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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Greenland tensions continue to grow

Associated Press

President Donald Trump linked his aggressive stance on Greenland to last year's decision not to award him the Nobel Peace Prize, telling Norway's prime minister that he no longer felt "an obligation to think purely of Peace," two European officials said Monday.

Trump's message to Jonas Gahr Støre appears to ratchet up a standoff between Washington and its closest allies over his threats to take over Greenland, a self-governing territory of NATO member Denmark. To force European countries that have rallied around Denmark and Greenland toward talks, Trump on Saturday announced a 10% import tax starting in February on goods from eight nations, including Norway.

Those countries issued a forceful rebuke. But British Prime Minister Keir Starmer sought to de-escalate tensions on Monday.

While the White House has not ruled taking control of the strategic Arctic island by force, Starmer said he did not believe military action would occur.

"I think this can be resolved and should be resolved through calm discussion," he said.

Still, the American leader's message to Gahr Støre could further fracture a U.S.-European relationship already strained by differences over how to end the nearly four-year war in Ukraine, previous rounds of tariffs, military spending and migration policy.

In a sign of how tensions have increased in recent days, thousands of Greenlanders marched over the weekend in protest of any effort to take over their island. Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen said in a Facebook post Monday that the tariff threats would not change their stance.

"We will not be pressured,"

he wrote. "We stand firm on dialogue, on respect and on international law."

According to two European officials, Trump's message to Gahr Støre read in part: "Considering your Country decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped 8 Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace, although it will always be predominant, but can now think about what is good and proper for the United States of America."

It concluded: "The World is not secure unless we have Complete and Total Control of Greenland."

The officials, who were not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity, said it had been forwarded to multiple European ambassadors in Washington. PBS first reported on the content of Trump's note.

Gahr Støre confirmed Mon-

day that he had received a text message from Trump but did not release its contents. The White House did not respond to questions about the letter.

Gahr Støre said Trump's message was a reply to an earlier missive sent on behalf of himself and Finnish President Alexander Stubb, in which they conveyed their opposition to the tariff announcement, pointed to a need to de-escalate, and proposed a telephone conversation among the three leaders.

"Norway's position on Greenland is clear. Greenland is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and Norway fully supports the Kingdom of Denmark on this matter," Støre said. "As regards the Nobel Peace Prize, I have clearly explained, including to President Trump what is well known, the prize is awarded by an independent Nobel Committee and not the Norwegian Government."

Army tests medics' ability to keep wounded troops alive

BY ALISON BATH

Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — The Army is testing the ability of its combat medics to keep critically injured soldiers alive on the future battlefield, where they no longer will be able to rely on quick medical evacuations.

That new reality was the hallmark of the recent Best Medic Competition at U.S. Army Garrison Italy in Vicenza as 24 Army and international competitors faced two grueling days that tested their fortitude and expertise.

The U.S. Army Southern European Task Force, Africa event

featured service members from Ghana, Liberia and Italy alongside American counterparts.

The competition, which ended Thursday, included a four-hour test designed to assess and reinforce medics' ability to sustain life, prevent further deterioration and make sound clinical decisions, said Sgt. Maj. Shanett Robinson, SETAF-AF's chief medical noncommissioned officer and lead planner for the competition.

"Ultimately, this focus ensures medics are prepared to save lives when evacuation timelines are uncertain, reinforcing readiness for the com-

plex operational environments they are likely to face," Robinson said.

The competition reflects a departure from the "golden hour" benchmark of stabilizing and readying a seriously wounded service member for transport within 60 minutes of injury to increase survival chances.

The Army is working quickly to develop new protocols and strategies aimed at ensuring that combat medics can quickly assess injuries and keep wounded soldiers alive for hours, even days, until they can be moved.

But recent conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war have

yielded lessons about the impacts of congested logistics, denied communications and other challenges on the modern battlefield. The U.S. military is preparing for the likelihood that it won't be able to rely on air and technological superiority in large-scale operations against peer adversaries to pull off swift battlefield medical rescues.

"Evacuating casualties to operating rooms within the Golden Hour of injury will be a forgone luxury in large-scale combat operations and other austere operational environments," an article published in the Army's Military Review said.

Commissaries expand home delivery in US

By LYDIA GORDON

Stars and Stripes

Dozens of Defense Department commissaries in the U.S. are expanding their offerings to include home delivery, a move that parallels the rise of commercial services that bring groceries and meals right to customers' door.

Beginning this week, 70 domestic commissaries ranging from Hawaii to North Carolina are scheduled to launch delivery service through the Click2Go app.

Delivery will be available on the Click2Go app for shoppers within a 20-mile radius of a participating store, the Defense Commissary Agency said in a statement.

The app is accessible via phone, tablet or computer, and a list of commissaries offering delivery service is available on DeCA's website.

Full rollout across the select ed locations is expected to continue through late January, the agency statement said.

The launch began with 32 stores on Wednesday, and ex tends application access to the remaining facilities until Sunday, Military Times said.

