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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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War heroes images flagged for DEI removal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — References to a World War II Medal of Honor recipient, the Enola Gay aircraft that dropped an atomic bomb on Japan and the first women to pass Marine infantry training are among the tens of thousands of photos and online posts marked for deletion as the Defense Department works to purge diversity, equity and inclusion content, according to a database obtained by The Associated Press.

The database, which was confirmed by U.S. officials and published by AP, includes more than 26,000 images that have been flagged for removal across every military branch. But the eventual total could be much higher.

One official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details that have not been made public, said the purge could delete as many as 100,000 images or posts in total, when considering social media pages and other websites that are also

being culled for DEI content. The official said it's not clear if the database has been finalized.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had given the military until Wednesday to remove content that highlights diversity efforts in its ranks following President Donald Trump's executive order ending those programs across the federal government.

The vast majority of the Pentagon purge targets women and minorities, including notable milestones made in the military. And it also removes a large number of posts that mention various commemorative months — such as those for Black and Hispanic people and women.

But a review of the database also underscores the confusion that has swirled among agencies about what to remove following Trump's order.

In some cases, photos seemed to be flagged for removal simply because their file included the word "gay," including service members with that last name

and an image of the B-29 aircraft Enola Gay, which dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, during World War II.

Several photos of an Army Corps of Engineers dredging project in California were marked for deletion, apparently because a local engineer in the photo had the last name Gay. And a photo of Army Corps biologists was on the list, seemingly because it mentioned they were recording data about fish — including their weight, size, hatchery and gender.

In addition, some photos of the Tuskegee Airmen, the nation's first Black military pilots who served in a segregated WWII unit, were listed on the database, but those may likely be protected due to historical content.

The Air Force briefly removed new recruit training courses that included videos of the Tuskegee Airmen soon after Trump's order. That drew the White House's ire over "malicious compliance," and the Air Force quickly reversed the removal.

Many of the images listed in the database already have been removed. Others were still visible Thursday, and it's not clear if they will be taken down at some point or be allowed to stay, including images with historical significance such as those of the Tuskegee Airmen.

Asked about the database, Pentagon spokesman John Ullyot said in a statement, "We are pleased by the rapid compliance across the Department with the directive removing DEI content from all platforms. In the rare cases that content is removed that is out of the clearly outlined scope of the directive, we instruct components accordingly."

He noted that Hegseth has declared that "DEI is dead" and that efforts to put one group ahead of another through DEI programs erodes camaraderie and threatens mission execution.

Researchers, doctors rally for science against Trump cuts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Researchers, doctors, their patients and supporters ventured out of labs, hospitals and offices Friday to stand up to what they call a blitz on lifesaving science by the Trump administration.

In the nation's capital, several hundred people gathered at the Stand Up for Science rally. Organizers said similar rallies were planned in more than 30 U.S. cities.

Politicians, scientists, musicians, doctors and their patients were expected to make the case

that firings, budget and grant cuts in health, climate, science and other research government agencies in the Trump administration's first 47 days in office are endangering not just the future but the present.

"Science is under attack in the United States," said rally co-organizer Colette Delawalla, a doctoral student in clinical psychology. "We're not just going to stand here and take it."

"American scientific progress and forward movement is a public good and public good is coming to a screeching halt

right now," Delawalla said.

Health and science advances are happening faster than ever, said former National Institutes of Health Director Francis Collins, who helped map the human genome. The funding cuts put at risk progress on Alzheimer's Disease, diabetes and cancer, he said.

"It's a very bad time with all the promise and momentum," Collins said.

Friday's rally in Washington was at the Lincoln Memorial, in the shadow of a statue of the president who created the Na-

tional Academy of Sciences in 1863.

Some of the expected speakers study giant colliding galaxies, the tiny genetic blueprint of life inside humans and the warming atmosphere.

Nobel Prize winning biologist Victor Ambros, Bill Nye The Science Guy, former NASA chief Bill Nelson and a host of other politicians, and patients — some with rare diseases — were expected to take the stage to talk about their work and the importance of scientific research.

Trump says he sent letter to Iran leader

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — President Donald Trump sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, seeking a new deal with Tehran to restrain its rapidly advancing nuclear program and replace the agreement he withdrew America from in his first term in office.

Iranian state media immediately picked up on Trump's acknowledgment, given in portions of a Fox Business News interview aired on Friday, though there was no confirmation from Khamenei's office that any letter had been received. The interview is expected to air in full on Sunday.

It also remained unclear just how the 85-year-old supreme leader would react, given that former President Barack Obama had kept his letters to Kha-

menei secret ahead of the start of negotiations that led to Tehran's 2015 deal with world powers.

Trump's acknowledgment comes as both Israel and the United States have warned they will never let Iran acquire a nuclear weapon, leading to fears of a military confrontation as Tehran enriches uranium at near weapons-grade levels — a purity only sought by atomic-armed nations.

"I've written them a letter saying, 'I hope you're going to negotiate because if we have to go in militarily, it's going to be a terrible thing,'" Trump said. He later added that he had sent the letter "yesterday" in the interview, which was filmed on Thursday.

