

## Congress certifies Trump election victory

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Congress certified President-elect Donald Trump as the winner of the 2024 election in proceedings that unfolded Monday without violence or mayhem, in stark contrast to the Jan. 6, 2021, violence as his mob of supporters stormed the Capitol.

Lawmakers convened under heavy security and a snowstorm to meet the date required by law to certify the election, but the legacy of Jan. 6 leaves an extraordinary fact: The candidate who tried to overturn the previous election won this time and is legitimately returning to power.

Layers of tall black fencing

flank the U.S. Capitol complex in a stark reminder of what happened four years ago, when a defeated Trump sent his mob to “fight like hell” in what became the most gruesome attack on the seat of American democracy in 200 years.

Vice President Kamala Harris, presiding over proceedings as the role of the office, read the tally.

The chamber broke into applause, first Republicans for Trump, then Democrats for Harris.

The whole process happened swiftly and without unrest. One by one, the state results were read aloud by the tellers as sen-

ators and representatives sat in seats in the House chamber. Vice President-elect JD Vance joined his former colleagues. Within half an hour, the process was done.

No violence, protests or even procedural objections in Congress this time. Republicans who challenged the 2020 election results when Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden have no qualms this year after he defeated Harris.

And Democrats frustrated by Trump’s 312-226 Electoral College victory nevertheless accept the choice of the voters. Even the winter snow blanketing the grounds didn’t interfere.

Trump said in a Monday post online that Congress was certifying a “GREAT” election victory and called it “A BIG MOMENT IN HISTORY.”

The day’s return to a U.S. tradition that launches the peaceful transfer of presidential power comes with an asterisk as Trump prepares to take office in two weeks with a revived sense of authority. He has continued to deny that he lost four years ago, has mused about staying beyond the Constitution’s two-term White House limit and has promised to pardon some of the over 1,250 people who have pleaded guilty or were convicted of crimes for the Capitol siege.

## Recent attacks highlight increased role by troops, vets

*Associated Press*

The military ties of the man who carried out an attack in New Orleans on New Year’s and another who died in an explosion in Las Vegas the same day highlight the increased role of people with military experience in ideologically driven attacks, especially those that seek mass casualties.

In New Orleans, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a veteran of the U.S. Army, was killed by police after a deadly rampage in a pickup truck that left 14 others dead and injured dozens more. It’s being investigated as an act of terrorism inspired by the Islamic State.

In Las Vegas, officials said Matthew Livelsberger, an active duty member of the U.S. Army Special Forces, shot himself in the head in a Tesla Cybertruck packed with firework mortars and camp fuel canisters, shortly before it exploded

outside the entrance of the Trump International Hotel, injuring seven people. On Friday, investigators said Livelsberger wrote that the explosion was meant to serve as a “wake up call” and that the country was “terminally ill and headed toward collapse.”

Service members and veterans who radicalize make up a tiny fraction of a percentage point of the millions who have served their country. But an Associated Press investigation published last year found that radicalization among both veterans and active duty service members was on the rise and that hundreds of people with military backgrounds had been arrested for extremist crimes since 2017. The AP found that extremist plots they were involved in during that period had killed or injured nearly 100 people.

The AP also found multiple

issues with the Pentagon’s efforts to address extremism in the ranks, including that there is still no force-wide system to track it, and that a cornerstone report on the issue contained old data, misleading analyses and ignored evidence of the problem.

Since 2017, both veterans and active duty service members radicalized at a faster rate than people without military backgrounds, according to data from terrorism researchers at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, or START, at the University of Maryland.

Less than 1% of adults are currently serving in the U.S. military, but active duty military members make up a disproportionate 3.2% of the extremist cases START researchers found between 2017 and 2022.

While the number of people

with military backgrounds involved in violent extremist plots remains small, the participation of active military and veterans gave extremist plots more potential for mass injury or death, according to data collected and analyzed by the AP and START.

More than 480 people with a military background were accused of ideologically driven extremist crimes from 2017 through 2023, including the more than 230 arrested in connection with the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection — 18% of those arrested for the attack as of late last year, according to START.

The AP’s analysis found that plots involving people with military backgrounds were more likely to involve mass casualties, weapons training or firearms than plots that didn’t include someone with a military background. This held true whether or not the plots were carried out.

# Navy reduces presence in Mediterranean

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

NAPLES, Italy — U.S. Navy presence in the Mediterranean Sea is at its lowest in years, an indication the service is feeling the pinch of sustaining the fleet following long overseas deployments, analysts say.

There isn't a carrier strike group or amphibious ready group in the region, a notable change since the near-constant presence of at least one of those groups in the Mediterranean since December 2022. The Navy hasn't said if it plans to send more ships to Europe anytime soon.

Last week, a single destroyer, USS Oscar Austin, was on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean, USNI News reported on Dec. 30.

The only other Navy ships in the area on Friday appeared to be the fast-attack submarine USS Indiana, the oiler USS Laramie and the expeditionary sea base USS Woody Williams.

In 2022, naval presence in the Mediterranean and Black seas reached highs not seen since the Cold War as Russia prepared to invade Ukraine and the service surged forces to the region.

While some of those ships subsequently returned stateside, the Navy's force in the region largely remained constant, increasing in the aftermath of Hamas' attack on Israel in October 2023 amid concerns of a wider conflict.

