

# Rubio defends Trump on Venezuela

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Secretary of State Marco Rubio gave a full-throated defense Wednesday of President Donald Trump's military operation to oust and arrest then-Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, while also using his wide-ranging congressional testimony to touch on Greenland, NATO, Iran and China.

As Republican and Democratic members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee offered starkly different readings of the administration's foreign policy, Rubio addressed Trump's intentions and his often bellicose rhetoric that have alarmed U.S. allies in Europe and elsewhere.

In the first public hearing since the Jan. 3 intervention to depose Maduro, Rubio said Trump had acted to take out a major U.S. national security threat in the Western Hemisphere. Trump's top diplomat said America was safer and more secure as a result and that the Republican administration would work with interim authorities to stabilize the South American country.

"We're not going to have this thing turn around overnight, but I think we're making good and decent progress," Rubio said. "We are certainly better off today in Venezuela than we were four weeks ago and I think and hope and expect that we'll be better off in three months and six months and nine months than we would have been had Maduro still been there."

The former Florida senator said that Venezuela's current leaders are cooperating and would soon begin to see benefits. But he backed away from re-

marks prepared for the hearing that Washington would not hesitate to take further military action should those leaders not fully accept Trump's demands.

"I can tell you right now with full certainty, we are not postured to nor do we intend or expect to have to take any military action in Venezuela at any time," Rubio said. "I think it would require the emergence of an imminent threat of the kind that we do not anticipate at this time."

He said Venezuela soon will be allowed to sell oil that is now subject to U.S. sanctions. The revenue would be set aside to pay for basic government services such as policing and health care. Oil sale money will be deposited in a U.S. Treasury-controlled account and released after the U.S. approves monthly budgets to be submitted by Venezuela, he said.

Republican senators, with few exceptions, praised the Venezuelan operation. Among Democrats, there was deep skepticism.

They questioned Trump's policies in Venezuela and their potential for encouraging moves by China against Taiwan and Russia even more so in Ukraine, as well as his threats to take Greenland from NATO ally Denmark and his insults about the alliance's contributions to U.S. security.

Rubio played them all down.

He said the uproar over Greenland within NATO is calming and that talks are underway about how to deal with Trump's demands. The Republican president insists the U.S. needs Greenland to counter threats from Russia and China, but he recently backed away

from a pledge to impose tariffs on several European countries that sent troops to the semiautonomous Danish territory in a show of solidarity.

"I think we're going to get something positive done," Rubio said.

Rubio dismissed criticism that Trump was undermining the alliance, while repeating the long-running American complaint that member nations need to boost their defense budgets.

"NATO needs to be reimagined," Rubio said. "I just think this president complains about it louder than other presidents."

He said China's stated goal to reunify Taiwan with the mainland would not be affected by any other world event, including the Maduro operation.

"The situation on Taiwan is a legacy project" that Chinese President Xi Jinping has made "very clear that that's what he intends to do and that's going to be irrespective anything that happens in the world," Rubio said.

As Trump once more threatens Iran with military action, Rubio said there was no current plan to attack. Asked about the potential for a change of government in Tehran, Rubio said that would require "a lot of careful thinking" because it would be "far more complex" than ousting Maduro.

The committee chairman, Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, praised Trump's decisions to remove Maduro, continue deadly military strikes on boats suspected of smuggling drugs in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean and seize sanctioned tankers.

Risch also offered new details on the operation in the Venezuela

lan capital, saying it involved "only about 200 troops" and a "firefight that lasted less than 27 minutes."

"This military action was incredibly brief, targeted and successful," Risch said, adding that the U.S. and other nations may have to assist Venezuela when it seeks to restore democratic elections. "Venezuela may require U.S. and international oversight to ensure these elections are indeed free and fair," he said.

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, the committee's top Democrat, questioned whether that operation was worth it, considering most of Maduro's top aides and lieutenants still run Venezuela and the economic situation there remains bleak.

"We've traded one dictator for another, so it's no wonder that so many of my constituents are asking, why is the president spending so much time focused on Venezuela instead of the cost of living and their kitchen table economic concerns?" she asked. "From Venezuela to Europe, the United States is spending more, risking more and achieving less."

Congressional Democrats have condemned Trump's moves as exceeding the authority of the executive branch, while most Republicans have supported them as a legitimate exercise of presidential power.

The GOP-led House narrowly defeated a war powers act resolution that would have directed Trump to remove U.S. troops from Venezuela. As Rubio argued, the administration says there are no U.S. troops on the ground in Venezuela despite a large military buildup in the region.

# 2 officers fired shots when protester killed

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Two federal officers fired shots during the encounter that killed Department of Veterans Affairs hospital ICU nurse Alex Pretti over the weekend in Minneapolis, a Customs and Border Protection official told Congress in a notice sent Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Ecuador's minister of foreign affairs filed an objection saying immigration agents tried to enter the country's consulate in the city without permission.

Officers tried to take Pretti into custody and he resisted, leading to a struggle, according to a notification to Congress. During the struggle, a Border Patrol agent yelled, "He's got a gun!" multiple times, the official said.

A Border Patrol officer and a CBP officer each fired Glock pistols, the notice said.