The White House confirmed Trump's comments, saying that he sent a letter to Iran's leaders seeking to negotiate a deal.

"I would rather negotiate a deal. I'm not sure that everybody agrees with me, but we can make a deal that would be just as good as if you won militarily," Trump added. "But the time is happening now. The time is coming up. Something's going to happen one way or the other."

"I hope you're going to negotiate because it's going to be a lot better for Iran and I think they want to get that letter," Trump said. "The other alternative is we have to do something because you can't let them have a nuclear weapon."

Trump offered no details of what, if anything, was specifically offered to Iran in the letter. The move recalled Trump's letter-writing to North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in his first term, which led to face-to-face meetings but no deals to limit Pyongyang's atomic bombs and

a missile program capable of reaching the continental U.S.

Iran long has maintained its program is for peaceful purposes, even as its officials increasingly threaten to pursue the bomb as tensions are high with the U.S. over its sanctions and with Israel as a shaky ceasefire holds in its war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

U.S. intelligence agencies assess that Iran has yet to begin a weapons program, but has "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so."

Since Trump's return, his administration has consistently said that Iran must be prevented from acquiring nuclear weapons. A report last month, however, by the United Nations' nuclear watchdog said Iran has accelerated its production of near weapons-grade uranium.

Putin ready to agree to Ukraine truce with conditions

Bloomberg News (TNS)

Russia is willing to discuss a temporary truce in Ukraine provided there is progress toward a final peace settlement, according to people familiar with the matter in Moscow.

In the first signal of a positive response from President Vladimir Putin to U.S. counterpart Donald Trump's call for a ceasefire, the offer was conveyed at last month's talks in Saudi Arabia between top Russian and American officials, the people said, asking not to be identified discussing internal policy.

In order to agree to a cessation of hostilities, there would have to be a clear understanding about the framework principles of the final peace accord, two people with knowledge of the matter said. Russia will in-

sist in particular on establishing the parameters of an eventual peacekeeping mission, including agreement on which countries would take part, said another person familiar with the issue.

The details emerged as the U.S. and Ukraine plan to meet in Saudi Arabia next week for their first direct talks since Trump's Oval Office bust-up with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy last week. U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff said the meeting aims to reach "a framework for a peace agreement and an initial ceasefire."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov didn't immediately respond to a request to comment.

Russia has said it won't accept the presence of NATO troops on Ukrainian soil, rejecting a proposal by European

countries to put together a "coalition of the willing" to help monitor any peace accord.

It doesn't object to countries such as China that have been neutral in the conflict deploying forces to Ukraine, the two people said.

Since his Jan. 20 inauguration, Trump has overturned U.S. policy on Russia's invasion of Ukraine to try to bring a rapid end to the three-year-long war that's Europe's worst conflict in 80 years.

He held phone talks with Putin last month and the pair agreed to hold a summit, though no date has been set yet.

Trump abandoned U.S. support for Ukraine's eventual entry into NATO, and his top officials said it was unrealistic to expect a return of all Ukrainian territory seized by Russia since

2014.

After the confrontation with Zelenskyy at the White House, Trump paused military aid to Ukraine and has suspended some intelligence-sharing with Kyiv, shocking European allies who say the U.S. risks rewarding Russia's aggression in starting the February 2022 invasion.

Putin has repeatedly brushed aside Trump's bid for a quick halt to the war. During his annual news conference in December, he said: "We don't need a truce — we need peace: long-term, durable, with guarantees for the Russian Federation and its citizens."

Russia on Thursday rejected a Franco-British plan for a partial one-month truce covering air and maritime operations including a halt to strikes targeting energy infrastructure.

New EPA rule says spending over \$50K requires DOGE nod

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Environmental Protection Agency has issued new guidance directing that spending items greater than \$50,000 now require approval from Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

The guidance, issued this week, escalates the role that the new efficiency group, known as DOGE, plays in EPA operations.

"Any assistance agreement, contract or interagency agreement transaction (valued at) \$50,000 or greater must receive approval from an EPA DOGE team member," the EPA guidance says, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

To facilitate the DOGE team review, EPA staff members have been directed to submit a brief, one-page explanation of each funding action each day between 3 and 6 p.m. Eastern time, the guidance says. Other relevant forms also must be completed.

President Donald Trump has tasked DOGE with digging up what he and Musk call waste, fraud and abuse. The Republican president suggested Thursday that Cabinet members and agency leaders would take the lead on spending and staffing cuts, but he said Musk could push harder down the line.

"If they can cut, it's better," Trump said of agency leaders. "And if they don't cut, then Elon will do the cutting."

The EPA did not respond to a request Friday for comment.

Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, the top Democrat on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, called the new directive "trou-

bling," adding that it means agency actions, including routine contracts and grant awards, "now face unnecessary bureaucratic delays."

Routine expenditures such as small-scale grants for air and water quality monitoring, laboratory equipment purchases, hazardous waste disposal at federal sites and money for municipal recycling programs are among spending that will probably be affected, he said.

