

## DOD lays off first probationary workers

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Civilians working for the Navy and the Defense Department's health and logistics agencies were the first to lose their jobs as the Pentagon began firing workers last week.

The Navy, the Defense Health Agency and the Defense Logistics Agency confirmed civilian job terminations are underway at those organizations, though information on those firings was limited Friday.

The firings are part of a Defense Department-wide effort to reduce the civilian workforce by up to 8%, beginning with 5,400 probationary workers. Those layoffs began Monday, according to a memo released by the Pentagon that was dated the same day.

The Navy does not have the number of civilian personnel fired "readily available for public release," said Cmdr. Tim Hawkins, the Navy's assistant chief of information, media

operations, production and plans. "The process is in progress. We will look to provide additional information when able."

The Defense Health Agency also was unable to say how many probationary workers had been fired, though an official with the agency said, "To date, DHA dismissals are restricted to headquarters positions that are administrative in nature."

The Defense Logistics Agency confirmed Thursday that fewer than 100 civilian personnel of its workforce of 25,000 were dismissed Monday from their jobs.

The civilian workers fired were probationary, officials confirmed. The federal government considers workers to be probationary if they have been on the job for less than one to two years. Probationary workers lack the employment protections of more seasoned workers.

"DLA released probationary

employees consistent with the Department of Defense's broader efforts to ensure resources are aligned with the department's strategic objectives," the agency said in a statement.

The Defense Logistics Agency provides logistics support to the military and foreign nations. It is the Defense Department's largest combat support agency. The agency declined to identify the divisions where the dismissed employees worked or whether more terminations are expected.

Workers fired Monday were "the first step" in the Defense Department's effort to "appropriately align its personnel resources with its critical war-fighting functions," read the March 3 memo signed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Their employment, he said, was not in the public interest.

"The department will continue taking steps to implement [President Donald Trump's] direction to restore accountabil-

ity to the American public, reduce the size of the federal government's workforce through efficiency improvements and attrition, and faithfully and responsibly manage taxpayer dollars," the memo reads.

The firings were planned to start the week before last. Multiple Pentagon officials were unable to provide a reason for the delay.

The firings will come in waves until officials dismiss the 5,400 workers required by Hegseth, a defense official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said Thursday. The official was unable to say how many layoffs had already occurred or what departments were impacted.

Veterans make up about 30% of the federal workforce but comprise nearly half of the Defense Department's civilian workforce. There are more than 950,000 civilian employees across the Defense Department, according to its civilian careers website.

## 2 soldiers, 1 ex-soldier accused of selling secrets to China

BY SVETLANA  
SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Two Army soldiers stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington and a former soldier in Oregon have been accused in separate indictments of sharing classified military information with China, according to the Justice Department.

First Lt. Li Tian, a health services administrator serving in Washington, is accused of conspiring with Ruoyu Duan, a former soldier based in Oregon, to

gather information secretly about the Army's operations, including technical manuals, from November 2021 to December 2024.

Tian was tasked with obtaining instructions and manuals for Bradley and Stryker armored vehicles used by the Army and selling them to Duan, who was paid by unknown people in China, according to the Justice Department. Duan served in the Army from 2013 to 2017 and routinely made payments to other security clearance holders and active-duty

service members, according to the indictment, though only two soldiers were named in indictments released last week.

A second indictment accuses Sgt. Jian Zhao, a battery supply sergeant assigned to the 17th Field Artillery Brigade in Washington, of obtaining and selling about 20 government hard drives, some marked "SECRET" and "TOP SECRET," to buyers in China.

Zhao received at least \$15,000 in payments from August to December 2024.

"These arrests underscore

the persistent and increasing foreign intelligence threat facing our Army and nation," Brig. Gen. Rhett Cox, the commanding general of Army Counterintelligence Command, said in a statement on Thursday.

Tian and Duan are charged in Oregon with conspiring to commit bribery and theft of government property. Zhao is charged in Washington with bribery, theft of government property and conspiring to obtain and transmit national defense information to an individual not authorized to receive it.

# Fort Bragg is back, with new namesake

By COREY DICKSTEIN  
*Stars and Stripes*

FORT BRAGG, N.C. — Army Pfc. Roland L. Bragg's youngest daughter shrugged off the idea that there was anything cynical about choosing her father as the new namesake for the service's largest installation once named for a Confederate general.

"My father was a very humble man, and he was a good man, and he did what was right," Bragg's 69-year-old daughter, Diane Watts, said Friday at the North Carolina post where she and her family members gathered with Fort Bragg's top brass to recognize its new — and old — name. "I couldn't be more thrilled. They found a good one in my father's name."

Less than two years after the Army officially changed Fort Bragg — then named for Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg, who was a slave owner and failed military tactician who struggled to relate to his own troops — to Fort Liberty in June 2023, the world's most populous military base is again Fort Bragg. This time named for Roland Bragg, the little-known World War II private whose Battle of the Bulge heroics earned him a Silver Star and a Purple Heart.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the change last

month, undoing a yearslong and multimillion-dollar effort to find a new name for the post and eight other Army installations associated with the Confederacy. Hegseth had blasted the name changing efforts as "woke" and damaging to the military's intergenerational bonds before taking the Pentagon's top job under President Donald Trump, who has also long opposed the installations' name changes.

