

Army expects to meet 2025 recruiting goals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Army expects to meet its enlistment goals for 2025, marking a dramatic turnaround for a service that has struggled for several years to bring in enough young people and has undergone a major overhaul of its recruiting programs.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth said the Army is on pace to bring in 61,000 young people by the end of the fiscal year in September and will have more than 20,000 additional young people signed up in the delayed entry program for 2026. It's the second straight year of meeting the goals.

"What's really remarkable is the first quarter contracts that we have signed are the highest rate in the last 10 years," Wormuth said. "We are going like gangbusters, which is terrific."

Wormuth, who took over the Army four years ago as restrictions caused by the COVID-19

pandemic were devastating recruitment across the military, also flatly rejected suggestions that the Army is "woke."

Critics have used the term to describe what they call an over-emphasis on diversity and equity programs. Some Republicans have blamed "wokeness" for the recruiting struggles, a claim repeated by President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, during his confirmation hearing last week.

Wormuth dismissed the claims.

"Concerns about the Army being, quote, woke, have not been a significant issue in our recruiting crisis," she said. "They weren't at the beginning of the crisis. They weren't in the middle of the crisis. They aren't now. The data does not show that young Americans don't want to join the Army because they think the army is woke — however they define that."

Hegseth has vowed to remove

"woke" programs and officers from the military. And during his hearing Tuesday, he told senators that troops will rejoice as the Trump administration takes office and makes those changes.

"We've already seen it in recruiting numbers," he said. "There's already been a surge since President Trump won the election."

In fact, according to Army data, recruiting numbers have been increasing steadily over the past year, with the highest total in August 2024 — before the November election. Army officials closely track recruiting numbers.

Instead, a significant driver of the recruiting success was the Army's decision to launch the Future Soldier Prep Course, at Fort Jackson, S.C., in August 2022. That program gives lower-performing recruits up to 90 days of academic or fitness instruction to help them meet military standards and move on to basic training.

In the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, 2024, the Army met its recruiting goal of 55,000 and began to rebuild its delayed entry pool. About 24% of those recruits came out of the prep course. Wormuth said she expects it will contribute about 30% of this year's recruits.

The Army and the military more broadly have struggled with recruiting for about a decade, as the unemployment rate shrank and competition grew from private companies able and willing to pay more and offer similar or better benefits.

Just 23% of young adults are physically, mentally and morally qualified to serve without receiving some type of waiver. Moral behavior issues include drug use, gang ties or a criminal record. And the coronavirus pandemic shut down enlistment stations and in-person recruiting in schools and at public events that the military has long relied upon.

First three hostages released by Hamas return to Israel

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — The first three hostages released from Gaza have arrived in Israel, the military announced Sunday, hours after the fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took hold. Their mothers were waiting to meet them.

Israeli media, carrying live footage from Qatar-based Al Jazeera, showed the three women walking to Red Cross vehicles as their convoy moved through Gaza City. The vehicles were accompanied by armed men who wore green Hamas headbands and struggled to guard the cars from an unruly crowd that swelled into the thousands.

No further glimpses of the three were immediately expected as they will be taken for medical assessment. "They appear to be in good health," President Joe Biden said in

brief remarks as they were arriving in Israel.

In Tel Aviv, thousands of people gathered to watch the news on large screens erupted in cheers. For months, many had gathered in the square to demand a ceasefire deal.

The ceasefire ushers in an initial six-week period of calm and raises hopes for the release of dozens of militant-held hostages and an end to the devastating 15-month war. A last-minute delay by Hamas put off the truce's start by nearly three hours and highlighted its fragility.

Even before the ceasefire took effect, celebrations broke out across the territory and some Palestinians began returning to their homes.

Next up is the release of 90 Palestinian prisoners later Sunday. In the Israeli-occu-

pied West Bank, families and friends gathered excitedly as cars honked and people waved the Palestinian flag.

The truce, which started at 11:15 a.m. local time, is the first step toward ultimately ending the conflict and returning nearly 100 hostages abducted in Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack.

Romi Gonen, 24, Emily Damari, 28, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, were released. Gonen was abducted from the Nova music festival, while the others were kidnapped from Kibbutz Kfar Aza. Damari is an Israeli-British dual citizen.

In the interim between 8:30 a.m. and when the ceasefire took hold, Israeli fire killed at least 26 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It did not say whether they were civilians or fighters.

Austin, 1st Black defense secretary, ends term

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin bid farewell Friday to the forces and personnel he has led through a tumultuous term that had three major military crises, a global pandemic and a personal brush with cancer that became a flashpoint for the way it was mishandled.

In a ceremony tinged with emotion, Austin heralded his troops as the “most lethal fighting force on Earth” and told the packed crowd at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall, Va., that, “for the past four years, we’ve stood up to our rivals. We’ve weakened our foes, strengthened our friends, invested in our future and done right by our people.”

In a subtle note to his possible successor, he said the job as Pentagon chief “demands calm, judgment and humility. It tests you, it tempers you.”

But he also offered a warning against any plans by the next administration to try to fire so-called “woke” generals who back diversity programs, or remove women from combat jobs and transgender troops from service.

“We don’t lower our standards for our recruits. We take good people and make them even better. And those who want to join us must raise their game,” said Austin. “But any military that turns away qualified patriots who are eager to serve is just making itself smaller and weaker.”