The reasons behind the Navy's current ship allocation in

the Mediterranean are varied and complex, analysts said.

For example, it's common for many ships to return to port during the holidays. And with a cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, there's less likelihood of a sudden crisis.

Meanwhile, the service is fighting Iranian-backed Houthi militants threatening ships in the Red Sea, among other competing priorities that are drawing resources.

But ultimately, the reduction in forces on patrol in the eastern Mediterranean boils down to having a fleet that is inadequately sized to meet demand, analysts said.

Presence in the Mediterranean is "partly threat-driven and situation-driven, and it's all conditioned by (the fact that) there aren't enough ships in the Navy," said Bradley Martin, a retired Navy surface warfare officer and director of the Rand Corp. National Security Supply Chain Institute.

With limited U.S. ashore bases in the region, the presence of a carrier in the eastern Mediterranean offers more flexibility. It also signals to Russia and other competitors that the U.S. is militarily committed to the region, naval experts said.

"The European theater and the mischief and war-making at work in that theater demands a strong U.S. response in concert with (allies)," said Bryan McGrath, managing director of

the Maryland-based national security and defense consulting firm the Ferry Bridge Group.

"One of the ways you deter another power is to show that other power that you are willing to risk things that are important to you," McGrath added. "That is the essence of deterrence, and we don't routinely do that."

That doesn't mean the U.S. lacks the resources to respond to a crisis in the region, Martin and other analysts pointed out.

In addition to Oscar Austin, four other destroyers are based at Rota, Spain, and could be in the area within days. Air Force planes from Aviano Air Base in northern Italy and other locations in Europe and the Middle East could be used if needed.

And navies from NATO countries, such as Italy, France, Greece and Spain, regularly patrol the Mediterranean.

"It's a little awkward that we don't have something in the eastern Med for anyone that likes having the reassurance of a surface ship," said Michael Bohnert, a Rand Corp. analyst. "But from a military and a practical perspective, it's perfectly fine."

Still, multiple extended deployments have taken a toll on Navy ships and played havoc with maintenance and repair schedules, said Bryan Clark, director of the Hudson Institute's Center for Defense Concepts and Technology.

For example, the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower

spent roughly nine months deployed, fending off Houthi attacks at a combat tempo unseen in decades.

The Navy also extended the deployments of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford and the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, among other ships and groups.

Those extended deployments hurt an already tight maintenance and repair schedule, creating a domino effect of delays exacerbated by the need for additional work from the wear and tear of having a ship at sea for a longer period, Clark said.

"The Navy worked a lot of ships hard over the last year-and-a-half with what's going on in Israel and the Middle East," Clark said. "Those operations put a huge stress on the force."

In 2024, the service's deployable battle force was estimated to be 293, down three from the year before, Stars and Stripes reported in March 2023. That number includes 11 aircraft carriers in various cycles of operation, deployment and maintenance.

Three carriers — USS George Washington, USS Carl Vinson and USS Harry S. Truman — are now deployed.

In the final analysis, shortage of ships and manpower explains why the service has fewer ships in the Mediterranean, said McGrath, who served 21 years in the Navy, including as commander of the destroyer USS Bulkeley.

## Macron says President-elect Trump has 'solid ally' in France

*Associated Press*

PARIS — French President Emmanuel Macron extended an olive branch to President-elect Donald Trump on Monday, declaring that France is "a solid ally" as he outlined his vision for global diplomacy in 2025 during

his New Year's address to French ambassadors.

"Donald Trump knows that he has a solid ally in France, an ally he does not underestimate, one who believes in Europe and carries a lucid ambition for the transatlantic relationship," Macron

said at the Élysée Palace, emphasizing France's commitment to fostering cooperation while urging European nations to fortify their unity and resilience.

"If we decide to be weak and defeatist, there is little chance we will be respected by the United

States under President Trump," he warned.

Macron's speech, delivered against a backdrop of geopolitical turmoil, laid out France's foreign policy priorities, spanning the Ukraine war, European defense, and the Middle East.

# Trump seeks hush money sentencing delay

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump on Monday moved to indefinitely postpone this week's sentencing in his hush money case as he appeals a ruling that upheld the historic verdict and put him on course to be the first president to take office convicted of felony crimes.

Trump's lawyers said they will ask a New York appeals court to reverse Manhattan Judge Juan M. Merchan's ruling last week, which set the case for sentencing Friday — a

little more than a week before his inauguration.

Merchan rejected Trump's bid to throw out the May 30 verdict because of his impending return to the White House. Trump's lawyers said they will also appeal a prior decision in which the judge refused to dismiss the case on presidential immunity grounds.

In his decision last week, the judge signaled he is not likely to sentence Trump, a Republican, to any punishment for his historic conviction on 34 felony counts of falsifying busi-

ness records.

Trump has said it "would be the end of the Presidency as we know it" if the ruling is allowed to stand.

Trump's lawyers argued Monday that their appeal to the Appellate Division of the state's trial court should trigger what's known as an automatic stay, or pause, in the proceedings. If that doesn't happen, they said, Merchan should step in and halt Friday's sentencing.

They asked Merchan to inform them by Monday afternoon of his decision "to allow

sufficient time for President Trump to seek an emergency appellate review."

