

Israeli security cabinet OKs ceasefire

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel's security cabinet recommended approval on Friday of a ceasefire deal after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed an agreement had been reached that would pause the 15-month war with Hamas in Gaza and release dozens of hostages held by militants there.

Mediators Qatar and the U.S. announced the ceasefire on Wednesday, but the deal hung in limbo for more than a day as Netanyahu insisted there were last-minute snags he blamed on Hamas.

The militants maintained they were "committed" to the deal, while residents of Gaza and families of the hostages anxiously waited to see if it would materialize.

The deal now goes to the full Cabinet of ministers for final sign-off. It is expected to OK the ceasefire, which could start as soon as Sunday, even though it has drawn fierce resistance from Netanyahu's far-right coalition partners. Their objections could destabilize his government, however.

Hamas triggered the war with its Oct. 7, 2023, cross-border attack into Israel that killed some 1,200 people and left some 250 others captive.

Israel responded with a devastating offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed.

Beyond the death and destruction in Gaza, the conflict has also destabilized the Middle East and sparked worldwide protests.

On Thursday, Israeli strikes killed at least 72 people in Gaza. In previous conflicts, both sides have increased military operations in the final hours before ceasefires as a way to project strength.

Netanyahu instructed a special task force to prepare to receive the hostages returning

from Gaza and said that their families were informed a deal had been reached. The prime minister's office said that if the deal passes, the ceasefire could start Sunday, and the first hostages could be freed then too.

Under the deal, 33 of some 100 hostages who remain in Gaza are set to be released over six weeks in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces will pull back from many areas, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would be able to return to what's left of their homes and there would be a surge of humanitarian assistance.

The remainder of the hostages, including male soldiers, are to be released in a second — and much more difficult — phase that will be negotiated during the first.

Hamas has said it will not release the remaining captives without a lasting ceasefire and a full Israeli withdrawal, while Israel has vowed to keep fighting until it dismantles the group and

to maintain open-ended security control over the territory.

Jaher Jabareen, head of Hamas' office responsible for prisoners, said that the names of those expected to be released from Israeli jails will be published but didn't say when.

Longer-term questions about postwar Gaza remain, including who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction.

On Thursday, Israel's hard-line national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, threatened to quit the government if Israel approved the ceasefire. "If the 'deal' passes, we will leave the government with a heavy heart," he wrote on the social media platform X on Friday.

Ben-Gvir's resignation would not bring down the government or derail the ceasefire deal, but the move would destabilize the government at a delicate moment and could eventually lead to its collapse if Ben-Gvir were joined by other key Netanyahu allies.

Wildfires, related dangers persist a week later in LA

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — It has been more than a week since two massive fires forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in the Los Angeles area, and officials said Thursday residents won't be going home soon. As the search continues for human remains in the leveled neighborhoods, properties also face new dangers with burned slopes at risk of landslides and the charred debris laden with asbestos and other toxins.

More than 80,000 people are

still under evacuation orders, and many do not know what, if anything, is left of their houses, apartments and possessions. Scores of people have gathered at checkpoints to plead with police and soldiers restricting access to their neighborhoods.

Officials said they understand their frustration, but they asked residents for patience as hazardous materials teams and cadaver dogs comb the sites block by block. They said it will be a week or more before people can go back.

"The properties have been damaged beyond belief," Los Angeles County Public Works Director Mark Pestrella said at a briefing. "They are full of sediment, debris, silt and hazardous materials."

Hillsides have become unstable behind some damaged homes, and a small landslide in Pacific Palisades this week sent debris into the streets, he added.

Recognizing the health risks, the county on Thursday prohibited any cleanup or removal of fire debris until a hazardous

materials inspection is completed by government officials.

The government has not yet released estimates, but private firms expect losses to climb into the tens of billions of dollars. The blazes could become the costliest fire disaster in U.S. history.

The federal government already has approved spending \$100 million to remove paint, cleaners, asbestos, batteries and other household waste from the rubble before crews can begin clearing debris.

Mystery airstrip appears on Yemeni island

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A mysterious airstrip being built on a remote island in Yemen is nearing completion, satellite photos analyzed by The Associated Press show, one of several built in a nation mired in a stalemated war threatening to reignite.

The airstrip on Abd al-Kuri Island, which rises out of the Indian Ocean near the mouth of the Gulf of Aden, could provide a key landing zone for military operations patrolling that waterway.

That could be useful as commercial shipping through the Gulf and Red Sea — a key route for cargo and energy shipments heading to Europe — has halved under attacks by Yemen's Ira-

nian-backed Houthi rebels. The area also has seen weapons smuggling from Iran to the rebels.

The runway is likely built by the United Arab Emirates, which has long been suspected of expanding its military presence in the region and has backed a Saudi-led war against the Houthis.

While the Houthis have linked their campaign to the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, experts worry a ceasefire in that conflict may not be enough to see the rebels halt a campaign that's drawn them global attention.