Hegseth did not consult with Pfc. Bragg's family before delivering the order to revert the post to Fort Bragg in his honor. Watts said she only learned of the name change honoring her father when a news reporter called her shortly after the announcement. She thought it was a "prank call," she said.

On Friday, just outside the 18th Airborne Corps' headquarters on Fort Bragg, Lt. Gen. Gregory Anderson, the unit's commander, joined Col. Chad Mixon, the post's garrison commander, in permanently retiring the short-lived Fort Liberty colors and replacing them with the once-retired Fort Bragg flag.

Officials made no mention of the post's past ties to the Confederacy during the ceremony. Anderson said they were choosing to look forward with Pfc. Bragg as a perfect example of an "ordinary

hero" forged on Fort Bragg's vast training ranges.

The 172,000-acre Fort Bragg is the most populous military base in the world, boasting some 282,000 people, including 50,000 active-duty service members.

Known throughout the Army as "the center of the universe," the base hosts some of the Army's most-deployed units, including its immediate response force — an 82nd Airborne Division unit tasked with always being prepared to deploy quickly. The installation is also home to key units such as the 18th Airborne Corps, Army Forces Command, Army Special Operations Command, 1st Special Forces Command, 3rd Special Forces Group, Army Reserve Command, the Army's most elite unit known as Delta Force and the multiservice Joint Special Operations Command.

Bragg's Army service was brief but action-packed, and family members said it left a profound impact on him even though he rarely talked about his military days.

Bragg of Webster, Maine, was drafted into the Army as a 20-year-old in 1943, according to the service. He trained at Fort Bragg before deploying to Europe to fight with the 513th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 17th Airborne Division in the 18th Air-

borne Corps.

In January 1945, amid the fierce fighting on the frozen battlefields of Bastogne, Belgium, Bragg was wounded and taken prisoner alongside four other soldiers by German troops. The captured soldiers were transferred to a German aid station where Bragg found he had something in common with their German guard — both were freemasons, Anderson said.

"They somehow convinced the German guard to let the prisoners go, but only if [Pfc.] Bragg first knocked the German guard out with a rifle, so it looked like he struggled," the general said. "Wounded as he was, Pfc. Bragg was more than happy to oblige."

Bragg took the German's uniform, stole a nearby ambulance and loaded his fellow wounded Americans into the back and raced toward U.S. lines under heavy fire. He survived, but he believed for more than 50 years that none of the men in the back of the ambulance made it. Only decades later did he learn one of the men did survive, his family members said Friday.

By November 1945, Bragg left the Army to return to Maine where he spent his life running an auto repair and salvage garage and raising his three daughters. He died in 1999.

## Former administrator of POW/MIA group sentenced

By MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

A Virginia woman whose embezzlement nearly bankrupted the nation's preeminent advocacy organization for American prisoners of war will serve time behind bars and pay restitution to the group, a federal judge in Virginia has ruled.

Jennifer Giorffino, a former administrator for the National League of Families of American

Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia, had pleaded guilty Oct. 31 in federal court in Alexandria, Va., to a single count of wire fraud.

U.S. District Judge Patricia Tolliver Giles on Thursday sentenced Giorffino to three years and nine months in prison followed by two years of supervised release, according to court records. Giorffino will also be required to pay about \$257,000 in restitution.

Prosecutors had sought the maximum penalty of four years and three months against the 54-year-old married mother of two. Giles recommended that Giorffino serve out her sentence at the minimum-security Federal Prison Camp Alderson in West Virginia.

Giorffino was hired in 2019 and began siphoning off donations for personal retail purchases in October 2022, the prosecutor's sen-

tencing recommendation stated. In all, Giorffino took \$257,259 from the nonprofit, which was founded in 1970 and is also known as the National League of POW/MIA Families.

In 1971, the league created the iconic black-and-white POW/MIA flag that flies over government and military institutions.

As part of her sentence, Giorffino must participate in a mental health treatment program.

# Naval Base Kitsap set for carrier swap

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

BREMERTON, Wash. — Naval Base Kitsap would swap the Navy's oldest aircraft carrier for its newest under a plan released Friday.

"The Navy proposes to replace an older Nimitz-class aircraft carrier at NBK-Bremerton with the next-generation Ford-class aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy," according to a statement from U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

The USS Nimitz, commissioned in 1975 just days after the fall of Saigon ended the Vietnam

War, is slated to move from the naval base at Bremerton, which is west of Seattle on Puget Sound, to Naval Station Norfolk, Va., by April 2026.

The Navy on Friday also released a draft environmental impact assessment calling for public comment on the plan to bring the USS John F. Kennedy to Kitsap after it is commissioned later this year. The Navy said electrical and other facilities upgrades at Kitsap would be necessary before moving the new carrier to Bremerton.

"USS John F. Kennedy would arrive no earlier than fiscal year

2029," according to the Fleet Forces Command statement.

The John F. Kennedy would join the USS Ronald Reagan at Kitsap.

When the Nimitz arrives at Norfolk, it will begin an estimated 12-month "Ship's Terminal Offload Plan," or STOP, according to Naval Sea Systems Command.

"The ship will no longer operate as an active part of the fleet," said Jamie K. Koehler, a command spokeswoman.

But there will be one more deployment before the Nimitz relinquishes its place in the fleet.

In November 2024, the Nimitz was approved as seaworthy and combat-ready following a Navy review in San Diego. That allowed the aircraft carrier to surpass its official 50-year service life for a final deployment.

