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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Dems: 70K civilians targeted in DOD firings

BY LINDA F. HERSEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers are warning the Defense Department is preparing to fire tens of thousands of civilian workers — many of them veterans — in a “tsunami of layoffs” that could pose a risk to national security.

More than 70,000 civilian personnel are being targeted for a mass firing similar to the terminations of probationary employees recently carried out at multiple federal agencies, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said Thursday during a news conference.

Affected jobs could span logistics, equipment maintenance, aircraft repair and information security, he said.

“This will inevitably impact defense readiness,” Blumenthal said. “There’s a domino effect that will extend across the

military. People get demoralized and disillusioned. Costs go well beyond dollars and cents.”

The Pentagon has already announced that it plans to terminate 5,400 workers in a first phase of cuts. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had said he expected the reductions would impact 5% to 8% of the civilian workforce.

He also said a hiring freeze will be implemented after the layoffs while a review of staffing needs at the Defense Department is conducted.

The review will help identify “low-impact and low-priority” programs that could be eliminated, according to the department. Robert Salesses, acting deputy defense secretary, stated the initiative would reallocate \$50 billion in fiscal 2026 to reflect the priorities of President Donald Trump’s administration.

Blumenthal, who was joined by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., said a memo on Trump’s budget “relook” for fiscal 2026 contains a list of proposed budget reductions amounting to an 8% to 10% cut of the existing Defense Department budget estimate of \$876 billion.

Fiscal 2026 starts Oct. 1, 2025, and runs through Sept. 30, 2026. The senators did not provide the memo.

Blumenthal and Kaine are members of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Blumenthal also sits on the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing Thursday to consider John Phelan as Navy secretary, Blumenthal criticized cuts to the civilian workforce proposed in the memo that include reductions of more than 70,000 personnel and \$70 billion in spending.

“The administration appears to be undertaking a first wave — part of a purge — an 8% slash to both the budget and defense workforce,” he said.

“I view it as a breathtaking act of disrespect. The administration branded these positions as non-mission critical,” Blumenthal added.

Phelan said the proposed budget cuts are for planning purposes only and the reductions will come from non-warfighting elements.

At the same time, the House last week approved a budget framework that would allocate an additional \$100 billion for defense spending in the next decade as part of Trump’s domestic agenda.

The Senate also advanced its own budget blueprint last week that calls for allocating an extra \$150 billion in spending for the military.

Transgender troops now being ID'd for removal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The military services have 30 days to figure out how they will seek out and identify transgender service members to remove them from the force — a daunting task that may end up relying on troops self-reporting or tattling on their colleagues.

A memo sent to Defense Department leaders on Thursday — after the Pentagon filed it late Wednesday as part of a response to a lawsuit — orders the services to set up procedures to identify troops diagnosed with or being treated for gender dysphoria by March 26. They will then have 30 days to begin removing those troops from service.

The order expands on the executive order signed by President Donald Trump during his early days in office setting out steps toward banning transgender individuals from serving in the military. The directive has been challenged in court.

A senior defense official said Thursday they believe there are about 4,200 troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria currently serving in the active duty, National Guard and Reserves.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel issues, said that between 2015 and 2024, the total cost for psychotherapy, gender-affirming hormone therapy, gender-affirming surgery and

other treatment for service members is about \$52 million.

However, the issue has taken up a large part of the Pentagon’s attention and time as Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth work to root them out, arguing that their medical condition doesn’t meet military standards.

“The medical, surgical, and mental health constraints on individuals who have a current diagnosis or history of, or exhibit symptoms consistent with, gender dysphoria are incompatible with the high mental and physical standards necessary for military service,” Darin Selnick, who is serving as defense undersecretary for personnel,

said in the new memo.

It claims that the lethality and integrity of the military “is inconsistent” with what transgender personnel go through as they transition to the gender they identify with, and it issues an edict that gender is “immutable, unchanging during a person’s life.”

Lawyers for six transgender service members who are suing over Trump’s executive order have argued in court filings that his directive openly expresses “hostility” toward transgender people and marks them as “unequal and dispensable, demeaning them in the eyes of their fellow service members and the public.”

Report details Navy shipbuilding shortfalls

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy's approach to managing the shipbuilding industry is ineffective as ships face lengthy construction delays, according to a new federal watchdog report.

"These problems are in part because the ship industrial base faces workforce and infrastructure challenges that put the Navy's goals out of reach. Yet, the Navy continues to expect different performance outcomes in the coming years than it has achieved in the past," according to a report published Thursday by the Government Accountability Office.

The Navy, which relies on contracted private shipbuilding companies, planned to have a battle force of 313 ships by 2025. But in its fiscal 2025 shipbuilding plan, the Navy said the service will have 287 ships by 2025 — 26 fewer ships than expected.

From 2019-23, the Navy planned for the delivery of 11 new Virginia-class submarines and 15 new Arleigh Burke-class destroyers.

Only four of those submarines and seven of the destroyers were delivered.

The report also found 37 out of 45 — or 85% — of ships now under construction are facing delays ranging from five

months to more than three years.