Investigators from CBP's Office of Professional Responsibility conducted the analysis based on a review of body camera footage and agency documentation, the notice said. The law requires the agency to inform relevant congressional committees about deaths in CBP custody within 72 hours.

The development came a day after President Donald Trump ordered border czar Tom Homan to take over his administration's immigration crackdown in Minnesota in the wake of Pretti's death, which was the second fatal shooting this month of a person at the hands of immigration law enforcement.

By sending Homan to Minnesota, "we're going to de-escalate a little bit," Trump said on Fox News' "Will Cain Show."

The president added of Homan, "Tom, as tough as he is, gets along" with governors and mayors, even in Democratic areas.

As he left the White House on Tuesday, the president was asked whether Pretti's killing was justified. He responded by saying that a "big investigation" was underway. In the hours after Pretti's death, some administration officials sought to blame the shooting on the 37-year-old intensive care nurse.

Stephen Miller, Trump's deputy chief of staff who had initially called Pretti "an assassin," issued a statement suggesting CBP offi-

cers in Minneapolis "may not have been following" protocol. He said the Homeland Security Department's initial statements about what transpired on Saturday was "based on reports from CBP on the ground."

A video of the Ecuadorian consulate entry attempt posted on social media shows a staffer running to the door to turn the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents away, telling them, "This is the Ecuadorian consulate. You're not allowed to enter." One ICE officer can be heard threatening to "grab" the staffer if he touched the agent before agreeing to leave. International law generally prohibits law enforcement authorities from entering foreign consulates or embassies without permission.

## Man wounded after trading gunfire with agents in Ariz.

Associated Press

A man who authorities say was involved in a human smuggling operation was shot Tuesday in an exchange of gunfire with the U.S. Border Patrol and after firing at a federal helicopter near the U.S.-Mexico border, authorities said.

Federal agents were attempting to apprehend the 34-year-old Arizona man during a traffic stop near Arivaca, Ariz., when he fled and shot at a Border Patrol helicopter and at agents, authorities said. Agents returned fire, striking the man and wounding him, FBI special agent Heith Janke said.

The suspect, Patrick Gary Schlegel, was transported to a hospital and was recovering from surgery Tuesday evening, authorities said. Pima County Sheriff Chris Nanos said during a news conference that he believes the Border Patrol agent

involved in the shooting "acted lawfully" based on what is known so far.

Prior to the shooting, agents had attempted to stop the same vehicle but the occupants drove away, Nanos said. Later in the morning, a border patrol agent saw the vehicle in the same area and attempted to stop it, but the driver fled on foot.

Schlegel was in federal custody and expected to be charged with assault on a federal officer, alien smuggling and felon in possession of a firearm, Janke said.

Schlegel has a criminal history that includes a December warrant for escape stemming from a human smuggling and firearms conviction, court records show. On Dec. 15, Schlegel signed out of the institution where he had been incarcerated, Dismas Charities in Tucson, to go to a counseling session but did not return.

## Noem faces rising calls for her firing or impeachment

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A groundswell of voices have come to the same conclusion: Kristi Noem must go.

From Democratic Party leaders to the nation's leading advocacy organizations to even the most centrist lawmakers in Congress, the calls are mounting for the Homeland Security secretary to step aside after the shooting deaths in Minneapolis of two people who protested deportation policy. At a defining moment in her tenure, few Republicans are rising to Noem's defense.

"The country is disgusted by what the Department of Homeland Security has done," top House Democratic Reps. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, Katherine Clark of Massachusetts and Pete Aguilar of California said in a joint statement.

"Kristi Noem should be fired

immediately," the Democrats said, "or we will commence impeachment proceedings in the House of Representatives."

What started as sharp criticism of the Homeland Security secretary, and a longshot move by Democratic lawmakers signing onto impeachment legislation in the Republican-controlled House, has morphed into an inflection point for Noem, who has been the high-profile face of the Trump administration's immigration enforcement.

Noem's brash leadership style and remarks in the aftermath of the shooting deaths of Alex Pretti and Renee Good have been seen as doing irreparable damage.

"What she's done in Minnesota should be disqualifying. She should be out of a job," said Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C.

President Donald Trump defended Noem on Wednesday.

# President aims to keep focus on affordability

Associated Press

CLIVE, Iowa—President Donald Trump on Tuesday made his first big pitch ahead of this year's midterm elections on his administration's economic performance, even as his White House remains mired in the fallout in Minneapolis over a second fatal shooting by federal immigration officers this month.

Trump gave a speech in a suburb of Des Moines where he talked up the tax cuts he signed into law last year and took credit for the soaring performance of the stock market, saying he "made a lot of people rich," including some "that I don't even like."

"If we lose the midterms, you'll lose so many of the things

that we're talking about," Trump told Iowans, who are expected to reflect their feelings on his presidency when they vote in two highly competitive congressional races later this year.

The trip for the Republican president was part of a White House push to focus more on affordability ahead of elections in November that will determine control of Congress.

But the president once again suggested that concerns about prices were exaggerated by his political opponents.

The visit was part of the White House's strategy to have Trump travel out of Washington once a week ahead of the midterm elections to focus on economic issues

facing everyday Americans — an effort that keeps getting diverted by crisis.