Whitehouse, an outspoken critic of Musk and Trump, said the involvement of Musk's "unvetted, inexperienced team raises serious concerns about improper external influence on specialized agency decision-making."

In a letter to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, Whitehouse said spending actions greater than \$50,000 are often complex and require specialized knowledge of environmental science, policy and regulations. "Allowing unskilled, self-proclaimed 'experts,' not vetted for conflicts of interest, to have veto power over funding determinations is inappropriate and risks compromising the agency's mission to protect public health and the environment," Whitehouse wrote.

An EPA directive says the new guidance is intended to comply with executive orders issued by Trump that seek to restrict federal spending.

Whitehouse called those orders illegal, adding: "It is already established by court order that it is Congress that authorizes and appropriates funds for specific purposes, not the (White House) Office of Management and Budget or the president via executive order or DOGE."

SpaceX's latest test flight ends in another explosion

Associated Press

Nearly two months after an explosion sent flaming debris raining down on the Turks and Caicos, SpaceX launched another mammoth Starship rocket on Thursday but lost contact minutes into the test flight as the spacecraft came tumbling down and broke apart.

This time, wreckage from the latest explosion was seen streaming from the skies over Florida. It was not immediately known whether the spacecraft's self-destruct system had kicked in to blow it up.

The 403-foot rocket blasted off from Texas. SpaceX caught the first-stage booster back at the pad with giant mechanical arms, but engines on the spacecraft on top started shutting down as it streaked eastward for what was supposed to be a controlled entry over the Indian Ocean, half a world away. Contact was lost less than 10 minutes into the flight as the spacecraft went into an out-of-control spin.

Starship reached nearly 90 miles in altitude before trouble struck and before four mock satellites could be deployed. It was not immediately clear where it came down, but images of flaming debris were captured from Florida, including near Cape Canaveral, and posted online.

The space-skimming flight was supposed to last an hour. The Federal Aviation Administration said it would require SpaceX to investigate the accident.

"Unfortunately this happened last time too, so we have some practice at this now," SpaceX flight commentator Dan Huot said from the launch site.

SpaceX later confirmed that the spacecraft experienced "a rapid unscheduled disassembly" during the ascent engine firing and said it alerted safety officials.

Flights were briefly grounded at Orlando International Airport "due to space launch debris in the area," the airport posted on X.

Private lunar lander declared dead after landing sideways

Associated Press

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — A private lunar lander is no longer working after landing sideways in a crater near the moon's south pole, and its mission is over, officials said Friday.

The news came less than 24 hours after the botched landing attempt by Texas-based Intuitive Machines.

Launched last week, the lander named Athena missed its mark by more than 800 feet and ended up in a frigid crater, the company said in declaring it dead.

Athena managed to send back pictures confirming its position and activate a few experiments before going silent. NASA and

other customers had packed the lander with tens of millions of dollars' worth of experiments including an ice drill, drone and pair of rovers to roam the unexplored terrain ahead of astronauts' planned arrival later this decade.

It's unlikely Athena's batteries can be recharged given the way the lander's solar panels are pointed and the extreme cold in the crater.

"The mission has concluded and teams are continuing to assess the data collected throughout the mission," the company said in a statement.

This was the second landing attempt for Intuitive Machines. The first, a year ago, also ended with a sideways landing.

Promised USAID funds for Gaza don't arrive

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — The Trump administration's cuts to the U.S. Agency for International Development have frozen hundreds of millions of dollars in contractual payments to aid groups, leaving them paying out of pocket to preserve a fragile ceasefire, according to officials from the humanitarian agency.

The cutbacks threaten to halt the small gains aid workers have made combating Gaza's humanitarian crisis during the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. They also could endanger the tenuous truce, which the Trump administration helped cement.

USAID was supposed to fund much of the aid to Gaza as the ceasefire progressed, and the Trump administration approved over \$383 million on Jan. 31 to that end, according to three USAID officials.

But since then, there have been no confirmed payments to any partners in the Middle East, they said. The officials, who have survived multiple rounds of furloughs, spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

Two senior officials at aid organizations confirmed they have not received any of the promised funds, after spending

millions of dollars on supplies and services.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the political sensitivity of the issue and of their work in Gaza, said they could not afford to continue aid operations indefinitely.

Some organizations have already reported laying off workers and scaling down operations, according to internal USAID information shared with The Associated Press.

That could imperil the ceasefire, under which Hamas is supposed to release hostages held in Gaza in exchange for Israel

releasing Palestinian prisoners and ramping up the entry of humanitarian assistance.

"The U.S. established very specific, concrete commitments for aid delivery under the ceasefire, and there is no way ... to fulfill those as long as the funding freeze is in place," said Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International and a former USAID official.

USAID has been one of the biggest targets of a broad campaign by President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, to slash the size of the federal government.

Russia launches strikes on Ukraine energy supplies

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia attacked Ukrainian energy facilities with dozens of missiles and drones during the night, officials said Friday, hobbling the country's ability to deliver heat and light to its citizens and to power weapons factories vital to its defenses.