The service is operated by contractor OnPoint, which set delivery fees at \$17.75 for addresses within 10 miles and \$31.25 for deliveries within 11 to 20 miles, Military Times reported last month.

The remaining 108 continen

tal stores are eligible for future expansion under OnPoint's contract, according to the statement. However, officials did not provide a timeline for a broader rollout or confirmation that it will happen.

The expansion is the latest step in an initiative that began as a pilot program four years ago and comes as services like Uber Eats and DoorDash demonstrate the demand for such shopping and dining convenience.

"Commissary delivery is just one example of how DeCA is working to offer a next-level benefit to better serve our military community," John Hall, the agency's director and CEO, said in the statement.

The decision followed discussions with key user groups, including junior enlisted service members and disabled veterans, according to the statement.

One commissary at Fort Bragg, N.C., was among the eight locations included in the 2022 pilot program, and a second commissary in the northern part of the installation is on the list of 70 in the expansion.

"I've heard about (the service) and think it's a great option for military families, especially those who ... can't always get on base," Vanessa Morris, a military spouse at Fort Bragg, said Friday in response to questions.

The service will not be available at overseas commissaries due to host-nation restrictions.

Trump to order networks to 'protect' Army-Navy game

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump said Saturday night that he would order television networks to block other college football games from airing at the same time as the annual Army-Navy football game, a move sought by the event's supporters that also raised immediate legal questions.

"Under my Administration, the second Saturday in December belongs to Army-Navy, and ONLY Army-Navy!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "I will soon sign a Historic Executive Order securing an EXCLUSIVE 4 hour Broadcast window, so this National Event stands above Commercial Post-season Games. No other Game or Team can violate this Time Slot!!!"

The rivalry game between the two military service academies has traditionally aired on Saturday afternoons in December, with no competition from other college football games.

The game has also been a ratings boon for CBS, which has broadcast the showdown since 1996. But the game's closely guarded TV window is facing pressure as college sports leaders consider expanding the College Football Playoff, with some proposals calling to shift the Army-Navy game to a different day or to broadcast other games at the same time.

Dozens of lawmakers have urged college football leaders to protect the Army-Navy game's TV window, saying it helps with national unity and military recruitment. Trump, who has regularly attended the Army-Navy game since he was first elected president in 2016, framed his planned order as a patriotic act.

"We must protect the Tradition, and the Players, who protect us. Please let this serve as Notice to ALL Television Networks, Stations, and Outlets," Trump wrote.

Several telecommunications

lawyers and media-law experts told The Washington Post that Trump's planned order was probably illegal, citing the First Amendment and other regulations.

"With a stroke of a pen, the President will assert a power that any television programmer in history would have killed for," Jeffrey Cole, the director of the USC Annenberg School for Communication's Center for the Digital Future, wrote in an email. "While the goal may be commendable (at least for Army-Navy) and the President has as much right to persuade or coerce as any fan, he has no legal power of enforcement."

The White House did not respond to questions about why Trump announced the order or its legality.

The Federal Communications Commission, which regulates TV broadcasts, also did not respond to questions about the planned order. However, Brendan Carr, the Trump-ap

pointed chairman of the FCC, reposted Trump's message on social media.

Paramount Skydance, which owns CBS, did not respond to questions about whether the company sought Trump's planned order.

Sens. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, and Jack Reed, D-R.I., spearheaded a congressional letter in December 2024 urging college football leaders to "set aside the second Saturday in December in future seasons solely for the Army vs. Navy Game," arguing that an exclusive TV window was important for patriotism and confidence in the military.

"The Army-Navy game highlights and celebrates — more than any college football game in America — true student-athlete-patriots," Sullivan posted on social media last month. "It's important to preserve this as the profit-focused NCAA looks to encroach on this special game and day."

Minneapolis mayor decries deployment plan

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The mayor of Minneapolis said Sunday that sending active duty soldiers into Minnesota to help with an immigration crackdown is a ridiculous and unconstitutional idea as he urged protesters to remain peaceful so the president won't see a need to send in the U.S. military.

Daily protests have been ongoing throughout January since the Department of Homeland Security ramped up immigration enforcement in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul by bringing in more than 2,000 federal officers.

Three hotels where protesters have said Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers were staying in the area stopped taking reservations Sunday.

In a diverse neighborhood where immigration officers have been seen frequently, U.S.

postal workers marched through on Sunday, chanting: "Protect our routes. Get ICE out."

The Pentagon has ordered about 1,500 active-duty soldiers based in Alaska who specialize in operating in arctic conditions to be ready in case of a possible deployment to Minnesota, two defense officials said Sunday.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans, said two infantry battalions of the Army's 11th Airborne Division have been given prepare-to-deploy orders.

One defense official said the troops are standing by to deploy to Minnesota should President Donald Trump invoke the Insurrection Act.

The rarely used 19th century law would allow the president to send military troops into Minnesota, where protesters have

been confronting federal immigration agents for weeks. He has since backed off the threat, at least for now.

"It's ridiculous, but we will not be intimidated by the actions of this federal government," Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey told CNN's State of the Union on Sunday. "It is not fair, it's not just, and it's completely unconstitutional."

