

Envoy taking Putin's comments to Trump

Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff to discuss details of the American proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in the war with Ukraine, asking him to convey Moscow's thoughts to Washington, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday.

Putin asked Witkoff late Thursday to give additional messages to U.S. President Donald Trump, Peskov told reporters, after the Russian leader said at a news conference that he supported a truce in principle but set out a host of details that need to be clarified before it is agreed.

Trump said the U.S. held "very good and productive" discussions with Putin the day before. In a post on his Truth Social site Friday morning, Trump said "that there is a very good chance that this horrible, bloody war can finally come to an end," adding that Ukrainian troops are surrounded by the

Russian military.

Ukraine, under severe military pressure on parts of the front line three years after Russia's full-scale invasion, has already endorsed the truce proposal. Russia's army has gained battlefield momentum, and analysts say Putin likely will be reluctant to rush into a ceasefire while he feels he has an advantage. The Russian army, backed by North Korean troops, are now close to completely driving Ukrainian forces from their foothold in Russia's Kursk border region in what would be a major setback for Kyiv.

Ukraine's General Staff, however, denied Friday that its forces in Kursk are encircled by Moscow's troops and said that any reports to that effect were "fabricated by the Russians for political manipulation and to exert pressure on Ukraine and its partners."

A possible phone call between Putin and Trump to settle outstanding ceasefire issues

could be arranged after Witkoff delivers the messages in Washington, Peskov said. "There is an understanding on both sides that such a call is needed," Peskov said.

"There are certainly some grounds for cautious optimism," Peskov said. "A lot still needs to be done, but the president has shown solidarity with President Trump's position."

U.S. officials have said they were set to discuss technical issues related to a ceasefire next week. Given the range of issues on the table, and the sharp differences between what Moscow and Kyiv want, it could potentially take weeks or months for the guns to fall silent.

Trump vowed during his election campaign to settle the war in 24 hours, but in January he changed that time frame, voicing hope that peace could be negotiated in six months.

Putin's apparently amicable tone toward the White House reflects the remarkable shift in

U.S. relations with Russia and Ukraine since Trump returned to office in January. Former President Joe Biden had sought to isolate Putin.

Trump has threatened both Russia and Ukraine with punitive measures if they don't engage with his peace efforts.

Trump briefly cut off critical military aid and intelligence sharing in an apparent effort to push Kyiv to enter talks on ending the war. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had a tense meeting at the White House on Feb. 28 in which Trump questioned whether Ukraine wanted to halt the war.

Trump has raised the possibility of tightening sanctions on Russia, though his administration has also embraced Kremlin positions on the conflict, including indicating that Ukraine's hopes of joining NATO are unlikely to be realized and that it probably will not get back the land that Russia's army occupies.

Differences remain as Trump huddles with NATO boss

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte on Thursday presented a united front over a ceasefire plan in Ukraine, but it was clear trans-Atlantic differences remain unresolved.

The meeting came just over a week after Trump's pick for his ambassador to NATO told senators that the U.S. commitment to the alliance was "ironclad," though some Democrats have expressed concerns about a potential shift in U.S. policy away from the longtime military com-

pact.

As have other world leaders, Rutte sat beside Trump in the Oval Office on Thursday and tried a little flattery, saying he wanted to "commend" the U.S. president over his attempts to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict and crediting Trump with "breaking a deadlock."

Rutte also told Trump he was "totally right" about China and Russia stepping up their activities in the Arctic and said it was "very important" for Arctic nations besides Russia to work together under U.S. leadership to keep the resource-rich region

safe. The NATO boss said increasing European defense production — long a Trump demand — would be on their agenda, while Trump said member nations must take actions to keep the alliance "relevant" and "strong."

But it was clear their differences remained.

"We have to do it. We really need it for national security," Trump said of a potential U.S. annexation of Greenland. Rutte declined to comment, saying there was no need to "drag NATO" into the matter.

Trump also took a swipe at

Rutte, a former Dutch prime minister, saying the United States devotes more to its defense budget than European countries do. "We're on the other side of the ocean, and they're right there," he said, appearing to refer to Russia. "It's unfair."

Trump said he and Rutte would also "be talking about trade" and suggested the NATO leader could urge alliance member countries to give the U.S. better terms on the exchange of goods and services amid his trade war with Canada, the European Union and other nations.

Congressional Dems divided as shutdown deadline looms

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate finds itself on Friday in a familiar position, working to avoid a partial government shutdown with just hours to spare as Democrats confront two painful options: allowing passage of a bill they believe gives President Donald Trump vast discretion on spending decisions or voting no and letting a funding lapse ensue.

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer gave members of his caucus days to vent their frustration about the options before them but abruptly switched course and made clear on the eve of voting that he will not allow a government shutdown. His move outraged many in the party who want to fight the Trump agenda, but gives senators room to side with Republicans and allow the continuing resolution, often described as a CR, to advance.

In a rare move, the House Democratic leadership, which essentially held the line against the bill in their chamber, issued a scathing rejoinder, warning

against caving to Trump, billionaire Elon Musk and the Republican agenda marching forward in Congress.

"House Democrats will not be complicit," wrote House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, House Democratic Whip Katherine Clark and House Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar in a joint statement from the party's annual issues conference retreat, where frustrations were boiling over.