On the ground in Iowa, Trump first made a stop at a local restaurant, where he met with some locals and sat down for an interview with Fox News Channel — in which he said that he was currently attempting to "de-escalate a little bit" in Minnesota.

The latest effort comes as the Trump administration is grappling with the weekend shooting death of Alex Pretti, a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital ICU nurse killed by federal agents in Iowa's northern neighbor.

As he greeted diners at an Iowa restaurant, Trump weighed in with comments that were like-

ly to exacerbate frustration among some of his backers who are also strong Second Amendment proponents.

"He certainly shouldn't have been carrying a gun," Trump said of Pretti.

He called it a "very, very unfortunate incident" but said: "I don't like that he had a gun. I don't like that he had two fully loaded magazines. That's a lot of bad stuff."

Trump, speaking Tuesday in Clive, a suburb of Des Moines, talked up the wide-ranging tariffs he imposed on nearly all U.S. trading partners.

He also promoted the deals he's struck with drugmakers to get them to lower costs on some prescription drugs.

## Man arrested after spraying an unknown substance on Rep. Omar

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A man sprayed an unknown substance on Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar and was tackled to the ground Tuesday during a town hall in Minneapolis, where tensions over federal immigration enforcement have come to a head after agents fatally shot an intensive care nurse and a mother of three this month.

The audience cheered as the man was pinned down and his arms were tied behind his back. In video of the incident, someone in the crowd can be heard saying, "Oh my God, he sprayed something on her."

Just before that Omar had called for the abolishment of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and for Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem to resign or face impeachment. Calls are mounting on Capitol Hill for Noem to step down after the shooting deaths in Minnesota.

polis of two people who protested deportations. Few Republicans have risen to her defense.

"ICE cannot be reformed," Omar said, seconds before the attack.

Minneapolis police said officers saw the man use a syringe to spray an unknown liquid at Omar. They immediately arrested him and booked him at the county jail for third-degree assault, spokesperson Trevor Folke said. Forensic scientists responded to the scene.

Police identified the man as 55-year-old Anthony Kazmierczak.

Omar continued speaking for about 25 more minutes after the man was ushered out by security, saying she would not be intimidated.

There was a strong, vinegar-like smell after the man pushed on the syringe, according to an Associated Press journalist who was there.

## Deaths rise as cold grips storm-socked US states

Associated Press

Three Texas siblings who perished in an icy pond were among several dozen deaths in U.S. states gripped by frigid cold as crews scrambled Tuesday to repair hundreds of thousands of power outages in the shivering South and forecasters warned the winter weather is expected to get worse.

Brutal cold lingered in the wake of a massive storm that dumped deep snow across more than 1,300 miles from Arkansas to New England and left parts of the South coated in treacherous ice.

Freezing temperatures hovered Tuesday as far south as Tennessee, Arkansas and North Carolina and were forecast to plunge again overnight. Parts of northern Florida were expected to sink to 25 degrees Fahrenheit late Tuesday into early Wednesday.

The U.S. aviation system was returning to normal after a brutal weekend that saw more than 17,000 commercial flights canceled. There were about 6,300

cancellations in the U.S. Monday and about 2,500 Tuesday, according to FlightAware, a flight tracking and data company. Less than 500 were anticipated to be canceled Wednesday.

The arctic misery over the eastern half of the U.S. was expected to worsen Friday and Saturday. The National Weather Service said another winter storm could hit parts of the East Coast this weekend, and more record lows were forecast as far south as Florida.

Crews were working feverishly to restore power to the more than 410,000 homes and businesses without electricity Tuesday evening. Over half the outages were in Tennessee and Mississippi, where temperatures could bottom out at the end of the week.

Officials in states afflicted with severe cold reported at least 50 deaths.

Three brothers ages 6, 8 and 9 died Monday after falling through ice on a private pond near Bonham, Texas, Fannin County Sheriff Cody Shook said Tuesday.

# Denmark and Greenland hold European talks after US deal

Bloomberg News

Denmark and Greenland's leaders are in Berlin and Paris this week to shore up European backing after a framework deal with the U.S. paved the way for negotiations on the Arctic island.

In Berlin, Mette Frederiksen and Jens-Frederik Nielsen attended the Welt Economic Summit on Tuesday, meeting policy-makers and diplomats to discuss the the geopolitical situation.

They also spoke with Chancellor Friedrich Merz, according to a spokesperson for the German government.

It comes after President Donald Trump and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte last week agreed to a "framework" over Greenland, with discussions expected to focus on areas includ-

ing mining rights, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's role on the island and the defense relationship between Denmark and the U.S.

Trump has said he needs control of Greenland for national security purposes, though he has confirmed he won't use force to take over the territory.

Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark but has its own government. Frederiksen and Nielsen will travel to Paris for a working lunch with French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday.

They are set to discuss security issues in the Arctic and the economic and social development of Greenland, "which France and the European Union are ready to support," the Elysee said in a statement.

On Monday, Frederiksen reiterated Denmark seeks a permanent NATO presence in Greenland, similar to the Baltic Sentry operation in the Baltic Sea.