Thousands of Minneapolis citizens are exercising their First Amendment rights and the protests have been peaceful, Frey said.

"We are not going to take the bait. We will not counter Donald Trump's chaos with our own brand of chaos here," Frey said.

Gov. Tim Walz has mobilized the Minnesota National Guard, although no units have been deployed to the streets.

At least three hotels in Minneapolis-St. Paul that protesters

said housed officers in the immigrant crackdown were not accepting reservations Sunday. Rooms could not be booked online before early February at the Hilton DoubleTree and IHG InterContinental hotels in downtown St. Paul and at the Hilton Canopy hotel in Minneapolis.

Over the phone, an InterContinental hotel front desk employee said it was closing for the safety of the staff, but declined to comment on the specific concerns. The DoubleTree and InterContinental hotels had empty lobbies with signs out front saying they were "temporarily closed for business until further notice." The Canopy hotel was open, but not accepting reservations.

The Canopy has been the site of noisy protests by anti-ICE demonstrators aimed to prevent agents from sleeping.

'60 Minutes' airs previously pulled deportation story

Associated Press

"60 Minutes" on Sunday aired its story about Trump administration deportations that was abruptly pulled from the news magazine's lineup a month ago, a move that had triggered an internal battle about political pressure that spilled out into the open.

Correspondent Sharyn Alfonsi made no reference to her dispute with CBS News editor-in-chief Bari Weiss in the story about deportees who had been sent to El Salvador's notoriously harsh CECOT prison. When the segment was struck from the Dec. 21 episode on Weiss' orders, Alfonsi told her "60 Minutes" colleagues that it "was not an editorial decision, it was a political one."

Weiss had argued that the story did not sufficiently reflect the administration's viewpoint or

advance reporting that had been done by other news organizations earlier.

The story shown Sunday included no on-camera interviews with Trump administration officials. But it did include statements from the White House and Department of Homeland Security that were not part of what Alfonsi had used before her story was pulled. Some of statements, which were carried on the website, were dated prior to Dec. 21.

"Since November, '60 Minutes' has made several attempts to interview key Trump administration officials on camera about our story," Alfonsi said. "They declined our requests."

CBS News, in a statement said, that its "leadership has always been committed to airing the '60 Minutes' CECOT piece as soon as it was ready.

DOJ vows to press charges after disruptions at church where ICE official is pastor

AP/Report for America

MINNEAPOLIS — The U.S. Department of Justice said Sunday it is investigating a group of protesters in Minnesota who disrupted services at a church where a local official with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement apparently serves as a pastor.

A livestreamed video posted on the Facebook page of Black Lives Matter Minnesota, one of the protest's organizers, shows a group of people interrupting services at the Cities Church in St. Paul by chanting "ICE out" and "Justice for Renee Good." The 37-year-old mother of three was fatally shot by an ICE agent in Minneapolis earlier this month amid a surge in federal immigration enforcement activities.

The protesters allege that one of the church's pastors — David Easterwood — also leads the local ICE field office overseeing operations involving violent tactics and illegal arrests.

U.S. Department of Justice Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon said her agency is investigating federal civil rights violations "by these people desecrating a house of worship and interfering with Christian worshippers."

"A house of worship is not a public forum for your protest! It is a space protected from exactly such acts by federal criminal and civil laws!" she said on social media.

Attorney General Pam Bondi also weighed in on social media, saying that any violations of federal law would be prosecuted.

Israel blasts Trump picks for Gaza board

Associated Press

The European Union's executive arm, Russia and Thailand on Monday were the latest to be asked to join U.S. President Donald Trump's new Board of Peace that will supervise the next phase of the Gaza peace plan, as a top Israeli official said the initiative is "bad for Israel" and should be scrapped.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin received the invitation and that the Kremlin is now "studying the details" and would seek clarity of "all the nuances" in contacts with the U.S. The Thai Foreign Ministry said it was also invited and that it was reviewing the details.

European Commission spokesman Olof Gill confirmed that Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the commission, received an invitation and would be speaking to other EU leaders about Gaza. Gill didn't say whether the invitation has been accepted, but that the commission wants "to contribute to a comprehensive plan to end the Gaza conflict."

It's unclear how many leaders have been invited to join the board. But a Trump reference in the invitation letters that the body would "embark on a bold new ap-

proach to resolving global conflict" suggested it could act as a rival to the U.N. Security Council, the most powerful body of the global organization created in the wake of World War II.

Israeli far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich on Monday dismissed the Board of Peace as a raw deal for Israel and called for its dissolution.

"It is time to explain to the president that his plan is bad for the State of Israel and to cancel it," Smotrich said at a ceremony inaugurating the new Yatziv settlement in the occupied West Bank. "Gaza is ours, its future will affect our future more than anyone else's. We will take responsibility for what happens there, impose military administration, and complete the mission."

He suggested that Israel renew a full-scale offensive on Gaza to destroy Hamas if it doesn't abide by a "short ultimatum for real disarmament and exile."