Any delay in sentencing Trump could run out the clock on closing the case before his second term begins Jan. 20. As president, he will again be immune from criminal proceedings, making it unlikely he can be sentenced while in office. If sentencing doesn't happen before Trump is sworn in, waiting until he leaves office in 2029 "may become the only viable option," Merchan said last week.

## New Orleans attacker used Meta glasses to check site

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — The man responsible for the truck attack in New Orleans on New Year's Day that killed 14 people visited the city twice before and recorded video of the French Quarter with Meta smart glasses, an FBI official said Sunday.

Shamsud-Din Jabbar also traveled to Cairo and Canada before the attack although it was not yet clear whether those trips were connected to the attack, Deputy Assistant Director Christopher Raia said at a news conference. Federal officials believe Jabbar, a U.S. citizen and former U.S. Army soldier, was inspired by the Islamic State militant group to carry out the attack.

Police fatally shot Jabbar, 42, during an exchange of gunfire at the scene of the deadly crash of the rented pickup truck on Bourbon Street, famous worldwide for its festive vibes in New Orleans' historic French Quarter.

Federal investigators so far believe Jabbar acted alone, but are continuing to explore his contacts.

"All investigative details and evidence that we have now still support that Jabbar acted alone

here in New Orleans," said Raia. "We have not seen any indications of an accomplice in the United States, but we are still looking into potential associates in the U.S. and outside of our borders."

Lyonel Myrthil, FBI special agent in charge of the New Orleans Field Office, said Jabbar traveled to Cairo in the summer of 2023 and then to the Canadian province of Ontario a few days later.

"Our agents are getting answers to where he went, who he met with and how those trips may or may not tie into his actions here," Myrthil said.

Jabbar had also traveled to New Orleans twice in the months preceding the attack, first in October and again in November.

On Oct. 31, Myrthil said Jabbar used glasses from Meta, the parent company of Facebook, to record video as he rode through the French Quarter on a bicycle as "he plotted this hideous attack." He said Jabbar was also in New Orleans on Nov. 10.

He also wore the glasses capable of livestreaming during the attack, but Myrthil said Jabbar did not activate them.

## Nippon, US Steel file federal suit after \$15B deal scuttled

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel filed a federal lawsuit challenging a Biden administration decision to block Nippon's proposed \$15 billion acquisition of the Pittsburgh company, and said the head of the Steelworkers union and a rival steelmaker worked together to scuttle the buyout.

Outgoing President Joe Biden said Friday that U.S. companies producing a large amount of steel need to "keep leading the fight on behalf of America's national interests," though Japan, where Nippon is based, is a strong ally.

In separate lawsuits filed Monday in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia and the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania, the steelmakers allege it was a political decision made by the Biden administration that had no rational legal basis.

"Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel have engaged in good faith with all parties to underscore how the Transaction will enhance, not threaten, United States national security," the companies said in a prepared statement Monday.

Nippon Steel had promised to

invest \$2.7 billion in U.S. Steel's aging blast furnace operations in Gary, Ind., and Pennsylvania's Mon Valley.

It also vowed not to reduce production capacity in the U.S. over the next decade without first getting U.S. government approval.

Biden on Friday decided to stop the Nippon takeover — after federal regulators deadlocked on whether to approve it — because "a strong domestically owned and operated steel industry represents an essential national security priority. ... Without domestic steel production and domestic steel workers, our nation is less strong and less secure," he said in a statement.

While administration officials have said the decision was unrelated to Japan's relationship with the U.S., this is the first time a U.S. president has blocked a merger between a U.S. and Japanese firm.

The president's decision to block the deal comes after the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, known as CFIUS, failed to reach consensus on the possible national security risks of the deal last month, and sent a long-awaited report on the merger to Biden.



# Biden bans new offshore oil, gas drilling

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is moving to ban new offshore oil and gas drilling in most coastal waters, a last-minute effort to block possible action by the incoming Trump administration to expand offshore drilling.

Biden, whose term expires in two weeks, said he is using authority under the federal Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to protect offshore areas along the East and West coasts, the eastern Gulf of Mexico and portions

of Alaska's Northern Bering Sea from future oil and natural gas leasing.

"My decision reflects what coastal communities, businesses and beachgoers have known for a long time: that drilling off these coasts could cause irreversible damage to places we hold dear and is unnecessary to meet our nation's energy needs," Biden said in a statement.

Biden's orders would not affect large swaths of the Gulf of Mexico, where most U.S. off-

shore drilling occurs, but it would protect coastlines along California, Florida and other states from future drilling.

Biden's actions, which protect more than 625 million acres of federal waters, could be difficult for President-elect Donald Trump to unwind, since they would likely require an act of Congress to repeal. Trump himself has a complicated history on offshore drilling. He signed a memorandum in 2020 directing the interior secretary to prohibit drilling in the waters off both

Florida coasts, and off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina until 2032.

The action came after Trump initially moved to vastly expand offshore drilling, before retreating amid widespread opposition in Florida and other coastal states.

Trump has vowed to establish what he calls American "energy dominance" around the world as he seeks to boost U.S. oil and gas drilling and move away from Biden's focus on climate change.

## Russia claims it has captured another key east Ukraine town

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian troops in eastern Ukraine have captured the stronghold of Kurakhove after a monthslong battle, Russia's Defense Ministry claimed Monday, adding the wrecked town to the Kremlin's list of conquests during the almost three-year war.