"This would not only be important for NATO's northern flank, but would also send a very strong geopolitical signal to Russia and China," she said at a wind energy summit in Hamburg. "We are working toward this and at the same time we are talking bilaterally with the United States about issues that concern us and the United States."

Merz on Tuesday told Frederiksen that "Germany, as a European NATO ally, would also do more for security in the High North within the framework of NATO. This is a common transatlantic interest," the spokesperson said.

# Opponent challenges Tuberville residency

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A Republican opponent is challenging U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville's eligibility to run for governor of Alabama, accusing the football coach-turned-politician of not meeting the legal requirement to have lived in the state for seven years.

Ken McFeeters, who is running against Tuberville for the Republican nomination for governor, filed the challenge Tuesday with the Alabama Republican Party. McFeeters in a phone interview said he believes Tuberville lives in a multimillion-dollar beach home in Florida instead of a smaller home that he has listed as his residence in Auburn, Ala.

Property tax records show the former Auburn University football coach has a home in Auburn with an appraised value of \$291,780 on which he claims a homestead exemption. He also has a beach home in Walton County, Fla., with an estimated market value of \$5.5 million, according to property records.

The Auburn house was initially purchased by Tuberville's wife and son in 2017. The senator's name was later added to the property, and the son's name removed. Both homes appear to have recently been put in a revocable trust with Tuberville's wife as trustee.

Mallory Jaspers, a spokeswoman for Tuberville, called the challenge a "ridiculous PR stunt from a desperate candidate."

"Senator Tuberville has proudly represented Alabama in the United States Senate for the past six years. This made-up narrative didn't work when he was running for Senate in 2019, and it certainly isn't going to work now," Jaspers wrote in an email.

# Combined casualties in war in Ukraine could soon hit 2M

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A new report warns that the number of soldiers killed, injured or missing on both sides of Russia's war on Ukraine could hit 2 million by the spring, with Russia suffering the largest number of troop deaths recorded for any major power in any conflict since World War II.

Tuesday's report from the Center for Strategic and International Studies came less than a month before the fourth anniversary of Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

As the war grinds through another bitterly cold winter, Russian strikes hit an apartment block Wednesday on the outskirts of Kyiv, killing two people.

Nine others were also injured in different attacks in the Ukrai-

nian cities of Odesa and Kryvyi Rih and the front-line region of Zaporizhzhia.

The CSIS report said Russia suffered 1.2 million casualties, including up to 325,000 troop deaths, between February 2022 and December 2025.

"Despite claims of battlefield momentum in Ukraine, the data shows that Russia is paying an extraordinary price for minimal gains and is in decline as a major power," the report said. "No major power has suffered anywhere near these numbers of casualties or fatalities in any war since World War II."

It estimated that Ukraine, with its smaller army and population, had suffered between 500,000 to 600,000 military casualties, including up to 140,000 deaths.

Neither Moscow nor Kyiv gives timely data on military losses, and each side seeks to amplify the other side's casualties.

The report estimated that at current rates, combined Russian and Ukrainian casualties may be as high as 1.8 million and could reach 2 million by spring.

The figures from the CSIS were compiled using the Washington, D.C.-based think tank's own analysis, data published by independent Russian news site Mediazona with the BBC, estimates by the British government and interviews with state officials.

The report also said that Russian forces were advancing at a sluggish pace since they seized the initiative on the battlefield in 2024, despite their much larger size.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Charlotte man pleads guilty to monkey abuse

**NC** CHARLOTTE — A Charlotte man last week pleaded guilty to federal charges related to abuse of monkeys.

Robert M. Craig pleaded guilty based on his involvement with online groups dedicated to creating and distributing videos depicting extreme acts of violence and sexual abuse of monkeys, according to a Department of Justice release.

According to court documents, Craig conspired with others to create and distribute so-called “animal crush videos” which depicted acts of sadistic violence against baby and adult monkeys.

Craig signed a statement of facts saying he shared a video in which a monkey was mutilated, and other videos shared by the conspirators also depicted mutilation and sodomization of monkeys.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and FBI investigated the case.

### Suburban school district fights rare state takeover

**NJ** LAKEWOOD — Lakewood’s school board says it will fight the state’s plan to take over its school district, arguing the unusual move is “neither warranted nor in the best interest” of the Ocean County community.

Outgoing state Education Commissioner Kevin Dehmer announced earlier this month that the state initiated a process to take over Lakewood Township School District. State officials said the suburban district has had years of financial and

operational problems that are denying students a proper education.

The Lakewood Board of Education issued a statement last week saying it plans to “defend the integrity” of the district and fight the state’s plan.

New Jersey has previously taken over school districts in Jersey City, Paterson, Newark and Camden amid concerns about mismanagement and poor test scores. If successful, Lakewood would be the first full state takeover in a suburban area.

### Body found in dunes in search for missing man

**NC** CAPE HATTERAS — The search for a missing Arkansas man on North Carolina’s Outer Banks took an unexpected turn when a different body was found, according to investigators.

The identity of the person and a cause of death have not been released.

“On Jan. 25, a Cape Hatteras National Seashore visitor found a deceased male in the dunes south of off-road vehicle Ramp 2,” the park said in an email to The Charlotte Observer.