On Saturday, the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the formation of the committee wasn't coordinated with the Israeli government and "is contrary to its policy."

The U.S. is expected to announce its official list of members in the coming days, likely during

the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

Board members will oversee an executive committee that will be in charge of implementing the tough second phase of the Gaza peace plan that includes the deployment of an international security force, disarmament of Hamas and reconstruction of the war-devastated territory.

A \$1 billion contribution secures permanent membership on the board with the money going to rebuild Gaza, according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity about the charter, which hasn't been made public. A three-year appointment has no contribution requirement.

But details of how this will also work remain murky. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Monday the U.K. is talking to allies about the Board of Peace. Although the U.K. hasn't said whether Starmer has been formally invited to join, he said it's necessary to proceed with the plan's second phase and that the U.K. has "indicated willingness, to play our part, and we will."

Egypt's top diplomat on Monday met with the leader of the newly appointed committee of Palestinian technocrats who will be running Gaza's day-to-day af-

fairs during the second phase of the peace plan.

Foreign Minister Bader Abdelatty met with Ali Shaath, a Palestinian engineer and former official with the Western-backed Palestinian Authority, who was named last week as chief commissioner of the National Committee for the Administration of Gaza. Abdelatty expressed Egypt's "complete support" to the committee and affirmed its role in running Gaza's daily affairs until the Palestinian Authority takes over the territory, a statement from the Egyptian ministry said following the meeting.

The U.N. World Food Program on Monday said it has "significantly expanded" its operations across Gaza 100 days into the ceasefire, reaching more than a million people each month with hot meals, bread bundles and food parcels. But it warned the situation remains "extremely fragile" even as critical progress has been made in pushing back famine.

The most recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis in December indicates that 77% of the population is facing crisis levels of food insecurity with over 100,000 people experiencing catastrophic levels of hunger.

ICE: Detained immigrant killed himself at Texas facility

Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — An immigrant from Nicaragua was found dead at a Texas immigration detention facility last week, federal officials said.

Victor Manuel Diaz appears to have killed himself Wednesday at the sprawling tent complex at the U.S. Army's Fort Bliss base in El Paso, Immigration and Customs Enforcement said in a statement. The federal investigation into his death continues.

It's the same facility where ICE said another detainee died earlier this month as staff mem-

bers tried to keep him from killing himself. But a fellow detainee said at least five officers were restraining the handcuffed inmate and at least one had an arm around his neck.

Diaz was swept up on Jan. 6 in the federal crackdown on immigration in Minnesota and sent to Texas, ICE said.

Diaz entered the United States in March 2024 and Border Patrol officers took him into custody. He was released on parole pending a court date and a judge ordered him to leave the U.S. in an August hearing that Diaz did not attend, ICE

said.

Diaz was given a final order for removal on Jan. 12, two days before he was found unconscious in his room, authorities said.

ICE did not release any other details on Diaz's death. The agency notifies Congress and releases a statement on its website of all in-custody deaths.

Diaz, 36, was being held at Camp Montana East where ICE said another detainee, Geraldo Lunas Campos, died as staff members tried to prevent him from killing himself.

But a preliminary investiga-

tion by the El Paso County Medical Examiner's Office found Lunas Campos, 55, died from asphyxia from chest and neck compression and said the death would likely be classified a homicide.

A fellow detainee told the AP that Lunas Campos was handcuffed and refused to go back into his cell when at least five guards pinned him to the floor.

The detainee said that at least one of the guards had squeezed one of their arms around Lunas Campos' neck.

ICE said it is still investigating that death.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man convicted of killing Uber driver

OH SPRINGFIELD — A jury convicted an 83-year-old Ohio man of murder in the shooting of an Uber driver who he wrongly thought was trying to rob him after scam phone calls deceived them both.

William J. Brock fatally shot the driver after wrongly assuming she was in on a plot to get \$12,000 in supposed bond money for a relative, authorities said.

The driver fell victim to the same scammer, driving to Brock's home to pick up a package for delivery, according to investigators.

Brock shot the driver, Letha Toland-Hall, 61, of Dublin, six times when she showed up at his home in March 2024, authorities said. Brock, of South Charleston, was convicted of murder, felonious assault and kidnapping.

Former Nickelodeon star killed in hit-and-run

NY NEW YORK — Law enforcement officials said Kianna Underwood, a former Nickelodeon child star, was killed Friday in a hit-and-run in New York. She was 33.

According to the New York Police Department, Underwood was crossing an intersection in the Brownsville neighborhood of Brooklyn when a black Ford Explorer SUV hit her in the morning. While lying in the street, she was then "subsequently struck by a black and gray sedan," NYPD said in a statement. Underwood was pronounced dead at the scene.

Police said both drivers left the scene and have not been

identified. The investigation is ongoing.

Underwood starred in Nickelodeon's popular children's sketch comedy show "All That" over seven episodes in 2005.

Heroin, cocaine found inside child's car seat

MI ST. CLAIR COUNTY — Two men were arrested during separate traffic stops last week and now face drug charges after police found alleged narcotics inside the vehicles.