For years, shipbuilders have said they need a stable industrial base to hire and retain a workforce and invest in shipyard infrastructure. The Navy has tried to reassure the shipbuilding industry through long-range planning, seeking the funds for future ships years in advance.

"However, our analysis of the Navy's shipbuilding plans for fiscal years 2019 through 2025 found that the Navy made significant changes to these plans from year to year, resulting in an unreliable signal of shipbuilding demand," the report read.

The Navy planned in 2019 to procure 11 ships in fiscal 2025. But under its fiscal 2025 plan, the Navy reduced its procurement plans to six ships.

Enduring changes, the report read, require a strategic, rather than reactive, approach that aligns with the National Defense Industrial Strategy.

"As such, developing a strategy to motivate the ship industrial base to perform better — including goals and the resources it needs to achieve them — will help the Navy break a cycle of poor performance that has stifled the growth and modernization of the fleet for decades," the report reads.

3K troops, Strykers ordered to border

The Washington Post

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered about 3,000 active-duty troops to the southern U.S. border, including soldiers from a motorized brigade equipped with 20-ton armored Stryker combat vehicles, defense officials familiar with the effort said.

The defense secretary approved the orders Friday, said two officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal Defense Department planning.

The soldiers are primarily from the 4th Infantry Division's 2nd Stryker Brigade at Fort Carson, Colo., and will be joined by soldiers specializing in engineering, intelligence and public affairs, the officials said.

The Pentagon announced the deployment in a statement Saturday afternoon after the news was first reported by The Washington Post. Hegseth has or-

dered the deployment of a Stryker brigade combat team and a helicopter unit to "reinforce and expand current border security operations to seal the border and protect the territorial integrity of the United States," the statement said.

The troops will arrive in coming weeks.

About 2,400 soldiers will deploy with the Stryker brigade and an additional 550 will go with the aviation unit, said another defense official.

A handful of others will join them.

After news of the deployment, Hegseth said in a post on X that the administration is "dead serious about 100% OPERATIONAL CONTROL of the southern border."

The mission had been in planning since January and comes despite a sharp drop in border crossings since the Trump administration took office.

US carrier, warships make port in S. Korea

BY DAVID CHOI
Stars and Stripes

A U.S. aircraft carrier and two warships arrived at South Korea's largest port Sunday in a show of force aimed at deterring North Korea, the South Korean navy said.

The USS Carl Vinson pulled into Busan, about 200 miles southeast of Seoul, as part of ongoing efforts by the United States and South Korea to strengthen cooperation and train for threats posed by North Korea, according to a South Korean navy news release.

The aircraft carrier was accompanied by the USS Princeton, a guided-missile cruiser, and the USS Sterett, a guided-missile destroyer, the release said. All three warships are homeported in San Diego.

While in Busan, sailors from the three warships are scheduled to participate in cultural exchanges, including a visit to

the U.N. Memorial Cemetery, where approximately 2,330 Korean War veterans are buried, according to the release.

Lt. Cmdr. Jamie Moroney, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet based at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, said the carrier was making a "scheduled port visit" and declined to comment on its itinerary.

"With almost seven decades of partnership, the U.S. and [South Korean] navies are working more closely and are more integrated than ever before," she said in an email Sunday. "This port visit highlights our continued cooperation with [South Korea] and our strong support for the region."

On Saturday, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea toured the Carl Vinson at sea alongside South Korean navy officials, according to a separate news release from the carrier strike group.

Leaders discuss end to war in Ukraine

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Sunday that Europe was at a crossroads in history and must do the heavy lifting to defend itself as world leaders met in London to discuss ways of working together to stop Russia's war in Ukraine.

Starmer pledged to supply more arms to defend Ukraine, announcing that the U.K. will use \$2 billion in export financing to supply 5,000 air defense missiles.

His call for European allies to increase their arms spending to shore up their own defenses and Ukraine's was not a sign that he thought the United States had become an unreliable ally, he said. No two countries are more closely aligned than the U.K. and the U.S., Starmer said.

"One thing our history tells us is that if there is conflict in Europe, it will wash up on our shores," he said.

The summit comes two days after U.S. support for Ukraine appeared in greater jeopardy after President Donald Trump lashed out at Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and said he wasn't grateful enough for U.S. support.

"Even while Russia talks about peace, they are continuing their relentless aggression," Starmer said at the opening of the meeting.

Starmer, flanked by Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron, said the three of them had agreed to work on a plan to stop the fighting, and take that to the U.S., which has discussed brokering a peace deal.

"To support peace in our continent, and to succeed, this effort must have strong U.S. backing," he said.

The meeting had been overshadowed by the extraordinary scolding of Zelenskyy by Trump.

Starmer said he's focused on being a bridge to restore peace talks, whose collapse he used as an opportunity to re-engage with Trump, Zelenskyy and Macron rather than "ramp up the rhetoric."

Sunday's summit included talks on establishing a European military force to be sent to Ukraine to underpin a ceasefire. Starmer said it would involve "a coalition of the willing."

Starmer told the BBC he does not trust Russian President Vladimir Putin but does trust

Trump. "Do I believe Donald Trump when he says he wants lasting peace? The answer to that is yes," he said.