The incident appears to be unrelated to any ongoing investigations in Dare County.”

A search has been ongoing since Jan. 16 for Christopher Lee Palmer, 39, after the Arkansas man’s Ford F-250 was found stuck on the beach at Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

Traffic cameras show the pickup was in Dare County as early as Jan. 9, and it was hauling a blue and white kayak, officials say. That kayak was not in the truck when it was found Jan. 12 at Cape Point, park officials

said.

Palmer’s father, Bren Palmer, says his son was dealing with a terminal illness and may have chosen to die at sea rather than face treatments. Chris Palmer was traveling with his 11-year-old dog Zoey, who is also believed to be dead, the family said in a Facebook post.

### Vet, key to first Trump impeachment, seeks seat

**FL** TALLAHASSEE — Alex Vindman, who became a key player along with his twin brother in President Donald Trump’s first impeachment, announced on Tuesday that he is running for the U.S. Senate as a Democrat in Florida.

Vindman, an Army veteran, was serving on the National Security Council in 2019 when the Republican president pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to investigate Joe Biden, then a Democratic candidate. He and his brother, Eugene, a lawyer on the National Security Council, reported their concerns and sparked investigations.

Eugene Vindman now serves as a congressman from Virginia. If Alex Vindman clinches the Democratic nomination, he’ll challenge Republican Sen. Ashley Moody, a former state attorney general who was appointed to fill the seat vacated by Marco Rubio as he became secretary of state.

The winner of November’s special election will finish the last two years of Rubio’s term.

Vindman was forced out of the National Security Council and later retired from the Army after testifying against Trump during impeachment hearings.

He said “this president unleashed a reign of terror and retribution, not just against me and my family but against all of us.”

### Ex-Olympian pleads not guilty to drug charges

**CA** SANTA ANA — A former Canadian Olympic snowboarder pleaded not guilty to running a billion-dollar drug trafficking ring and orchestrating multiple killings, as one of the FBI’s top fugitives made his first U.S. court appearance Monday since he was arrested in Mexico last week and flown to California.

U.S. authorities say Ryan Wedding, who competed in a single event for his home country in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, had been hiding in Mexico for more than a decade. He was added to the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list last March when authorities offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to his arrest and conviction.

Authorities say Wedding moved as much as 60 tons of cocaine between Colombia, Mexico, Canada and Southern California and believe he was working under the protection of the Sinaloa Cartel, one of Mexico’s most powerful drug rings. His drug trafficking group was the largest supplier of cocaine to Canada, according to a 2024 indictment.

Mexican officials said he turned himself in at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City last week and was flown to Southern California after a yearlong effort by authorities in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Colombia and the Dominican Republic to arrest him.

— From wire reports

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## Reporting World, National and Military News

# Belichick not voted into Hall in 1st year

Associated Press

Six-time Super Bowl champion head coach Bill Belichick didn't get voted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility, according to a report from ESPN.

Citing four unidentified sources, ESPN reported Tuesday that Belichick didn't receive the necessary 40 votes from the 50-person panel of media members and other Hall of Famers. ESPN said Belichick received a call from the Hall of Fame last Friday with the news.

The Hall of Fame declined to comment before its class of

2026 is announced at NFL Honors in San Francisco on Feb. 5.

The report of Belichick's snub was met with significant criticism, including from Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, who posted on social media: "Insane ... don't even understand how this could be possible."

Belichick was hired by New England in 2000 and led the franchise to six Super Bowl wins and three other appearances in the title game during an 18-year span from 2001-18. Belichick's 333 wins in the regular season and playoffs are the sec-

ond most to Don Shula's 347. He won AP NFL Coach of the Year three times.

Belichick also was one of the game's top defensive assistants before taking over in New England, winning two earlier Super Bowls as defensive coordinator for the New York Giants.

Belichick's career did have blemishes. He was implicated in a sign-stealing scandal dubbed "Spygate" in the 2007 season and was fined \$500,000 after the team was caught filming defensive signals from the New York Jets during a game.

Belichick's tenure in New

England ended following the 2023 season. He just finished his first year coaching in college at North Carolina.

Belichick was one of five finalists among coaches, contributors and senior players who last appeared in a game in 2000 or earlier. Patriots owner Robert Kraft was the contributor finalist, with Roger Craig, Ken Anderson and L.C. Greenwood the players.

Between one and three of those finalists will be inducted into the Hall along with 3-5 modern-era players from a group of 15 finalists.

## George, Embiid give 76ers energy in win over Bucks

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Paul George scored 32 points, Joel Embiid had 18 of his 29 points in the first quarter and the Philadelphia 76ers rolled to a 139-122 victory over the short-handed Milwaukee Bucks on Tuesday night.

Tyrese Maxey added 22 points for Philadelphia, which was blown out a night earlier at Charlotte with Embiid and George sidelined.

Myles Turner scored 31 points for Milwaukee, which lost its third straight and sixth of seven. Two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo sat out with a right calf strain that the team said will sideline him indefinitely.

George hit back-to-back 3-pointers early in the fourth quarter to help the 76ers extend their 11-point lead to start the period to 18 points.