Meanwhile, the Houthis have lobbed repeated attacks at Israel, as well as U.S. warships operating in the Red Sea, raising

fears that one may make it through and endanger the lives of American service members.

A battlefield miscalculation by Yemen's many adversarial parties, new fatal attacks on Israel or a deadly assault on an American warship easily could shatter the country's relative calm.

And it remains unclear just how President-elect Donald Trump, who will be inaugurated on Monday, will handle the emboldened rebel group.

"The Houthis feed off war — war is good for them," said Wolf-Christian Paes, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies who studies Yemen. "Finally they can live up to their slogan, which famously, of course, de-

clares, 'Death to America, death to the Jews.' They see themselves as being in this epic battle against their archenemies and from their view, they're winning."

Satellite photos taken Jan. 7 by Planet Labs PBC show trucks and other heavy equipment on the north-south runway built into Abd al-Kuri, which is about 21 miles in length and about 3 miles at its widest point.

The runway has been paved, with the markings "18" and "36" to the airstrip's north and south respectively. As of Jan. 7, there was still a segment missing from the 1.5-mile-long runway that's 150 feet wide. Trucks could be seen grading and laying asphalt over the missing 950-foot segment.

Lithuania vows to boost defense spending to 5-6%

Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Lithuania has decided to raise its spending on defense to between 5% and 6% of overall national economic output starting in 2026 due to the threat of Russian aggression in the region, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said Friday.

The Baltic nation, which borders Russia, currently spends a bit over 3%.

With the president's pledge, it becomes the first NATO nation to vow to reach a 5% goal recently called for by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

Nausėda said the "historic decision" was taken by the State Defense Council on Friday to achieve that level from 2026 to 2030.

Reaching that goal would make Lithuania the NATO country spending the most on defense as a percentage of its

economic output. The current leader is Poland, which already spends more than 4% and plans to go higher.

"The possibility of Russian military aggression is still real, but not imminent. We need to increase our efforts to strengthen defense and deterrence significantly, devoting more resources to this end," Nausėda told reporters after the meeting in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius.

Trump has for years expressed skepticism about NATO, openly questioning the value of the alliance that has defined American foreign policy for decades and threatening not to defend members that fail to meet defense-spending goals.

Earlier this month, Trump said NATO countries should spend at least 5% of GDP on defense, up from the current 2% target.

Russia, Iran sign treaty amid Western sanctions

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart, Masoud Pezeshkian, signed a broad cooperation pact Friday as their countries deepened their partnership in the face of stinging Western sanctions.

Russian and Iranian officials say the "comprehensive strategic partnership treaty" covers all areas — from trade and military cooperation to science, education and culture.

Putin praised the deal as a "real breakthrough, creating conditions for the stable and sustainable development of Russia, Iran and the entire region."

He said the amount of trade and economic cooperation was still insufficient, voicing hope the new treaty will help clear bureaucratic hurdles and expand ties. The Russian leader

added that the countries are trying to resolve technical obstacles to advance planned projects to ship Russian natural gas to Iran and build transport corridors to Iranian ports in the Gulf.

Pezeshkian said the projects are feasible, adding that experts were working to resolve the remaining obstacles.

"We witness a new chapter of strategic relations," the Iranian president said, adding that the countries were set to expand trade ties and also boost the "level of security cooperation."

His visit came ahead of Monday's inauguration of Donald Trump, who has pledged to broker peace in Ukraine and take a tougher stance on Iran, which is grappling with growing economic problems and other challenges, including military setbacks in its sphere of influence across the Mideast.

Supreme Court upholds ban of TikTok

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Friday unanimously upheld the federal law banning TikTok beginning Sunday unless it's sold by its China-based parent company, holding that the risk to national security posed by its ties to China overcomes concerns about limiting speech by the app or its 170 million users in the United States.

A sale does not appear imminent and, although experts have said the app will not disappear from existing users' phones once the law takes effect on Jan. 19, new users won't be able to download it and updates won't be available. That will eventually render the app unworkable, the Justice Department has said in court filings.

The decision came against the backdrop of unusual politi-

cal agitation by President-elect Donald Trump, who vowed that he could negotiate a solution, and the administration of President Joe Biden, which has signaled it won't enforce the law beginning Sunday, his final full day in office.

Trump, mindful of TikTok's popularity and his own 14.7 million followers on the app, finds himself on the opposite side of the argument from prominent Senate Republicans who fault TikTok's Chinese owner for not finding a buyer before now. Trump said in a Truth Social post shortly before the decision was issued that TikTok was among the topics in his conversation Friday with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

It's unclear what options are open to Trump once he is sworn in as president on Monday. The

law allowed for a 90-day pause in the restrictions on the app if there had been progress toward a sale before it took effect.

Some digital rights groups slammed the court's ruling shortly after it was released.

At arguments, the justices were told by a lawyer for TikTok and ByteDance Ltd., the Chinese technology company that is its parent, how difficult it would be to consummate a deal, especially since Chinese law restricts the sale of the proprietary algorithm that has made the social media platform wildly successful.