Starmer said there are "intense discussions" to get a security guarantee from the U.S.

"If there is to be a deal, if there is to be a stopping of the fighting, then that agreement has to be defended, because the worst of all outcomes is that there is a temporary pause and then Putin comes again," Starmer said.

The three essentials Starmer listed for a successful peace deal were: arming the Ukrainians to put them in a position of strength; including a European element to guarantee security; and providing a "U.S. backstop," to prevent Putin from breaking promises.

Starmer hosted the meeting at Lancaster House, a 200-year-old mansion near Buckingham Palace, following a charm offensive last week to persuade Trump to put Ukraine at the center of negotiations and tilt his allegiances toward Europe.

Leaders from Germany, Denmark, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Canada, Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Romania were at the

summit. The Turkish foreign minister, NATO secretary-general and the presidents of the European Commission and European Council were also in attendance.

Zelenskyy received broad support from leaders across Europe after the White House fiasco, an exceptional attack on an ally broadcast on live television.

Starmer embraced Zelenskyy as he arrived at the meeting Sunday.

Europe has been anxious since Trump initiated direct peace talks with Putin, who had been isolated by most Western leaders since invading Ukraine three years ago. The scramble to remain relevant and protect European interests as their once stalwart ally appeared to be cozying up to Putin was even more troubling when Trump called Zelenskyy a dictator and falsely said Ukraine started the war.

Meetings in recent days had provided some hope — until Zelenskyy's visit to the White House.

Visits to the Oval Office by Macron, who had declared his visit a "turning point," and Starmer were seen as steps in the right direction.

Navy SEALs drill with Lithuanians, Germans in Baltic

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

Navy SEALs and combat crewmen launched small raiding crafts from a high-speed patrol boat off the Lithuanian coastline in a show of force aimed at "reestablishing deterrence" in the Baltic region, the Navy said.

The SEALs, along with German and Lithuanian special operators, carried out a range of maritime maneuvers and combat tactics at sea over a two-week span.

"Exercises like this are crucial to ensuring we can operate

seamlessly together to fight and win wars," Capt. V. Scott King, commander of Naval Special Warfare Group 2, said in a statement Thursday.

The exercises were conducted around Klaipeda, a seaside Lithuanian city about 50 miles from the Russian military enclave of Kaliningrad.

The Baltic Sea region has emerged as a potential flashpoint with Russia. In recent months, a series of suspected sabotage incidents targeted critical undersea infrastructure, including communications cables.

In January, NATO responded with a new surveillance mission in the region focused on tracking down potential saboteurs. Some 40 U.S. Marines have deployed to Finland to assist in that campaign. Meanwhile, U.S. special operators have forged closer partnerships with their counterparts in the Baltics.

Advanced marksmanship and close-quarters combat techniques were among the tactics rehearsed. The special operators also fine-tuned their ability to launch small raiding craft from the well decks of the Combatant Craft Medium, a

versatile patrol vessel that plays a key role in SEAL missions.

The event culminated with a scenario that showcased the troops' preparedness to carry out combat operations in the maritime realm, the SEALs said. The Navy did not elaborate on the details of the scenario.

"This training showcases U.S. forces' lethality as well as re-establishes the U.S. military as a formidable deterrent to those who may try to test America's military capabilities," the statement said.

Private lunar lander aces moon touchdown

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.—A private lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kickstart business on Earth's celestial neighbor ahead of astronaut missions.

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon's northeastern edge of the near side.

Confirmation of successful touchdown came from the company's Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles away.

"You all stuck the landing. We're on the moon," Firefly's Will Coogan, chief engineer for the lander, reported.

An upright and stable landing makes Firefly—a startup founded a decade ago—the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Eleven countries have faltered, with only five claiming success: Russia, the U.S., China, India and Japan.

A half hour after landing, Blue Ghost started to send back pictures from the surface, the first one a selfie somewhat obscured by the sun's glare. The second shot included the home planet, a blue dot glimmering in the blackness of space.

Two other companies' landers are hot on Blue Ghost's heels, with the next one expected to join it on the moon later this week.

Blue Ghost—named after a rare U.S. species of fireflies—had its size and shape going for it. The squat four-legged lander stands 6-foot-6 tall and 11 feet

wide, providing extra stability, according to the company.

Launched in mid-January from Florida, the lander carried 10 experiments to the moon for NASA. The space agency paid \$101 million for the delivery, plus \$44 million for the science and tech on board. It's the third mission under NASA's commercial lunar delivery program, intended to ignite a lunar economy of competing private businesses while scouting around before astronauts show up later this decade.

Firefly's Ray Allensworth said the lander skipped over hazards including boulders to land safely. Allensworth said the team continued to analyze the data to figure out the lander's exact position, but all indications suggest it landed within the 328-foot target zone in Mare Crisium.

The demos should get two

weeks of run time, before lunar daytime ends and the lander shuts down.

It carried a vacuum to suck up moon dirt for analysis and a drill to measure temperature as deep as 10 feet below the surface. Also on board: a device for eliminating abrasive lunar dust—a scourge for NASA's long-ago Apollo moonwalkers, who got it caked all over their spacesuits and equipment.