Both arrests happened in the Port Huron area, according to the St. Clair County Sheriff's Office.

During one traffic stop, a 59-year-old Detroit man was found to be operating the vehicle without a license. Police found 26 grams of crack cocaine, eight grams of heroin, six grams of powder cocaine, and a large amount of money during a search of the vehicle. The cocaine and heroin were concealed inside a child's car seat, police said.

Later in the day, a 45-year-old man was arrested after another traffic stop where police seized 144 grams of methamphetamine, and found drug paraphernalia, prescription pills, ketamine, and a 20-gauge shotgun.

State's millionaire tax gets governor's support

RI PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island Gov. Dan McKee proposed a higher tax on millionaires to help fill a hole in the state's budget and offset cuts to other levies that would benefit lower-income residents.

McKee is seeking to raise the state levy applied to incomes

over \$1 million to 8.99%, an increase of three percentage points, according to his budget proposal released Thursday. The threshold is higher than a similar proposal backed by labor leaders and other lawmakers in Rhode Island that called for a surtax on the top 1% of earners, or those with incomes of more than \$640,000.

McKee previously opposed a tax on the wealthy but has more recently warmed to the idea, pointing to the budget strain created by federal cuts to Medicaid, food assistance and other programs under President Donald Trump.

Man indicted in slaying of ex-wife and her husband

OH COLUMBUS — An Ohio grand jury has indicted a man in the double homicide of his ex-wife and her husband who were killed in their Columbus home last month.

Court records showed a Franklin County grand jury charged Michael David McKee on Friday, with aggravated murder and aggravated burglary while using a firearm suppressor. McKee, 39, a vascular surgeon who was living in Chicago, is charged in the shooting deaths of 39-year-old Monique Tepe, from whom he was divorced in 2017, and dentist Dr. Spencer Tepe, 37, in their home on Dec. 30.

Toddler dies from flu, 1st pediatric death this season

VA RICHMOND — A toddler in Virginia died of flu complications, becoming the first pediatric death reported this flu season, state health officials said Wednesday.

day.

The child was described only as "pre-school age" or younger than 5 years old and lived in the "East Region," officials said in a statement. Officials declined to release further details, citing privacy issues.

State Health Commissioner Karen Shelton extended condolences to the family but urged residents to get vaccinated. Health officials said that fewer than 30% of eligible Virginians reported receiving a flu shot this season.

"Even though the flu is common, it can cause serious illness and even death. I urge everyone who is eligible to receive the flu vaccine to do so not only to protect themselves, but to protect those around them," Shelton said.

Trump pardons former governor of Puerto Rico

DC WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump pardoned former Puerto Rico Gov. Wanda Vázquez, who had pleaded guilty last August to a campaign finance violation in a federal case that authorities say also involved a former FBI agent and a Venezuelan banker.

Her sentencing had been set for later this month.

Federal prosecutors had been seeking one year behind bars, something that Vázquez's attorneys opposed as they accused prosecutors of violating a guilty plea deal reached last year that saw previous charges including bribery and fraud dropped.

They noted that Vázquez had agreed to plead guilty to accepting a promise of a campaign contribution that was never received.

— From wire reports

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Maye leads Patriots over Stroud, Texans

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — Mike Vrabel returned to New England on a mission to have the franchise playing again in meaningful games in January — as he did so often as a player.

In his first year as the head coach, he wanted to do it by building a culture of players that wanted to perform for each other. Their most complete team effort of the season has the Patriots one win from a trip to the Super Bowl.

Drake Maye threw three touchdown passes in the snow and rain, Marcus Jones returned one of C.J. Stroud's four interceptions for a score and New England defeated the Houston Texans 28-16 on Sunday to advance to the AFC championship game for the first time in seven years.

The Patriots (16-3) will take on the Broncos (15-3) in Denver next Sunday, with the winner advancing to the NFL's title game in three weeks.

"Everybody's stepping up. We're using everybody. Every-

body's making plays. Everybody's helping us win," said Vrabel, who won three Super Bowls as a playmaking linebacker for New England. "I'm excited for these guys, but also, they're not satisfied, and I can tell that."

The Patriots — winners of 15 of their last 16 games — will make their 16th conference championship game appearance and first since their run to their sixth Super Bowl title under Bill Belichick in the 2018 season. New England has won its last nine divisional round games.

Maye finished 16 of 27 for 179 yards, but had an interception and fumbled four times, losing two in cold conditions in which snow and rain fell throughout. One of Maye's fumbles set up Houston's first touchdown.

"Just proud of the guys," Maye said. "Battled the elements. This is New England. This is what we're trying to embrace and we want to embrace all season long. Props to our defense, played a hell of a game. We've got to protect the football

better, but we made enough plays to win it."

Carlton Davis III had two interceptions for the Patriots. Craig Woodson added an interception and fumble recovery.

"They bring it every week," Maye said of his defense.

"It's fun to watch. And we could help them out some more, but just proud of the guys. Enjoy this one, and we're back on the road."

The eight combined turnovers — Woody Marks also lost a fumble for the Texans — were the most in a playoff game since 2015 when Arizona and Carolina combined for eight in the NFC championship game.