The dispute over TikTok's ties to China has come to embody the geopolitical competition between Washington and Beijing. The U.S. has said it's concerned about TikTok collecting vast swaths of user data,

including sensitive information on viewing habits, that could fall into the hands of the Chinese government through coercion. Officials have also warned the algorithm that fuels what users see on the app is vulnerable to manipulation by Chinese authorities, who can use it to shape content on the platform in a way that's difficult to detect.

TikTok points out the U.S. has not presented evidence that China has attempted to manipulate content on its U.S. platform or gather American user data through TikTok.

Bipartisan majorities in Congress passed legislation and Biden signed it into law in April. The law was the culmination of a yearslong saga in Washington over TikTok, which the government sees as a national security threat.

Biden commutes nearly 2,500 drug sentences

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden announced Friday that he was commuting the sentences of almost 2,500 people convicted of nonviolent drug offenses, using his final days in office on a flurry of clemency actions meant to nullify prison terms he deemed too harsh.

The recent round of clemency gives Biden the presidential record for most individual pardons and commutations issued. The Democrat said he is seeking to undo "disproportionately long sentences compared to the sentences they would receive today under current law, policy, and practice."

"Today's clemency action provides relief for individuals who received lengthy sentences based on discredited distinctions between crack and powder cocaine, as well as outdated sentencing enhancements for

drug crimes," Biden said. "This action is an important step toward righting historic wrongs, correcting sentencing disparities and providing deserving individuals the opportunity to return to their families and communities after spending far too much time behind bars."

Biden said more could yet be coming, promising to use the time before President-elect Donald Trump is inaugurated Monday to "continue to review additional commutations and pardons."

The move comes as Biden continues to weigh whether to issue sweeping pardons for officials and allies who the White House fears could be unjustly targeted by Trump's administration. Though presidential pardoning powers are absolute, such a move would be a risky use of the president's constitutional power.

SpaceX accident likely caused by fire, fuel leak

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — SpaceX suspects a fire may have caused its Starship to break apart during liftoff and send trails of flaming debris near the Caribbean.

SpaceX's Elon Musk said preliminary indications are that leaking fuel built up pressure in the cavity above the engine firewall. The resulting fire would have doomed the spacecraft.

On Friday, the company promised "a thorough investigation" in coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration.

The 400-foot Starship — the world's biggest and most powerful rocket — launched from the southern tip of Texas on a test flight early Thursday evening.

The booster made it back to the pad for a catch by giant mechanical arms, only the second

time in Starship history. But the engines on the still ascending spacecraft shut down one by one, and communication was lost 8 ½ minutes into the flight.

Dramatic video taken near the Turks and Caicos Islands showed spacecraft debris raining down from the sky in a stream of fireballs.

SpaceX said Starship remained in its designated launch corridor over the Gulf of Mexico and then the Atlantic. Any surviving wreckage would have fallen along that path over water, the company said on its website.

Starship had been shooting for a controlled entry over the Indian Ocean. It was the seventh test flight of a Starship, but it featured a new and upgraded spacecraft.

The booster and spacecraft for the eighth demo are already built and undergoing testing.

Migrant detention bill might be Trump's first law to sign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate is heading toward a final vote on legislation that would require federal authorities to detain migrants accused of theft and violent crimes and give states power to challenge federal immigration policies, setting a new tone on immigration as Donald Trump enters the White House.

Newly in the majority, Senate Republicans have made the so-called Laken Riley Act — named after a Georgia student who was killed last year by a Venezuelan man — a top priority, potentially making it the first bill Trump signs as president.

On Friday, it cleared a key procedural hurdle as several Democrats voted with all Republicans to advance it to a final vote. Democrats, who last year allowed similar legislation to languish, initially supported opening debate on the bill, sig-

naling a new willingness to consider crackdowns on illegal immigration following their election losses. However, most voted against advancing the bill to a final vote after they were unable to make significant changes to the legislation.

"Obviously border security was a very, very big issue in November's election," said Senate Majority Leader John Thune, a South Dakota Republican. Americans "clearly want a change in policies when it comes to securing our border and immigration."

In the early days of the new Congress, Republicans have dared Democrats to join them in efforts to restrict illegal immigration and deport migrants who are tied to crimes. In several cases, they have. Most Senate Democrats voted to advance the Laken Riley Act last week as they sought changes in the bill.

In the House, all Republi-

cans, as well as 48 Democrats, voted to pass a similar version of the bill this month. And this week, 61 Democrats also voted for a separate bill to require deportation and block entry into the U.S. for foreign nationals who are convicted of physical or sexual abuse.

The votes have given Republicans some early wins as they enjoy a trifecta of power across the House, Senate and White House, though the bills have mostly retread on policy where federal authorities already have discretion to act.

Once Trump enters office and attempts to set up large-scale deportation operations, congressional Republicans will face intense pressure to pay for his priorities while also balancing their pledges to tame budget deficits and concerns about the economic, as well as humanitarian, impacts of mass deportations.

