89:** Brandon Ingram scored 24 points to help New Orleans beat visiting Los Angeles.

Jonas Valanciunas added 18 points and 16 rebounds for the Pelicans. They led throughout and by as many as 28 points en route to their third victory in four games.

Terance Mann scored 15 points, and Marcus Morris had 12 for the Clippers.

# Pastrnak's hat trick lifts Bruins past Flyers

Associated Press

BOSTON — David Pastrnak scored a hat trick, Tuukka Rask made 24 saves in his return from hip surgery and the Boston Bruins beat the Philadelphia Flyers 3-2 on Thursday night.

Rask, the winningest goalie in franchise history, made his season debut after recovering from surgery last summer to repair a torn labrum. Rask was solid in net and got plenty of help from his teammates, who held Philadelphia to 27 shots as the Bruins won their fourth straight and seventh in eight games.

Cam Atkinson and Joel Farabee scored for Philadelphia, which lost its sixth in a row. Carter Hart finished with 33 saves, keeping the Flyers close despite a listless start.

Pastrnak completed his 11th career hat trick with a power-play goal late in the second period after Philadelphia had scored twice to tie it.

**Lightning 4, Canucks 2:** Steven Stamkos scored his team-leading 18th goal, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 24 saves and host Tampa Bay defeated Vancouver.

Anthony Cirelli, Boris Katchouk and Brayden Point also scored for the Lightning. Katchouk made it 3-1 at 11:24 of the third period during a 2-on-0, and Vasilevskiy stopped Elias Pettersson's breakaway after the ensuing faceoff.

**Rangers 3, Sharks 0:** Igor Shesterkin made 37 saves in his return from COVID-19 protocol, Braden Schneider scored in his NHL debut and visiting New York stopped San Jose.

Chris Kreider got his first career short-handed goal and an empty-netter to reach 200 goals as the Rangers followed up a 1-0 victory over the Sharks at home on Dec. 3 with another shutout less than six weeks later.

**Kings 6, Penguins 2:** Mikey Anderson, Viktor Arvidsson and Anze Kopitar scored in a span of 1:23 of the third period, and host Los Angeles downed Pittsburgh for its third straight victory.

Dustin Brown had a goal and an assist to reach 700 career points. Sean Durzi had a goal and two assists, and the Kings went 5-2-0 on their seven-game homestand.

**Blue Jackets 6, Hurricanes**

**0:** Yegor Chinakhov scored two goals and Elvis Merzlikins posted a 31-save shutout as visiting Columbus blanked Carolina.

Emil Bemstrom, Patrik Laine, Cole Sillinger and Jack Roslovic also scored for the Blue Jackets, who squandered a 4-0 lead against Carolina earlier this month.

**Islanders 3, Devils 2:** Mathew Barzal scored with less than five minutes left to push host New York past New Jersey.

Josh Bailey and Adam Pelech also scored, and Zach Parise added two assists for the Islanders. New York extended its point streak to five games (4-0-1). Ilya Sorokin made 30 saves in his ninth win of the season.

**Jets 3, Red Wings 0:** Connor Hellebuyck made 33 saves for his second shutout of the season and Andrew Copp scored twice in visiting Winnipeg's victory over Detroit.

Kyle Connor added an empty-net goal to cap Winnipeg's first game since a 7-1 loss in Colorado a week ago and just its fourth since Dec. 19. The Jets, who dressed six players on emergency recall, had seven postponements during that stretch.

**Blues 2, Kraken 1:** Robert Thomas and Pavel Buchnevich scored in the third period as host St. Louis came back to beat Seattle.

Ville Husso made 31 saves and the Blues extended their home point streak to 13 games, going back to Nov. 18.

**Sabres 4, Predators 1:** Jeff Skinner scored twice and Aaron Dell made 29 saves to lead visiting Buffalo over Nashville.

Mark Jankowski and Vinnie Hinostroza also scored for the Sabres, who snapped a six-game losing streak.

**Blackhawks 3, Canadiens 2 (OT):** Philipp Kurashev scored 2:24 into overtime and host Chicago topped Montreal.

Montreal, a Stanley Cup finalist last season, has dropped five straight and is 1-9-3 in its past 13 games. The Canadiens are 7-24-5 overall, leaving them at the bottom of the NHL standings.

**Senators 4, Flames 1:** Nick Paul scored twice in the first period, Matt Murray made 27 saves for his first victory of the season and visiting Ottawa beat Calgary.

Drake Batherson and Connor Brown also scored for Ottawa.

## Capitals' Ovechkin headlines All-Star roster

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Washington star Alexander Ovechkin and high-scoring Edmonton teammates Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl headline the rosters for the NHL All-Star Weekend announced Thursday.

Selected for the eighth time, Ovechkin led voting in the Metropolitan Division to earn the captaincy for the Feb. 4-5 event at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas.

The event features a three-game tournament played in a 3-on-3 format, with 11-man teams from each of the league's four divisions. A player will be added to each team through Last Men In voting that ends Monday night.

Ovechkin was selected to the Metropolitan squad along with fellow forwards Sebastian Aho of Carolina, Claude Giroux of Philadelphia, Jack Hughes of New Jersey and Chris

Kreider of the New York Rangers, defenseman Adam Fox of the Rangers, Zach Werenski of Columbus and Adam Pelech of the New York Islanders, and goalies Frederik Andersen of Carolina and Tristan Jarry of Pittsburgh. Rod Brind'Amour of Carolina is set to coach the division.

McDavid and Draisaitl were selected to the Pacific team with fellow forwards Jordan Eberle of Seattle, Johnny Gaudreau of Calgary, Adrian Kempe of Los Angeles, Timo Meier of San Jose, Mark Stone of Vegas, defenseman Alex Pietrangolo of Vegas and goalies John Gibson of Anaheim and Thatcher Demko of Vancouver. McDavid is set to be the captain, and Peter DeBoer of Vegas the coach.

Goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy and defenseman Victor Hedman of Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay are set to represent the At-

lantic along with forwards Auston Matthews of Toronto, Drake Batherson of Ottawa, Patrice Bergeron of Boston, Jonathan Huberdeau of Florida, Dylan Larkin of Detroit and Nick Suzuki of Montreal, defenseman Rasmus Dahlin of Buffalo and goalie Jack Campbell of Toronto. Matthews topped the voting to take the captaincy, and Andrew Brunette of Florida earned the coaching spot.

In the Central, Nathan MacKinnon of Colorado was selected along with fellow forwards Kyle Connor of Winnipeg, Alex DeBrincat of Chicago, Kirill Kaprizov of Minnesota, Clayton Keller of Arizona, Jordan Kyrou of St. Louis, Joe Pavelski of Dallas, defenseman Cale Makar of Colorado and goalies Juuse Saros of Nashville and Cam Talbot of Minnesota. MacKinnon is the captain, and Jared Bednar of Colorado the coach.