On its way to the moon, Blue Ghost beamed back exquisite pictures of the home planet. The lander continued to stun once in orbit around the moon, with detailed shots of the moon's gray pockmarked surface. At the same time, an on-board receiver tracked and acquired signals from the U.S. GPS and European Galileo constellations, an encouraging step forward in navigation for future explorers.

Israel cuts off Gaza aid to pressure Hamas on truce

Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel—Israel stopped the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" if Hamas doesn't accept a new proposal to extend a fragile ceasefire.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the existing ceasefire agreement and said its decision to cut off aid was "cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack" on the truce, which took hold in January after more than a year of negotiations. Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which included a surge in humanitarian assistance, expired on Saturday.

The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout and

a lasting ceasefire.

An Israeli official said the decision to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration.

Hundreds of aid trucks have entered Gaza daily since the ceasefire began on Jan. 19, and it was unclear what the immediate impact of the aid cutoff would be.

Israel said the new proposal, which it said came from U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff, called for extending the ceasefire through Ramadan—the Muslim holy month that began over the weekend—and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends on April 20.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office.

Kurds declare ceasefire in 40-year Turkey insurgency

Associated Press

ISTANBUL—Kurdish militants who have waged a 40-year insurgency in Turkey declared a ceasefire on Saturday in what could mark a significant boost to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government, two days after their imprisoned leader called for the group to disarm.

The announcement by the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, comes alongside major changes in the region, including the reconfiguration of power in neighboring Syria, the weakening of the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon and the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

While the government is yet to respond in detail to the PKK's declaration, Erdogan warned that Turkey would "always keep our iron fist ready in case the hand we extend is left in the air or bitten." Speaking at a Ramadan fast-breaking dinner in Istanbul, Erdogan added: "We will continue our ongoing (military) operations, if necessary, until we eliminate the last terrorist without leaving a single stone on top of another, without leaving a single head on his shoulder."

The conflict between Turkey and the PKK has led to tens of thousands of deaths since it began in 1984. The ceasefire is the first sign of a breakthrough since peace talks broke down in summer of 2015.

The PKK declaration was published by the Firat News Agency, a media outlet close to the group, on Saturday. It referred to the insurgents' leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned by Turkey since 1999. Some believe the main aim of the reconciliation effort is for Erdogan's government to garner Kurdish support for a new constitution that would allow him to remain in power beyond 2028, when his term ends.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bill would make it harder to sue for excessive force

AL MONTGOMERY — Divisive legislation that would expand legal immunity for police officers who use excessive force or kill someone in the line of duty advanced in the Alabama legislature last week.

The action sparked outcry among civil rights attorneys and activists who say that it would make civil and criminal prosecution functionally impossible.

Existing Alabama law already offers enhanced legal protections for law enforcement, but proponents of the “back the blue” bill say that it will increase the recruitment and retention of officers and make police safer.

Police and civilians alike are currently entitled to a “stand your ground” hearing in criminal cases where a judge can determine whether the defendant acted in self-defense. The new bill would allow an additional immunity hearing for officers accused of criminal wrongdoing, where a judge will decide if a case can proceed based on whether the officer acted recklessly outside the scope of law enforcement duties.

Man gets probation for threatening ex-speaker

MT BILLINGS — A Montana man was sentenced to four years of probation for threatening to assault former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy after becoming upset with the government for not shooting down a Chinese spy balloon that floated over the defendant’s home city.

Richard Rogers, 45, of Bill-

ings, was convicted by a federal jury on charges of threatening a member of Congress and making harassing phone calls to the FBI and congressional staff. He routinely made vulgar and obscene comments and berated officials during the calls.

Prosecutors last week urged Judge Susan Watters to sentence Rogers to two years in prison. But Watters noted that Rogers did not act on his threats.

Katy Perry, Gayle King part of trip into space

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — Katy Perry and Gayle King are headed to space with Jeff Bezos’ fiancee Lauren Sanchez and three other women.

Bezos’ rocket company Blue Origin announced the all-female celebrity crew Thursday.

Sanchez, a helicopter pilot and former TV journalist, picked the crew who will join her on a 10-minute spaceflight from West Texas, the company said. They will blast off sometime this spring aboard a New Shepard rocket. No launch date was given. It was not immediately known who’s footing the bill for this upcoming flight.

Sanchez invited singer Perry and TV journalist King, as well as a former NASA rocket scientist who now heads an engineering firm Aisha Bowe, research scientist Amanda Nguyen and movie producer Kerianne Flynn.

Woman arrested in Tesla dealership vandalism

CO DENVER — Federal prosecutors have charged a woman in connection with vandalism of a Colorado

Tesla dealership, which included Molotov cocktails being thrown at vehicles and the words “Nazi cars” spray painted on the building, along with a message that appeared directed at company co-founder Elon Musk.

Lucy Grace Nelson appeared in federal court in Denver on Thursday after being arrested on a single federal charge of malicious destruction of property.