Ohio official expected to succeed Sen. Vance

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Republican Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine is expected to select his lieutenant governor, Jon Husted, on Friday to succeed Vice President-elect JD Vance in the U.S. Senate, according to two people familiar with the matter.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity before an announcement planned for 1 p.m. Eastern time Friday.

Choosing Husted, who had been positioning to run for governor in 2026, potentially averts a divisive and expensive GOP primary to fill Vance's seat next year.

DeWine's expected decision ends months of jockeying among top Ohio Republicans for Vance's position, which he had held for less than two years. The former senator resigned Friday.

The 57-year-old Husted, a former Ohio House speaker and two-term Ohio secretary of state, would serve until Dec. 15, 2026.

A special election for the last two years of Vance's six-year term will be held in November 2026.

Vance's election as vice president in November opened up one of Ohio's U.S. Senate seats for the third time in as many years, availing DeWine of a long list of people who had sought the seat and lost in 2022 and 2024.

That list included former Ohio Republican Chair Jane Timken; Secretary of State Frank LaRose; and state Sen. Matt Dolan. Two-term Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague and Republican attorney and strategist Mehek Cooke, a frequent guest on Fox News, were also in the mix, as were members of the state's congressional delegation.

Trump's homeland security pick faces pointed scrutiny about immigration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem, Donald Trump's pick to lead the agency central to his vision of cracking down on illegal immigration, faced senators Friday at a confirmation hearing that will be her first chance to lay out her vision for the sprawling Department of Homeland Security.

Noem, a two-term governor and former U.S. congresswoman, was chosen by the president-elect to lead the department responsible for immigration and border-related actions that will be central to his plans for mass deportations and tightened access at the border.

Noem acknowledged that her nomination as DHS Secretary was "a bit of surprise" to many, but said she asked for the job because "it was the president's No. 1 priority."

"I knew that it needed to have someone in the position that would do what the president promised the American people," Noem said, someone "strong enough to do it and follow through to make sure that we're protecting our communities and America."

She would replace outgoing Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who was so vilified by Republicans angry at the number of migrants crossing the country's

southern border that they impeached him in early 2024.

The immigration and border-related agencies Noem would oversee include U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Citizenship and Immigration Services. Beyond those agencies, the department is also responsible for securing airline transportation, protecting dignitaries, responding to natural disasters and more.

Noem would be entering a job that was a pressure cooker under the first Trump administration. Six people cycled through the homeland security position during his four years in office.

Memo throws wrench in plans for NIL pay

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Plans for colleges to pay athletes directly for their name, image and likeness deals would run afoul of Title IX, the Department of Education said in guidance issued Thursday that adds more confusion to the shifting landscape in college sports.

The nine-page memo from the department's Office for Civil Rights said NIL money that goes to athletes should be treated the same as athletic financial aid — i.e., scholarships. It's a position that, if it remains in place after President-elect Donald Trump takes office, could upend plans that many schools are making for next school year.

Under terms of the House settlement, universities will be able to pay athletes directly under a revenue-sharing plan that would see the biggest schools distribute around \$20.5 million each to athletes.

Many schools have publicly stated that the majority of that money would go to football and men's basketball players,

which, according to the guidance, would be in violation of Title IX.

"When a school provides athletic financial assistance in forms other than scholarships or grants, including compensation for the use of a student-athlete's NIL, such assistance also must be made proportionately available to male and female athletes," the memo said.

Passed in 1972, Title IX requires that schools pay out financial assistance in proportion to the number of students of each gender who play sports on campus. It also calls for schools to provide opportunities to play varsity sports in proportion to the gender distribution on campus.

NCAA board chair Linda Livingstone said the association doesn't give guidance to schools about Title IX compliance.

"We're going to have to get back to our schools and see what the implications are," said Livingstone, who is the president at Baylor.

Illinois athletic director Josh

Whitman, who serves as the chair of the NCAA Division I Council, said "the world has changed over and over again just in the last six months."

"We've been building plans on top of plans for some time now, and this is the most recent example of where we're going to take the guidance under advisement and figure out what, if any, changes we have to make to the strategies we've developed," he said.

The guidance was less clear on how money from third-party collectives that are closely affiliated with the schools will be treated. The memo said those payments, which are the norm but were expected to be reduced under the new rules, were not considered financial assistance.

But, the guidance said, "it is possible that NIL agreements between student-athletes and third parties will create similar disparities and therefore trigger a school's Title IX obligations."

David Ridpath, a former

president of the Drake Group, an NCAA watchdog, called the memo "not surprising, and very consistent with the law."

"There was always a question of how Title IX applies to NIL. Now there is just more guidance," he said. "It's essentially just following the law virtually the way it's always been written."

Though the government has the authority to crack down on schools that violate Title IX standards, typically those actions come from athletes suing schools, alleging they violated the law.

There's one such lawsuit involving more than two dozen female athletes who are suing the University of Oregon.

The plaintiffs' attorney, Arthur Bryant, said the fact sheet backed their claims.