The Navy won't say which theater of operations that the Nimitz will serve its final mission.

For now, the nuclear-powered carrier is at its homeport on Puget Sound where it returned Feb. 19.

Congress was notified Thursday the carrier was moving to Norfolk, the U.S. Naval Institute News reported Thursday.

## N. Korea unveils nuclear-powered sub for 1st time

*Associated Press*

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea unveiled for the first time a nuclear-powered submarine under construction, a weapons system that can pose a major security threat to South Korea and the U.S.

The state media agency on Saturday released photos showing what it called "a nuclear-powered strategic guided missile submarine," as it reported leader Kim Jong Un's visits to major shipyards where warships are built.

The Korean Central News

Agency, or KCNA, didn't provide details on the submarine, but said that Kim was briefed on its construction.

The naval vessel appears to be a 6,000-ton-class or 7,000-ton-class one that can carry about 10 missiles, said Moon Keun-sik, a South Korean submarine expert who teaches at Seoul's Hanyang University. He said that the use of the term "the strategic guided missiles" meant it would carry nuclear-capable weapons.

"It would be absolutely threatening to us and the U.S.," Moon said.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman Brian Hughes said that "we're aware of these claims and do not have additional information to provide at this time."

"The U.S. is committed to the complete denuclearization of North Korea," Hughes said.

A nuclear-powered submarine was among a long wish list of sophisticated weaponry that Kim vowed to introduce during a major political conference in 2021 to cope with what he called escalating U.S.-led military threats. Other weapons were solid-fueled intercontinental ballis-

tic missiles, hypersonic weapons, spy satellites and multi-warhead missiles. North Korea has since performed a run of testing activities to acquire them.

North Korea obtaining a greater ability to fire missiles from underwater is a worrying development, because it's difficult for its rivals to detect such launches in advance.

Questions about how North Korea, a heavily sanctioned and impoverished country, could get resources and technology to build nuclear-powered submarines have surfaced.

## DOD signs AI deal to help plan military maneuvers

*The Washington Post*

U.S. military commanders will use artificial intelligence tools to plan and help execute movements of ships, planes and other assets under a contract called "Thunderforge" led by start-up Scale AI, the company said Wednesday.

The deal comes as the Defense Department and the U.S. tech industry are becoming more closely entwined. Scale will use AI tools from Microsoft and Google to help build Thun-

derforge, which is also being integrated into start-up weapons developer Anduril's systems.

The Thunderforge project aims to find ways to use AI to speed up military decision-making during peace and wartime.

Commanders' roles have become more challenging as military operations and equipment have become more complex and technology-centric over the past decades, with missions involving drones and conventional forces spanning land, sea and

air, as well as cyberattacks.

Under the new contract, Scale will develop AI programs that commanders could ask for recommendations about how to most efficiently move resources throughout a region. The technology could combine data from intelligence sources and battlefield sensors with information on the positions of friendly and enemy planes and ships.

Today, commanders must often make decisions based on information from various staff of-

ficers and sensor systems. "The planning and operational process for the U.S. military has not evolved since Napoleon," said Dan Tadross, the head of federal delivery at Scale who previously served with the Marines and researched military applications of AI for the Navy.

After years of theorizing that AI could help military planning, the technology is now at the point where it can actually be helpful, Tadross said in an interview.

# 2 days of clashes, killings rock Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The death toll from two days of clashes between Syrian security forces and loyalists of ousted President Bashar Assad and revenge killings that followed has risen to more than 1,000, a war monitoring group said Saturday, making it one of the deadliest acts of violence since Syria's conflict began 14 years ago.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said in addition to 745 civilians killed, mostly in shootings from close distance, 125 government security force members and 148 militants with armed groups affiliated with Assad were killed. It added that electricity and drinking water were cut off in large areas around the city of

Latakia.

The clashes, which erupted Thursday, marked a major escalation in the challenge to the new government in Damascus, three months after insurgents took authority after removing Assad from power.

The government has said that they were responding to attacks from remnants of Assad's forces and blamed "individual actions" for the rampant violence.

The revenge killings that started Friday by Sunni Muslim gunmen loyal to the government against members of Assad's minority Alawite sect are a major blow to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the faction that led the overthrow of the former government. Alawites made up a large part of Assad's support

base for decades.

Residents of Alawite villages and towns spoke to The Associated Press about killings during which gunmen shot Alawites, the majority of them men, in the streets or at the gates of their homes. Many homes of Alawites were looted and then set on fire in different areas, two residents of Syria's coastal region told the AP from their hideouts.

They asked that their names not be public out of fear of being killed by gunmen, adding that thousands of people have fled to nearby mountains for safety.

Residents of Baniyas, one of the towns worst hit by the violence, said bodies were strewn on the streets or left in homes and on the roofs of buildings, and nobody was able to collect

them. One resident said that the gunmen prevented residents for hours from removing the bodies of five of their neighbors killed Friday at close range.

Ali Sheha, a 57-year-old resident of Baniyas who fled with his family and neighbors hours after the violence broke out Friday, said that at least 20 of his neighbors and colleagues in one neighborhood of Baniyas where Alawites lived, were killed, some of them in their shops, or in their homes.

Sheha called the attacks "revenge killings" of the Alawite minority for the crimes committed by Assad's government. Other residents said the gunmen included foreign fighters, and militants from neighboring villages and towns.