Cassie Wiemken of the U.S. Attorney’s Office said the federal government had a compelling interest to prosecute the case because of the danger posed by the “incendiary devices” allegedly used.

DMV voter registrations restart after snafu

OR SALEM — Oregon authorities say the state’s DMV has resumed automatic voter registrations, after being paused since last fall because of the discovery of errors that registered nearly 1,600 people who didn’t show proof of U.S. citizenship.

Gov. Tina Kotek had paused the automatic DMV registrations in October. The improper voter registrations occurred in part because Oregon allows some residents who aren’t citizens to obtain driver’s licenses, and the state’s so-called “Motor Voter” law automatically registers most people to vote when they seek a new license or ID.

The Secretary of State’s office said it reviewed the cases and found that of the nearly 1,600 people who were mistakenly registered, only 17 voted in an election.

The Secretary of State’s elections division investigated the 17 cases, according to the offic-

e’s website.

The DMV said it has put new controls in place. It hired a “voter registration integrity analyst” and changed the computer interface for DMV staff and now requires a manager to review all files for accuracy at the end of the day.

Outrage follows release of cannibal killer

CT HARTFORD — The conditional release granted to a man who axed a man to death before eating his brain and one of his eyeballs has outraged a number of Connecticut lawmakers, including one who has proposed a bill that would partially reform the standards used by the state board that made the decision.

The release, granted to Tyree Smith following a hearing before the state Psychiatric Security Review Board, made headlines around the world as details of the horrific killing spread.

The granting of Smith’s release also brought into forefront House Bill 6392, which was proposed in January by Republican state Rep. Devin Carney after he learned last year that Smith in 2023 had been granted temporary leave privileges, including overnights, from Whiting Forensic Hospital. The bill would require the review board to consider public safety as its “primary concern” while treating the wellbeing of an acquittee as “secondary.” It would also require hearings to be held for individuals requesting temporary leave and increase the waiting period between applications for such leave privileges and conditional release from six months to a year.

— From wire reports

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Jackets beat Wings in Stadium Series

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Justin Danforth scored with 2:17 remaining to lift the Columbus Blue Jackets over Detroit 5-3 on Saturday night in the Stadium Series, leapfrogging the Red Wings to take sole possession of the first Eastern Conference wild-card spot.

Denton Mateychuk notched the team's first-ever outdoor goal, Dmitri Voronkov and Mathieu Olivier scored 32 seconds apart in the second period, and Adam Fantilli added an empty-netter.

Elvis Merzlikins made 43 stops to help Columbus beat Detroit for the second time in three days and win its fourth straight in front of 94,751 at Ohio Stadium.

Alex DeBrincat scored twice to extend his point streak to nine games. Patrick Kane added a goal, and Cam Talbot made 16 stops for the Red Wings, who snapped a five-game road win streak and cling to the second wild-card spot.

The NHL made it a priority to honor Johnny Gaudreau, the NHL star known as "Johnny

Hockey," and his younger brother, Matthew, who were struck and killed while riding bicycles near their New Jersey home Aug. 29, during the Blue Jackets' first outdoor hockey experience.

Columbus entered the arena in what team captain Boone Jenner called "Signature Johnny fit," wearing matching sweatshirts from Avalon Surf Shop, emulating Gaudreau's ritual of representing businesses from his New Jersey home. Detroit donned No. 13 Gaudreau jerseys from across his career, including Team USA and the Boston College Eagles.

Bruins 3, Penguins 2: David Pastrnak had a goal and an assist, extending his point streak to 17 games, and visiting Boston beat Pittsburgh.

Panthers 3, Flames 0: Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 23 shots for his 47th career shutout, Jonah Gadjovich and Evan Rodrigues had second-period goals, and host Florida beat Calgary.

Islanders 7, Predators 4: New York goaltender Ilya Sorokin was credited with his

first career goal when Nashville forward Steven Stamkos sent a pass into his own net in the final seconds of host New York's victory.

Oilers 3, Hurricanes 1: Adam Henrique and Corey Perry scored to help visiting Edmonton beat Carolina.

Connor McDavid added an empty-netter and Calvin Pickard stopped 35 shots for the Oilers, who snapped a five-game losing streak.

Canadiens 4, Sabres 2: Montreal extended its winning streak to a season-high four games with a win at Buffalo.

Senators 5, Sharks 3: Tim Stutzle scored and added an assist to keep his 11-game point streak alive, Brady Tkachuk and Shane Pinto returned to the lineup and scored, and host Ottawa ended a five-game losing streak with a victory over San Jose.

Flyers 2, Jets 1 (SO): Rookie Matvei Michkov scored on a backhander against Connor Hellebuyck in the shootout and visiting Philadelphia beat Winnipeg.

Lightning 3, Capitals 1:

Mitchell Chaffee and Gage Goncalves scored, Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 20 of the 21 shots he faced behind a remarkable tight-checking team effort as visiting Tampa Bay won its eighth consecutive game by beating Eastern Conference-leading Washington.

Blues 4, Kings 1: Colton Parayko and Pavel Buchnevich each scored, and Jordan Binnington made 25 saves to help host St. Louis beat Los Angeles.