"It makes clear our approach in the Title IX lawsuit is correct and strengthens our case," Bryant told Sportico. "It also signals that the proposed settlement in House v. NCAA should not be approved."

Miami Dolphins to play in NFL's first game in Spain

Associated Press

The Miami Dolphins will play in the NFL's first-ever regular-season game in Spain when Madrid hosts a matchup next season at iconic Bernabéu Stadium, the league announced Friday.

The Dolphins will be the designated "home" team at Real Madrid's venue, which features a soccer pitch that retracts to make way for a field that can be used for American football. It has a capacity of about 80,000.

"We are thrilled to play the

NFL's inaugural game in Spain, a country of rich history, tradition and passion and home to a vibrant Dolphins fanbase," said Tom Garfinkel, the Dolphins' vice chair, president and CEO.

The date of the game and Miami's opponent will be announced this spring.

The Dolphins and the Chicago Bears hold marketing rights in Spain as part of the league's Global Markets Program, which allows teams to hold events and sign commercial

deals in those locations.

"The exciting first-ever game in Spain underlines the NFL's continued commitment to expanding its global footprint and reaching new audiences across the world," said Brett Gosper, the league's head of Europe and APAC.

Miami missed the playoffs after going 8-9 this season in the AFC East.

The Dolphins are 2-5 in games played outside the United States and have lost their

past four international games, mostly recently in Frankfurt, Germany, in 2023 when they lost 21-14 to the Kansas City Chiefs. Miami has played five times in London and once in Toronto.

The NFL has been aggressively expanding its global footprint in search of new fans and revenue streams.

As of the 2025 season, the NFL can schedule up to eight league-operated regular-season games internationally.

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Gauff, Sabalenka move closer to rematch in Australian Open

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Coco Gauff still hasn't lost a match or even a set at the Australian Open — or, actually, this season. She moved into the fourth round at Melbourne Park with a straightforward 6-4, 6-2 victory over 2021 U.S. Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez on Friday night.

While there have been plenty of surprises in the men's bracket so far, most of the top women have progressed through the draw without an issue. That includes wins on Friday for No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka, who is the two-time defending champion in Australia; No. 3 Gauff; No. 11 Paula Badosa; and No. 14 Mirra Andrejeva.

However, No. 7 seed Jessica Pegula was ousted by world No. 55 Olga Danilovic in two sets.

The Serbian player beat the U.S. Open runner-up 7-6 (3), 6-1 after she hit 28 winners and saved all six break points she faced. It was Danilovic's third career win over a top-10 player.

Naomi Osaka, a two-time champion in Australia, stopped playing because of a strained abdominal muscle after dropping the first set of her match against Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Belinda Bencic.

Men's winners in third-round action included No. 2 Alexander Zverev, No. 3 Carlos Alcaraz,

No. 7 Novak Djokovic and No. 12 Tommy Paul. Djokovic — who won 10 of his 24 Grand Slam titles at the Australian Open — overcame some mid-match breathing trouble to dismiss No. 26 Tomas Machac 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.

"I think I played really well," Djokovic said. "I'm very happy with my game."

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina had a much more difficult path, coming back from two sets down for the second match in a row and saving two match points to sneak past 19-year-old Jakub Mensik 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (7), 6-4, 6-2. Davidovich Fokina is the first man since 2005 to win twice in a row in Australia after falling behind 0-2 in sets.

"In all these years I had a lot of up-and-downs," Davidovich Fokina said. "I had decided this year to fight every point."

Alcaraz's next opponent will be No. 15 Jack Draper or Aleksandar Vukic.

A year ago, 2023 U.S. Open champion Gauff had her best run in Melbourne, getting to the semifinals before bowing out against Sabalenka, who extended her winning streak at the tournament to 17 matches by eliminating Clara Tauson 7-6 (5), 6-4 on Friday.

Like Gauff, Sabalenka is unbeaten in the early going in 2025. They could meet in the semifinals again this time

around next weekend.

Gauff needed just 75 minutes to get past Fernandez, a left-hander who was seeded 30th. Gauff was broken just once and compiled an 18-7 advantage in total winners.

It was Gauff's second recent win over Fernandez, after beating her in the United Cup team competition. That is part of Gauff's 8-0 record, 16-0 in sets, so far this season.

That made this one "harder," Gauff said, "because she knows what to expect, and I definitely think she played a little bit different today."

That prompted Gauff to switch some things up too, as she seeks her second major championship. She's tweaked her coaching staff and altered her serving and forehand mechanics a bit after being a tad disappointed with her Grand Slam performances in 2024 — even if the season did end with a title at the WTA Finals.

"Tennis feels so high stakes, but it's really not. I'm so lucky to do what I do — also get paid doing it," said Gauff, a 20-year-old from Florida.

"My biggest thing I learned last year is just not to take anything for granted," Gauff said, "and just realized this time is going to go by so fast. ... I'm just trying to enjoy it while I'm here."