After the game against the Hornets, the Sixers didn't make it back to Philadelphia until after 1 a.m. Tuesday.

But the return of Embiid and George, who both sat Monday for injury management, provided a jolt of energy for the Sixers. Maxey found Embiid for an alley-oop dunk late in the first half and Maxey jumped up and down

with excitement as both players smiled toward Bucks coach Doc Rivers, who led the Sixers for three seasons.

George made 11 of 21 shots, including 9 of 15 3-pointers. Embiid added nine rebounds and five assists.

**Wizards 115, Trail Blazers 111:** Alex Sarr had 29 points, 12 rebounds and six blocked shots, and host Washington snapped a nine-game losing streak with a victory over Portland.

The Wizards led 112-106 when Shaedon Sharpe hit a 3-pointer and a dunk to cut the lead to one with 20.5 seconds left.

Kyshawn George made one of two free throws with 15.5 seconds to play, and Khris Middleton's free throws made it a four-point game.

**Knicks 103, Kings 87:** Jalen Brunson scored 28 points and host New York dominated the fourth quarter to beat Sacramento for its third straight victory.

Mikal Bridges added 18 points and Karl-Anthony Towns had 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Knicks, who outscored the Kings 31-15 in the final period after the game was tied at 72 after three.

DeMar DeRozan scored 34

points for Sacramento, which lost its sixth straight.

**Thunder 104, Pelicans 95:** Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 29 points and host Oklahoma City beat New Orleans to avoid its first three-game skid of the season.

Chet Holmgren had 20 points, 14 rebounds and five blocks for the NBA-best Thunder (38-10).

Gilgeous-Alexander shot 8-for-22 from the field but went 13-for-14 from the line. He scored at least 20 points for the 118th consecutive game, the second-longest streak in NBA history.

Zion Williamson led the Pelicans with 21 points on 8-for-11 shooting and 11 rebounds.

**Pistons 109, Nuggets 107:** Tobias Harris scored 22 points, including two free throws with 2 seconds left, and visiting Detroit held off a late Denver rally for the win.

Cade Cunningham had 22 points and 11 assists for the Pistons, who have won nine of 11 and lead the Eastern Conference by 5½ games over Boston.

Jamal Murray had 24 points and 10 assists, but missed two free throws in the final seconds.

**Suns 106, Nets 102:** Mark Williams scored 27 points, Dillon Brooks had 26 and short-

handed Phoenix beat visiting Brooklyn in a game that featured a scuffle late in the fourth quarter.

After Brooks put the Suns ahead 104-102 on two free throws with 1:23 remaining, a steal by Phoenix's Royce O'Neale led to a scramble for the ball in the paint. Brooks tried to wrestle the ball away from Zaire Williams after the whistle, and the Nets' Egor Demin pushed Brooks.

Michael Porter Jr. finished with a season-high 36 points for Brooklyn, which has lost six straight and 14 of 16.

**Clippers 115, Jazz 103:** Kawhi Leonard scored 21 points, James Harden had 16 points and 10 assists, and visiting Los Angeles beat Utah for its ninth win in 10 games.

Kris Dunn added 14 points and a season-best five steals for the Clippers (22-24), who have the best record in the NBA since Christmas. They have won 16 of their last 19 games — immediately after going 3-16 in their previous 19.

Ace Bailey scored 20 points and Brice Sensabaugh added 13, but the Jazz (15-32) have dropped seven of their last eight games.

# Pegula finally reaches Australian Open semis

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — After three previous losses in Australian Open quarterfinals, Jessica Pegula defeated Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 7-6 (1) on Wednesday to advance to the final four at Melbourne Park for the first time.

It marked Pegula's 14th win in her past 15 matches against fellow Americans, continuing her strong run of domestic dominance.

In the earlier quarterfinal at Rod Laver Arena, Elena Rybakina defeated Iga Swiatek 7-5, 6-1 to prevent the Polish player from completing a career Grand Slam of singles titles.

Pegula meets Rybakina in one semifinal Thursday, while top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka will play Elina Svitolina in the other.

The 31-year-old Pegula also beat Madison Keys, another American and the defending champion, in her previous match to advance to the quarterfinals.

Pegula is looking for her first Grand Slam title while Rybaki-

na is after her second after winning Wimbledon in 2022.

Pegula was almost perfect in winning the first set and closed it out with an ace. The second set was much closer, with each breaking the other twice.

"I've been waiting for the time when I can kind of break through," she said of her semifinal appearance. "I feel like I really play some good tennis here and I like the conditions."

Pegula said she knew Anisimova would step up in the second set.

"I felt like I could win the rallies and I could put pressure on her serves," Pegula said. "I just told myself to gear right back up. You've got to win the tiebreak unless you want to go to a third set, and I really didn't want to."

Rybakina and Pegula are 3-3 in head-to-head play.

Swiatek is a four-time French Open champion and has won the U.S. Open and Wimbledon. She was trying to become the 11th woman to complete a career Grand Slam.

The first set took an hour and

Rybakina broke Swiatek in the final game. The second was almost the opposite.