Houston (13-6) has lost in the divisional round in three straight seasons under coach DeMeco Ryans. The franchise fell to 0-7 in this round.

"It's tough to win a game when you turn the ball over five times," Ryans said.

Stroud finished 20 of 47 with a TD pass. All of his interceptions came in the first half as he became the first player with five or

more INTs and five or more fumbles in a single postseason. Will Anderson forced two fumbles for the Texans.

"I feel like I let people down," Stroud said. "I'm not happy with that. It hurts. I'm not used to it."

Leading 21-16 in the fourth quarter, New England stretched its lead to 27-16 when Kayshon Boutte got behind Derek Stingley Jr. and pulled in a diving, one-hand catch in the corner of the end zone for a touchdown.

The Texans had the ball with 5:48 to play, but punted on fourth-and-18 at their own 21 with 4:18 remaining.

The Patriots' next drive took the clock under two minutes. But Houston turned it over on downs when Stroud's fourth-down pass to Xavier Hutchinson was batted down by Robert Spillane.

New England now goes back on the road, where it is 8-0 this season.

"We feel like we deserve to be here," Maye said. "I like our chances with those guys in the locker room."

Rams shake off late TD by Williams, beat Bears in OT

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Matthew Stafford and Sean McVay shot knowing glances at each other, then went to work on the drive that got the Los Angeles Rams one step away from the Super Bowl.

Stafford and the Rams survived an incredible throw by Caleb Williams that forced overtime, beating the Chicago Bears 20-17 on Sunday night to advance to the NFC championship game.

Harrison Mevis kicked a 42-yard field goal in OT after Kam Curl intercepted a deep pass by Williams on the Bears' first possession of the extra period. Stafford glanced at his coach prior to the winning drive, then completed three passes for first downs — including a 16-yarder to Puka Nacua to get Los Angeles into field-goal range.

"I looked right at Sean, he looked right at me," Stafford said. "And I'm like, 'Here we go.' That's what it's all about. What an unbelievable job by our defense today, getting

us the ball over and over again. Whether it be fourth-down stops or turnovers, they were clutch and timely."

So was Mevis.

The "Thiccer Kicker," as he's known, ended Chicago's season. Teammates mobbed him while a crowd that was rocking earlier watched in near silence at the conclusion of a cold, snowy night.

The Rams (14-5) will visit the NFC West rival Seahawks next Sunday in their first trip to the conference championship game since the 2021 team won the Super Bowl. Seattle beat the 49ers 41-6 on Saturday.

"It was like, all right, the football gods are smiling on us," McVay said. "The weather had calmed down. There wasn't a lot of wind right there. ... I was really happy for him, and I was very confident that he would make that."

LA led 17-10 in the final minute of regulation and the Bears faced fourth-and-4 from the 14-yard line when Williams back-

pedaled to avoid the pass rush and heaved the ball to Cole Kmet for the tying touchdown with 18 seconds left. Although officially a 14-yard pass, the ball traveled 51.2 yards in the air, according to the NFL's Next Gen Stats.

Chicago coach Ben Johnson thought about trying for a go-ahead 2-point conversion, but ultimately decided to send out Cairo Santos for the extra point.

Williams threw for two touchdowns but was intercepted three times as the Bears (12-7) — who pulled off seven fourth-quarter comeback wins in Johnson's first season — came up short this time. They won the NFC North after finishing last in the division a year ago.

"Our guys are feeling it right now," Johnson said. "They all believed, man. They all believed that we could find a way to win each and every week. And so it's disappointing like that. I'm proud of the group. It's a special group."

Bills fire McDermott after 9 seasons

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — The Buffalo Bills fired coach Sean McDermott on Monday after the team again failed to reach the Super Bowl in his nine seasons.

The move came two days after Buffalo was eliminated in a heart-wrenching 33-30 overtime loss at Denver in the divisional round of the playoffs.

"Sean helped change the mindset of this organization and was instrumental in the Bills becoming a perennial playoff team," owner Terry Pegula said. "But I feel we are in need of a new structure within our leadership to give this organization the best opportunity to take our team to the next level."

As part of the new structure, Pegula announced he was promoting general manager Brandon Beane to president of football operations. Beane, who is

also completing his ninth season in Buffalo, will oversee the coaching search.

The Bills went 12-5 in the regular season and saw their five-year run atop the AFC East end, finishing second behind New England. Buffalo became the NFL's first team to win a playoff round in six consecutive years but not reach the Super Bowl.

The 51-year-old McDermott finished with a 98-50 regular-season record and was 8-8 in the playoffs, ranking second on the team list in wins behind Hall of Fame coach Marv Levy (112-70, 11-8). Levy did so over 11 seasons during a tenure that included the Jim Kelly-led team reaching — and losing — four straight Super Bowls in the early 1990s.

McDermott's failure to reach the Super Bowl with Josh Allen at quarterback became his undoing. Though Allen has broken

many of Kelly's passing and scoring records, the Bills have advanced to the AFC championship game just twice — and lost both times to Kansas City — during a team-record seven-year playoff run.