US amateur upstages top players in Dubai

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A 22-year-old American amateur making his debut on the European tour upstaged Rory McIlroy, Jon Rahm and many of the world's top players at the Dubai Desert Classic for a share of the first-round lead on Thursday.

David Ford, a senior at the University of North Carolina, holed a 40-foot eagle putt at his first hole, ran off five straight birdies midway through the round and signed for a 7-under 65 at Emirates Golf Club.

Ford is a lefty, a triplet, No. 6 in the world amateur rankings and playing outside the United States for the first time. He earned an exemption for the Dubai Desert Classic, one of the most prestigious events on the European tour, as a reward for finishing the autumn section of the collegiate golf schedule at No. 1 in the PGA Tour's university ranking.

Asked if he was expecting to contend in Dubai, where six of the world's top 20 are competing, Ford said: "I try to keep my expectations low. I know where my game is at right now, and I have got a lot of people around me believing in me, which is really helpful going into this week."

Ford was tied for the lead with Ricardo Gouveia of Portugal and David Micheluzzi of Australia — and five shots clear of defending champion McIlroy, who said he felt "a little uncomfortable" in shooting 70.

Ford, who is planning to turn pro in May, has played three times on the PGA Tour — at the RSM Classic and Barbasol Championship across 2022-23 and the Arnold Palmer Invitational last year.

Dodgers star Ohtani donating \$500,000 to help some affected by LA wildfires

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Los Angeles Dodgers superstar Shohei Ohtani is donating \$500,000 to help firefighters and animals forced to flee the deadly wildfires around the region.

Ohtani announced his inten-

tion on Instagram, with LA Strong in white against a black background.

"We'll be donating \$500,000 to help those firefighters and those forced to live in shelter to help animals in need," he wrote.

The Dodgers and other Los Angeles sports teams are partnering in selling an "LA Strong" collection of T-shirts and sweatshirts, with all proceeds benefiting the Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation and American Red Cross.

Oklahoma City routs Cleveland 134-114

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 40 points and eight assists in three quarters, and the Oklahoma City Thunder rolled past the Cleveland Cavaliers 134-114 on Thursday night in a matchup of teams with the best records in the NBA.

The Western Conference-leading Thunder and the East-leading Cavaliers now have matching 34-6 records. The Cavaliers won the first meeting 129-122 on Jan. 8. In the rematch, the Thunder handed the Cavaliers their worst loss of the season.

Lu Dort scored a season-high 22 points and Jalen Williams added 19 for Oklahoma City, which won its fourth straight game.

Darius Garland had 20 points and nine assists for Cleveland, and Jarrett Allen added 13 points. Donovan Mitchell, Cleveland's top scorer, was held to eight points on 3-for-15 shooting.

The Cavaliers led 12-10 before Oklahoma City took over.

The Thunder closed the first quarter on a 22-2 run to take a 32-14 lead. Gilgeous-Alexander scored 15 points in the opening period.

Gilgeous-Alexander scored 11 points in a three-minute stretch late in the first half to help the Thunder take a 75-49 lead at the break.

■ **Pacers 111, Pistons 100:** Myles Turner scored 28 points, Pascal Siakam added 26 and Indiana beat Detroit.

Turner was 8 of 11 from 3-point range while his teammates went 5 for 19.

Tyrese Haliburton had 17 points and eight assists as the Pacers won for the seventh time in eight games.

Tim Hardaway Jr. finished with 25 points while Cade Cunningham had 20 points and nine assists despite shooting 7 for 21 (1 for 7 on 3-pointers). Detroit had won 10 of 12.

The Pacers missed 10 of 12 shots to start the fourth quarter, allowing the Pistons to cut the lead to 96-90 with 5:38 to play despite committing 19 turnovers.

Detroit, though, came up empty on its next six possessions as Indiana moved the lead back to 12 points.

The Pistons shot 2 for 17 on 3-pointers in the second half.

■ **Suns 130, Wizards 123:** Devin Booker scored 37 points, Kevin Durant added 23 and Phoenix weathered a late rally in a victory over Washington.

Booker had his third-consecutive 30-plus game to help Phoenix survive after Washington cut a 24-point deficit to three late in the fourth quarter.

Rookie Ryan Dunn added 18 points and 11 rebounds, and Grayson Allen had 21 points for the Suns. They improved to 1-1 on their five-game trip.

Tyus Jones had nine points and 10 assists as the Suns won their fifth out of seven overall.

Rookie Keyshawn George scored a career-high 24 points for the Wizards. They lost their eighth straight but snapped a stretch of double-digit defeats at three.

Jordan Poole added 18 points, and Alex Sarr had 16 points and nine rebounds.

■ **Clippers 118, Trail Blazers 89:** Norman Powell scored 23 points, James Harden had 19 points and Los Angeles beat Portland.

The Clippers routed Portland a night after beating Brooklyn at home by a franchise-record 59 points.

Dalano Banton led the Trail Blazers with 23 points. Scoot Henderson had 16 points.

Kobe Brown's dunk in the fourth pushed the Clippers to their biggest lead at 34.