The overnight barrage — which also pounded residences and wounded at least 10 people — came days after the U.S. suspended military aid and intelligence to Ukraine to pressure it into accepting a peace deal being pushed by the Trump administration. Without U.S. intelligence, Ukraine's ability to strike inside Russia and defend itself from bombardment is significantly diminished.

Ukraine is having a tough time on the battlefield. An onslaught by Russia's bigger army is straining short-handed Ukrainian forces at places along the 600-mile front line.

Officials from the U.S. and Ukraine will meet in Saudi Arabia next week to discuss ending the war, which began more than three years ago when Russia

launched a full-scale invasion. On Friday, President Trump said on social media he was "strongly considering" placing additional sanctions on Russia to force it into peace talks.

"To Russia and Ukraine, get to the table right now, before it is too late," Trump said.

Ukraine came under a "massive missile and drone" attack overnight, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko wrote on Facebook.

"Russia is trying to hurt ordinary Ukrainians by striking energy and gas production facilities, without abandoning its goal of leaving us without light and heat, and causing the greatest harm to ordinary citizens," Halushchenko wrote.

Zelenskyy on Friday won the support of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan for Ukraine's proposals to take some first steps toward stopping the war, including a halt on firing missiles, drones and bombs at energy and other civilian infrastructure. Zelenskyy has also proposed ceasing combat operations in the Black Sea to allow safe shipping.

WWII bomb disposal in Paris causes chaos, closures

Associated Press

PARIS — Train services from Paris will gradually resume later Friday after the disposal operation of an unexploded World War II bomb caused transportation chaos in the French capital, including the suspension of high-speed train links with London and Brussels.

Transport Minister Philippe Tabarot said that almost 500 trains were canceled and the disruption affected around 600,000 people at the Gare du Nord, France's busiest train station. It wasn't immediately clear how the bomb was made safe or disposed of.

"We're delighted and relieved that all this has come to an end," he said, adding that a major highway was immediately reopened after it was closed for several hours. Train services were scheduled to resume from 6 p.m. local time.

Rail services were halted at Gare du Nord, upending commuters' workdays and travelers' weekend getaway plans, as bomb-disposal experts worked to make the half-ton explosive

device safe.

Eurostar, the operator of sleek high-speed trains through the Channel Tunnel that joins England with the European continent, said it expects normal traffic between Paris and Brussels and between Paris and London on Saturday. The company said it will run two extra trains, one leaving London to Paris in the morning, the other from Paris to London in the afternoon.

The cascade of transportation woes first hit morning rush-hour train services before also spreading to the road network, with Paris police closing the A1 highway that feeds into the north of the city, as well as sections of the capital's always-busy ring road, as the bomb-disposal operation dragged on.

Eurostar announced the cancellation of all its services linking its Paris hub at Gare du Nord to the U.K. and Belgian capitals.

Scores of commuter, regional and high-speed trains between Paris and towns and cities in northern France were also canceled.

Lakers win 8th straight, beat Knicks in OT

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Luka Doncic scored 32 points, LeBron James added 31 and the Los Angeles Lakers extended their winning streak to eight games by overcoming a double-digit deficit in the fourth quarter and defeating the New York Knicks 113-109 in overtime Thursday night.

Doncic, who also had 12 assists and eight rebounds, had five points in overtime as the Lakers improved to 9-2 since he made his LA debut on Feb. 10.

James scored the Lakers' final four points, all at the foul line, and finished with 12 rebounds and eight assists for Los Angeles.

Knicks star Jalen Brunson was injured on a drive in overtime, twisting his right ankle and foot as he crashed to the floor after contact with Austin Reaves and with James close behind. Reaves was called for a foul after a review, and Brunson made both free throws before limping off after the Knicks intentionally fouled to stop the clock.

Brunson had 39 points and 10 assists.

The game was tied at 107 be-

fore Jaxson Hayes made a pair of free throws with 59.7 seconds remaining to put the Lakers on top for good.

James then made a pair of foul shots to put Los Angeles up by four after Karl Anthony Towns was called for a loose ball foul after Miles McBride missed a jumper.

Celtics 123, 76ers 105: Jayson Tatum had 35 points and seven rebounds and Boston powered past Philadelphia.

It was Tatum's 24th game this season with at least 30 points even though he sat out the entire fourth quarter as Boston won for the ninth time in its last 11 games.

Payton Pritchard added 19 points and Derrick White finished with 12 points after having one of his teeth knocked out in the first half when he took an inadvertent elbow. But he returned to start the third quarter.

Warriors 121, Nets 119: Stephen Curry scored 40 points, with a turnaround heave from just inside halfcourt among his seven 3-pointers, and Golden State climbed out of a 22-point hole to beat Brooklyn.

Jimmy Butler added 25 for the Warriors, who finished 4-1

on their road trip despite falling behind 27-5. They rallied from at least 20 down to win for the third time this season.

Cam Johnson scored 26 points and Cam Thomas had 23 for the Nets, who lost their sixth straight.

Hawks 124, Pacers 118: Trae Young had 22 points and 16 assists, Onyeka Okongwu added 20 points and 13 rebounds and Atlanta beat Indiana to open a two-game set.