Buffalo's last three playoff losses have all been decided by three points. And three of McDermott's playoff losses ended in overtime.

That includes a 42-36 loss to the Chiefs in the 2021 divisional round that's become dubbed "13 seconds" — the amount of time Patrick Mahomes had to complete two passes for 44 yards and set up Harrison Butker's tying, 49-yard field goal on the final play of regulation.

Despite his playoff inconsistencies, McDermott oversaw a team that won 10 or more regular-season games in seven straight seasons, including two team record-matching 13-win

seasons.

The Bills reached the playoffs in eight of McDermott's nine seasons. That includes 2017, when they sneaked into the postseason on the final day to end a 17-year playoff drought that at the time was the longest active streak in North America's four major sports.

Buffalo became a model of stability under McDermott and Beane. And now the Bills undergo their first coaching search since McDermott took over for Rex Ryan, who was fired after two seasons in Buffalo.

McDermott was hired after spending six seasons as Carolina's defensive coordinator. Before that, he broke into the NFL in 1999 as a member of Andy Reid's first staff in Philadelphia. McDermott worked his way up the ranks to become the Eagles' defensive coordinator before being fired in 2010.

Swiatek defeats Yue in tight match; Djokovic clinches win

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Iga Swiatek knows she has plenty to work on in her bid for a first Australian Open title and a career Grand Slam.

The No. 2-ranked Swiatek never got comfortable in a 7-6 (5), 6-3 win over No. 130-ranked Chinese qualifier Yuan Yue in the first-round on Monday night.

Novak Djokovic already has a record 10 titles in Australia among his 24 major championships, and just keeps racking up the records.

He equaled two all-time tennis marks by starting his 21st Australian Open and his 81st Grand Slam tournament, and he added another milestone in the last night match Monday with his 100th win at Melbourne Park.

The 38-year-old Djokovic had a 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 first-round win over Pedro Martinez to become

the first man to win 100 or more matches at three Grand Slam tournaments.

Swiatek won Wimbledon last year to go with her four French Open titles and her victory at the 2022 U.S. Open, leaving the Australian Open as the only major missing from her collection. She has twice reached the semifinals.

Yuan was swinging freely and rifling winners as she took a 5-3 lead, and Swiatek had to switch things up.

"I was a bit rusty at the beginning," she said. "Many ups and downs, but overall I have some stuff to work on. I'll just focus on that."

From down 5-3 in the first, she held a service game at love to force Yuan to serve for the set. Swiatek broke back to level and then, in the tiebreaker, she remained composed and converted on her second set point.

Swiatek had a disrupted preparation for the year's first major, losing two singles matches at the United Cup but helping Poland win the title for the first time.

One of those losses was to No. 3 Coco Gauff, who also had some struggles before beating Kamilia Rakhimova 6-2, 6-3 in the opening match on Rod Laver Arena on Day 2.

Gauff has won two Grand Slam titles but, like Swiatek, has never gone past the semifinals at Melbourne Park.

She had six double-faults in the first set against Rakhimova, but found her range in the second. It's not a new issue — she had a tour-high 431 double-faults last year — but is something Gauff is working on.

Women advancing

No. 4 Amanda Anisimova, runner-up at the last two majors, and No. 6 Jessica Pegula won in

straight sets, advancing along with No. 8 Mirra Andreeva, No. 17 Victoria Mboko and No. 25 Paula Badosa.

Stan can

Stan Wawrinka kicked off his farewell season at the Slams with a 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (4) win over Laslo Djere. The 2014 champion announced last month that 2026 will be his last year on the elite tour.

"It is my last year. It's been too long that I'm coming back!" he said. "The passion is still intact. Today was amazing. I'm so happy that I won — I have a chance to play one more here."

Three-time Australian Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev beat Jesper de Jong 7-5, 6-2, 7-6 (2) to advance along with No. 6 Alex de Minaur, No. 12 Casper Ruud, No. 13 Andrey Rublev, No. 19 seed Tommy Paul and Reilly Opelka.

Durant climbs points list in Rockets win

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Kevin Durant had 18 points and moved into sixth place on the NBA's career points list, and Jabari Smith Jr. scored a season-high 32 points as the Houston Rockets beat the New Orleans Pelicans 119-110 Sunday night.

Alperen Sengun had 21 points and eight rebounds and Amen Thompson finished with 20 points as Houston won for the third time in four games.

Trey Murphy III scored 21 points on 7-for-15 shooting and Zion Williamson had 20 points and six rebounds. Derik Queen finished with 15 points for New Orleans, which lost for the fourth time in five games and 13th time in 15 games.

With 15.2 seconds left in the game, Durant stepped to the free throw line needing one point to pass Hall of Famer Dirk Nowitzki (31,560 points) on the NBA's scoring list. The 15-time All-Star made two free throws and received a standing ovation from the home crowd.

"To be up there with Dirk, somebody I looked up to, I idolized, I competed against," Du-

rant said. "We had some great battles. He always was supportive of my career and my game. So, you know to be up there with a legend like that, it's just insane. And be right under Michael Jordan, it's crazy man."