Austin, 71, spent 41 years of his life in a military uniform. He retired as a highly decorated four-star general who earned a Silver Star — an award given for gallantry in action — for leading troops from the front in the initial 2003 invasion of Iraq.

He is one of the many Pentagon leaders who have served in combat and has “dust on his boots” — something President-elect Donald Trump’s choice for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, has falsely claimed is his distinction and why he is needed to restore a military hollowed out by “woke” diversity initiatives.

“There have been a lot of narratives out there about how capable, how weak our military is,” Austin

said in an interview with The Associated Press. “You’ve just got to look at the things we have done, that we continue to do, at a moment’s notice.”

Austin retired from the Army in 2016 only to be asked to return to the Pentagon by President Joe Biden in 2021, making history as the nation’s first Black defense secretary. He took the helm of the Pentagon at the height of COVID-19 and just weeks after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol by a mob of Trump’s supporters. His early months saw the department working through a divisive COVID-19 vaccine mandate for the force and a deep dive to determine whether there was a wider extremism problem in the ranks.

Vet, space agency official picked as Air Force chief

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald Trump has selected Troy Meink, an Air Force veteran and the principal deputy director of the National Reconnaissance Office, to serve as the next Air Force secretary.

“Troy will work with our incredible secretary of defense nominee, Pete Hegseth, to ensure that our nation’s Air Force is the most effective and deadly force in the world, as we secure PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH,” Trump said Thursday on Truth Social.

Meink, who is from Lemmon, S.D., entered the Air Force in 1988 through the ROTC program at South Dakota State University. He began his military career as a KC-135 tanker navigator and instructor before leaving active-duty service in 1993. He completed eight combat missions and 29 combat support missions during the Desert

Shield, Desert Storm and Provide Comfort operations, according to his old Air Force profile.

He then spent much of his career as an Air Force civilian worker in various jobs in space operations, including as deputy undersecretary of the Air Force for space.

Meink was appointed to his current job at the NRO in October 2020.

The intelligence agency is part of the Defense Department that works closely with Space Force. He also worked as the NRO director of geospatial intelligence systems acquisition, overseeing a budget of more than \$15 billion.

Selecting Meink could signal space operations will be a focus during the Trump administration. Trump championed the creation of Space Force during his first term, and SpaceX’s CEO Elon Musk is a close adviser to the president-elect.

US sub stops in Gibraltar after personnel transfer

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — A U.S. Navy submarine spotted last week near Gibraltar made a port visit to the city on Saturday, the service said.

The fast-attack submarine USS Indiana arrived in Gibraltar as part of a regularly scheduled visit, Cmdr. Timothy Gorman, a spokesman for U.S. 6th Fleet, said in a statement on Saturday. The statement did not indicate how long the submarine would remain in Gibraltar.

On Monday, area ship watchers spotted Indiana completing a personnel transfer and later photographed its arrival on Saturday at a U.K. navy base in the British territory near the Strait of Gibraltar.

Indiana, which carries Tomahawk missiles, also was seen last month in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

One of the last visits by a U.S. submarine to Gibraltar was in

November 2022 when the ballistic missile submarine USS Rhode Island made a brief stop. Previously, the last ballistic missile submarine to make a port call there was USS Alaska in June 2021, according to the service.

The Navy typically does not announce the location of its submarines. But in August, the service announced that guided-cruise missile submarine USS Georgia had completed training exercises in the Eastern Mediterranean.

That announcement came as the Pentagon bolstered its forces in the Middle East amid deepening worries of an Israel-Iran conflict.

It wasn’t clear on Saturday how long USS Indiana had been in the 6th Fleet area of responsibility, which spans from the Arctic Ocean to the coast of Antarctica, including the Adriatic, Baltic, Mediterranean and North seas, among others.

Forecast forces Trump inauguration indoors

The Washington Post

Donald Trump's inauguration will be moved indoors because of the dangerously cold weather predicted for Monday. Temperatures in Washington, D.C., will not get much above 20 degrees, and, factoring in howling winds, it will feel like the single digits.

Trump's inauguration is poised to be the most frigid since President Ronald Reagan's in 1985, when it was so cold that the swearing-in ceremony was moved inside. It will be even colder than it was during Barack Obama's inauguration in 2009, when the high temperature was 30 degrees, the low 19, and wind chills were in the teens.

"There is an Arctic blast sweeping the Country," Trump wrote on Truth Social midday Friday. "I don't want to see people hurt, or injured, in any way. It is dangerous conditions for the tens of thousands of Law Enforcement, First Responders, Police

K9s and even horses, and hundreds of thousands of supporters that will be outside for many hours on the 20th (In any event, if you decide to come, dress warmly!)." Trump added that the inaugural address, prayers and other speeches will be delivered in the Capitol Rotunda as they were during the 1985 inauguration. A live viewing event will be held at Capital One Arena.

The wintry conditions threaten to be about as harsh as they get in the D.C. area. The ground may be covered in fresh snow from a storm Sunday — snow that strong gusts may whip through the cold air.

The inauguration temperature forecast has trended lower in recent days as computer model forecasts for the intensity of the cold have escalated. Bone-chilling cold is set to invade much of the eastern United States as a lobe of the polar vortex dives south

from Canada.