"We remain strongly opposed to the partisan spending bill under consideration in the Senate."

But early Friday, Schumer picked up one unexpected nod of support — from Trump himself, who just a day earlier was gearing up to blame Democrats for any shutdown.

"Congratulations to Chuck Schumer for doing the right thing — Took 'guts' and courage!" the president posted on his social media account.

A procedural vote Friday will provide a first test of whether the package has the 60 votes needed to advance, ahead of fi-

nal voting likely later in the day. At least eight Democrats will need to join with Republicans, who hold a 53-47 majority but have some dissent in their ranks, to move the funding package forward.

Schumer has acknowledged the difficult choice he faced but insisted Democrats would not allow a government shutdown and warned of the havoc Trump and Musk could bring if federal offices shuttered.

"A shutdown will allow DOGE to shift into overdrive," Schumer said, referring to the Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency. "Donald Trump and Elon Musk would be free to destroy vital government services at a much faster rate."

Congress has been unable to pass the annual appropriations bills designed to fund the government, so they've resorted to passing short-term extensions instead.

The legislation before the Senate marks the third such continuing resolution for the current fiscal year, now nearly half over.

2 judges tell Trump to rehire feds

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Two federal judges handed down orders requiring President Donald Trump's administration to rehire thousands, if not tens of thousands, of probationary workers let go in mass firings across multiple agencies Thursday, slowing down for now the president's dramatic downsizing of the federal government.

Both judges separately found legal problems with the way the mass terminations were carried out and ordered the employees be at least temporarily brought back on the job.

The Trump administration has already appealed the first ruling. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt cast it as an attempt to encroach on the president's power to hire and fire employees.

In San Francisco, U.S. District Judge William Alsup found that terminations across six agencies were directed by the Office of Personnel Management and an acting director, Charles Ezell, who lacked the authority to do so.

In Baltimore, U.S. District Judge James Bredar found that the administration did not follow laws set out for large-scale layoffs, including 60 days' advance notice. Bredar, who was appointed by President Barack Obama, ordered the firings temporarily halted and the workforce returned to the status quo before the layoffs began. He sided with nearly two dozen states that filed a lawsuit alleging the mass firings are illegal and already having an impact on state governments as they try to help the suddenly jobless.

At least 24,000 probationary employees have been terminated since Trump took office, the lawsuit alleges.

Postal Service plans to cut 10,000 workers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Postmaster General Louis DeJoy plans to cut 10,000 workers and billions of dollars from the U.S. Postal Service budget and he'll do that working with Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency, according to a letter sent to Congress on Thursday.

DOGE will assist USPS with addressing "big problems" at the \$78 billion-a-year agency, which has sometimes struggled

in recent years to stay afloat. The agreement also includes the General Services Administration in an effort to help the Postal Service identify and achieve "further efficiencies."

USPS listed such issues as mismanagement of the agency's retirement assets and Workers' Compensation Program, as well as an array of regulatory requirements that the letter described as "restricting normal business practice."

"This is an effort aligned with our efforts, as while we have accomplished a great deal, there is much more to be done," DeJoy wrote.

Critics of the agreement fear negative effects of the cuts will be felt across America. Democratic U.S. Rep. Gerald Connolly of Virginia, who was sent the letter, said turning over the Postal Service to DOGE would result in it being undermined and privatized.

High court asked to allow citizenship limits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is asking the Supreme Court to allow restrictions on birthright citizenship to partly take effect while legal fights play out.

In emergency applications filed at the high court on Thursday, the administration asked the justices to narrow court orders entered by district judges in Maryland, Massachusetts and Washington that blocked the order President Donald Trump signed shortly after beginning his second term.

The order currently is blocked nationwide. Three federal appeals courts have rejected the administration's pleas, including one in Massachusetts on Tuesday.

The order would deny citizenship to those born after Feb. 19 whose parents are in the country illegally.

It also forbids U.S. agencies from issuing any document or accepting any state document recognizing citizenship for such children.

Roughly two dozen states, as well as several individuals and groups, have sued over the executive order, which they say violates the Constitution's 14th Amendment promise of citizenship to anyone born inside the United States.

The Justice Department argues that individual judges lack the power to give nationwide effect to their rulings.

The administration instead wants the justices to allow

Trump's plan to go into effect for everyone except the handful of people and group that sued, arguing that the states lack the legal right, or standing, to challenge the executive order.

As a fallback, the administration asked "at a minimum" to be allowed to make public announcements about how they plan to carry out the policy if it eventually is allowed to take effect.

Acting Solicitor General Sarah Harris contends in her filing that Trump's order is constitutional because the 14th amendment's citizenship clause, properly read, "does not extend citizenship universally to everyone born in the United States."

But the emergency appeal is not directly focused on the val-

idity of the order. Instead, it raises an issue that has previously drawn criticism from some members of the court, the broad reach of orders issued by individual federal judges.

In all, five conservative justices, a majority of the court, have raised concerns in the past about nationwide, or universal, injunctions.

But the court has never ruled on the matter.

The administration made a similar argument in Trump's first term, including in the Supreme Court fight over his ban on travel to the U.S. from several Muslim majority countries.

The court eventually upheld Trump's policy but did not take up the issue of nationwide injunctions.