## House Republicans unveil bill to avoid shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans unveiled a spending bill Saturday that would keep federal agencies funded through Sept. 30, pushing ahead with a go-it-alone strategy that seems certain to spark a major confrontation with Democrats over the contours of government spending.

The 99-page bill would provide a slight boost to defense programs while trimming non-defense programs below 2024 budget year levels. That approach is likely to be a nonstarter for most Democrats who have long insisted that defense and nondefense spending move in the same direction.

Congress must act by midnight Friday to avoid a partial government shutdown.

Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., is teeing up the bill for a vote on Tuesday despite the lack of buy-in from Democrats, essentially daring them to vote

against it and risk a shutdown. He also is betting that Republicans can muscle the legislation through largely by themselves.

Normally, when it comes to keeping the government fully open for business, Republicans have had to work with Democrats to craft a bipartisan measure that both sides can support. That's because Republicans almost always lack the votes to pass spending bills on their own.

Crucially, the strategy has the backing of President Donald Trump, who has shown an ability so far in his term to hold Republicans in line.

House Republicans' leadership staff outlined the measure, saying it would allow for about \$892.5 billion in defense spending and about \$708 billion in nondefense spending.

Republicans noted that it would provide for the largest pay increase to junior enlisted servicemembers in more than 40 years.

## One of the last US survivors of Pearl Harbor dies at 102

BY WYATT OLSON

*Stars and Stripes*

Jessie A. Mahaffey, one of the last remaining survivors of the sinking of the USS Oklahoma during the 1941 Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, died March 1 in Alexandria, La. He was 102.

The Oklahoma capsized and sank within minutes of the Sunday morning attack, killing 429 crew members.

With Mahaffey's death, only two survivors of the Oklahoma are known to be living, according to a tally maintained by Kathleen Farley, president of the California chapter of Sons and Daughters of Pearl Harbor Survivors.

By that same tally, only 14 veterans who survived the 1941 attack are still alive.

Jessie Alton Mahaffey was born Nov. 23, 1922, in Florien, La., according to an obituary posted online by Warren Meadows Funeral Home in Many, La.

Mahaffey joined the Navy in the summer of 1941 after graduating high school in Louisiana. After attending boot camp in San Diego, he was assigned to the Oklahoma.

On the morning of the attack, he was preparing for an inspection when Japanese torpedo bombers attacked the Oklahoma, he told KTBS-TV in Shreveport in a Dec. 7 interview.

"It was a quiet Sunday, and we had the day off except for the yearly admiral inspection," he told the station. "Then we heard a siren, saw planes and smoke. It must have only gone on for 45 minutes, but it was crazy."

Mahaffey left the Navy when the war ended in 1945, returning to Louisiana where he worked for the phone company for 30 years.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Joyce, and is survived by two sons. His funeral was held March 8 at Warren Meadows Funeral Home.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Uber and Waymo team up to sell driverless rides

**TX** AUSTIN — Uber will shift into a new gear in Austin, Texas, when its ride-hailing service will begin dispatching self-driving cars to pick up passengers.

The autonomous option is being provided through a partnership that brings together Uber and robotaxi pioneer Waymo, which already sells self-driving rides through its own app in Phoenix, San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Waymo is now trying to expand into more cities by teaming up with Uber — an alliance that was announced in September. The partnership begins in Austin and will, later this year, expand to offer robotaxi rides in Atlanta.

### Lava fountain spews over 100 feet into air

**HI** HONOLULU — Lava from a Hawaii volcano shot into the sky in tall fountains that were expected to grow even bigger as part of an off-and-on eruption.

The eruption began Dec. 23 in a crater at the summit of Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes, in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on the Big island.

What began in the morning with sporadic, small flows became continuous fountaining in the afternoon, the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory said. They reached 150 to 165 feet and were expected to grow.

No residential areas have been threatened by the eruption. People have been flocking to overlook sites inside the park for views of the fiery show.

### Pricey police robot dog is out of service

**HI** HONOLULU — In the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic, flush with federal relief money, the Honolulu Police Department made national headlines for spending \$150,000 on a robot dog.

A four-legged machine that can walk and even dance, Spot was ostensibly purchased to take people's temperatures at a city-run homeless encampment, an explanation that attracted so much criticism that HPD leaders were hauled before the Honolulu City Council in 2021.

There, they defended the six-figure purchase by saying Spot would actually be useful for years to come. Four years later, Spot is playing dead.

"The department still has the robotic dog but is not deploying it at this time," HPD spokesperson Michelle Yu said via email.

In fact, Spot hasn't been used since 2021, she said, and the department apparently doesn't know what to do with it.

### Killer whales amaze with rarely seen bird hunt

**WA** SEATTLE — A pod of orcas swam close to shore and amazed onlookers in Seattle by treating the whale watchers to the rare sight of the apex predators hunting a bird.

The pod of Bigg's killer whales visited Elliott Bay and were seemingly on a hunt underwater just off Seattle's maritime industrial docks. The pod exited the bay close to the West Seattle neighborhood across from downtown, where people were waiting to catch sight of them.

Kersti Muul, who runs a WhatsApp whale alert system for the Seattle area called "Salish Wildlife Watch," recorded footage as the whales appeared just below a lookout point.

One of the whales was seen capturing a bird and taking it below water, sparking gasps from onlookers.