Temperatures early Monday will hover in the mid- to upper teens and will only slowly rise into the low 20s by noon, when the swearing-in ceremony takes place. Winds will be sustained at 10 to 20 mph, with gusts of 20 to 35 mph. That will make it feel about 10 degrees colder than the actual air temperature. If a gust surpasses 28 mph (reached during Joe Biden's presidential inauguration) at noon, it will mark the strongest inaugural gust since the 35 mph measured at Reagan's 1985 inauguration.

While the cold will be teeth-chattering, skies should be partly to mostly sunny, with no precipitation expected.

On Monday evening, air temperatures will fall back into the teens, with wind chills plunging to near zero. The cold will become even more intense after Inauguration Day. Subzero wind chills are expected both Tuesday and

Wednesday mornings.

Trump's upcoming inauguration — while frigid — will not be as cold as Reagan's on Jan. 21, 1985, which was the coldest on record. The temperature in D.C. that morning dropped to minus-4 degrees (a record for the date) and climbed to only 7 degrees at noon. It was so cold that it forced Reagan to take the oath of office indoors, and the inaugural parade was canceled.

The other particularly cold January inaugurations were Obama's in 2009 and President John F. Kennedy's in 1961, when the high was 26 and the low 19. Kennedy's inauguration followed a snowstorm that produced 8 inches the previous day.

President Ulysses S. Grant's second swearing-in on March 4, 1873, remains Washington's coldest March day on record. The low temperature that morning was 4 degrees, and the high reached only 20.

Thousands march in DC before Trump takes office

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of people from around the United States rallied in the nation's capital Saturday for women's reproductive rights and other causes they believe are under threat from the incoming Trump administration, reprising the original Women's March days before President-elect Donald Trump's second inauguration.

Eight years after the first historic Women's March at the start of Trump's first term, marchers said they were caught off guard by Trump's victory and are determined now to show that support remains strong for women's access to abortion, for transgender people, for combating climate change and other issues.

The march is just one of several protests, rallies and vigils focused on abortion, rights, immi-

gration rights and the Israel-Hamas war planned in advance of inauguration Monday. Around the country, over 350 similar marches were held in every state.

Jill Parrish of Austin, Texas, said she initially bought a plane ticket to Washington for what she expected to be Democratic Vice President Kamala Harris' inauguration. She wound up changing the dates to march in protest ahead of Trump's swearing-in instead, saying the world should know that half of U.S. voters didn't support Trump.

"Most importantly, I'm here to demonstrate my fear, about the state of our democracy," Parrish said.

Rebranded and reorganized, the rally has a new name — the People's March — as a means to broaden support.

Confusion with Trump DOD picks not in place

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It is unclear who will take over at the Pentagon and the military services when the top leaders all step down Monday as President-elect Donald Trump is sworn into office.

As of Friday, officials said they had not heard who will become the acting defense secretary. Officials said the military chiefs of the Army, Navy and Air Force were getting ready to step in as acting service secretaries — a rare move — because no civilians had been named or, in some cases, had turned down the opportunity.

As is customary, all current political appointees will step down as of noon EST on Inauguration Day, leaving open dozens of defense posts that require Senate confirmation. In addition to the top job and all three service secretaries, all of their deputies and se-

nior policy staff will leave.

The Senate Armed Services Committee is expected to vote Monday on Trump's choice to head the Defense Department, Pete Hegseth, but the full Senate vote may not happen until days later. As a result someone from the Biden administration would have to take over temporarily.

For the service secretaries, officials said that while things could still change before the inauguration, the Trump team is eyeing Gen. Randy George, chief of staff of the Army, to be that service's temporary head. They said Gen. David Allvin, chief of staff of the Air Force, and Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the Navy chief, are aware they may have to step in if no civilian is named as acting secretary.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

TikTok restoring service after going dark

Associated Press

TikTok said Sunday it was restoring service to users in the United States after the popular video-sharing platform went dark in response to a federal ban that President-elect Donald Trump said he would try to pause by executive order on his first day in office.

Trump said he planned to issue the order to give TikTok's China-based parent company more time to find an approved buyer before the popular video-sharing platform is subject to a permanent U.S. ban. He announced the move on his Truth Social account as millions of U.S. TikTok users awoke to discover they could no longer access the TikTok app or

platform.

Google and Apple removed the app from their digital stores to comply with the law, which required them to do so if TikTok parent company ByteDance didn't sell its U.S. operation by Sunday. The law, which passed with wide bipartisan support in April, allowed for steep fines for noncompliance.

The company that runs TikTok said in a post on X that Trump's post had provided "the necessary clarity and assurance to our service providers that they will face no penalties providing TikTok to over 170 million Americans."

Some users reported soon after TikTok's statement that the

app was working again, and TikTok's website appeared to be functioning for at least some users. Even as TikTok was flickering back on, it remained unavailable for download in Apple and Google's app stores.

The law that took effect Sunday required ByteDance to cut ties with the platform's U.S. operations due to national security concerns posed by the app's Chinese roots. However, the statute gave the sitting president authority to grant a 90-day extension if a viable sale is underway.

Although investors made a few offers, ByteDance previously said it would not sell. In his post on Sunday, Trump said he "would like the United States to

have a 50% ownership position in a joint venture," but it was not immediately clear if he was referring to the government or an American company.

Trump said his order would "extend the period of time before the law's prohibitions take effect" and "confirm that there will be no liability for any company that helped keep TikTok from going dark before my order."