The claim, which drew no response from Ukrainian authorities, came a day after the Russian Defense Ministry said Ukrainian forces had pressed new attacks in Russia's Kursk border region.

The inauguration in two weeks' time of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump has brought a new element of uncertainty into the conflict and triggered an apparent effort by both sides to establish battlefield gains before any possible peace talks are held.

Trump hasn't detailed his plans for accomplishing his goal of ending the fighting, but his presence in the White House is likely to affect how the war plays out.

Kurakhove is a key stronghold for the Ukrainian army on the eastern front line in the partially occupied Donetsk region.

Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday that Ukraine launched a fresh offensive in the Kursk region of Russia. It claimed its forces pushed back Ukrainian troops,

but some reports from Russian military bloggers indicated that Moscow's forces faced significant pressure.

A ministry statement said Ukrainian forces attacked about 9 a.m. local time near the village of Berdin with two tanks, a mine-clearing vehicle and 12 armored combat vehicles with paratroopers. Two Ukrainian attacks were repelled, it said.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Andriy Yermak said there was "good news" from Kursk and that Russia was "getting what it deserves." And Andriy Kovalenko, head of Ukraine's official Centre Against Disinformation, said on Telegram that Russian troops were attacked in several places.

Kurakhove has an industrial zone, a thermal power plant and a reservoir. It also sits on a highway running between eastern and southern Ukraine.

In November, The Associated Press reported from the town that some 7,000-10,000 people likely remained in Kurakhove. The town has been under relentless attacks from artillery, multiple rocket launchers, powerful guided bombs and drones.

Ukrainian officials usually comment on major battlefield defeats only days after Russia announces them.

## Winter blast closes schools, cuts power in many states

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A huge swath of the U.S. was blasted with ice, snow and wind on Monday as the polar vortex that dipped south over the weekend kept much of the country east of the Rockies in its frigid grip, making many roads treacherous, forcing school closures, and causing widespread power outages and flight cancellations.

In Kentucky's biggest city, Louisville, Hugh Ross used his shovel Monday to break hard sheets of ice as he cleared a driveway. Frozen rain fell atop several inches of snow that arrived Sunday, which he said "couldn't have been worse."

"You've got to break it up first," Ross explained. "If you don't do that, you're wasting your time. I did a couple of layers yesterday, so I had to make sure I wasn't in too bad of shape today."

Ice and snow blanketed major roads in Kansas, western Nebraska and parts of Indiana, where that National Guard was activated to help stranded motorists.

More than 300,000 customers were without power early Monday across Kentucky, Indiana, Virginia, West Virginia, Illinois and Missouri, according to the electric utility tracking website

PowerOutage.us.

The National Weather Service issued winter storm warnings for Kansas and Missouri, where blizzard conditions brought wind gusts of up to 45 mph. The warnings extended to New Jersey into early Tuesday.

The polar vortex of ultra-cold air usually spins around the North Pole, but it sometimes escapes and plunges southward into the U.S., Europe and Asia.

Starting Monday, the eastern two-thirds of the U.S. would be dealing with bone-chilling cold and wind chills, forecasters said. Temperatures could be 12 to 25 degrees below normal. The Northeast, which has had a relatively mild start to winter, is likely to experience several days of cold, said Jon Palmer, a weather service meteorologist in Maine.

The cold air was expected to grip the Eastern Seaboard as far south as Georgia, with temperatures dropping into the low single digits in some coastal areas, Palmer said. Major southern cities including New Orleans and Dallas were bracing for uncharacteristically cold weather.

School closings were widespread Monday in Indiana, Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri and Kansas, among other states.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Spider monkey found in Rolls-Royce during stop

**CA** OAKLAND — A baby spider monkey discovered by the California Highway Patrol is in critical condition — suffering from malnourishment, skin and coat issues and an upper respiratory infection. But the Oakland Zoo is hopeful that the plucky young primate will make a full recovery.

The baby monkey is being housed in a humid environment to help treat her upper respiratory infection and has been given fluids and a proper diet, according to zoo officials.

It is illegal to own primates as pets in the state of California and the poor condition of the young spider monkey is a prime example of why, zoo officials said.

CHP officers discovered the monkey during a bizarre traffic stop in Madera County. Officers pulled over a Rolls-Royce Ghost speeding north on Highway 99 and were stunned to find a small monkey wearing a onesie inside — as well as copious amounts of marijuana and five cellphones.

The driver was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence, possession of an exotic animal and possession of cannabis for sale.

## Jill Biden gifted \$20K diamond in 2023

**DC** WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and his family were given tens of thousands of dollars in gifts from foreign leaders in 2023, according to an annual accounting published by the State Department, with first lady Jill Biden receiving the single most ex-

pensive present: a \$20,000 diamond from India's leader.

The 7.5-carat diamond from Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was easily the most costly gift presented to any member of the first family in 2023, although she also received a brooch valued at \$14,063 from the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States and a bracelet, brooch and photograph album worth \$4,510 from the president and first lady of Egypt.

The \$20,000 diamond was retained for official use in the White House East Wing, according to a State Department document, while the other gifts to the president and first lady were sent to the archives.

## AG: TikTok's live video feature 'groomed' minors

**UT** SALT LAKE CITY — TikTok has long known that its popular video livestreams encourage sexual content, including streams exploiting and "grooming" minors, according to a lawsuit from the state of Utah that was unredacted.