### Man executed by firing squad is first in 15 years

**SC** COLUMBIA — A South Carolina man who killed his ex-girlfriend's parents with a baseball bat was executed by firing squad Friday, the first U.S. prisoner in 15 years to die by that method, which he saw as preferable to the electric chair or lethal injection.

Three volunteer prison employees used rifles to carry out the execution of Brad Sigmon, 67, who was pronounced dead at 6:08 p.m.

Sigmon killed David and Gladys Larke in their Greenville County home in 2001 in a botched plot to kidnap their daughter.

Sigmon's lawyers said he chose the firing squad because the electric chair would "cook him alive," and he feared that a lethal injection of pentobarbital into his veins would send a rush of fluid and blood into his lungs and drown him.

### State police launch probe into inmate death

**NY** NEW YORK — New York state police are investigating the death of an inmate as the state corrections system continues to be roiled by a wildcat strike by prison staff.

The agency said it had launched a probe into the death

of Messiah Nantwi at Mid-State Correctional Facility. Police and corrections officials have declined to provide details, other than to say the 22-year-old died at a hospital in Utica.

The New York Times, citing accounts from other inmates, reported that he was beaten by correctional officers.

Thomas Mailey, a corrections department spokesperson, didn't immediately respond to an email seeking more details about Nantwi's death. But he confirmed that 11 staffers have been placed on administrative leave, pending the results of the police probe.

### Dems vow to 'punch back' against Musk over court

**WI** MADISON — Democrats promised to "punch back" against Elon Musk in the race for control of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, casting the election as a referendum on the billionaire adviser to President Donald Trump.

The Wisconsin Democratic Party announced a new \$1 million-plus effort to portray the April 1 election as the first chance for angry voters to make their feelings known about what the Trump administration has been doing. The effort comes as Musk — the world's richest person — and other Republican allies have outpaced Democrats in spending.

Democrats can overcome the funding disadvantage by tapping into the "rage" that voters feel as Musk "tears the country apart," Wisconsin Democratic Party Chairman Ben Wikler said.

"We're going to punch back," he said.

— From wire reports

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# No. 7 Alabama stuns No. 1 Auburn at buzzer

Associated Press

AUBURN, Ala. — Mark Sears hit a game-winning floater as time expired, and No. 7 Alabama spoiled the home finale of rival and No. 1 Auburn with a 93-91 overtime victory Saturday.

The off-balance buzzer-beater from the free-throw line was only the third made basket of the game for Sears, who finished with nine points.

Alabama (24-7, 13-5 Southeastern Conference) got 23 points from Grant Nelson and 15 points each from Labaron Philon and Clifford Omoruyi.

The win ended a two-game losing skid for Alabama and handed a second straight loss to Auburn (27-4, 15-3).

Tahaad Pettiford added 19 points for Auburn, which was without second-leading scorer Chad Baker-Mazara for the final 10:52 of regulation and overtime. Baker-Mazara was ejected for a Flagrant 2 foul on Alabama's Chris Youngblood.

**No. 2 Duke 82, North Carolina 69:** Freshman Kon Knueppel scored 17 points to help the visiting Blue Devils beat the rival Tar Heels and clinch the outright Atlantic Coast Conference regular-season title.

Cooper Flagg added 15 points, nine rebounds and six assists despite first-half foul trouble for Duke (28-3, 19-1).

The Blue Devils are in position to rise to No. 1 in Monday's AP Top 25 poll with top-ranked Auburn losing its past two games.

**No. 3 Houston 65, Baylor 61:** L.J. Cryer scored 23 points with six 3-pointers as Big 12 champion and the visiting Cougars won their 10th consecutive game, beating the Bears to wrap up the regular season.

J'Wan Roberts added 11 points and 10 rebounds for Houston (27-4, 19-1 Big 12), including two free throws with 13 seconds remaining. Milos Uzan had 12 points and Emanuel Sharp scored 11.

**No. 4 Tennessee 75, South**

**Carolina 65:** Chaz Lanier scored 23 points to lead the host Volunteers over the Gamecocks.

Tennessee (25-6, 12-6 Southeastern Conference) wrapped up a double bye for the SEC Tournament. Cade Phillips came off the bench to score 15 points, Igor Milicic had 13 and Jordan Gainey added 10 points.

**No. 5 Florida 90, Mississippi 71:** Walter Clayton Jr. scored 23 points on senior night, Alex Condon notched his second straight double-double and the host Gators beat the Rebels in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Fellow senior Alijah Martin chipped in 13 points for Florida, which closed out the regular season by winning nine of 10 and strengthening its case for a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. The Gators (27-4, 14-4 Southeastern Conference) already clinched the No. 2 seed in next week's league tournament.

**No. 6 St. John's 68, No. 20 Marquette 84 (OT):** Zubey Ejiofor hit a tiebreaking shot at the buzzer, Kadary Richmond got the first Red Storm triple-double this century and visiting St. John's beat the Golden Eagles in overtime for its sixth consecutive victory.

The Red Storm (27-4, 18-2 Big East) matched a program record for regular-season wins. They went 27-4 in 1985-86 and ended up finishing 31-5 that year. They had already clinched their first Big East outright regular-season title since 1985 a week earlier.