The on-and-off availability of TikTok came after the U.S. Supreme Court held in a unanimous ruling Friday that the risk to national security posed by TikTok's ties to China outweighed concerns about limiting speech by the app or its millions of users in the United States.

LA fire containment, recovery efforts make progress

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Firefighters are taking advantage of a lull in the wind to make steady progress against the massive fires that have ravaged Los Angeles since Jan. 7.

Officials are also easing evacuation orders and lifting curfews across the region as residents of burned neighborhoods return to face the damage.

As of Saturday morning, the Palisades fire, which has burned nearly 24,000 acres and

killed at least 10 people, was listed as 43% contained, according to the Cal Fire website. That's up from 31% on Friday morning.

The Eaton fire, which tore through Altadena burning 14,000 acres and killing at least 17 people, was listed at 73% contained, up from 65% on Friday morning.

There are still 27 people reported missing: 20 from the Eaton fire and seven from the Palisades, according to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Depart-

ment.

Cooler temperatures, higher humidity and calm winds through Monday morning were expected to give firefighters a needed respite, though Saturday afternoon, the Santa Ana wind forecast worsened, with forecasters expecting to issue a red flag fire weather warning starting Monday.

The red flag warning could go into effect for wide swaths of the counties of Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Riverside, San

Bernardino and Ventura from 10 a.m. Monday until 10 p.m. Tuesday.

As the mop-up work continues, officials are allowing for the slow "repopulation" of certain neighborhoods in the Palisades.

Only residents are allowed in and people will need an ID with their name, photo and address — like a driver's license — to get past the checkpoints manned by the Los Angeles Police Department and the National Guard.

South Korea's impeached President Yoon is arrested

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Hours after South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol was formally arrested, triggering rioting by his supporters, his lawyers said Sunday that he remains defiant in his refusal to answer questions over the probe into his declaration of martial law last month.

Yoon was formally arrested early on Sunday, days after being apprehended at his presidential compound in Seoul. He

faces possible imprisonment over his short-lived imposition of martial law, which set off the country's most serious political crisis since its democratization in the late 1980s.

Yoon's arrest could mark the beginning of an extended period in custody, lasting months or more.

The decision to arrest Yoon ignited unrest at the Seoul Western District Court, where dozens of his supporters broke in and rioted, destroying the main

door and windows. They used plastic chairs, metal beams and police shields that they managed to wrestle away from officers. Some were seen throwing objects and using fire extinguishers, destroying furniture and office machines, smashing glass doors and spraying water on computer servers. They shouted demands to see the judge who had issued the warrant, but she had already left.

Hundreds of police officers were deployed and nearly 90

protesters were arrested. Some injured police officers were seen being treated at ambulance vans. The court said it was trying to confirm whether any staff members were injured and assess the damage to its facilities.

In a statement issued through lawyers, Yoon lamented that the court did not recognize the "just purpose" of his martial law decree but also urged his supporters to express their frustrations peacefully.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mattress company sued after man found dead

GA ATLANTA — A Georgia man suffering a mental health crisis wandered into a Sealy Mattress facility, and his body was found locked inside the back of a truck there about a week later, his family says in a wrongful death lawsuit.

Relatives had been frantically searching for Joshua Armour after he disappeared in October. Location data from his phone showed he was somewhere on the property in Conyers, Ga., southeast of Atlanta.

After the family told a supervisor at Sealy that Armour, 27, appeared to be there, employees were instructed to close and lock all the trailers out of concern that someone was on the property, the lawsuit states. Armour's brother and sister say they were told to leave and were not allowed to search the area.

Once the trailers were locked, they could not be opened from the inside, and "Sealy did absolutely nothing to locate or protect Joshua," the lawsuit says.

Hotel settles claim involving Arab Americans

FL ORLANDO — The owner of a hotel in Orlando's tourist district has reached an agreement with the U.S. Justice Department after the agency sued alleging discrimination when the resort canceled a planned conference for an Arab American group in the weeks after the attack that triggered the war in Gaza.

The Justice Department alleged that the owner of DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Orlando at SeaWorld had discriminated on

the basis of national origin when the hotel canceled hosting an annual summit held by the Arab America Foundation in November 2023, almost a month after the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7, 2023.

There had been no threats or specific risks to the hotel related to the summit or any other non-discriminatory reason to cancel the meeting for the Arab American cultural and educational group, the complaint said.

The owner, AWH Orlando Property, denied the allegations and didn't admit liability.

Slaughterhouse cleaners cited over child labor

NE OMAHA — The problem of kids working in dangerous slaughterhouses continues to be a concern as the Labor Department announced its third agreement last week with a company in the industry agreeing to pay a penalty and reform its practices to help ensure it won't hire underage workers again.

On Thursday, the Department said investigators found that another slaughterhouse cleaning company called QSI had employed 54 children at 13 meatpacking plants in eight states on overnight shifts sanitizing the industrial carving and slicing machines companies use to produce beef and chicken between 2021 and 2024. This is at least the fourth example of one of these cleaning contractors being caught employing kids in the last two-and-a-half years. QSI will pay a \$400,000 penalty.

QSI disputes the way the Department describes the problem and points out that investigators weren't able to find any current juvenile workers and

didn't require a formal court agreement with ongoing monitoring like they did a couple years ago with the PSSI cleaning company, which ultimately paid more than \$1.5 million and agreed to changes.