TikTok also discovered through an internal investigation that the feature, called TikTok Live, facilitated money laundering and allowed users to sell drugs and fund terrorism, the lawsuit alleged.

Bipartisan attorneys general from more than a dozen states sued TikTok last fall, accusing the app of financially and sexually exploiting minors. Utah also sued TikTok on similar grounds in June. Several of those lawsuits — including those from Utah, Vermont, New Hampshire, Kentucky and the District of Columbia — focused on TikTok Live. The suits cited

investigative reporting from Forbes that found adult men regularly use the livestreams to coax teen girls to perform racy, sometimes sexual acts in exchange for digital "gifts" that can be redeemed for money.

## Man tries to drive off in autonomous Waymo car

**CA** LOS ANGELES — After a man hopped behind the wheel of an autonomous Waymo vehicle and tried to drive off, the company offered assurances that the car's technology includes protections against bad actors.

A man in downtown LA allegedly attempted to get into a Waymo and drive away. Police responded and eventually got the man out of the car.

It was not immediately clear if the man was the person who had called the vehicle.

The incident raised questions about how the autonomous vehicle ride-share company protects its human-free cars, just months after Waymo began providing rides for all Angelenos.

The service now operates more than 100 vehicles in Los Angeles. Waymo has many more vehicles roaming the streets of San Francisco, Daly City and Phoenix, among several other locations.

In more than 5 million rides taken in Waymos, only a "handful" of people have attempted to commandeer the vehicles, according to the company.

## Hundreds of animals die in shopping center fire

**TX** DALLAS — A fire that broke out at a shopping center in Dallas killed more than 500 animals, most of

which were small birds, authorities said.

The 579 animals in the pet shop at Plaza Latina in Northwest Dallas died from smoke inhalation, Dallas Fire-Rescue spokesperson Jason Evans said in a statement.

The flames from the fire never reached the animals. Chickens, hamsters, two dogs and two cats also died, Evans said.

The two-alarm fire took about two hours and as many as 45 firefighters to extinguish around 11 a.m., Evans said.

"While DFR personnel did search and attempt rescue, all animals in the shop unfortunately perished due to smoke inhalation," Evans said.

The cause of the fire was not immediately determined and is under investigation, Evans said.

## NYC deli dispute ends in fatal stabbing

**NY** NEW YORK — A woman accused of stabbing a postal worker to death in a New York City deli was charged with murder. Witnesses said the killing followed a quarrel over whose turn it was to order.

Jaia Cruz, 24, was being held without bail after her arraignment in the killing of letter carrier Ray Hodge. Hodge, 36, was stabbed in the chest, neck and arms at a Harlem deli, according to a court complaint. Police found him wounded on the floor in his postal uniform.

Another customer, Janet Rich, told the Daily News that Hodge and Cruz argued at the sandwich counter over who was next. Rich said she and another person tried unsuccessfully to intervene.

— From wire reports

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# NFL playoff picture finalized on last day

Associated Press

The road to the Super Bowl in the NFC will go through Motown.

The Detroit Lions secured a No. 1 seed with a 31-9 victory over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday night.

Jahmyr Gibbs scored four touchdowns to help the Lions (15-2) clinch the NFC North, earn a first-round bye and home-field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs.

The Vikings (14-3) missed an opportunity to overtake Detroit for the top spot and ended up with the fifth seed. They'll play on the road against the No. 4 seed Los Angeles Rams (10-7) next Monday night.

The Denver Broncos and Tampa Bay Buccaneers captured the NFL's final two playoff spots earlier in the day in Week 18.

Rookie quarterback Bo Nix led the Broncos to a 38-0 victory over Kansas City's backups, sending Denver to the postseason for the first time since Peyton Manning helped the team win the Super Bowl following the 2015 season.

The Buccaneers clinched the NFC South with a 27-19 comeback victory over New Orleans and earned the No. 3 seed when the Los Angeles Rams lost to Seattle 30-25.

Tampa Bay (10-7) will host Washington (12-5) in the wild-card round next Sunday night.

The Broncos (10-7) got the seventh seed and will visit Buffalo (13-4) in the first game Sunday.

Denver's victory eliminated Cincinnati and Miami, which lost to the Jets.

Green Bay, which lost 24-22 to Chicago, will be the seventh seed and visits No. 2 seed Philadelphia on Sunday in the middle game of a playoff tripleheader. The Eagles (14-3) beat the Packers (11-6) in the season opener, 34-29, in Brazil.

The Commanders beat Dallas 23-19 behind backup quarterback Marcus Mariota's two touchdown passes. Washington opened the season with a loss in Tampa Bay, but rookie QB Jayden Daniels has

come a long way since Week 1.

The AFC's playoff picture became more clear Saturday when the Baltimore Ravens beat Cleveland to clinch the North and the No. 3 seed. The Chiefs (15-2) already locked up a first-round bye, the Bills are the No. 2 seed and the Houston Texans are No. 4.

The Los Angeles Chargers beat Las Vegas to get the No. 5 seed. The Chargers (10-7) will play at Houston (10-7) in the first wild-card game Saturday afternoon. The Ravens (12-5) host the Pittsburgh Steelers (10-7), who lost the final four games of the regular season to drop to the No. 6 seed, on Saturday night. The division rivals split the season series.