Durant now has 31,562 career points. Michael Jordan is fifth on the list at 32,292.

Grizzlies 126, Magic 109: Ja Morant had 24 points and 13 assists in his return to the lineup to lead Memphis to a victory over Orlando in the first regular-season game in London since 2019.

Jock Landale added 21 points and 8 rebounds and Ja- ren Jackson Jr. had 17 points as the Grizzlies avenged their 118-111 loss to the Magic in Berlin on Thursday in the first of their European doublehead- er.

Orlando trailed by 33 points in the first half before reducing the deficit to 17 on Paolo Banchero's 3-pointer to make it 108-91 with 8:15 left in the fourth quarter. Memphis closed it out from there.

Lakers 110, Raptors 93:

Luka Doncic had 25 points and seven assists, LeBron James added 24 points and seven assists, and host Los Angeles returned to form with a victory over Toronto.

Deandre Ayton had 25 points and 13 rebounds in his impressive return from a knee injury for the Lakers, who won for just the second time in seven games.

Ayton had his highest-scoring performance since Nov. 3 while making all 10 of his shots.

Bulls 124, Nets 102: Coby White scored 24 points, Ayo Dosunmu had 19 and host Chi- cago beat Brooklyn to split a home-and-home set.

Nikola Vucevic added 17 points, 11 rebounds and six assists for the Bulls. Matias Buzelis also scored 17.

Nolan Traore scored 16 points for the Nets. Danny Wolf and Jalen Wilson each had 14. Brooklyn has lost nine of 11.

Hornets 110, Nuggets 87: Brandon Miller scored 23 points, Tidjane Salaun came off the bench to add 13 points and 11 rebounds, and visiting Charlotte blew past injury-de-

pleted Denver.

Rookie big man Ryan Kalk- brenner had 17 points and six rebounds, Collin Sexton had 14 points and five assists, and La- Melo Ball had 10 points, six assists and three steals for the Hornets.

The Nuggets were without five of their top eight scorers — center Nikola Jokic, forward Aaron Gordon, forward Came- ron Johnson, guard Christian Braun and center Jonas Valan- ciunas. The five players com- bined to average 77.3 points per game.

Trail Blazers 117, Kings 110: Deni Avdija had 26 points, eight assists and eight rebounds in his return from a back injury to help visiting Portland beat Sacramento.

Avdija missed three games after straining his lower back late in a game against New York last Sunday. He looked fine while helping the Trail Blazers secure their ninth vic- tory in their last 12 games, going 10 of 18 from the floor in 31 minutes.

Donovan Clingan added 21 points and 17 rebounds.

Red Wings defeat Senators on DeBrincat's OT goal

Associated Press

DETROIT — Alex DeBrincat scored 36 seconds into overtime to give the surging Detroit Red Wings a 4-3 win over the Ottawa Senators on Sunday.

Axel Sandin-Pellikka, Lucas Raymond and James van Riemsdyk also scored for Detroit. Patrick Kane assisted on Sandin-Pellikka's goal, moving him two points shy of Mike Modano's record of 1,374 career points by a U.S.-born player.

John Gibson made 19 saves for his 15th victory in his last 17 games. The Red Wings im- proved to 9-4 in overtime games.

Drake Batherson had a goal and an assist for Ottawa. Dylan

Cozens and Shane Pinto also scored, and James Reimer made 30 saves.

DeBrincat's team-high 26th goal was set up by Andrew Copp as Detroit kept pace with Tampa Bay atop the Atlantic Division standings. The Red Wings have won six of their last seven games.

Van Riemsdyk's power-play goal off a rebound with 3:07 left in the second period involved some nifty stick work. He maneuvered the puck between his legs and shot it over Reimer's pad with the stick behind the back.

Lightning 4, Stars 1: Brandon Hagel's tiebreaking goal midway through the second pe-

riod proved to be the winner, and Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 19 saves on 20 shots as visit- ing Tampa Bay beat Dallas.

Hagel took a pass at the goal line to the left side of Stars goal- tender Jake Oettinger, playing off the line, and muscled the puck through the stick of Dallas defenseman Esa Lindell for a 2-1 lead. It was Hagel's sixth winning goal this season, tied for second in the NHL behind Nashville's Steven Stamkos, who has seven.

The Lightning are a league- best 18-4-4 on the road and 20- 1-0 when leading after two peri- ods.

Oskar Back scored for the struggling Stars, who came off a

2-3-1 road trip and have lost three straight in regulation, scoring one goal in each game

Oilers 5, Blues 0: Zach Hy- man had two goals and an assist, Connor Ingram made 27 saves for his first shutout of the season and host Edmonton beat St. Louis.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins played in his 1,000th regular-season contest, becoming just the 63rd player in history to record a goal in his milestone match. Connor McDavid and Mattias Ekholm each had a pair of assists.

The Oilers are now 21-1-4 when scoring first this season.

Jordan Binnington had 23 saves for the Blues, who snapped a two-game win streak.