Earlier in the week, Perdue Farms agreed to pay \$4 million after children were found working at one of its chicken processing plants in Virginia, and meatpacking giant JBS Foods also agreed to pay \$4 million and make changes to try to keep kids from getting jobs at its plants.

Defense contractor to build 4,000-worker plant

OH COLUMBUS — U.S. defense contractor Anduril Industries is preparing to build a massive advanced manufacturing facility in central Ohio, adding a planned 4,000 jobs to the area's burgeoning high-tech sector, state officials announced Thursday.

The Cosa Mesa, Calif.-based defense technology company plans to begin construction of what it's calling "Arsenal 1" as soon as state and local approvals are secured. The 5 million-square-foot facility will be located on a 500-acre site near Rick- enbacker International Airport, southeast of Columbus.

Production of military drones and autonomous air vehicles would begin in July 2026.

Gold medal from 1904 Olympics sells for \$545K

MA BOSTON — A gold medal awarded at the first Olympics hosted on U.S. soil was sold at auction for over half a million dollars, part of hundreds of lots of memorabilia from the Games over the decades, a firm announced Fri-

day.

The 1904 St. Louis Olympics medal, auctioned for \$545,371, bears the inscription "Olympiad, 1904" and shows a victorious athlete holding a wreath on the front. On the other side, Nike, the goddess of victory in ancient Greek mythology, is shown alongside Zeus, the pantheon's king of gods, and the words for the 110-meter hurdles it was awarded. The medal, awarded to American Fred Schule, includes the original ribbon and leather case.

This was the first Olympics where gold medals were awarded. Unlike Olympic medals these days which are mostly made of silver with gold plating, these were smaller and made entirely of gold.

Giuliani settles legal fight with election workers

NY NEW YORK — Rudy Giuliani reached a deal Thursday that lets the cash-strapped ex-New York City mayor keep his homes and belongings, including prized World Series rings, in exchange for unspecified compensation and a promise to never again speak ill of two former Georgia elections workers who won a \$148 million defamation judgment against him.

The agreement resolves all pending litigation between Giuliani and the former election workers, Ruby Freeman and her daughter, Wandrea "Shaye" Moss. It also led to the cancellation of a trial to decide the ownership of his Florida condominium and three World Series rings that Giuliani, a prominent New York Yankees fan, had received from the team.

— From wire reports

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Daniels, Commanders stun top-seeded Lions

Associated Press

DETROIT — Jayden Daniels and the nothing-to-lose Washington Commanders sent the top-seeded Detroit Lions to a stunningly swift playoff exit.

Daniels threw two touchdown passes and fellow rookie Mike Sainristil had two interceptions, two dazzling performances that helped Washington beat Detroit 45-31 on Saturday night to reach the NFC championship game for the first time since winning the franchise's third Super Bowl 33 years ago.

"It's a surreal moment," Daniels said.

The sixth-seeded Commanders (14-5) were nearly double-digit underdogs against the Super Bowl-favorite Lions (15-3) and overcame doubts as they did all season with a new quarterback, coach and general manager.

"I always believed that we could achieve more than people

give us credit for," Daniels said.

Detroit, the NFC's top team for the first time with a franchise-record 15 wins, doomed its chances of living up to expectations by turning the ball over five times.

Sainristil, who won a national title at Michigan last season, picked off his second pass on a trick play with receiver Jameson Williams throwing into coverage off a reverse in the fourth quarter.

"Mike is somebody that he's hard to fool," Washington coach Dan Quinn said.

Quan Martin returned an interception 40 yards for a touchdown in the second quarter to put the Commanders ahead 24-14.

Jared Goff threw three interceptions and lost a fumble, turning it over three times in the ill-fated first half. He finished 23-for-40 for 313 yards with a TD

pass to Sam LaPorta that gave the Lions their last lead midway through the second quarter.

Daniels finished with 299 yards passing and 51 yards rushing, and — just as important — didn't turn the ball over.

"He has a different poise," Quinn said. "He's a rare competitor."

Daniels became the second rookie quarterback to knock off a top-seeded team, joining Joe Flacco, who led Baltimore past Tennessee on Jan. 10, 2009.

Quinn led Washington to its first playoff victory in 19 years last week. The Commanders rallied past Tampa Bay for their sixth comeback win and fifth straight on the final play from scrimmage in regulation or overtime.

Washington, which converted three of four fourth downs, didn't let Detroit keep it that close.

"Give them credit," Lions

coach Dan Campbell said. "They earned that game and we didn't."

The Commanders outscored Detroit 28-14 in the second quarter — the highest-scoring quarter in NFL playoff history — to take a 31-21 lead at halftime.

Daniels had 242 yards passing in the first half, setting a rookie record one week after becoming the first rookie to lead his team in yards rushing and passing in a playoff win.

The former LSU star, who was the No. 2 pick overall, was 22-for-31, including the long TD on the screen to Terry McLaurin and a 5-yard throw for a score to Zach Ertz in the second quarter.

Brian Robinson ran for 77 yards and two touchdowns.

Detroit's Jahmyr Gibbs ran for 105 yards and two touchdowns while Amon-Ra St. Brown had eight receptions for 137 yards.

Chiefs top Texans, advance to 7th straight AFC title game

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Patrick Mahomes has never lost in the divisional round of the playoffs with the Kansas City Chiefs.