■ **Kings 132, Rockets 127:** DeMar DeRozan had 33 points, Malik Monk added 26 points and nine assists and Sacramento beat Houston.

Monk made the last four free throws for Kings. They improved to 21-20 with their eighth victory in nine games.

Domantas Sabonis had 20 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists for the Kings, and DeAaron Fox added 19 points.

Jaden Green led Houston with 28 points. Alperen Sengun had 21 points and 10 rebounds.

The Rockets had won seven straight on the road.

Minnesota upsets No. 20 Michigan in OT with 3-pointer

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Dawson Garcia made a 3-pointer from the near edge of the center-court logo to give Minnesota an 84-81 overtime victory over No. 20 Michigan on Thursday night.

The Wolverines tied it on Danny Wolf's driving layup with seven seconds to play. But the Gophers had time to bring the ball upcourt, where Lu'Cye Patterson found Garcia for the winner from the "M" logo. The jumper gave coach Ben Johnson his first career victory over a ranked team.

Garcia — whose two free throws with 7.4 seconds to play sent the game to overtime tied at 71 — finished with 27 points and

12 rebounds to lead the Gophers (9-10, 1-6 Big Ten). Patterson scored 15 of his 22 points in the second half, and Mike Mitchell Jr. added 20 points.

Wolf led Michigan (13-4, 5-1) with 23 points and 10 rebounds. Vladislav Goldin had 18 points and eight rebounds, Will Tschetter scored 15 points and Tre Donaldson added 14.

■ **Oregon State 97, No. 16 Gonzaga 89, OT:** Michael Rataj had a career-high 29 points and Oregon State pulled away late in overtime to beat Gonzaga.

Nate Kingz added 20 points for the Beavers (14-5, 4-2 West Coast Conference), who were boosted by a sellout crowd at Gill Coliseum.

Graham Ike had 26 points and nine rebounds for Gonzaga (14-5, 5-1) before fouling out in overtime.

The loss snapped a five-game winning streak.

Braden Huff's jumper got Gonzaga to 91-89 with 57 seconds left in the extra period, but Liutauras Lelevicus answered with a layup for the Beavers. Oregon State closed out the game with free throws before fans rushed the court.

It was tight throughout. Oregon State tied it at 77 on Damarco Minor's jumper, then went ahead on Rataj's basket with 1:39 left.

Ben Gregg made a 3-pointer for Gonzaga with 21 seconds left

to narrow it to 81-80. After Lake made free throws, Ike hit a 3 that sent it to OT tied at 83.

■ **Temple 88, No. 18 Memphis 81:** Jamal Mashburn Jr. scored 21 points, Quante Berry added 19 and Temple upset Memphis.

Shane Dezonie added 15 points for the Owls (11-6 overall, 3-1 American), who had lost six in a row to the Tigers.

PJ Haggerty scored 21 for Memphis (13-4, 3-1), which was trying to improve to 4-0 in the conference for the first time since 2013. Tyrese Hunter scored 16 points and Dain Dainja had 14 points for the Tigers, who entered 4-0 in true road games.

Red Wings stay hot, beat Panthers 5-2

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Dylan Larkin scored two goals and the surging Detroit Red Wings beat the Florida Panthers 5-2 on Thursday night.

Larkin, Jonatan Berggren and Patrick Kane had power-play goals for Detroit, which also got a goal from Marco Kasper. Cam Talbot stopped 40 shots for the Red Wings.

Anton Lundell and Evan Rodrigues scored for Florida, which is 4-6-1 in its last 11. Sergei Bobrovsky was chased in the second period after allowing four goals on 15 shots, getting relieved by Spencer Knight.

Larkin's empty-netter with 1:22 left sealed the win.

■ **Blue Jackets 4, Sharks 1:** James van Riemsdyk scored twice and Columbus beat San Jose to extend their win streak to six games — their longest since January 2020.

Kent Johnson had a goal and an assist and Adam Fantilli scored a goal to stretch his point streak to eight games. Van Riemsdyk's second was an empty-netter with 2:01 remaining.

Elvis Merzlikins made 18 saves as the Blue Jackets improved to 16-5-3 at home.

■ **Maple Leafs 4, Devils 3, OT:** William Nylander scored his second goal of the game at 1:10 of overtime to give Toronto a victory over New Jersey.

Devils coach Sheldon Keefe was back at Scotiabank Arena as a visitor for the first time since being fired by the Maple Leafs in the spring.

Nylander added an assist, Auston Matthews also had two goals and Joseph Woll stopped 21 shots. Mitch Marner and Jake McCabe had two assists each.

■ **Lightning 4, Ducks 3, SO:** Jake Guentzel scored the only goal in the shootout as Tampa Bay beat Anaheim.

Brayden Point, Anthony Cirelli and Guentzel scored for Tampa Bay during regulation

while Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 34 saves and stopped all three shots he faced in the shootout.