Georges Niang scored 12 of his 24 points in the fourth quarter for the Hawks, who had lost five in a row against Indiana since the 2022-23 season. His layup with 1:07 left put Atlanta up 116-109.

Pascal Siakam had 35 points for the Pacers, who were playing without two-time All-Star guard Tyrese Haliburton for only the second time this season. Haliburton was out with a hip issue.

The Pacers had a 92-82 lead late in the third quarter after a 11-0 run when Siakam hit three 3-pointers. Atlanta outscored them 38-24 in the fourth quarter.

Bulls 125, Magic 123: Coby White scored a career-high 44

points and Chicago beat Orlando Magic.

White was 7 of 15 from 3-point range. He scored Chicago's last nine points on two layups, a dunk and a 3-pointer.

Josh Giddey added 19 points, 13 rebounds and nine assists, and Tre Jones had 20 points.

Paolo Banchero and Cole Anthony scored 20 points each for Orlando.

Rockets 109, Pelicans 97: Amen Thompson had 21 points and 11 rebounds and Houston had a dominating second half to beat New Orleans to open a home-and-home set.

Alperen Sengun added 22 points, eight assists and three steals, and Tari Eason scored 21 points as the Rockets snapped a three-game losing streak.

Trey Murphy III scored 26 points to lead the Pelicans. Zion Williamson had 20 points and 10 rebounds.

Thompson had 12 points in the second half, including a dunk to cap the Rockets' opening spurt right out of the break that put them ahead for the first time — and for the rest of the game. They later had a 12-0 run in the third quarter.

Knicks guard Jalen Brunson to miss time after ankle injury

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — New York star guard Jalen Brunson could miss an extended period of time after suffering an ankle injury during overtime in the Knicks' 113-109 loss to the Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday night.

Coach Tom Thibodeau said after the game that Brunson was still being examined by the

medical staff.

"It's a bummer of an injury. We expect him to be out for a little bit," forward Josh Hart said.

Brunson — who is seventh in the league in scoring (26.3 points per game) and eighth in assists (7.4 per game) — rolled his right ankle with 1:24 remaining in overtime after landing on the foot of Lakers guard Austin

Reaves after being fouled on a drive to the basket. Brunson got help up from teammates and stayed in the game to make both free throws and tie it at 107. He then came out and went to the locker room.

Brunson led the Knicks with 39 points and 10 assists. He sent the game into overtime with a three-point play after the Lak-

ers rallied from a double-digit deficit midway through the fourth quarter.

"His mental toughness is through the roof. It doesn't surprise me the way he played the whole game. He still keeps battling and battling," Thibodeau said about Brunson, who was 13 of 26 from the field and made 12 of his 13 foul shots.

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Hurricanes win 3rd straight beating Bruins

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Seth Jarvis scored with 18.6 seconds remaining and the Carolina Hurricanes won their third consecutive game by defeating the Boston Bruins 3-2 on Thursday night.

Sebastian Aho and Brent Burns also scored for the Hurricanes, whose last three victories have each come by one goal. Pyotr Kochetkov made 32 saves.

Morgan Geekie scored both goals for the Bruins, who have lost three straight. Joonas Korpisalo made 20 saves.

Jarvis' winning goal was a reprieve for the Hurricanes, who had a potential go-ahead goal with 1:15 wiped out by video review because of an offside call.

Jets 4, Flyers 1: Mark Scheifele had a goal and two assists, Kyle Connor added a goal and an assist and Winnipeg snapped a three-game skid by defeating Philadelphia.

Nikolaj Ehlers and Adam Lowry also scored for the Jets, who became the first NHL team to reach 90 points this season.

Matvei Michkov scored the lone goal for Philadelphia, which lost for the third time in four games.

Utah 4, Red Wings 2: Kevin Stenlund scored the go-ahead

goal early in the third period and Utah handed Detroit its fourth straight loss.

Stenlund scored his first goal in 24 games, while Dylan Guenther, Nick Schmaltz and Lawson Crouse also scored for Utah. Karel Vejmelka made 38 saves on the same day he signed to a five-year contract extension.

Dylan Larkin and Jonatan Berggren scored first-period goals for the Red Wings. Alex Lyon stopped 15 shots.

Panthers 3, Blue Jackets 0: Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 16 shots for his second shutout in four games and fourth of the season, and the Florida Panthers won their fifth straight, 3-0 over the Columbus Blue Jackets on Thursday night.

The win for Bobrovsky was his 423rd, moving the 36-year-old, 14-year veteran into a tie with Tony Esposito for 10th on the NHL's career list. He did it in 742 games, 144 fewer than Esposito.

Aleksander Barkov assisted on Florida's first two goals and scored on an empty-netter. Sam Reinhart also had a goal and two assists for the Panthers.

Lightning 6, Sabres 5: Jake Guentzel had a hat trick, Oliver Bjorkstrand scored the go-ahead goal early in the third pe-

riod, and Tampa Bay rallied for a victory over Buffalo.