The Houston Texans still have never won.

With the Chiefs' star quarterback hitting best buddy Travis Kelce seven times for 117 yards and a touchdown and a pass rush that dragged Texans quarterback C.J. Stroud to the ground eight times, Kansas City rolled to a 23-14 victory Saturday that sent the two-time defending Super Bowl champions to the AFC title game for the seventh consecutive season.

The Chiefs are the fourth team in NFL history to follow back-to-back Lombardi Trophies by advancing to the conference title game, and the three previous lost. They will try to change that at Arrowhead Stadium next weekend against the Bills or Ravens, who played on Sunday in Buffalo for a shot at dethroning the defending champs.

"It's been a special run," Mahomes said. "I still remember moments from the World Series my dad played when I was 5 years old. These are the moments that I'll cherish my entire life."

The run isn't over yet, though. Not with Kansas City (16-2) chasing an unprecedented

third straight Lombardi Trophy.

Mahomes, who threw for 177 yards and a score, improved to 16-3 in the postseason, tying Joe Montana for the second-most wins by a starting QB in NFL history behind Tom Brady. That includes his peerless 7-0 mark in divisional playoff games.

Meanwhile, Mahomes and Kelce helped Andy Reid become just the fourth coach in NFL history with 300 career wins.

"I joked to the guys, you know, you get a couple of more and you might be able to equal my weight," Reid said.

There was plenty of joking in the Chiefs' locker room Saturday night. Not a whole lot in Houston locker room. They still have never won in six divisional games, twice losing to Kansas City in devastating fashion.

Stroud threw for 245 yards but was sacked eight times, while Joe Mixon — who had been questionable to play with an ankle injury — ran for 88 yards and their only touchdown.

Texans kicker Ka'imi Fairbairn missed a 55-yard field goal attempt, a PAT try and had another field-goal attempt blocked with 1:46 left, which would have kept their comeback hopes alive by making it a one-possession game.

"Knowing what we were up against in this

game, we can't make the mistakes that we made," Houston coach DeMeco Ryans said. "We had a lot of self-inflicted mistakes that happened, whether it was special teams not converting, defensively not being where we're supposed to be in coverage, offensively not protecting our quarterback and keeping him clean."

"On top of everything else we have to deal with," Ryans added, "that's going to be an uphill battle."

The Texans' special teams were a mess right from the start. The Chiefs nearly opened the game with a kick return touchdown, a bizarre play that ended with Houston cornerback Kris Boyd nearly shoving his own assistant coach to the ground.

The Texans held Kansas City to a couple of field goals early, but their defense was unable to stop them late in the first half, when the bruising Kareem Hunt barreled into the end zone to give the AFC West champions a 13-3 lead.

"We're fortunate we've got a lot of great character guys in the building," Kelce said. "On top of that, as the years have gone on, we only got here by focusing on the task at hand. And right now, this one was great. We're going to enjoy this one tonight. But the task at hand is going to be that AFC championship."

Nelson, No. 4 Alabama top No. 8 Kentucky

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Grant Nelson had 25 points and 11 rebounds as No. 4 Alabama beat No. 8 Kentucky 102-97 on Saturday in a matchup of two of the top offensive teams in the country.

Nelson was 7-for-13 from the field and 9-for-10 at the line. He scored a total of 21 points in his previous three games.

Mark Sears scored 16 of his 24 points in the second half for the Crimson Tide (15-3, 4-1 SEC), who had five players score in double figures.

The Wildcats (14-4, 3-2) had won two in a row since an 82-69 loss at Georgia. Otega Owhe had 21 points for Kentucky, and Lamont Butler finished with 17 points and eight assists.

The Wildcats grabbed a 56-52 lead on Brandon Garrison's dunk with 16:13 left, but Alabama responded with a 14-2 run.

No. 1 Auburn 70, No. 23 Georgia 68: Tahaad Pettiford hit 5 of 7 shots from 3-point range, scoring 24 points off the bench to help the visiting Tigers escape the Bulldogs with a win.

Auburn (17-1, 5-0 SEC) has won 10 in a row and a second straight game without star Johni Broome, who injured his ankle in a Jan. 11 victory over South Carolina.

West Virginia 64, No. 2 Iowa State 57: Javon Small scored 12 of his 27 points in the final two minutes to lead the host Mountaineers to a victory over the Cyclones, ending Iowa State's national-best winning streak at 12 games.

Amani Hansberry added 12 points for West Virginia (13-4, 4-2 Big 12), which beat a ranked team for the fourth time this season.

Curtis Jones scored 18 points to lead the Cyclones (15-2, 5-1). Keshon Gilbert added 13 points and Josh Jefferson had 10 points and 10 rebounds.

No. 3 Duke 88, Boston College 63: Cooper Flagg scored 28 points, settling down after missing four of his first five shots to lead the visiting Blue Devils to their 12th straight victory.

Tyrese Proctor added 20 points for Duke (16-2, 8-0 Atlantic Coast Conference).

No. 5 Florida 84, Texas 60: Alijah Martin scored 22 points, Walter Clayton Jr. added 19 and the host Gators beat the Longhorns to start a new home winning streak.

Four days after having a 16-game winning streak in Gainesville snapped by Missouri, Florida (16-2, 3-2 Southeastern Conference) bounced back with

more effort and energy.