Robby Fabbri, Troy Terry and Leo Carlsson scored for the Ducks, who fell to 1-3-1 on a six-game road trip. Lukas Dostal stopped 32 shots for Anaheim.

Tampa Bay held a 3-2 lead heading into the third period before Fabbri tipped in Jacob Trouba's point shot at 9:53 of the third period to send the game to overtime.

■ **Flyers 5, Islanders 3:** Sean Couturier had a goal and an assist, Travis Konecny added three assists and Philadelphia defeated New York.

Morgan Frost, Garnet Hathaway, Cam York and Noah Cates also scored for Philadelphia. Samuel Ersson made 26 saves as the Flyers won for the third time in four games.

Joel Farabee had two assists following three consecutive games as a healthy scratch.

Bo Horvat, Mathew Barzal and Anders Lee scored for New York. Ilya Sorokin stopped 19 shots after a two-game absence due to illness.

■ **Capitals 1, Senators 0, OT:** Alex Ovechkin scored with 1:53 left in overtime to give Washington a victory over Ottawa.

Ovechkin's goal was the 874th of his career, moving him 20 behind Wayne Gretzky's NHL record, and he broke a league record by scoring against his 179th goaltender. Jaromir Jagr scored against 178 goalies.

The 39-year-old winger took a pass from Rasmus Sandin on a 2-on-1 breakaway and fired it past rookie Leevi Merilainen, who made 26 saves.

Logan Thompson made 24 saves for Washington, his second consecutive shutout.

■ **Blues 4, Flames 1:** Brayden Schenn scored twice, Jordan Kyrou had his 20th goal and St. Louis beat Calgary to sweep a two-game set in St. Louis.

On Tuesday night, the Blues

beat the Flames 2-1.

Colton Parayko also scored for St. Louis and Joel Hofer stopped 28 shots. Dylan Holloway added two assists.

Yegor Sharangovich scored for the Flames. Dustin Wolf had 25 saves.

St. Louis scored three goals in the first period on 13 shots.

■ **Jets 2, Kraken 1:** Dylan DeMelo scored with 27 seconds left to play to give Winnipeg a victory over Seattle.

Matty Beniers scored in the first period for Seattle and Mark Scheifele scored a power-play goal for Winnipeg in the second period. Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck made 18 saves and Seattle's Joey Daccord stopped 34 shots.

The Jets stretched their point streak to five games (4-0-1) and improved to 8-2-2 in their last 12.

Scheifele's power-play goal drew the Jets even at 9:35 of the second. With Jamie Oleksiak off for interference, Scheifele whipped Kyle Connor's rebound past Daccord.

Hellebuyck kept it a 1-1 game when he stopped Andre Burakovsky on a breakaway late in the second.

Beniers opened the scoring midway through the opening period when he converted a perfect pass from Kaapo Kakko on Hellebuyck's doorstep.

■ **Canadiens 3, Stars 1:** Alex Newhook's deflection broke a tie midway through the third period and unbeaten rookie Jakub Dobes made 32 saves as Montreal defeated Dallas.

Newhook's goal stood up following a replay review to check the height of his stick while he was tied up with Dallas' Wyatt Johnston just outside the crease.

The 23-year-old goalie was brought up from Laval of the AHL following the NHL's Christmas break to back up Sam Montembeault.

Juraj Slafkovsky and Joel Armia also scored for the Cana-

diens, who have points in 12 of their last 14 games (11-2-1). Armia's was a last-minute empty-netter.

Jason Robertson scored for the Stars, who have lost two of their last three following a season-best seven-game winning streak. Jake Oettinger stopped 21 shots but had his six-game winning streak snapped.

■ **Predators 3, Blackhawks 2, SO:** Steven Stamkos scored in regulation and had Nashville's third straight shootout goal in their defeat of Chicago.

Filip Forsberg tied it with 3:03 left with his 300th NHL goal, and Juuse Saros made 24 saves in regulation and overtime. Gustav Nyquist and Ryan O'Reilly scored on Nashville's first two attempts in the tiebreaker and Stamkos put it away on the third.

■ **Rangers 5, Utah 3:** Artemi Panarin scored two goals, Chris Kreider had the go-ahead goal off a defensive deflection with 9:38 to play, and New York rallied for a victory over Utah.

Matias Maccelli scored twice to lead Utah and Barrett Hayton assisted on both goals. Karel Vejmelka had 20 saves, but Utah dropped its third straight at home and suffered its 10th loss in 12 games.

■ **Oilers 4, Avalanche 3:** Evan Bouchard scored with 6:55 left and surging Edmonton overcame a three-goal deficit to beat Colorado.

Edmonton, playing on the second night of a back-to-back, has won four in a row and eight of nine.

Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist, Viktor Arvidsson and Brett Kulak also scored and Stuart Skinner recovered from a shaky start to make 22 saves.

■ **Kings 5, Canucks 1:** Alex Turcotte scored twice and added an assist as Los Angeles thumped struggling Vancouver.

Adrian Kempe and Kevin Fiala each had a goal and an assist. Warren Foegele also scored for the Kings.