## Evans, Bucs top Saints to secure NFC South title

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Just 36 seconds away from clinching the NFC South title, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers had another goal to achieve.

Take a knee on their 32-yard line and run out the clock?

No chance. Mike Evans still needed 5 yards to make history.

Evans caught a 9-yard pass on the final play of the game to surpass 1,000 yards for the 11th straight season, tying Jerry Rice for the most ever in the NFL and setting off a wild celebration following Tampa Bay's 27-19 victory over the New Orleans Saints on Sunday.

Mayfield used his legs and arm to help the Buccaneers secure their fourth straight division championship, rallying the team from a 16-6 deficit for his first career win after trailing by 10 or more points. Mayfield had been 0-43 in those situations.

Tampa Bay (10-7) will host the Washington Commanders (12-5) next Sunday night in a wild-card playoff game. It's a rematch of the Bucs' 37-20 victory over Washington in Week 1 in rookie quarterback Jayden Daniels' first game.

**Broncos 38, Chiefs 0:** Rookie Bo Nix set a franchise record by completing his first 18 passes and host Denver ended an eight-year playoff drought with a rout of Kansas City.

The Broncos (10-7) snapped a two-game skid and buried nearly a decade's worth of futility and frustrations by returning to the postseason party for the first time since win-

ning Super Bowl 50 following the 2015 season.

**Bears 24, Packers 22:** Caleb Williams drove visiting Chicago to Cairo Santos' 51-yard field goal as time expired and the Bears snapped a 10-game skid with a victory over playoff-bound Green Bay, who lost quarterback Jordan Love and wide receiver Christian Watson to injuries.

Packers coach Matt LaFleur said Love was held out as a precaution. The QB had some practice tosses on the sideline late in the game.

**Eagles 20, Giants 13:** Tanner McKee threw for 269 yards and two touchdowns in a game full of backups to help host Philadelphia tune up for the postseason with a victory over New York.

The NFC East champion Eagles (14-3) are the No. 2 seed in the conference and will host Green Bay next weekend in a wild-card game.

**Texans 23, Titans 14:** C.J. Stroud completed all six of his passes for 50 yards and a touchdown Sunday on visiting Houston's opening drive before going to the bench as the Texans snapped a two-game skid going into the AFC playoffs with a victory over Tennessee.

Houston (10-7) will host the Los Angeles Chargers in an AFC wild-card game. The Texans won for the first time since clinching their second straight AFC South title Dec. 15 with a win over Miami.

**Commanders 23, Cowboys 19:** Marcus Mariota threw a 5-yard touchdown pass to

Terry McLaurin with 3 seconds left, lifting visiting Washington to a victory over Dallas and clinching the sixth seed in the NFC playoffs.

**Patriots 23, Bills 16:** Joe Milton III passed for a touchdown and ran for another in his NFL debut, and host New England cost itself the No. 1 overall pick in the NFL draft with a win over AFC East champion Buffalo.

**Panthers 44, Falcons 38 (OT):** Bryce Young passed for three touchdowns, ran for two scores and led a 70-yard drive capped by Miles Sanders' 1-yard TD run on the opening possession of overtime to give visiting Carolina a win over Atlanta.

**Colts 26, Jaguars 23 (OT):** Jonathan Taylor ran for 177 yards, including 33 yards on six consecutive carries in overtime to set up Matt Gay's go-ahead 38-yard field goal, and host Indianapolis beat Jacksonville.

**Chargers 34, Raiders 20:** Justin Herbert passed for 346 yards and two touchdowns, and visiting Los Angeles secured the fifth seed in the AFC playoffs with a victory over Las Vegas.

**Jets 32, Dolphins 20:** Aaron Rodgers threw a season-high four touchdown passes — Nos. 500, 501, 502 and 503 of his storied career — in what could've been his final NFL game to lead host New York to a victory over Miami.

**Cardinals 47, 49ers 24:** Kyler Murray threw for 242 yards and four touchdowns, two to Greg Dortch, and host Arizona beat injury-depleted San Francisco.



# Gibbs scores 4 TDs, gives Lions No. 1 seed

Associated Press

DETROIT — Jahmyr Gibbs was the game-breaking player the Detroit Lions needed to get their high-powered offense in gear — and give them a first-round bye and home-field advantage in the NFC playoffs.

Gibbs scored three of his franchise-record-tying four touchdowns in the second half, and the Lions beat the Minnesota Vikings 31-9 on Sunday night to win their second straight NFC North title.

“Everybody’s got to come through here, baby!” Detroit defensive end Za’Darius Smith said to the roaring crowd after the game.

The Lions (15-2) and Vikings (14-3) could meet again in two weeks.

Banged-up Detroit will have a much-needed week off, while Minnesota plays at the NFC West champion Los Angeles Rams next Monday night.

In the NFL’s final game be-

fore the playoffs, two teams played in the regular season with a combined 28 victories for the first time. A No. 1 seed was determined in a regular-season finale for the third time in three-plus decades.

The Lions are seeking their first Super Bowl appearance and hoping to end an NFL championship drought that dates to 1957. They are a No. 1 seed for the first time in franchise history.

“It’s not the cherry on top,” quarterback Jared Goff said. “Not yet.”