Vanderbilt 76, No. 6 Tennessee 75: Jason Edwards scored 18 points as the host Commodores held off the Volunteers for their second straight win.

Jaylen Carey added 14 for Vanderbilt. Tyler Nickel had 13 and AJ Hoggard had 11.

Xavier 59, No. 7 Marquette 57: Zach Freemantle had 14 points and 10 rebounds and the visiting Musketeers hung on in the final seconds to beat the Golden Eagles to earn their third straight victory while snapping Marquette's six-game winning streak.

Xavier (12-7, 4-4 Big East) never trailed and led by as many as 19 but needed to make a stop in the final seconds to preserve the victory.

No. 9 Kansas 84, Kansas State 74: Hunter Dickinson had 25 points and Zeke Mayo scored 24 to lead the host Jayhawks over the Wildcats.

Kansas (13-4, 4-2 Big 12) built a big lead to start the game.

No. 10 Houston 69, UCF 68: J'Wan Roberts made a go-ahead layup with 1.1 seconds left to lift the visiting Cougars to a victory over the Knights.

Roberts powered his way to the basket off an inbounds pass, beating UCF's shot blockers to the rim. The Knights were un-

able to get off a final shot attempt.

No. 11 Texas A&M 68, LSU 57: Zhuric Phelps scored 13 points, fellow guard Wade Taylor IV added 12 and the host Aggies beat the Tigers.

No. 17 Purdue 65, No. 13 Oregon 58: Trey Kaufman-Renn had 23 points and 11 rebounds to help lead the visiting Boilermakers past the Ducks.

Braden Smith added 15 points and seven rebounds as Purdue (15-4, 7-1 Big Ten) won its seventh straight.

Creighton 68, No. 14 UConn 63: Jamiya Neal had a career-high 24 points to lead the visiting Bluejays past the Huskies.

No. 15 Mississippi State 84, No. 21 Mississippi 81 (OT): Riley Kugel scored a season-high 21 points, including two free throws with 11 seconds remaining in overtime, as the host Bulldogs knocked off the Rebels.

Santa Clara 103, No. 16 Gonzaga 99: Tyeree Bryan made seven 3-pointers and scored a career-high 35 points to help the visiting Broncos upset the Bulldogs.

No. 24 Wisconsin 84, Southern Cal 69: John Blackwell scored 28 points and the visiting Badgers defeated the Trojans to extend their winning streak to seven games.

Young scores 28 to help Hawks edge Celtics in OT

Associated Press

BOSTON — Dyson Daniels hit a short jumper in the lane with just over a minute left in overtime and Onyeka Okongwu made two free throws with 11 seconds left, lifting the Atlanta Hawks to a 119-115 victory over the Boston Celtics on Saturday night.

Trae Young led Atlanta with 28 points and 12 assists, and Daniels finished with 23 points.

Jaylen Brown had 24 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists for Boston.

Celtics star Jayson Tatum added 23 points after coming into the game listed as questionable with a left shoulder strain. He shot 7-for-21 overall.

Young hit two free throws to tie it with 3.5 seconds left in regulation and Tatum missed a fallaway as the horn sounded.

Suns 125, Pistons 121: Kevin Durant scored 30 of his 36 points in the second half and visiting Phoenix defeated Detroit.

Devin Booker scored 35 points, his fifth consecutive 30-point outing, as the Suns won for

the fifth time in six games.

Pacers 115, 76ers 102: Pascal Siakam scored 10 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, and Myles Turner added 18 points and 11 rebounds to help host Indiana beat short-handed Philadelphia.

Warriors 122, Wizards 114: Stephen Curry scored 26 points before leaving the game with an ankle injury in the final minute as host Golden State beat Washington.

There was no immediate word on the extent of his injury.

Cavaliers 124, Timberwolves 117: Donovan Mitchell scored 36 points, Darius Garland added 29 and NBA-leading Cleveland took control in the second half and beat host Minnesota.

Anthony Edwards scored 28 points and Julius Randle finished with 20 points, 14 rebounds and nine assists for Minnesota.

Rockets 125, Trail Blazers 103: Jalen Green scored 26 points and visiting Houston handed Portland its fifth straight loss.

Caps beat Penguins, win 4th straight

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Jakob Chychrun, Aliaksei Protas and Pierre-Luc Dubois scored, Logan Thompson made 18 saves and the Washington Capitals beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-1 on Saturday night for their fourth consecutive victory.

Thompson came up just short of becoming the first player in franchise history to record three shutouts in a row, when he allowed Bryan Rust to score midway through the third period. His shutout streak ended at 198 minutes, 22 seconds, the longest in the NHL this season and third-longest in Capitals history.

Brandon Duhaime sealed it with an empty-netter with 1:30 left. The Capitals are 7-0-3 in their past 10 games, picking up points despite not playing their best during this stretch.

The Penguins lost for an eighth time in 10 games.

Flyers 3, Devils 1: Bobby Brink and Travis Konecny scored in the third period as Philadelphia won at New Jersey.

Matvei Michkov also scored for the Flyers in the first meeting of the season between the Metropolitan Division rivals. Tyson Foerster had two assists, and Samuel Ersson made 12 saves.

Dougie Hamilton scored for the Devils. It was the first goal for the defenseman since Dec. 2 and his sixth of the season.