Bjorkstrand scored on a wrist shot with 18:20 remaining, assisted by Nikita Kucherov and Yanni Gourde.

Guentzel scored all three of his goals in the second period. Nicholas Paul and Darren Radvanyi also scored for the Lightning.

Alex Tuch, Tage Thompson, Rasmus Dahlin, Peyton Krebs and John-Jason Peterka scored for the Sabres.

Predators 5, Kraken 3: Filip Forsberg scored two goals and Nashville beat Seattle.

Brady Skjei scored the first of the Predators' three second-period goals. Forsberg and Michael McCarron also scored in the period, with McCarron's wrap-around goal making it 4-1 with 9 seconds remaining.

Stars 3, Flames 2, OT: Jason Robertson scored twice, including the winner with 42 seconds remaining in overtime, and Dallas erased a two-goal deficit in a victory over Calgary.

Roope Hintz assisted on both of Robertson's goals to give him 11 in the past four games. He was the first player in franchise history with nine assists in a three-game stretch and has a six-game point streak.

Robertson's first goal was a

tying tally in the third period as the Stars extended their home winning streak.

Joel Farabee scored on a nifty between-the-legs move early in the first period for Calgary, and Mikael Backlund had an unassisted goal after a scramble in front of the net for a 2-0 lead early in the second.

Oilers 3, Canadiens 2, OT: Evan Bouchard scored off Connor McDavid's nifty centering pass after McDavid circled Montreal's zone late in overtime to the give Edmonton a victory.

Leon Draisaitl scored his NHL-leading 46th goal and assisted on Bouchard's goal. Corey Perry also scored and Stuart Skinner made 25 saves.

Avalanche 7, Sharks 3: Cale Makar had two goals and four assists for the first six-point game by a defenseman in franchise history and Nathan MacKinnon added two goals and three assists to extend his home points streak to 18 games in Colorado's romp over San Jose.

MacKinnon moved three points away from joining Joe Sakic and Peter Stastny as the only skaters in franchise history to reach 1,000 points.

Jonathan Drouin, Joel Kiviranta and Martin Necas added goals as the Avalanche improved to 4-0.

Crosby and MacKinnon bring out best in each other

Associated Press

DENVER — Nathan MacKinnon's childhood idol and role model has turned into a training partner and an offseason neighbor back home in the Halifax area of their native Nova Scotia.

One of his closest friends, too.

MacKinnon and Sidney Crosby have developed a tight bond, which made winning the 4 Nations Face-Off title together with Canada even more special. They just bring out the best in each other, whether it's as teammates internationally or as

rivals in the NHL.

Crosby, though, showed MacKinnon he still has some tricks up his sleeves when they met in Colorado's 4-1 win over Pittsburgh on Tuesday. The Penguins center got the better of his Avalanche counterpart on several faceoffs.

Now they go their separate ways — MacKinnon to chase a playoff spot and Crosby on his way to likely missing the playoffs for a third consecutive season.

"Still one of the best players

in this league at 37," MacKinnon said of his mentor who has spent all 20 of his NHL seasons in Pittsburgh. "It's amazing to see his longevity and definitely very grateful to play with him (at 4 Nations)."

Rumors being rumors, and Friday's trade deadline looming, there has been some speculation about a possible reunion between the two in Colorado. Much like he does a defenseman, Crosby has scurried around the topic.

"I'm sure there's a lot of hy-

potheticals out there," Crosby said.

MacKinnon joked it was the first tournament in which Crosby got to play with teammates who were big fans of his as kids.

"He's an amazing person," said MacKinnon, who squared off against Crosby on Tuesday for the 19th time, with MacKinnon improving to 10-6-3 over his friend. "He's fun to be around. He's just a great guy. He's like your friend — whatever you like about your best friend."

Michigan State claims its Big Ten title

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Of course, this is how Michigan State would clinch its outright Big Ten championship.

With a 91-84 win Thursday night at Iowa, No. 8 Michigan State guaranteed its spot atop the conference. Getting there was tricky, with a double-digit deficit in the first half and a frustrating start to the second. But in what's been the script that has carried the Spartans on their ascent to the conference throne, depth and poise carried the day in a winning effort.

The site of Carver-Hawkeye Arena still carried a sting heading into Thursday. It's the site of an improbable collapse two years ago that haunts the Spartans. Thursday was about a championship, but it was also about exorcising old demons.

Michigan State (25-5, 16-3 Big Ten) got out to an early 11-5 lead. Jeremy Fears Jr. led the way in transition and with his shot, while forward Jaxon Kohler added four points. Defensively, the Spartans forced misses on Iowa's first four 3-pointers.

But once Iowa (15-15, 6-13)

made a three — from the right hand of Pryce Sandfort 4:43 in — Iowa sparked a 13-2 run that took over the early going. It was a crash course in everything that makes this Hawkeyes team dangerous despite a lackluster season, with strong 3-point shooting aided by a lightning break.

Until a Jase Richardson three at 8:34 put a stop to it, Iowa's run grew to 22-2 and its lead to 14 points as it continued to carve up Michigan State's defense in the paint. It operated the pick-and-roll to devastating effect in the first half as the Spartans' bigs watched a step behind.