Many federal offices may begin closing this summer

Associated Press

Federal agencies will begin to vacate hundreds of offices across the country this summer under a frenetic and error-riddled push by Elon Musk's budget-cutting advisers to terminate leases that they say waste money.

Musk's Department of Government Efficiency maintains a list of canceled real estate leases on its website, but internal documents obtained by The Associated Press contain a crucial detail: when those cancellations are expected to take effect.

The documents from inside the General Services Administration, the U.S. government's real estate manager, list dozens of federal office and building leases expected to end by June 30, with hundreds more slated over the coming months.

The rapid pace of cancellations has raised alarms, with some agencies and lawmakers appealing to DOGE to exempt specific buildings. Several

agencies are facing 20 or more lease cancellations in all, including the IRS, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Many of the terminations would affect agencies that aren't as well-known but oversee services critical to many Americans.

They span from a Boise, Idaho, office of the Bureau of Reclamation — which oversees water supply and deals with disputes across the often-parched American West — to a Joliet, Ill., outpost of the Railroad Retirement Board, which provides benefits for railroad workers and their survivors.

The lease terminations do not mean all the locations will close. In some cases, agencies may negotiate new leases to stay in place, downsize their existing space or relocate elsewhere.

DOGE says GSA has notified landlords in recent weeks that it plans to terminate 793 leases.

Colleges facing probes as part of anti-DEI efforts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than 50 universities are being investigated for alleged racial discrimination as part of President Donald Trump's campaign to end diversity, equity and inclusion programs that his officials say exclude white and Asian American students.

The Education Department announced the investigations Friday, one month after issuing a memo warning America's schools and colleges that they could lose federal money over "race-based preferences" in admissions, scholarships or any aspect of student life.

"Students must be assessed according to merit and accomplishment, not prejudged by the color of their skin," Education Secretary Linda McMahon said in a statement.

Most of the new inquiries are focused on colleges' partnerships with the PhD Project, a nonprofit that helps students from underrepresented groups

get degrees in business. Department officials said that the group limits eligibility based on race and that colleges that partner with it are "engaging in race-exclusionary practices in their graduate programs."

The group of 45 colleges facing scrutiny over ties to the PhD Project include Arizona State, Ohio State and Rutgers, along with prestigious private schools like Yale, Cornell, Duke and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Six other colleges are being investigated for awarding "impermissible race-based scholarships," the department said, and another is accused of running a program that segregates students on the basis of race.

Those seven are: Grand Valley State University, Ithaca College, the New England College of Optometry, the University of Alabama, the University of Minnesota, the University of South Florida and the University of Tulsa School of Medicine.

Hamas says it will release US-Israeli hostage, 4 bodies

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Hamas said Friday it has accepted a proposal from mediators to release one living American-Israeli hostage and the bodies of four dual-nationals who had died in captivity.

The Israeli prime minister's office cast doubt on the offer, accusing Hamas of trying to manipulate talks underway in Qatar on the next stage of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire.

The militant group in the Gaza Strip did not immediately specify when the release of soldier Edan Alexander and the four bodies would take place — or what it expected to get in return.

Alexander was 19 when he was abducted from his base on the border with Gaza in southern Israel during the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, 2023, that sparked the war, which has been the deadliest and most destructive fighting ever between Israel and Hamas.

It was not clear which mediators had proposed the release to Hamas and the militants didn't name them.

The United States, led by Trump administration hostage envoy Steve Witkoff, has been pushing for a proposal that would extend the truce and see a limited number of hostage for prisoner exchanges.

Following the Hamas statement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Israel had "accepted the Witkoff outline and showed flexibility," but said that "Hamas is refusing and will not budge from its positions."

"At the same time, it continues to use manipulation and psychological warfare — the reports about Hamas' willingness to release American hostages are intended to sabotage the negotiations," read a letter from the government to hostage families.

It added that Israel's negotiating team would return Fri-

day from the Qatari capital of Doha. Netanyahu said he plans to convene his ministerial team on Saturday night to hear from the negotiators and decide on the next steps.

The first phase of the ceasefire ended two weeks ago but the pause in fighting has held — if tensely — for now.

The White House last week made a surprise announcement, saying that American officials had engaged in "ongoing talks and discussions" with Hamas officials, stepping away from a long-held U.S. policy of not directly engaging with the militant group.

That prompted a terse response from Netanyahu's office.

It was not immediately clear whether those talks were linked to Hamas' Friday announcement about releasing Alexander and the remains of the four additional captives, whose names were not disclosed.

Guatemala steps up patrols along border as US extends security goals

Associated Press

OCOS, Guatemala — As the United States government works to effectively extend its border security objectives south into Central America, countries like Guatemala have come under renewed scrutiny and pressure to step up their own border enforcement.

On Thursday, a Guatemalan army unit patrolled the Suchiate river that forms the western end of the Guatemala-Mexico border. The patrol was part of stepped up border operations since January, said Col. Juan Ernesto Celis.

President Bernardo Arévalo has said migration is a right but in a regulated fashion.

The soldiers on patrol are looking to stop illegal arms, drug and human trafficking across Guatemala's borders. At this border, they frequently coordinate with their Mexican counterparts.

Ann Marie Argueta, spokeswoman for Guatemala's defense department, said Thursday that the military wants to not only protect against crimes that threaten the population, but also prevent "incursions into national territory by transna-

tional organized crime."