Senators 6, Bruins 5 (SO): Tim Stutzle scored in the shootout to lift host Ottawa over Boston.

Leevi Merilainen, who made 23 saves in regulation and overtime, turned away all three Bruins skaters in the tiebreaker.

Josh Norris had two goals for the Senators, and Stutzle had a goal and an assist in regulation. Nick Jensen and Adam Gaudette also scored.

Ottawa scored twice in the final 3:13 to force overtime. Norris got his 17th goal of the season with 12 seconds remaining, tying it at 5.

Avalanche 6, Stars 3: Artturi Lehkonen had two goals and two assists, Cale Makar also scored twice and host Colorado beat Dallas.

Jonathan Drouin and Casey Mittelstadt each had a goal and two assists, and Josh Manson also had two assists for the Avalanche. Scott Wedgewood stopped 26 shots.

Jason Robertson had two goals and an assist, Matt Duchene also scored, and Wyatt Johnson had three assists for the Stars. Casey DeSmith finished with 30 saves.

Panthers 3, Ducks 0: Spencer Knight made 34 saves for his second shutout of the season and host Florida beat Anaheim.

Jesper Boqvist, Anton Lundell and Gustav Forsling scored. Boqvist opened the scoring midway through the second period with his career-high 11th of the season. Lundell scored in the third, and Forsling added an empty-netter.

The Ducks dropped their third straight to finish 1-4-1 on their six-game trip. John Gibson stopped 42 shots.

Lightning 5, Red Wings 1: Nikita Kucherov and Jake Guentzel each had a goal and two assists, helping host Tampa Bay beat Detroit.

Darren Raddysh had a goal and an assist as the Lightning won for the third time in four games.

Tampa Bay blew the game open early in the second, scoring three times in a span of 3:52 on goals from Guentzel, Kucherov and Chaffee.

Flames 3, Jets 1: Dustin Wolf made 38 saves, Blake Coleman had a goal and two assists and visiting Calgary beat Winnipeg.

Matt Coronato and Andrei Kuzmenko — on a power play —

also scored for the Flames. Coleman had an empty-net goal with 1:05 left.

Adam Lowry scored for the Jets. Eric Comrie made 19 saves.

Rangers 1, Blue Jackets 0 (SO): Vincent Trocheck scored the only goal of the shootout, Igor Shesterkin stopped 27 shots as host New York beat Columbus.

Shesterkin got his second shutout of the season and 17th of his career as the Rangers won their second straight. New York improved to 6-1-2 in January.

Daniil Tarasov had 26 saves and the Blue Jackets snapped a six-game winning streak.

Maple Leafs 7, Canadiens 3: Toronto scored seven unanswered goals to overcome a three-goal first-period deficit at Montreal.

Bobby McMann, Nicholas Robertson, William Nylander, Oliver Ekman-Larsson, Steven Lorentz, Auston Matthews and David Kampf scored for the Maple Leafs.

Kirby Dach, Patrik Laine, and Josh Anderson scored first-period goals for the Canadiens. Sam Montembeault finished with 27 saves.

Islanders 4, Sharks 1: Mathew Barzal and Brock Nelson each had a goal and an assist and host New York beat San Jose.

Noah Dobson and Ryan Pullock also scored, Marcus Hogberg made 18 saves and the Islanders snapped a two-game skid.

Barclay Goodrow scored for the Sharks and Alexander Georgiev finished with 27 saves as San Jose lost for the fifth time in six games.

Predators 6, Wild 2: Filip Forsberg had two goals and two assists to lead host Nashville to its third consecutive victory.

Colton Sissons, Steven Stamkos, Fedor Svechikov and Brady Skjei also scored and Juuse Saros made 27 saves for the Preda-

tors. Roman Josi had two assists.

Matt Boldy had a goal and an assist, David Jiricek also scored and Marc-Andre Fleury made 32 saves for Minnesota, loser of three straight and four of its past five.

Blackhawks 5, Golden Knights 3: Tyler Bertuzzi scored two power-play goals and host Chicago beat Vegas to end a four-game losing streak.

Seth Jones had a goal and two assists, helping set up Bertuzzi's team-leading 15th and 16th goals on deflections at the edge of the crease. Lukas Reichel and Taylor Hall also scored for the Blackhawks and Petr Mrazek stopped 32 shots as Chicago won for just the third time in 13 games (3-9-1).

Utah 4, Blues 2: Clayton Keller had a goal and three assists as host Utah beat St. Louis.

Logan Cooley had a goal and two assists, and Michael Kesselring and Nick Schmaltz also scored to help Utah snap a three-game losing streak with just its second win in seven games (2-4-1). Connor Ingram stopped 22 shots.

Kraken 4, Kings 2: Jaden Schwartz had a hat trick, Joey Daccord made 17 of his 28 saves in the third period and host Seattle beat Los Angeles.

Schwartz opened the scoring 28 seconds into the game and broke a 1-1 tie at 7:40. He completed the hat trick with an empty-netter in the third, his 16th goal of the season.

Canucks 3, Oilers 2: Quinn Hughes scored two power-play goals and struggling Vancouver defeated visiting Edmonton.

Danton Heinen also scored and J.T. Miller had two assists as the Canucks won for just the second time in eight games (2-4-2). Thatcher Demko had 13 saves.

Leon Draisaitl scored twice for the Oilers, and leads the NHL with 33 goals.