**No. 9 Texas Tech 85, Arizona State 57:** JT Toppin had 25 points and 11 rebounds, and the visiting Red Raiders pulled away from the Sun Devils for a victory in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Freshman guard Christian Anderson tied a season high with 21 points and made four 3-pointers off the bench for Texas Tech (24-7, 15-5 Big 12), which set a school record for con-

ference wins.

**No. 10 Iowa State 73, Kansas State 57:** Curtis Jones scored 24 points to lead the visiting Cyclones past the Wildcats.

Iowa State (23-8, 13-7 Big 12) led wire-to-wire. It got 14 points from Joshua Jefferson and 11 points from Dishon Jackson.

**No. 11 Clemson 65, Virginia Tech 47:** Viktor Lakhin scored 12 of his 16 points in the first half as the host Tigers opened a double-digit lead and beat the Hokies for the program's record-tying 26th victory of the season.

Clemson (26-5, 18-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) matched a mark set by the 1990 team led by Dale Davis and Elden Campbell, who won the Tigers' only ACC regular-season crown.

**Penn State 86, No. 12 Wisconsin 75:** D'Marco Dunn had 25 points and Yanic Konan Niederhauser added 15 points and 11 rebounds as the visiting Nittany Lions rallied in the second half for a victory over the Badgers, preventing Wisconsin from clinching a double bye in the Big Ten Tournament.

The Badgers (23-8, 13-7) went into the weekend in a three-way tie for third with No. 13 Maryland and No. 18 Purdue, but could have secured the double bye with a victory following Illinois' victory over the Boiler-makers on Friday.

**No. 13 Maryland 74, Northwestern 61:** Julian Reese had 19 points and 11 rebounds in his home finale, and the host Terrapins pulled away late for a victory over the Wildcats.

Maryland (24-7, 14-6 Big Ten) had a sluggish day offensively but did enough to win for the seventh time in eight games — with the only defeat coming on a 65-foot shot at the buzzer against Michigan State late last month.

**No. 14 Louisville 68, Stanford 48:** Terrence Edwards Jr. and Chucky Hepburn scored 16 points apiece, and the host Cardinals ended the regular season with a victory over the Cardinal.

Louisville (25-6, 18-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) used its defense to earn its ninth straight victory and 19th in 20 games. Stanford went nearly eight minutes between baskets, missing 11 shots in a row. That allowed the Cardinals to go on a 14-1 run and take a 29-11 lead after Hepburn's layup with 5:04 left before halftime.

**No. 19 Kentucky 91, No. 15 Missouri 83:** Otega Owhe scored 22 points, and Andrew Carr added 16 points and 12 rebounds to help the visiting Wildcats beat the Tigers.

Koby Brea scored 17 points and Amari Williams added 14 points and eight rebounds to help Kentucky (21-10, 10-8 Southeastern Conference) win its second game in a row.

**No. 22 Texas A&M 66, LSU 52:** Wade Taylor IV scored 17 points to become the Aggies' all-time scoring leader as visiting Texas A&M beat the Tigers in the SEC regular-season finale for both teams.

Taylor has amassed 1,999 points in his four seasons with the Aggies, surpassing Bernard King, who scored 1,990 from 1999-2003.

**No. 23 BYU 85, Utah 74:** Dawson Baker scored 15 points and Richie Saunders added 14 to lead the host Cougars to a victory over the rival Utes.

Keba Keita had 12 points and Egor Demin scored 10 for BYU (23-8, 14-6 Big 12), which won its eighth straight game. Both players had seven rebounds. Demin finished with six assists.

**Kansas 83, No. 24 Arizona 76:** Hunter Dickinson matched a career high with 33 points to lead the host Jayhawks past the Wildcats.

**Arkansas 93, No. 25 Mississippi State 92:** Jonas Aidoo made one of two free throws with 11 seconds left to break a tie game and the Bulldogs missed two potential game-winning shots at the rim at the other end to close out the host Razorbacks' victory.

# Panthers beat Sabres for 6th straight

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Vitek Vanecek stopped all 21 shots he faced in his Florida debut, and the Panthers beat the Buffalo Sabres 4-0 on Saturday night.

A.J. Greer, Carter Verhaeghe, Anton Lundell and Sam Bennett scored as the Panthers won their sixth straight game. Vanecek, acquired from San Jose on Wednesday, got his first shutout of the season and 10th of his career.

Captain Aleksander Barkov had an assist, giving him six points in his past two games. Nate Schmidt added two assists.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 32 saves for the Sabres, who lost their sixth in a row.

**Kraken 4, Flyers 1:** Matty Beniers, Chandler Stephenson and Tye Kartye scored in the second period, helping Seattle win at Philadelphia.

Brandon Montour also scored for the Kraken, who had lost four of five. Philipp Grubauer made 23 saves.

Beniers' 15th goal gave Seattle a 2-1 lead with 1:03 left in the second. Stephenson added a short-handed goal with 22 seconds remaining in the period.

Owen Tippett scored his 19th goal for Philadelphia in the first period. Samuel Ersson had 28 saves.

**Senators 4, Rangers 3 (OT):** Brady Tkachuk capped a two-goal effort with the game-winner 33 seconds into overtime as Ottawa beat visiting New York.

The Senators (32-25-5) took over the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. The Rangers (31-26-6) remain just outside with Columbus holding the second spot.

Trailing 3-1 early in the third period, the Senators rallied to force the extra period.