When U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Guatemala in February, Arévalo announced that Guatemala would form a border security force to patrol its borders with Honduras and El Salvador as well.

Last July, nearly 600 Mexicans fled fighting between cartels in their border communities and sought refuge in Guatemala. Mexico's two most powerful cartels from the northern states of Sinaloa and Jalisco have been battling for control of lucrative smuggling routes in southern Mexico.

Iran, China, Russia urge end to US sanctions

Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Representatives of China, Russia and Iran called Friday for an end to U.S. sanctions on Iran over its rapidly advancing nuclear program and a restart to multinational talks on the issue.

The three countries' meeting was the latest attempt to broach the matter and comes after U.S. President Donald Trump wrote to Iran's supreme leader in an attempt to jump-start talks.

The letter, which hasn't been published, was offered as Trump levied new sanctions on Iran as part of his "maximum pressure" campaign that holds out the possibility of military action while emphasizing he still believed a new deal could be reached.

China, Russia and Iran "emphasized the necessity of terminating all unlawful unilateral sanctions," China's Vice Foreign Minister Ma Zhaoxu read from a statement, flanked by Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov Sergey Alexeevich and Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi.

"The three countries reiterated that political and diplomatic engagement and dialogue based on the principle of mutual respect remains the only viable and practical option in this regard," Ma read.

In comments to the three representatives, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reinforced China's commitment to a peaceful settlement and opposition to "illegal" sanctions, China's official Xinhua News Agency reported. He added that China remains committed to the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear deal between Iran and six major countries as "the basis for new consensus."

Flagg hurt as No. 1 Duke beats Georgia Tech

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kon Kneueppel scored 28 points as No. 1 Duke overcame injuries to star Cooper Flagg and Maliq Brown to beat Georgia Tech 78-70 on Thursday and advance to the ACC Tournament semifinals.

Isaiah Evans scored 14 points on four 3-pointers and Khaman Maluach added 14 points and nine rebounds for the Blue Devils (29-3), who have won nine straight.

Flagg appeared to land awkwardly on Baye Ndongo's foot as he came down with a rebound late in the first half.

The ACC player of the year retreated to the Duke bench and punched a seat in frustration. After being helped to the locker room, Flagg returned to the Duke bench in the second half without a boot on his foot. He did not return to the game.

Brown went down with a shoulder injury in the first half.

Duncan Powell led Georgia Tech (17-16) with 24 points.

No. 2 Houston 77, Colorado 69: Emanuel Sharpe scored 19 points before fouling out, and No. 2 Houston overcame an injury to veteran forward J'Wan Roberts in the second half to beat Colorado and advance to the semifinals of the Big 12 Tournament.

LJ Cryer and Milos Uzan added 14 points apiece for the top-seeded Cougars (28-4), who will play No. 17 BYU — the No. 4 seed in the tournament — on Friday night for a spot in their second consecutive championship game.

Houston's postseason run a year ago was derailed by injuries, so it made sense that the

bench tensed up when Roberts went down right in front of it with about 18 minutes to go.

The Cougars' leading rebounder was helped to the locker room, where he was diagnosed with a right ankle sprain, and Roberts spent the rest of the game watching from the bench.

Andrej Jakimovski had 25 points for the Buffaloes (14-20), who won twice in the Big 12 tourney as its first No. 16 seed to finish a trying season on a high note.

Leading scorer Julian Hammond III managed just nine points on 2-for-13 shooting.

No. 6 St. John's 78, Butler 57: RJ Luis Jr. scored 20 points and No. 6 St. John's romped to a blowout of Butler in their Big East Tournament quarterfinal.

One game after posting the program's first triple-double this century, Kadary Richmond finished with 15 points, nine assists and eight rebounds for the Red Storm (28-4).

Aaron Scott also scored 15 for St. John's, which has won seven straight games — and 17 of 18 since the new year.

Coming off the school's first outright Big East regular-season title in 40 years, the Johnnies hold the top seed at the conference tournament for the first time since 1986.

They'll play No. 4 seed Xavier in the first semifinal Friday night at Madison Square Garden.

No. 9 Texas Tech 76, Baylor 74: JT Toppin had 26 points and 10 rebounds to lift No. 9 Texas Tech to a victory over Baylor in the Big 12 Tournament quarterfinals.

The second-seeded Red Raiders never trailed but almost

gave up the lead in the final minute after missing their final 10 field-goal attempts. VJ Edgecombe's attempt at a tying jumper at the buzzer missed off the glass.

Darrion Williams scored 14 points and Elijah Hawkins and Kerwin Walton had 12 each for Texas Tech (25-7), which will face Arizona in Friday's semifinals.

Norchedad Omier had 29 points and 15 rebounds for seventh-seeded Baylor (19-14).

No. 10 Clemson 57, SMU 54: Chase Hunter scored 21 points, Jaeden Zackery added 11 points and No. 10 Clemson battled back to beat SMU for its ninth straight win to reach the Atlantic Coast Conference semifinals.

Ian Schieffelin chipped in with nine points and 12 rebounds for the Tigers (27-5), who are seeking their first ACC Tournament title.

Matt Cross led SMU (23-10) with 13 points, while Boopie Miller had 10.

SMU led most of the second half, but Viktor Lakhin's lane jumper gave the Tigers a 52-51 lead with 4:50 left in the game.