Rybakina, who was born in Russia but represents Kazakhstan, broke her Polish opponent twice to start the set and moved to a 3-0 lead. She served two aces to go ahead 4-1, broke in the sixth game and finished the match with an ace.

The two played each other five times last season.

"We know each other pretty well," Rybakina said. "In the first set, for both of us, the first serve was not really working so we were trying to step in on the second serve and put pressure on the other."

"In the second I just started to play more freely and served better. For now the serve is really helping, so hopefully I can continue like this."

Rybakina spoke for most players about the grind of the Grand Slam tournaments — two weeks of trying to stay focused.

"There is always, like, challenging days," she said, "You can play indoor, you can play

outdoor, sun, it can be night match. So all these conditions a bit tricky. Also, how quick you can adapt to these circumstances."

"When it's the first final and you go so far in the tournament, of course you are more emotional," she added.

The top four seeds reached the final four in the men's draw, with two-time defending champion Jannik Sinner and 10-time Australian Open winner Novak Djokovic advancing Wednesday to a semifinal featuring No. 2 vs. No. 4. No. 1 Carlos Alcaraz will face No. 3 Alexander Zverev in Friday's other semifinal.

Djokovic, who had the benefit of a walkover in the fourth round, dropped the first two sets of his quarterfinal before fifth-seeded Lorenzo Musetti was forced to retire with an injured leg.

Sinner was all business in a 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 win over eighth-seeded Ben Shelton in the night match on Rod Laver Arena to extend his streak to 19 at Melbourne Park.

## Nebraska's perfect season ends with loss to Michigan

Associated Press

Major college basketball's longest winning streak ended at 24 games Tuesday night with No. 5 Nebraska's 75-72 loss at No. 3 Michigan.

"To beat Michigan, you have to play almost perfect and we had a lapse at the end," Cornhuskers guard Sam Hoiberg said.

Nebraska did not score over the final 3:20, missing its last five shots after leading most of the game despite two key players being out of the lineup. The Wolverines' Trey McKenney made a tiebreaking layup with 1:07 left, and Morez Johnson Jr. had 17 points and 12 rebounds.

"That just proved, hopefully to everybody, most importantly to the guys in the locker room, that we can compete with anybody," coach Fred Hoiberg said.

Rienk Mast missed the game with an illness as did double-digit scorer Braden Frager, who was out for a second straight game with an ankle injury.

"It's unfortunate, but I give our guys a lot of credit for the fight they showed in the game from start to finish," Fred Hoiberg said.

The 24-game winning streak was an improbable run for a school with a modest history in men's basketball. Nebraska has emerged as the feel-good story of the season before hitting a bump in the road at the Crisler Center in Ann Arbor, Mich.

The Cornhuskers' previous loss came in last year's final regular-season game, 83-68 to Iowa at home March 9. The streak started when they swept through four games to win the inaugural College Basketball Crown tournament in Las Vegas last April.

"We haven't had this feeling in a long time. It's been almost a year," Hoiberg said. "They were hurt by it. We're going to find out what we're made of."

Nebraska will have some time to regroup before hosting No. 9 Illinois on Sunday.

The Huskers' 20-1 start remains the pro-

gram's best and their No. 5 ranking in this week's AP Top 25 poll is the highest in school history.

The 24-game streak was the longest in Division I since Gonzaga reeled off 35 in a row between 2019-21.

Nebraska entered this season with 500-to-1 odds of winning the national championship. That was down to 35 to 1 on BetMGM Sportsbook before Tuesday's game.

The winning streak captured the imaginations of college basketball fans because so little is expected of Nebraska on the hardcourt.

The Cornhuskers are the only power-conference program that's never won an NCAA Tournament game, with an 0-8 record in March Madness. Nebraska's most recent regular-season conference championship was in 1950, and the school has finished with a winning conference record in just three of its first 14 seasons in the Big Ten.

# Kane ties record for points in Wings' loss

Associated Press

DETROIT — Anton Forsberg made 26 saves and the Los Angeles Kings beat the Red Wings 3-1 on Tuesday night as Detroit winger Patrick Kane moved into a tie with Dallas' Mike Modano as the highest-scoring American-born players in NHL history.

Kane matched Modano by recording his 1,374th point on an assist on a goal by Alex DeBrincat late in the third period. He accomplished the feat just a couple of months after turning 37, while Modano was 40 when he scored a goal to register point No. 1,374. For his career, Kane has 500 goals and 874 assists in 1,341 NHL regular-season games. Modano retired in 2011 with 561 goals and 813 assists in 1,499 games.

"Nothing really went right for us tonight, so it's tough to really think about (the record) right now, but hopefully next game's a better result and (I) can move past Mike next game," Kane said after the game. "That'd be nice, to do that and do it with a win."

Kane has been one of the faces of American hockey since getting taken with the first pick in the 2007 draft by Chicago. He helped the Blackhawks win the Stanley Cup three times from 2010-15 as a co-headliner of one of the most successful runs since the league's salary cap era began in '05.

Samuel Helenius, Andrei Kuzmenko and Corey Perry scored for the Kings, who won their third straight game.

Detroit's John Gibson made 19 saves and had his eight-game win streak halted, surrendering a goal midway through the second period and a power-play score early in the third.