Ridley Greig got Ottawa within one, burying a Dylan Cozens rebound at 10:16. With 2:52 left in regulation, Michael Amadio tied the game 3-3 jumping on a loose puck.

Artemi Panarin gave the Rangers a 3-1 lead at 7:08 of the third when he was able to get behind Ottawa's defense and beat Linus Ullmark's high glove to extend his goal streak to four games. Ullmark made 20 saves.

**Avalanche 7, Leafs 4:** Valeri Nichushkin completed a hat trick with an empty-net score after Nathan MacKinnon knocked in the go-ahead goal with 4:15 remaining as host Colorado rallied from two goals down to beat Toronto.

It was Nichushkin's first three-goal game in the regular season. He had a hat trick in Game 4 of a playoff series in 2024. Nichushkin tied his career-high with four points.

With Colorado on the power play, MacKinnon sent a wrist shot over the glove of Anthony Stolarz to give Colorado the lead. The Avalanche tied the game on Jonathan Drouin's goal with 8:05 left.

It was part of five consecutive goals for Colorado after trailing 4-2 in the second period.

Joel Kiviranta also scored and MacKinnon closed it out with an empty-netter for the Avalanche, who improved to 5-0 on their six-game homestand.

**Bruins 4, Lightning 0:** Jeremy Swayman stopped all 26 shots he faced to lead visiting Boston past Tampa Bay.

Cole Koepke scored twice against his former team. Mark Kastelic and Nikita Zadorov also scored for Boston, which won for only the second time in 10 games.

Swayman recorded his fourth shutout of the season and 16th of his career.

Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 21 saves for Tampa Bay.

Boston took the lead after Casey Mittelstadt intercepted a Nick Perbix pass in the neutral zone and found Koepke. As Koepke cut to the net and tried to slip a puck through the pads that Vasilevskiy stopped, Oliver Bjorkstrand tried to clear the

puck out of the paint but hit Vasilevskiy's pad and the puck rebounded into the net at 10:32 of the second period.

**Flames 1, Canadiens 0:** Joel Farabee scored the only goal and Dustin Wolf made 26 saves as host Calgary moved back into a playoff spot with a victory over Montreal.

The Flames moved into the second wild-card spot in the Western Conference, one point up on the idle Vancouver Canucks.

Montreal, which entered the game with points in six straight (5-0-1) games, was shut out for the fourth time this season.

Wolf, who collected his third shutout, improved to 22-12-4. He moved to 3-0-0 in his career against the Canadiens.

Jakub Dobes made 23 stops for the Canadiens.

**Kings 2, Blues 1 (OT):** Quinton Byfield scored on a wrist shot 27 seconds into overtime to give Los Angeles a victory over visiting St. Louis.

Byfield got his 13th goal of the season, capitalizing on a turnover forced by Adrian Kempe before scoring from the left circle to end the Kings' five-game skid.

Anze Kopitar also scored, and Darcy Kuemper made 19 saves for Los Angeles.

Nick Leddy scored and Joel Hofer made 22 saves, helping the Blues pick up a point for the 11th time in 13 games to surge back into wild-card contention.

Leddy's first goal of the season came early in the third period on a slap shot through traffic, canceling out Kopitar's tip of a shot from Drew Doughty late in the first.

**Predators 3, Blackhawks 2 (OT):** Steven Stamkos scored at 2:39 of overtime to complete his 14th career hat trick as Nashville beat visiting Chicago.

Justus Annunen finished with 17 saves as the Predators got their third straight win.

Ilya Mikheyev and Alex Vlas-

ic scored for the Blackhawks, who were 3-0-1 in their last four games. Arvid Soderblom had 38 saves.

Vlasic gave the Blackhawks a 1-0 lead 1:56 into the second period.

Chicago's Alec Martinez was sent off for high-sticking 25 seconds later, and Stamkos tied the score just 15 seconds into the power play.

Stamkos put the Predators ahead nearly 10 minutes later.

Mikheyev tied it with 7:38 left in regulation.

**Oilers 5, Stars 4:** Zach Hyman had two goals and an assist and Edmonton hung on to beat visiting Dallas.

Connor McDavid had a goal and an assist and Viktor Arvidsson and Connor Brown also scored for the Oilers, who have won three of their past four.

Stuart Skinner made 22 saves, but Edmonton nearly blew a 5-1 lead after two periods.

Trade deadline acquisition Mikko Rantanen had a goal and an assist in his debut for Dallas, which had its four-game winning streak stopped.

Stars forward Roope Hintz took a puck to the face in the second period and didn't return.

**Islanders 4, Sharks 2:** Jean-Gabriel Pageau had a goal and two assists, Ilya Sorokin stopped 38 shots and New York won at San Jose.

Anders Lee, Anthony Duclair and Adam Boqvist also scored for the Islanders, who have won four of their past five games. Noah Dobson and Simon Holmstrom each had two assists.

Nikolai Kovalenko and Will Smith scored for the Sharks, who have lost 10 of 12 (2-7-3). Macklin Celebrini had two assists and Alexandar Georgiev finished with 24 saves.

Duclair scored on a power play midway through the opening period and Pageau made it 2-0 with 39 seconds left in the first.

# Celtics end Lakers' winning streak at 8

Associated Press

BOSTON — Jayson Tatum had 40 points, 12 rebounds, and eight assists, and the Boston Celtics held off a late rally to beat the Los Angeles Lakers 111-101 on Saturday night.