SMU had a chance to tie or take the lead after Hunter missed a 3 with 17 seconds left with the shot clock winding down.

The Mustangs called timeout with 12.5 seconds left, but Chuck Harris missed a corner 3. There was a battle for the rebound before the ball went out of bounds.

It was initially ruled that the ball went off a Clemson player, but after reviewing the play, officials ruled SMU touched the ball last.

No. 17 BYU 96, No. 12 Iowa 96: Richie Saunders scored 23 points, hitting a crucial 3-pointer with less than a minute to go, and No. 17 BYU overcame a big game from Curtis Jones in a victory over No. 12 Iowa State in the quarterfinals of the Big 12 Tournament.

Fousseyni Traore added 15 points and Trevin Knell had 14 for the fourth-seeded Cougars (24-8), who went 18 of 36 from beyond the arc to set a tournament record for made 3-pointers, and advanced to play No. 2 Houston in the semifinals.

Jones hit seven 3s of his own and scored 31 points, and Milan Momcilovic had 18 for the short-handed Cyclones (24-9), who had won their last four games at the Big 12 tourney, including their run to the championship a year ago.

No. 13 Louisville 75, Stanford 73: Chucky Hepburn's putback jumper at the buzzer helped No. 13 Louisville overcome a 15-point second-half deficit to beat Stanford and advance the semifinals of the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament.

Terrence Edwards scored 25 points and Hepburn added 20 for the Cardinals (26-6), who have won 10 straight. Noah Waterman and James Scott each had 12.

Oziyah Sellers had 22 points and Maxime Raynaud added 17 points for Stanford (20-13), which was playing in its first ACC Tournament.

Stanford led 33-30 at halftime and appeared ready to pull away in the second half, building a 52-37 lead in the second half behind an 11-0 run.

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Texas Longhorns defeat Texas A&M in 2OT

FROM PAGE 5

Texas 94, No. 14 Texas

A&M 88 (2OT): Tre Johnson made the go-ahead 3-pointer with 2:08 left in the second overtime and the Texas Longhorns extended their first visit to the Southeastern Conference Tournament by beating old foe No. 14 Texas A&M to reach the quarterfinals.

Texas (19-14) came in as the SEC's No. 13 seed with the Longhorns needing victories to play their way into the NCAA Tournament. They will face No. 4 seed and eighth-ranked Tennessee on Friday.

Johnson finished with 20 points. Tramon Mark had 15, Kadin Shadrack added 14 and Jordan Pope had 13 for Texas.

Mark's short jumper hit off the rim just before the buzzer to force overtime and a thrilling finish.

Wade Taylor IV led the Aggies (22-10) with 29 points and was 17 for 18 at the free throw line, becoming the SEC's career tournament scoring leader. Manny Obaseki had 17 before fouling out. Aderss Garcia added 13 and Henry Coleman III had 10 points and 13 rebounds.

No. 15 Kentucky 85, Oklahoma 84: Otega Oweh made a baseline jumper with 0.5 seconds left after No. 15 Kentucky had blown a late lead in the final minutes, and the Wildcats beat Oklahoma to advance to the Southeastern Conference Tournament quarterfinals.

The sixth-seeded Wildcats (22-10), who led by 10 with 1:20 left, won their third straight and now will play fifth-ranked and third-seeded Alabama on Friday night.

Oweh finished with 27 points. Koby Brea added 22 and Andrew Carr 11.

No. 14 seed Oklahoma (20-13) won its SEC Tournament debut only to lose to a former Sooner for the second time since Feb. 26.

Oweh led Kentucky against

his old school with another late bucket.

Jeremiah Fears scored 28 points for Oklahoma, including a basket that gave the Sooners an 84-83 lead with 5.6 seconds remaining.

No. 18 Wisconsin 70, Northwestern 63:

Nolan Winter and John Tonje each scored 18 points to lead No. 18 Wisconsin to a victory over Northwestern in the second round of the Big Ten Tournament.

The Badgers (24-8), seeded fifth, will face No. 4 seed UCLA in Friday's quarterfinals.

Winter hit 4 of 5 shots and 9 of 10 free throws.

Nick Martinelli led the No. 13 seed Wildcats (17-16) with 22 points. Jordan Clayton added 10 points for Northwestern.

Leading by eight points, Wisconsin's Max Klesmit hit a 3-pointer to push the lead to 53-42. Kamari McGee followed that with a 3-pointer to push the lead to 56-42 with 8:58 remaining. Two more 3-pointers by Tonje gave the Badgers a 62-46 edge.

No. 20 Purdue 76, Southern

Cal 71: Trey Kaufman-Renn matched a career high with 30 points, including the go-ahead free throws with 28 seconds left, and No. 20 Purdue scored the final five points to beat Southern California in the second round of the Big Ten Tournament.

The sixth-seeded Boilermakers (22-10) trailed by 10 points in the first half, but they tied it by halftime and emerged from a back-and-forth second half thanks largely to Kaufman-Renn, who finished 12 of 20 from the field and 6 of 11 from the free-throw line.

Purdue advanced to face No. 22 and second-seeded Michigan in Friday's quarterfinals. The teams split this season, with each winning at home.