Game No. 272 of the regular season was expected to be a shootout with Pro Bowl quarterbacks leading high-scoring offenses, but Goff and Sam Darnold were not at their best.

Gibbs picked up the slack for his team.

“He’s as explosive as any player in the league,” Vikings coach Kevin O’Connell said.

Gibbs had 23 carries for 139

yards with a career-high three rushing touchdowns and caught five passes for 31 yards and another score.

“He was special, and we needed him to be,” Goff said.

Goff threw two interceptions after getting picked off only once in the previous seven games and Minnesota made field goals after the turnovers in the second and third quarters.

After Vikings rookie Will Reichard connected on his third kick to cut the deficit to 10-9 early in the third, Goff directed a 13-play, 70-yard drive that took 7:25 and was capped by a slick pass to Gibbs for a 10-yard touchdown on fourth-and-2.

Goff was 8-for-8 on that possession and finished 27-for-33 for 231 yards with a touchdown and two interceptions.

Darnold completed fewer than half his passes in the first half, missing opportunities to pick up first downs and score touchdowns. Minnesota was 0 of

3 in the red zone through two quarters to let Detroit lead 10-6 at halftime and failed to score a touchdown when they were inside the 20 for a fourth time in the second half.

The Vikings went for it on fourth down from the Lions 3 in the second quarter and Darnold, under pressure, overthrew an open Justin Jefferson in the end zone.

Darnold threw another incomplete pass on fourth down from the Detroit 2 early in the third.

“Kicking field goals isn’t going to get it done against that team,” Darnold said. “I have to hit those throws.”

O’Connell opted to attempt a 51-yard field goal late in the third, trailing by eight, and Reichard missed wide right.

Darnold was 18 of 41, a season-low 44% completion rate, and connected with Jefferson just three times on nine targets for 54 yards.

## Loss drops Rams into matchup with Vikings

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Matthew Stafford and nearly all of his fellow offensive starters watched the Los Angeles Rams’ regular-season finale in street clothes. Coach Sean McVay knew his NFC West champions would fall from the third to the fourth playoff seed if they lost to Seattle, but he didn’t care.

Jimmy Garoppolo and the backups nearly beat the Seattle Seahawks anyway, and that looks like an encouraging sign for the Rams next week and beyond.

“We’ve got some dawgs on this team, man,” Garoppolo said. “I know we’re going to show up next week ready to roll.”

Geno Smith passed for 223 yards and threw his career-best fourth touchdown pass to Noah Fant with 3:19 to play, and the Seahawks finished their 12th winning season in 13 years with a 30-25 victory over playoff-bound Los Angeles on Sunday.

Garoppolo passed for 334 yards and two TDs in his debut for the Rams (10-7), who had already clinched the division title through strength of schedule before they

hosted Seattle (10-7).

In keeping with McVay’s career-long policy of prioritizing rest and health over meaningless results, Los Angeles sat Stafford along with receivers Puka Nacua and Cooper Kupp, running back Kyren Williams and four starting offensive linemen.

But the Rams’ first loss since Nov. 24 dropped them to the fourth seed in the NFC playoff bracket behind Tampa Bay (10-7), which beat New Orleans.

That means Los Angeles’ visitor in the wild-card round Monday night will be the 14-3 Minnesota Vikings, who lost 31-9 at Detroit on Sunday night.

Asked if he cared about the team’s first playoff opponent before the Vikings-Lions game, McVay responded: “I really don’t.” “You know what’s at stake and you have tremendous respect, but I’m excited about seeing who that is, and then we’re going to dive into it,” he continued. “We’re going to go for it with no fear.”

Tyler Higbee and Tyler Johnson caught TD passes for the Rams, who had won five straight and nine of 11 since their bye week.

Although most of their defensive starters played, Los Angeles limited its snaps — and McVay even allowed offensive coordinator Mike LaFleur to call the Rams’ plays.

“It’s going to be a great challenge, but I do know this: I’ve been fortunate enough to get into this thing (before), and you can’t worry about ducking people,” said McVay, the youngest coach to win the Super Bowl. “If you ... really expect to make some noise when you get in it, you’re going to have to play people eventually. Felt like it was the smart move for our football team, and really, we had an opportunity to come away with the win.”

The Seahawks didn’t trail until the fourth quarter. After Johnson caught a 4-yard TD pass from Garoppolo, Los Angeles got the ball back and drove for Joshua Karty’s 38-yard field goal to go up 25-24 with 7:29 to play.

Fant put Seattle back ahead by holding on to Smith’s 16-yard TD pass despite landing nearly headfirst in the end zone after getting undercut.

# Thunder win team-record 15th straight

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 33 points and 11 rebounds, and the Oklahoma City Thunder pulled away from the Boston Celtics 105-92 on Sunday for their franchise-record 15th straight win.

The Thunder, who improved to 30-5, have not lost a game that counted in the standings since Dec. 1. Their loss to the Milwaukee Bucks in the NBA Cup final does not count on the team's record.

Jayson Tatum had 26 points and 10 rebounds for the defending NBA champion Celtics. Jaylen Brown scored 21 points, but went scoreless on 0-for-7 shooting in the second half.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored nine points in the first 3½ minutes of the game to help Oklahoma City take an early lead, but Boston rallied and led 65-55 at halftime.