Michigan State's offense didn't help matters. It missed 10 of 11 shots during that span, only complicating the problem. But when it did find a rhythm, Richardson made the beat. His run-breaking three was part of his 12 points in the first half. At times, he was the only pulse to the offense. It came with its sacrifices — he fell hard at the baseline and left the court in pain at 2:51. But he returned after just 45 seconds of game clock elapsed, no worse for

wear as he finished a tough and-one drive.

A 37-30 halftime deficit kept the game in reach for Michigan State — familiar territory for the Spartans, having trailed by a shot or two at halftime four times in its five-game win streak. This was the largest halftime deficit it faced since trailing Oregon by 14 in early February (another game it won).

In the second half, the shots kept falling for Iowa, even from unlikely sources. Forward Seydou Traore nailed a three as part of a five-point outburst early in the half, just his eighth made triple of the season. Kohler scored five for Michigan State himself, but Iowa still held a sizeable lead. Every time the Spartans chipped forward, Iowa had an answer in the form of a three, dunk or open layup.

All this was frustrating, and it showed in Michigan State's composure. Arguments over coverage boiled up between the guards, while the Spartans disputed foul calls, too. On one stretch with just over 12 minutes to play, Coen Carr took

hard contact on a dunk with no foul called, while Tre Holloman received a foul for a similar play the other way. An irate Tom Izzo made his dispute known to the officials, with the Iowa crowd begging for a technical. No foul came, and Izzo kept pressing his case after the next timeout.

Izzo's yelling worked. Richardson free throws and a Jaden Akins three brought the game to a single point deficit.

Carr's six points came as part of a 16-2 run that took the game over. Michigan State led 64-60 with 7:59 to play. After traded baskets, Akins made it a six-point lead with a three before Fears stole the ball and scored. A post move from Kohler brought the Spartans' lead to 10 points. A three from Holloman with 3:54 made it 15. Even in Iowa, the site of that old collapse, that would be enough to win both the game and the Big Ten title.

Ten points from Josh Dix helped Iowa claw back to single digits, trailing 87-79 with 51.3 seconds to play. But Michigan State prevailed to take sole possession of the Big Ten title.

Teams in US feature 7-footers more versatile than ever

Associated Press

Danny Wolf moves with the freedom of a guard in a 7-footer's body, bursting off screens for catch-and-shoot 3-pointers, beating defenders off the dribble, using his vision to find open teammates over smaller players.

Vladislav Goldin is more bruising, setting brain-jarring screens, muscling his way inside while overpowering nearly anyone who gets in his way.

No. 17 Michigan has the luxury of playing two 7-footers with distinctly-different styles, often doing it with both on the floor at the same time.

"It's a unique style that our coaches let us play," Wolf said.

"It's been great so far."

The role of the big man has changed in basketball over the past decade or so as players have become more skilled to fit a more free-flowing, 3-point oriented game.

Once relegated to the paint around the basket, bigs could now stretch the floor with long-range shooting touch, catching and shooting off screens, dribbling with the skills of a guard.

Back-to-the-basket big men have gone through a resurgence the past few seasons.

Purdue center Zach Edey became the first player to win consecutive national player of the year awards since Ralph Sampson by using his 7-4, 305-pound

frame to dominate inside. UConn won consecutive NCAA championships with 7-2 Donovan Clingan controlling the lane at both ends.

This season, Duke has risen to No. 2 in the AP Top 25 and become a national title contender behind fabulous freshmen Cooper Flagg and Kon Kneuppel. Khaman Maluach, a 7-2 freshman from South Sudan, has been a nice complement to those two, swatting shots on defense and running to the rim for dunks.

No. 7 Alabama has followed up its first Final Four a year ago with another strong season. Preseason All-American point guard Mark Sears makes the Crimson Tide go, but 6-11 center

Clifford Omoruyi has been their dominating force on the inside, flying in for lobs while using his strength to clean up on the glass and protect the rim.

But it's not all about the paint. There are still plenty of bigs finding success all the way out to the 3-point arc.

Agile Stanford 7-1 center Maxime Raynaud is averaging 20.2 points and 10.9 rebounds while leading the Cardinal with 54 3-pointers.

Creighton's Ryan Kalkbrenner can score inside and outside, averaging 19.1 points, 8.8 rebounds and shooting 36% from 3. The 7-1 senior also is fifth nationally with 2.69 blocked shots per game.

Pereira to defend light heavyweight in UFC 313

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Jon Jones remains the UFC's primary star, the reigning heavyweight champion widely considered the best mixed martial arts fighter of all time.

Jones lost his position as the top-ranked pound-to-pound fighter to Islam Makhachev, but Alex Pereira could get there. It's a case that UFC CEO Dana White made in January.

Pereira would likely have to beat Jones in the octagon, but the Brazilian has some work to do Saturday in UFC 313 before turning his attention to the possibility of moving up a weight class. He will put his light heavyweight belt on the line for the fourth time when he faces top-ranked challenger Magomed Ankalaev.