With USC (16-17) trailing by three in the closing seconds, Desmond Claude turned the ball over before the Trojans could attempt a tying 3-pointer. Big Ten Player of the Year Bra-

den Smith made two free throws to finish the scoring with 3.6 seconds remaining. Smith had 12 points on 3-of-10 shooting and nine assists.

Claude led the Trojans with 18 points. Wesley Yates added 13.

No. 21 Missouri 85, Mississippi State 73:

Tamar Bates scored 25 points and No. 21 Missouri beat Mississippi State to reach the quarterfinals of the Southeastern Conference Tournament.

Tony Perkins added a season-high 20 for the seventh-seeded Tigers (22-10), who will face No. 4 Florida on Friday night in the first tournament game for the Gators.

Josh Hubbard paced Mississippi State (21-12), which was the No. 10 seed in the SEC, with 24 points and Keshawn Murphy added 18.

Caleb Grill hit a 3-pointer as time expired in the first half, putting the Tigers up 39-34.

Thursday's game was much closer than the only regular-season matchup against the Tigers, an 88-61 victory for Missouri in Starkville.

No. 23 Oregon 72, Indiana

59: Jackson Shelstad had 18 points and TJ Bamba scored 17 to help No. 23 Oregon pull away late for a victory over Indiana in the second round of the Big Ten Tournament.

The Ducks (24-8) head into Friday's quarterfinal round against No. 7 Michigan State, the Big Ten regular-season champs, riding an eight-game winning streak.

Indiana (19-13) lost to Oregon for the second time in nine days and now must wait until Sunday to see if it makes the 68-team NCAA Tournament field.

No. 24 Illinois 106, Iowa 94:

Kylan Boswell scored a career-high 24 points and four other Illinois players finished in double figures as the 24th-ranked Fighting Illini beat Iowa in a wild second-round Big Ten Tournament game.

Tre White had 22 points and Tomislav Ivisic added 19 points, 10 rebounds and six assists as Illinois (21-11) won its fourth straight. The Illini face No. 11 Maryland in Friday's third quarterfinal game in Indianapolis.

Hawkeyes coach Fran McCaffery wasn't on the bench when Iowa guard Payton Sandfort tied the league's single-game tourney record for 3-pointers.

McCaffery was ejected with 13:33 left to play after drawing two technical fouls when he left the coach's box to argue with referees.

Sandfort made eight 3s, matching a mark done twice previously, to tie a career high with 30 points. Josh Dix added 21 points.

No. 25 Marquette 89, Xavier

87: Kam Jones scored 28 points and No. 25 Marquette rallied past Xavier in the Big East Tournament quarterfinals.

After trailing by 14 early in the second half, the fifth-seeded Golden Eagles (23-9) took the lead for good at 81-80 on Jones' layup with 1:16 remaining.

David Joplin connected on a pivotal 3-pointer with 26 seconds left, and Marquette held on to earn a semifinal matchup with sixth-ranked and top-seeded St. John's on Friday night at Madison Square Garden.

Ryan Conwell scored a career-high 38 points for Xavier (21-11), a school record for a Big East Tournament game. The fourth-seeded Musketeers, perched precariously on the bubble for an NCAA Tournament bid, had won seven straight.

Conwell shot 13 of 18 from the field and 7 for 11 on 3-pointers—including a long one he tossed in at the buzzer. Zach Freemantle had 15 points and Dailyn Swain added 11.

Chase Ross and Stevie Mitchell scored 16 points apiece for Marquette. Joplin finished with 14.

Antetokounmpo leads Bucks past Lakers

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo had 24 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists, and the Milwaukee Bucks snapped a three-game skid with a 126-106 victory over the short-handed Los Angeles Lakers on Thursday night.

The Bucks withstood a 45-point, 11-rebound performance from Luka Doncic, who had 29 points by halftime. His 45 points matched a season high and were his most since joining the Lakers.

Austin Reaves added 28 points for the Lakers, who lost their third straight.

Milwaukee's Brook Lopez scored 23 points, while Damian Lillard and Kevin Porter Jr. each had 22. Lillard also had 10 assists and six rebounds.

Los Angeles' LeBron James missed a second straight game due to a left groin strain. The Lakers also were missing Jackson Hayes (right knee bruise) and Rui Hachimura (left patellar tendinopathy).

Wizards 129, Pistons 125:

Alex Sarr made the go-ahead basket with 53 seconds left, followed with a blocked shot, and finished with 19 points to lead Washington to a victory over Detroit.

Justin Champagnie had 17 points and nine rebounds for the Wizards, while Kyshawn George scored all of his nine points in the fourth quarter, making three 3-pointers after going 0 for 4 through three quarters.

Cade Cunningham had 38 points and 10 rebounds for the Pistons, who had won two straight. Jalen Duren added 18 points and 14 rebounds.

Duren's follow shot gave the Pistons a 125-124 lead with 1:03 left. Sarr dunked at the other end to put Washington up 126-125, then blocked Cunningham's dunk attempt.

Tim Hardaway Jr. missed a tying 3-pointer with 8.7 seconds left and Marcus Smart clinched the game from the line.

Bulls 116, Nets 110:

Coby

White scored 31 points, and Chicago beat Brooklyn.

White extended his streak of 20-point games to a career-best seven, helping the Bulls rally to win their season-high fourth in a row.