Devils 3, Utah 1: Timo Meier scored the tiebreaking goal 14 seconds into the third period, and visiting New Jersey beat Utah.

Kraken 6, Canucks 3: Eeli Tolvanen had two goals, including the go-ahead score with 6:52 to go in the second period, and Vince Dunn had two assists to give him 200 for his career in host Seattle's victory over Vancouver.

Blackhawks 6, Ducks 3: Ryan Donato had two goals and an assist and visiting Chicago ended a five-game losing streak with a victory over Anaheim.

Avs, Wild, Panthers make moves in busy trade day

Associated Press

Defensemen Seth Jones and Ryan Lindgren and forward Gustav Nyquist were on the move Saturday as three Central Division teams got a jump on the NHL's looming trade deadline.

The Colorado Avalanche got the ball rolling with another splash by acquiring Lindgren and forward Jimmy Vesey in a trade with the New York Rangers. The Minnesota Wild answered hours later by acquiring pending free agent Nyquist.

And the last-place Chicago Blackhawks shipped out another veteran, sending Jones

to the defending champion Florida Panthers.

The NHL trade deadline is Friday.

The Rangers acquired a second- and a fourth-round pick, young forward Juuso Parssinen, veteran defenseman Calvin de Haan and the rights to unsigned prospect Hank Kempf. New York is retaining half of Lindgren's salary, according to a person with knowledge of the deal.

The Rangers will receive the better of their own or the Hurricanes' pick in the second round and the better of Carolina's or Vancouver's in the fourth round of the draft later

this year, the person said.

Nashville acquired a 2026 second-round pick from Minnesota, while retaining half of Nyquist's salary. The 35-year-old forward is joining the Wild at the trade deadline for the second time in three years.

Florida got Jones and a 2026 fourth-round pick from Chicago for goaltender Spencer Knight and a conditional first-round pick in next year's draft. The Blackhawks are also retaining 26% of Jones' salary.

Jones, 30, was the No. 4 overall pick by Nashville in the 2013 draft. He is under contract through 2030.

The Panthers are already deep at forward with Aleksander Barkov, Matthew Tkachuk, Sam Reinhart, Anton Lundell, Carter Verhaeghe and Gustav Forsling all locked up for at least three more seasons after this.

Lindgren, 27, has struggled this season, but he gives Colorado left-handed-shooting depth on the blue line in an attempt to make another long playoff run this spring. Vesey, 31, did not get as much playing time as he would have liked in New York, skating under 10 minutes a game, and could get a bigger opportunity with the Avalanche.

Bucks top short-handed Mavericks

Associated Press

DALLAS — Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points, nine rebounds and nine assists, Damian Lillard scored 28 and the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Dallas Mavericks 132-117 on Saturday night.

Gary Trent Jr. added 20 points as Milwaukee won for the sixth time in seven games, surging into fourth place in the Eastern Conference.

Kyrie Irving scored 31 points for the short-handed Mavericks, who are trying to stay afloat in the West playoff race until Anthony Davis returns from a groin injury, possibly by mid-March. The star forward got hurt in his Dallas debut after the seismic trade that sent Luka Doncic to the Los Angeles Lakers.

Irving made all 11 of his free throws, but was just 2-for-9 from 3-point range as the Mavs shot 28% (11-for-40) from beyond the arc.

Wizards 113, Hornets 110: Khris Middleton and Bilal Coulibaly each scored 17 points and visiting Washington defeated Charlotte in a matchup of the

teams with the NBA's two worst records.

Richaun Holmes added 15 points and nine rebounds for the Wizards, who had eight players finish in double figures in scoring.

Mark Williams had 24 points and 12 rebounds for the Hornets, who've lost six straight. LaMelo Ball added 20 points and Miles Bridges had 18 for Charlotte.

Pistons 115, Nets 94: Cade Cunningham broke out of a slump by scoring nine of his 15 points in the fourth quarter and host Detroit pulled away to beat Brooklyn.

Cunningham scored a season-worst 11 points Friday in a 134-119 loss to Denver and only had six points through three quarters against the Nets, but had a 3-pointer and two three-point plays.

Tobias Harris, Malik Beasley and Jalen Duren all added 18 points for the Pistons.

Tyrese Martin came off the bench to score 23 points for the Nets, who have lost four straight.

Kings 113, Rockets 103:

DeMar DeRozan had 21 points and visiting Sacramento overcome an early injury to Domanis Sabonis for its third straight victory.

Zach LaVine added 20 points for the Kings. Sacramento had a 13-3 run to push its advantage to 97-85 with 10 minutes remaining. LaVine and Keon Ellis had 3-pointers in that stretch and DeRozan scored the last five points.

Alperen Sengun led Houston with 30 points and 10 rebounds. Jalen Green added 24 points in the loss that ended a two-game winning streak.

Spurs 130, Grizzlies 128: De'Aaron Fox broke a tie with a 20-footer with 2.6 seconds left for the last of his 20 points and visiting San Antonio beat Memphis.

Memphis center Jaren Jackson Jr. had tied it with 22.3 seconds left on a 3-pointer that banked in, setting the stage for Fox's final basket.