The Kings have earned points in their last six games (3-0-3). The Red Wings lost for just the second time in six games and third time in their last 11.

Helenius got Los Angeles on

the board at the 10-minute mark of the second period, scoring his second of the season by converting a feed from Jeff Malott from behind the net.

Kuzmenko extended the lead to 2-0 for the Kings at 6:46 of the third period, scoring on the power play on assists from Adrian Kempe and Kevin Fiala. The goal was the 24th of the season with a man advantage for the Kings, who rank last in the NHL on the power play.

DeBrincat scored and pulled Detroit within 2-1 at 17:45 of the third period after the Red Wings pulled Gibson for the extra skater. Kane and Moritz Seider assisted.

The Kings iced the game when Perry scored into an empty net at 18:47.

**Jets 4, Devils 3:** Mark Scheifele scored his 26th goal of the season, reigning MVP Connor Hellebuyck stopped 26 of the 29 shots he faced and visiting Winnipeg ended its two-game skid by beating New Jersey.

The Devils have lost back-to-back games after winning three in a row at the start of their Western Conference road trip. They traded veteran winger Ondrej Palat to the New York Islanders in a deal that was consummated before he left the arena prior to warmups and finalized during the first period.

**Bruins 3, Predators 2 (OT):** David Pastrnak scored 15 seconds into overtime and host Boston beat Nashville.

Pastrnak tipped a pass from Charlie McAvoy past Juuse Saros for the winner as the Bruins held on after Nashville rallied from a 2-0 deficit to force overtime.

Jeremy Swayman stopped 28 shots for the Bruins, who improved to 8-1-1 in their last 10 games.

Roman Josi and Nick Blankenborg scored for Nashville, which has lost four of five since a three-game winning streak. Steven Stamkos had an assist

and Saros finished with 25 saves.

**Canadiens 3, Golden Knights 2 (OT):**

Jake Evans scored at 3:58 of overtime, leading Montreal to a home victory over Vegas.

Cole Caufield, with his 30th goal of the season, and Phillip Danault also scored for Montreal, as the Habs halted a two-game losing skid.

Pavel Dorofeyev scored both goals for the Golden Knights, who lost their third straight game against Montreal, dating back to last season.

**Mammoth 4, Panthers 3:**

Mikhail Sergachev scored in the third period to put Utah ahead to stay in a road win over Florida.

Nick Schmaltz, Sean Durzi and Barrett Hayton also scored goals for the Mammoth, who have won nine of their last 11 games and played without top goal-scorer Dylan Guenther, who has a lower-body injury.

Sergachev's goal with 8:55 to play gave Utah a 3-2 lead and Hayton made it 4-2 with an empty-netter with 56 seconds to play. Carter Verhaeghe scored with 16 seconds left to pull the Panthers within 4-3, setting up a frantic final few seconds.

**Sabres 7, Maple Leafs 4:**

Rasmus Dahlin had the first hat trick of his NHL career to go along with two assists and visiting Buffalo beat Toronto.

Tage Thompson, with a goal and an assist in his 500th NHL game, Josh Doan, Alex Tuch and Jack Quinn also scored for Buffalo, which has won four straight.

The Maple Leafs came home from a successful road trip, but finished their disastrous five-game homestand with a solitary point (0-4-1) and have dropped seven of eight overall.

**Stars 4, Blues 3:** Thomas Harley's goal with just over a minute left short-circuited a late rally by St. Louis and lifted Dallas to a road win.

Matt Duchene scored a pair of goals for his first multigoal game since Feb. 8. Roope Hintz also scored and Jake Oettinger made 23 saves, as the Stars won for the third time in their last four games and improved to 10-2-1 against St. Louis going back to Nov. 28, 2022.

Brayden Schenn scored twice and Robby Fabbri also scored in the third period as St. Louis attempted to rally from a 3-goal deficit. Jordan Binnington made 20 saves for the Blues, who dropped their fifth straight game.

**Wild 4, Blackhawks 3 (SO):**

Kirill Kaprizov scored the shootout winner as host Minnesota defeated Chicago.

Kaprizov was Minnesota's second shooter and beat Spencer Knight with a wrist shot. Wild goalie Jesper Wallstedt stopped all three shootout attempts as the Wild came back from a 3-0 deficit to beat Chicago for the 17th time in 18 games.

**Sharks 5, Canucks 2:** Macklin Celebreni had a goal and three assists, visiting San Jose scored three first-period goals in a span of 4:04, and went on to beat Vancouver.

Celebreni now has 78 points in 51 games this season.

Adam Gaudette, Tyler Toffoli, Will Smith and John Klingberg also had goals for the Sharks, and Yaroslav Askarov improved to 17-13-1 with 23 saves.

**Kraken 5, Capitals 1:** Jared McCann had two goals and two assists as host Seattle beat Washington.

Jordan Eberle and Matty Beniers each added a goal and an assist. Ryker Evans also scored for Seattle, and Philipp Grubauer made 19 saves.

Alex Ovechkin scored his 22nd goal of the season for Washington, and Logan Thompson stopped 27 shots. It was the 919th career goal for Ovechkin, extending his NHL record.