Kevin Huerter added 18 points and nine rebounds. Tre Jones scored 18 points and Julian Phillips finished with 16. Chicago is 10th in the Eastern Conference at 28-38 and holds the final play-in spot.

Cam Thomas led Brooklyn with 24 points and a career-high 10 assists, and Nic Claxton added 18 points and 14 rebounds. Tyrese Martin scored 19 points and Cam Johnson had 16, but the Nets lost for the 10th time in 12 games.

Warriors 130, Kings 104:

Stephen Curry became the first player in NBA history with 4,000 career 3-pointers, Draymond Green scored 23 points and Golden State beat Sacramento for their sixth straight victory and 11th of 12.

Fans jumped to their feet and

cheered when Curry connected in the third quarter, and a tribute played on the big screen during a timeout.

Playing a day before his 37th birthday, the two-time NBA MVP needed two more from deep coming into the game. Last Saturday, he became the 26th player to score 25,000 points. Curry had 11 points Thursday.

His first 3 was from the left wing with 5:35 left in the first. Smothered by Keegan Murray and DeMar DeRozan, Curry missed on his second try from near the top of the arc — after Green scored the first six points on a pair of 3s.

Jonathan Kuminga returned from a right ankle injury that sidelined him for 31 games. He had 18 points on 7-for-10 shooting.

DeRozan scored 23 points for the Kings in their third straight loss and fourth in five.

Steve Kerr matched late Hall of Famer Al Attles for most coaching wins in Warriors franchise history with 557.

Ohtani, other players return to Japan to start season

Associated Press

TOKYO — It's only two games to start the Major League Baseball season — the World Series-champion Dodgers against the Chicago Cubs on Tuesday and Wednesday at the Tokyo Dome.

But it's much more for Dodgers manager Dave Roberts, who was born in Japan. And for Shohei Ohtani and the four other Japanese players competing at home for the Dodgers and Cubs.

Then there's MLB, which opens its regular season for the second straight year in the Asian market. A year ago it was Seoul, South Korea, where the Dodgers and San Diego Padres split two games. It was also where the betting scandal broke around Ohtani's interpreter.

"It's hard to tell if this is the

golden age for Japanese players in the United States," Ohtani said Friday, speaking through an interpreter, as both teams trained at the Tokyo Dome.

"I know there's been a lot of Japanese players that came before me," Ohtani added. "But having five (Japanese players) is a big deal. It's truly a big deal."

Asked what he was most looking forward to, Ohtani replied: "Eating good food, getting over the jetlag, and just being able to enjoy playing the game."

It's a homecoming for Roberts, who was born on Okinawa to a Japanese mother and an American father. He's expecting relatives to attend from Okinawa, where last year he was honored by officials there.

"For me it's personal because

I get to represent my mom's side of the family," Roberts said. "I have a lot of relatives and family that can watch this baseball game — watch a Dodgers game at night instead of having to watch us in the morning."

The time difference between Japan and the American east coast is 13 hours, and Japan is 16 hours ahead of Los Angeles.

Japan is Dodgers country, swept away by Ohtani, the World Series title, and pitchers Yoshinobu Yamamoto and Roki Sasaki. They are expected to be the Dodgers starters against the Cubs.

"I think our mission was accomplished painting the country of Japan in Dodgers blue," Roberts said.

Yamamoto and Ohtani talked about the joy of being home, as

did Cubs pitcher Shota Imanaga and Seiya Suzuki, the likely DH. Imanaga is expected to start against Yamamoto in the first game.

"I hope my teammates are really enjoying Japan right now," Ohtani said. "But also I hope the fans get to see my teammates enjoying Japan."

Ohtani was reminded that he has not thrown a bullpen session in several weeks as he hopes to return to pitching after missing out last season following elbow surgery.

"I want to prioritize the hitting aspect as we're getting into the season, to give a little breather mentally and physically to the pitching side of things," he said. "This is according to plan, and I'm pleased with how things have been going."

Power-play goals lift Panthers over Leafs

Associated Press

TORONTO — Sam Bennett scored power-play goals late in each of the first two periods, Sergei Bobrovsky made 23 saves and the short-handed Florida Panthers beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 3-2 on Thursday night for their seventh victory in eight games.

Defenseman Niko Mikkola also scored for the defending champion Panthers. They lead the Atlantic Division, four points ahead of the second-place Maple Leafs. Toronto has lost four of five.

Florida played without Matthew Tkachuk (lower-body), newcomer Brad Marchand (upper-body) and defenseman Aaron Ekblad (suspension).

John Tavares had his 27th goal of the season for Toronto. Max Domi added a goal, and Anthony Stolarz stopped 22 shots.

Panthers captain Alexander Barkov, Tkachuk and Sam Reinhart and members of the team's management presented a Stanley Cup replica ring to the Hockey Hall of Fame in a ceremony Wednesday.

Golden Knights 4, Blue Jackets 0: Adin Hill made 27 saves, and Nicolas Roy and Brandon Saad had a goal and an assist each as Vegas beat Columbus.

It was Hill's fourth shutout this season and the 11th of his NHL career.

Pavel Dorofeyev scored and Tomas Hertl had two assists for the Golden Knights.

Elvis Merzlikins made 25 saves for the Blue Jackets, who have lost two in a row and four of five.