Fox's teammates mobbed him after Santi Aldama missed a desperation heave as the horn sounded.

Stephon Castle had 24 points

and seven assists to help the Spurs end a four-game losing streak. Devin Vassell matched Fox with 20 points, and Jeremy Sochan added 18.

Jackson scored 42 points. Jaylen Wells had 18 for Memphis and Zach Edey had 17 points, nine rebounds and three blocks.

76ers 126, Warriors 119: Quentin Grimes scored a career-high 44 points and host Philadelphia snapped a nine-game losing streak, beating Golden State in a game where Stephen Curry had his first dunk in six years.

Curry's one-handed jam on a break cut the 76ers' lead to 109-104 midway through the fourth quarter.

Kelly Oubre Jr. had 20 points for Philadelphia. Guerschon Yabusele added 18, and Paul George had 17 points and seven rebounds. The Sixers improved to 21-39, winning for the first time since Feb. 4 against Dallas.

Curry had 29 points and 13 assists for the Warriors, who had won five in a row. Quenton Post added 16 points, and Gary Payton Jr. had 15.

Stafford gets restructured contract to stay with Rams

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Quarterback Matthew Stafford is staying with the Los Angeles Rams under a restructured contract, ending weeks of speculation about the Super Bowl winner's future.

The Rams announced their new agreement with Stafford on Friday without initially revealing any details.

Stafford, 37, had two years left on the four-year, \$160 million contract extension he signed in 2022, shortly after leading Los Angeles to a championship in his first season with the team. But his \$27 million salary for the upcoming season

was significantly less than the compensation for most quarterbacks of Stafford's stature, and the deal had only \$4 million in guaranteed money remaining in 2025 and none in 2026.

Stafford reached a deal to get more guaranteed money last year on the day before training camp opened, and he engaged the Rams on a second renegotiation in recent weeks. The Rams apparently were reluctant to meet Stafford's initial demands, even allowing the quarterback to get an assessment of his value to other teams in view of a possible trade.

The Rams were concerned about a financial commitment

that would impede their ability to build depth, but the sides ultimately came to an agreement that will keep Stafford at the controls of coach Sean McVay's offense in 2025. The Rams' social media accounts went even farther, saying Stafford "is here to stay."

Stafford passed for 3,762 yards and 20 touchdowns last season for the Rams, who went 10-7 and won the NFC West before reaching the divisional round of the playoffs, where they lost a close road game to eventual champion Philadelphia.

The Las Vegas Raiders and the New York Giants were

among the teams widely reported to be interested in trading for Stafford, even discussing the framework of a potential new contract with Stafford's agent. Raiders minority owner Tom Brady and Stafford made headlines when they ran into each other recently at a Montana ski resort, but Brady's agent said the meeting was brief and accidental.

Stafford has led the Rams to three playoff appearances in four seasons with the team following 12 mostly unsuccessful years with the Detroit Lions, who traded Stafford to Los Angeles in a deal for Jared Goff in early 2021.

No. 5 Vols' long 3 at buzzer beats No. 6 Tide

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Jahmai Mashack raced up the court and hit a 3-pointer from well beyond the arc at the buzzer to give No. 5 Tennessee a 79-76 victory over No. 6 Alabama on Saturday.

The Volunteers (24-5, 11-5 Southeastern Conference) got the final shot by forcing a five-second inbounds violation under the Crimson Tide's basket with 3.8 seconds left.

Chaz Lanier and Jordan Gaine each scored 18 points for Tennessee. Zakai Zeigler had 15 and Mashack finished with 11.

Mark Sears led Alabama (23-6, 12-4) with 24 points. LaBaron Philan had 13, and Aden Holloway added 11.

No. 1 Auburn 94, No. 17 Kentucky 78: Miles Kelly scored a season-high 30 points to lead the visiting Tigers to a win over the Wildcats.

Auburn (27-2, 15-1 SEC) has six straight victories and won the SEC regular-season title outright when Tennessee beat Alabama. The Tigers posted video on X of their players celebrating on the team bus after watching the Volunteers' 3-pointer at the buzzer to win it.

Auburn won in Lexington for the first time since a 53-52 triumph over then-No. 1 Kentucky in 1988.

No. 2 Duke 100, Florida State 65: Isaiah Evans scored 19 points and the host Blue Devils overcame freshman star Cooper Flagg's injury scare to rout the Seminoles.

Flagg sat out more than 11 minutes to end the first half, twice leaving the gym to be evaluated after he was struck in the face on a hard foul. He was on the court for the first 12 minutes of the second half, when he racked up 12 of his 16 points.

Kon Knueppel and Khaman Maluach both had 14 points to help Duke (26-3, 17-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) maintain a one-game lead over Clemson in the league standings.

No. 3 Florida 89, No. 12 Tex-

as A&M 70: Will Richard made six 3-pointers and scored 25 points, Thomas Haugh added 17 points and the host Gators handed the Aggies a fourth consecutive loss.

Alijah Martin had 14 points for Florida, which bounced back from a midweek loss at unranked Georgia and moved a step closer to securing a double-bye in the Southeastern Conference Tournament in two weeks.