The Thunder trimmed the deficit to 80-76 at the end of the third quarter and regained the lead, 81-80, on a pair of free

throws by Jalen Williams early in the fourth.

Oklahoma City remained in control, and back-to-back 3s by Lu Dort put the Thunder up 100-88 with just under two minutes to play. Dort scored 11 points and made all three of his shots from beyond the arc in the fourth quarter.

**Pelicans 110, Wizards 98:** CJ McCollum scored 25 points and Dejounte Murray had a triple-double to help visiting New Orleans to a second straight victory over Washington.

Murray had 14 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds for his 20th career triple-double. Trey Murphy III added 22 points for the Pelicans.

New Orleans (7-29) swept a home-and-home set with the Wizards (6-27) and moved past them in the standings in this matchup of the NBA's bottom two teams.

**Cavaliers 115, Hornets 105:** Darius Garland scored 25 points, Jarrett Allen had 19 points and 11 rebounds, and

NBA-leading Cleveland beat visiting Charlotte to extend its winning streak to 10.

Donovan Mitchell had 17 of his 19 points in the second half and Evan Mobley added 17 for the Cavaliers, who won for the 18th time in 19 home games and are 31-4 overall. All 10 victories in Cleveland's streak have been by double digits, a franchise record.

LaMelo Ball and Brandon Miller paced the Hornets with 24 points apiece. Charlotte dropped its 10th in a row and is 1-18 since Nov. 23.

**Jazz 105, Magic 92:** Brice Sensabaugh scored 27 points, Collin Sexton added 20 and Walker Kessler grabbed 17 rebounds for visiting Utah in a win over Orlando.

Sensabaugh shot 11-for-19 from the field including 5-for-6 on 3-pointers in 28 minutes off the bench.

Johnny Juzang, Kyle Filipowski and Svi Mykhailiuk scored 12 points each for the Jazz.

**Rockets 119, Lakers 115:**

Jalen Green scored 33 points and Fred VanVleet grabbed a key steal late to allow host Houston to hold on for a win over Los Angeles.

Amen Thompson added 23 points and a career-high 16 rebounds in his return after a two-game suspension to help the Rockets eke out the victory after leading by as many as 22.

A basket by LeBron James got the Lakers within 117-115 with eight seconds to go. Alperen Sengun missed 1 of 2 free throws after that to give Los Angeles a chance to tie it.

**Kings 129, Warriors 99:** Malik Monk had 26 points and 12 assists, Domantas Sabonis contributed 22 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists, and visiting Sacramento dominated Golden State for its fourth straight win despite playing without leading scorer De'Aaron Fox.

The Kings never trailed, led 75-51 at halftime.

Stephen Curry scored 26 to go with seven rebounds after resting on Saturday.

## Aho scores in OT to lift Hurricanes over Penguins

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sebastian Aho's goal at 1:30 in overtime led the Carolina Hurricanes to a 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday night.

Aho added two assists. Seth Jarvis had two goals and Jalen Chatfield also scored for the Hurricanes, who improved to 3-0 against the Penguins this season. Dustin Tokarski had 16 saves for Carolina.

Kevin Hayes, Michael Bunting and Erik Karlsson scored for Pittsburgh. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 26 shots for the Penguins.

Pittsburgh built a 2-0 lead in the first six minutes of the game. Hayes and Bunting beat Tokarski for the early advantage.

Aho set up Jarvis' first goal

and then fed Chatfield to tie the game at 2-2 with 7:15 left in the second period. Jarvis made it 3-2 with an assist from Andrei Svechnikov with 3:42 left in the second.

The Hurricanes' penalty kill, second-best in the NHL, held up late in regulation when Chatfield was sent to the box for a delay of game with 3 minutes left in the third period.

**Rangers 6, Blackhawks 2:** Filip Chytil scored twice, Jonny Brodzinski, Will Borgen, Reilly Smith and Vincent Trocheck added goals, and visiting New York beat Chicago.

The Rangers won for the second time in three games and are 2-5 over their last seven games. The Blackhawks lost for the sixth time in seven starts.

Brodzinski and Borgen scored in the final five minutes of the first period to give New York a 2-1 lead. Both shots beat Chicago goaltender Arvid Soderblom (28 saves) from the high slot, Brodzinski's was aided by Mika Zibanejad's screen.

**Islanders 5, Bruins 4 (OT):** Bo Hovart scored his second goal of the game on a breakaway 3:10 into overtime and visiting New York snapped a three-game skid with a win over Boston.

Anders Lee scored twice, and Ryan Pulock had a goal and an assist for the Islanders.

Hovart fired a wrist shot that slipped between Jonas Korpisalo's pads for the winner.

David Pastrnak scored twice, and Cole Koepke and Justin Brazeau added goals as the

Bruins lost their fourth straight game.

**Maple Leafs 3, Flyers 2:** Morgan Rielly scored 2:25 into overtime and host Toronto extended its winning streak to four games with a victory over Philadelphia.

Rielly converted a feed from Auston Matthews for his fifth goal of the season and first in two months.

**Ducks 4, Lightning 1:** Frank Vatrano had two goals and assist after signing a three-year contract extension, and host Anaheim defeated Tampa Bay.

Troy Terry also had a goal and an assist for the Ducks, who have won four of their last six. Jackson Lacombe put it out of reach with a goal at 16:26 of the third.