Roy converted a pass from Jack Eichel during a power play at 12:00 of the first for a 1-0 lead on the Golden Knights' first shot of the game. The Blue Jackets at that point had 18 with eight on goal.

Saad made it 2-0 at 19:01 before Dorofeyev's goal at 12:17 of the second. Alex Pietrangelo made it 4-0 with an empty-net

goal in the third.

Saad has three goals in the past four games and five in 13 games for the Golden Knights.

Flyers 4, Lightning 3, SO: Owen Tippett and Matvei Michkov scored in the shootout, Bobby Brink had two goals and Philadelphia beat Tampa Bay.

Michkov and Tampa Bay's Brayden Point scored the only goals in the scheduled first three shootout attempts.

Tippett then beat Johnas Johansson and the Lightning failed to match, lifting the Flyers to a 1-5 record on their seven-game homestand.

Ryan Poehling had the other goal for Philadelphia. Gage Goncalves, Zemgus Girgensons and Cam Atkinson scored for Tampa Bay.

Atkinson received a video tribute for the two seasons and 36 goals he scored for the Flyers, then turned those appreciative cheers into boos when he tied the game at 3-all early in the third period. It was his first goal in 22 games.

Penguins 5, Blues 3: Ryan Graves scored 2:17 into the game and Pittsburgh never trailed in a win over St. Louis.

Graves' goal was his first of the season, and Conor Timmins flicked a shot over the stick-side shoulder of goaltender Jordan Binnington to give Pittsburgh a 2-0 lead almost 2 1/2 minutes into the second period.

Zack Bolduc scored a power-play goal with 8:25 left in the second period to cut the St. Louis deficit to 2-1.

Connor Dewar redirected a pass from Blake Lizotte into the net with 2:18 left in the second to make it 3-1. Timmins and Dewar were acquired last week in a trade with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Dylan Holloway added another power-play goal for St. Louis less than 90 seconds into the third period, Pittsburgh's Bryan Rust answered about six minutes later and Alexey Toropchenko's goal for St. Louis made

it 4-3 with about 11 minutes remaining.

Devils 3, Oilers 2: Jesper Bratt had a goal and two assists for his second straight three-point game and New Jersey rallied to beat Edmonton.

Bratt tied it at 2 with his 19th goal of the season at 6:50 of the third period, then set up Simon Nemec's first of the season 1:35 later. Brett Pesce also scored, and Jake Allen made 31 saves — 18 in the third period.

Leon Draisaitl scored his NHL-leading 47th goal for Edmonton. Evan Bouchard also scored and Connor McDavid had two assists. The Oilers lost their second straight and fell for the eighth time in 11 games.

Senators 6, Bruins 3: Drake Batherson had two goals and an assist to end a 10-game drought and Ottawa beat Boston for their fifth straight victory.

Shane Pinto, Tyler Kleven, Ridly Greig and Claude Giroux also scored to help Ottawa solidify its position as the Eastern Conference wild-card leader. Linus Ullmark made 22 saves.

David Pastrnak scored his 34th goal for Boston. Casey Mittelstadt and Marat Khusnutdinov added goals.

Rangers 3, Wild 2: Braden Schneider scored at 1:51 of overtime to give New York a victory over Minnesota.

Schneider slipped a backhander past goalie Filip Gustavsson into the top-right corner to end New York's four-game losing streak. Vincent Trocheck and Jonny Brodzinski also scored, and Igor Shesterkin made 26 saves.

Marcus Johansson and Frederick Gaudreau had tying power-play goals for Minnesota in the third period, and Gustavsson stopped 28 shots. The Wild top the Western Conference wild-card standings.

Trocheck opened the scoring at 6:45 of second with his 18th of the season. Johansson tied it with the man advantage at 3:55 of third, Brodzinski countered

at 6:39, and Gaudreau tied it again on another power play at 8:42.

Kings 3, Capitals 0: Quinton Byfield had a goal for the fifth consecutive game, Darcy Kuemper made 21 saves and Los Angeles beat Washington.

Kevin Fiala had a goal and an assist, Warren Foegele scored and the Kings won their fourth in a row following a season-high five-game losing streak.

Charlie Lindgren made 24 saves for the Capitals, who had won five straight. Alex Ovechkin did not have a shot on goal despite playing nearly 19 minutes with 8:41 of it on the power play.

That limited imprint on offense came in large part because of a second straight excellent showing from Los Angeles' penalty kill, which did not allow a goal in five tries after denying the New York Islanders on eight power plays on Tuesday.

The Kings broke the game open with goals from Fiala and Byfield 47 seconds apart early in the third period.

Fiala scored his 25th goal for the third time in four seasons by burying a one-timer on the power play before finding Byfield off the rush.

Sharks 4, Blackhawks 2: Undrafted rookie Collin Graf scored twice, Will Smith had a goal and an assist and San Jose beat Chicago.

Alexandar Georgiev made 24 saves for San Jose, and Tyler Toffoli had an empty-net goal.

Smith opened the scoring with a one-timer 3:48 into the game off a feed from Macklin Celebriani. Smith, a 19-year-old rookie, has 19 points (seven goals, 12 assists) in his past 19 games.

Frank Nazar and Ilya Mikheyev scored for Chicago. Spencer Knight had 21 saves.

Connor Bedard, Chicago's leading scorer with 61 points, was given 10-minute misconduct penalty with about nine minutes to play.