Texas A&M (20-9, 9-7 SEC) could fall out of the AP Top 25 college basketball poll. The Gators (25-4, 12-4), meanwhile, improved to 14-1 at home this season.

No. 4 Houston 73, Cincinnati

64: L.J. Cryer scored 20 points and the host Cougars clinched the outright Big 12 regular-season title for a second straight season with a win over the Bearcats.

Terrance Arceneaux added 10 points for Houston (25-4, 17-1 Big 12), which has won eight straight. The Cougars became the first team to win the regular-season championship in its first two years in a major conference since Idaho, which won the PCC in the 1921-22 and 1922-23 seasons. Houston joined the Big 12 in 2023.

The Cougars, who have won 12 straight over Cincinnati, shot 54% and owned a 17-9 advantage in points off turnovers.

No. 7 St. John's 71, Seton

Hall 61: RJ Luis Jr. scored 21 points and the host Red Storm beat the Pirates to clinch their first outright regular-season Big East title since 1985.

St. John's (26-4, 17-2) improved to 18-0 at home as it played in front of its third straight sellout crowd at Madison Square Garden and with coach Rick Pitino sporting a white suit for the second straight season.

Zuby Ejiofor added 17 points and 10 rebounds as the Red Storm shot 43.4% and struggled

until the final minutes.

No. 9 Iowa State 84, No. 22

Arizona 67: Milan Momcilovic scored 17 points as the host Cyclones survived a late scare from the Wildcats for a win.

Tamin Lipsey added 15 for Iowa State (22-7, 12-6 Big 12) while Curtis Jones and Nate Heise each contributed 12 points off the bench. Brandon Chatfield scored 10 points for a new season-high with the Cyclones.

No. 10 Texas Tech 78, Kan-

sas 73: JT Toppin had 21 points to lead the visiting Red Raiders to a win over the Jayhawks.

Christian Anderson had 15 points and Darrion Williams scored 14 for Texas Tech (22-7, 13-5 Big 12).

No. 13 Clemson 71, Virginia

58: Ian Schieffelin scored 13 of his 21 points in the second half to help the visiting Tigers come from behind and beat the Cavaliers.

Schieffelin, coming off a 24-point outing against Notre Dame, also grabbed 13 rebounds for his ninth double-double of the season as Clemson (24-5, 16-2 ACC) stayed a game behind first-place Duke in the conference standings.

Vanderbilt 97, No. 14 Mis-

souri 93 (OT): Chris Manon had 23 points and a game-high 11 rebounds as the host Commodores beat the Tigers in overtime for their third win in a row.

AJ Hoggard scored 21 points, Jason Edwards finished with 17 and Tyler Nickel added 12 for Vanderbilt (20-9, 8-8 Southeastern Conference).

No. 16 Maryland 68, Penn

State 64: Derik Queen had 23 points, Ja'kobi Gillespie scored 19 to lead the visiting Terrapins over the Nittany Lions.

Selton Miguel added 17 points for Maryland (22-7, 12-6 Big Ten), which overcame a 36-30 halftime deficit to snap a seven-game losing streak in Happy Valley.

No. 19 Louisville 79, Pitts-

burgh 68: Chucky Hepburn scored a career-high 37 points to

lead the host Cardinals to a victory over the Panthers.

Terrence Edwards Jr. added 23 points and seven rebounds for Louisville (23-6, 16-2 Atlantic Coast Conference), which shot 51.1% from the field (23-for-45) and went 11-for-21 (52.4%) from 3-point range.

No. 21 Marquette 76, Georgetown 61:

Kam Jones scored 13 points and had a career-high 13 assists for his fifth double-double as the visiting Golden Eagles easily topped the Hoyas.

David Joplin had 17 points and Ben Gold added 15 as Marquette (22-7, 13-5 Big East) led by as many as 28 in the second half for its second straight lopsided win after overpowering Providence 82-52 on Tuesday.

No. 23 Saint Mary's 74, Ore-

gon State 64: Augustas Marciolionis scored 25 points and the host Gaels won their seventh straight, beating the Beavers.

Marciolionis, the son of Hall of Famer Sarunas Marciolionis, made four 3-pointers and shot 7-for-12 overall to lead regular-season champion Saint Mary's (27-4, 17-1 West Coast Conference) in its final tune-up before the conference tournament this week. It's the best conference record in Gaels history.

No. 24 Mississippi State 81, LSU 69:

Josh Hubbard scored 20 of his 30 points in the second half to help the host Bulldogs beat the Tigers.

Riley Kugel had 12 points for Mississippi State on 5-for-6 shooting. The Bulldogs (20-9, 8-8 SEC) trailed by as many as eight points in the first half and were down 37-35 at halftime.

No. 25 BYU 77, West Virginia

56: Fousseyni Traore scored 20 points and had 10 rebounds for his second double-double of the season off the bench. Egor Demin had 15 points and six rebounds and the host Cougars dominated the Mountaineers.

Richie Saunders added 13 points for BYU (21-8, 12-6 Big 12), which has won six straight.