Oddsmakers list this as a close fight, with Pereira a -115 favorite at BetMGM Sportsbook and Ankalaev at -105.

"I'm not looking ahead," Pereira said through an interpret-

er. "But what I think for the future, what I have in hand, fighting Jon Jones or Olek Usyk in boxing, those I see possibly happening. It doesn't depend on me. It depends on the UFC. Whatever the UFC wants to do, I'll do it."

Pereira (12-2), who turns 38 on July 7, is making a late-career run at becoming the UFC's marquee attraction.

He entered the UFC in 2021 and won four fights in a row, the last being a fifth-round technical knockout of Israel Adesanya for the middleweight championship on Nov. 12, 2022. Adesanya won the rematch with a second-round TKO on April 8, 2023.

But it didn't take Pereira long to get back on track, scoring a second-round TKO of Jirí Procházka seven months later for the vacant light heavyweight title. He hasn't lost since, and Pereira attributed that success to better understanding himself as he's gotten older and making

the proper adjustments.

Ankalaev (20-1-1) has been chasing Pereira to land this fight. The 32-year-old from Russia comes off back-to-back victories, one by TKO and the other by unanimous decision.

"I can't even explain what I'm feeling right now," Ankalaev said through an interpreter. "It's been a really long time that we've been hunting this bout. We've been waiting for this opportunity. Over a year, we've been asking for it. Now we're finally here and we have this opportunity, I'm 100% motivated."

Pereira disputed that he had avoided Ankalaev, saying he wanted more than just this matchup.

"Many people have dreams," Pereira said. "This Saturday, I'm fulfilling one dream — to fight Ankalaev."

Ankalaev said he has mostly adhered to fasting rules as he observes Ramadan, which lasts a month and is considered one of the holiest parts of the Mus-

lim calendar. He said he broke "a couple of fasting sessions" to drink water in preparation for this fight, but that most of his training occurred beforehand.

His faith is why Ankalaev said he didn't take Pereira up on a bet in which the loser would donate \$200,000 to the other fighter's charity, which has created a little bit of a back-and-forth between the two combatants.

"Whatever this warfare is, it doesn't work for me," Ankalaev said. "I have a fight against him. I don't care what he writes online or says online or tweets. If he wants to do some sort of a charity donation, I'm willing and happy to do it. Tell him that."

The co-main event is a light-weight bout between third-ranked challenger Justin Gaethje (25-5) and No. 11 Rafael Fiziev (12-3). Gaethje was scheduled to fight Dan Hooker, who pulled out because of a hand injury.

Formula 1 stamps Cadillac ready to join grid in 2026

Associated Press

Cadillac's Formula 1 team received official approval Friday to join the grid in 2026 and its owners insist the team will be ready to compete.

Although the grid expansion was approved last November, it was not until Friday that governing body FIA and Formula One Management said the Cadillac F1 effort meets all the requirements to become the 11th team in the series next season.

"I am proud to lead the Federation in this progressive step for the championship," FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem said in a statement, who called adding an 11th team "a milestone" and a "transformative moment."

"GM/Cadillac brings fresh energy, aligning with the new FIA 2026 regulations and usher-

ing in an exciting era for the sport."

The team is owned by General Motors and TWG Motorsports, an arm of the larger TWG Global group owned by co-chairs Mark Walter and Thomas Tull. TWG Global has controlling interest in the Los Angeles Dodgers, Premier League club Chelsea, the Professional Women's Hockey League, as well as stakes in the Los Angeles Lakers and other ventures.

TWG Motorsports is also the majority owner of Andretti Global, which competes in IndyCar, Indy NXT and Formula E; NASCAR team Spire Motorsports; the two-car IMSA sports car GTP program fielded by Wayne Taylor Racing; and has a stake in Walkinshaw Andretti United, the Bathurst 1000-winning race team competing in Australia's

Supercars Championship.

"The Cadillac Formula 1 Team's presence in the paddock will inspire future competitors and fans," said Stefano Domenicali, President and CEO of Formula 1. "Their entry strengthens our mission to push motorsport's boundaries at the highest level. As we said in November, the commitment by General Motors to bring a Cadillac team to Formula 1 was an important and positive demonstration of the evolution of our sport."

Cadillac F1 will be the second American-owned team on the grid, joining Haas F1, which is owned by California businessman Gene Haas. The Haas program does not have an American driver or a partnership with an American manufacturer, but it is sponsored by MoneyGram.

Cadillac F1 anticipates being

distinctively American with its partnership with General Motors and the possibility of IndyCar driver Colton Herta, a California native, in the two-car lineup. It comes at a time when F1 has three races in the U.S., — in Miami, Austin, Texas, and Las Vegas — and teams are battling for sponsorship from American companies as the global series gains popularity in the U.S.

Cadillac's power trains will not be ready for some time and the team will lease engines from Ferrari until General Motors has a product ready to compete. The power trains will be built in a facility on the North Carolina campus of Hendrick Motorsports in Concord, while the F1 program will be run from a new facility being built in Indiana and a second factory in Silverstone, England.