With LeBron James in the locker room with a strained groin, Los Angeles cut a 20-point, fourth-quarter deficit to single digits. But Tatum and Jaylen Brown scored Boston's final 12 points to preserve the win.

Brown added 31 points as the Celtics earned their fourth straight victory.

James finished with 22 points, 14 rebounds and nine assists before exiting midway through the fourth quarter as the Lakers had their eight-game win streak snapped.

Luka Doncic had 34 points and eight rebounds in his first game in Boston since he and the Dallas Mavericks lost Game 5 of the NBA Finals as the Celtics clinched their 18th championship.

**Rockets 146, Pelicans 117:** Dillon Brooks had 27 points, Alperen Sengun and Aaron Holiday added 20 each and host Houston sailed to a win over New Orleans.

The Rockets never trailed in their second straight victory over the Pelicans after getting a 109-97 win in New Orleans on Thursday night.

**Hornets 105, Nets 102:** Miles Bridges scored 26 points and host Charlotte used a finishing 12-0 run to beat Brooklyn and snap a nine-game losing streak.

Bridges added 12 rebounds, five assists and a huge blocked shot in the closing seconds for the Hornets, who trailed 102-93 with under 3½ minutes remaining. Nick Smith Jr. scored 19 points while shooting 6-for-17 (3-for-9 from 3-point range) and 4-for-4 from the free-throw line.

**Magic 111, Bucks 109:** Paolo Banchero scored 29 points, Cole Anthony added 22 and visiting Orlando beat Milwaukee

to end a five-game skid and snap the Bucks' four-game winning streak.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 37 points and 11 rebounds for Milwaukee, which lost for just the second time in its last 10 games. Damian Lillard added 26 points.

**Bulls 114, Heat 109:** Josh Giddey scored 26 points and visiting Chicago rallied from a 17-point, first-half deficit to beat Miami.

Coby White finished with 21 points and Zach Collins had 18 points and 15 rebounds. Tre Jones added 15 points for the Bulls, who won their second straight in Florida after beating Orlando on Thursday.

**Wizards 118, Raptors 117:** Jordan Poole scored 34 points and NBA-worst Washington won its second straight game, beating host Toronto when Raptors guard Jamal Sheard's running layup at the buzzer was ruled to be late.

Bilal Coulibaly added 18 points and 10 rebounds to help

the Wizards improve to 13-49 with their second straight victory.

**Hawks 120, Pacers 118:** Trae Young had 36 points and Caris Lavert added 26 off the bench as host Atlanta held off Indiana for its third win in four games.

The Hawks led by 20 points after the first quarter and 17 at halftime, but the Pacers took the lead midway through the fourth quarter before Atlanta made key plays down the stretch.

**Warriors 115, Pistons 110:** Draymond Green hit a go-ahead 3-pointer with 35 seconds left, then secured a loose ball moments later and converted a free throw, Stephen Curry surpassed 25,000 points and host Golden State held off Detroit.

Curry made four 3-pointers and needs seven to become the first player in NBA history with 4,000. He had 32 points, making all 12 of his free throws.

## Plenty of ups, downs on last day of NHL trade deadline

Associated Press

Chris Patrick woke up Friday morning to see what trades around the NHL he missed. Quickly, the Washington Capitals' first-year general manager figured out that his colleagues around the league weren't bluffing about what they wanted in return.

"Prices have gone up significantly," he said to himself before sending a second-round pick to archrival Pittsburgh for depth forward Anthony Beauvillier before the deadline Friday. "You had to decide, if you wanted to participate, you had to be good paying higher prices. ... Back to Econ 101, supply and demand. It was in full force."

High prices were paid as big-name stars were among the 47 who changed places on dead-

line day alone. That doesn't even count the dozens traded over the previous week as the league's landscape was transformed.

"At the end of the day, one team's going to be happy: the team that wins the Stanley Cup," Columbus Blue Jackets GM Don Waddell said.

The Dallas Stars and Florida Panthers are now the co-betting favorites to do that in June, according to BetMGM Sportsbook. Only one team will win it, but there were plenty of winners and losers at the trade deadline.

### Winner: Rantanen

He had to be traded twice in six weeks, but the pot of gold at the end of his Colorado to Carolina to Dallas voyage is a

prominent role on a team with four players from Finland and the long-term security of an eight-year extension worth \$96 million that matches his jersey number.

Instead of dealing with the uncertainty of unrestricted free agency, Rantanen will make \$12 million a season through 2033. He also joins a top contender that already added Mikael Granlund and Cody Ceci in early February, should get No. 1 defenseman Miro Heiskanen back for the playoffs and could even get Tyler Seguin back around the same time.

### Loser: Hurricanes

GM Eric Tulsky tried to spin it positively, and if his team wins it all under his watch either this year or in the near fu-

ture, he will be validated. But giving up Martin Necas and Jack Drury in a three-team blockbuster in late January for 13 games of Rantanen and then flipping him for Logan Stankoven and two first- and two third-round draft picks does little to help Carolina's chances this spring.

### Winner: Capitals

It's not even about Beauvillier, who should slot in on the third line for the top team in the Eastern Conference. Carolina not having Rantanen and New Jersey losing leading scorer Jack Hughes for the remainder of the season because of shoulder surgery has parted Washington's path to the Eastern Conference final like the "Rock the Red" Sea.