

THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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GOP senator urges probe of chat scandal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top Republican and Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee requested an investigation Thursday into how Trump national security officials used the Signal app to discuss military strikes, ensuring at least some bipartisan scrutiny on an episode President Donald Trump has dismissed as frivolous.

Sen. Roger Wicker, the Republican chair of the committee, and Sen. Jack Reed, the top Democrat, signed onto a letter to the acting inspector general at the Department of Defense for an inquiry into the potential “use of unclassified networks to discuss sensitive and classified information, as well as the sharing of such information with those who do not have proper clearance and need to know.”

The senators’ assertion that classified information was potentially shared was notable, especially as Trump’s Republican

administration has contended there was no classified information on the Signal chain that had included Jeffrey Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic magazine.

Across Washington, the Signal leak presented a major test early in Trump’s second term on the federal government’s system of checks and balances meant to protect national security.

Yet even as mechanisms for oversight and investigation sputtered to life, it was a halting effort as most Republicans seemed content to allow the controversy to blow over. Meanwhile, Democrats slammed the Signal chat as a reckless violation of secrecy that could have put service members in harm’s way.

“This put pilots at risk because of sloppiness and carelessness,” said Sen. Mark Kelly, an Arizona Democrat and former fighter pilot.

Kelly and other Democrats

have called for Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to either resign or be fired. “If this was an officer in the military — at any level — or enlisted person, they would have been fired already,” Kelly said.

Asked by a reporter on Wednesday about the call by Wicker, of Mississippi, and Reed, of Rhode Island, for an inspector general probe at the Pentagon, Trump replied, “It doesn’t bother me.”

Wicker, whose support was crucial to Hegseth’s Senate confirmation, is one of the most ardent defense hawks in Congress and has said the committee will request a classified hearing with a top administration official, as well as for the administration to verify the contents of the Signal chat.

The contents, which were published by The Atlantic, show that Hegseth listed weapons systems and a timeline for the attack on Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen earlier this

month.

Senate Republicans have criticized the discussion on Signal but have stopped short of calling for the removal of Hegseth or anyone else involved.

Sen. Mike Rounds, a Republican member of both the Senate Intelligence and Armed Services committees, said that any oversight should be done “in a bipartisan way.”

Still, Democrats are pressing to probe much deeper. Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he wants to check the phones of those involved in the Signal chat for malware as well as whether Hegseth had shared military plans on other Signal chats.

Warner said he expected support from Republicans in calling for such an investigation, but so far Warner’s Republican counterpart on the intelligence committee, Sen. Tom Cotton, has given no sign he would join in those calls.

New US airstrike campaign on Houthis more intense

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A new American airstrike campaign against Yemen’s Houthi rebels appears more intense and more extensive, as the U.S. moves from solely targeting launch sites to firing at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in city neighborhoods, an Associated Press review of the operation shows.

The pattern under President Donald Trump reflects a departure from the Biden administration, which limited its strikes as Arab allies tried to reach a sep-

arate peace with the group.

It comes after the Iran-backed Houthis threatened to resume attacking “any Israeli vessel” and have repeatedly fired at Israel over the country’s refusal to allow aid into the Gaza Strip.

The Houthi attacks and the response to them have drawn new scrutiny in Washington after security officials in Trump’s administration shared plans for the first round of strikes on the rebels in a group chat that included a journalist.

But bombing alone may not be enough to stop the Houthis,

whose earlier barrage of missile fire toward the U.S. Navy represented the most intense combat it had seen since World War II.

“Folks that say, ‘We’ll go in there and take out everyone with the last name Houthi and we’ll win.’ The Houthi leadership has been taken out in history in the past, and they are resilient,” retired U.S. Navy Vice Adm. Kevin Donegan said. “They came back and they grew stronger. So this isn’t something that is a one-and-done.”

The Trump campaign began March 15. American warships

fired cruise missiles while fighter jets flying off of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier dropped bombs on Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen, a nation on the southern edge of the Arabian Peninsula that is the Arab world’s poorest.

Between March 15 to March 21, the U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, known as ACLED, reported 56 events. The campaign also has seen the highest number of events in a week since the American bombing campaign began on Yemen during the Israel-Hamas war.

Europe mulls more aid, armed force for Kyiv

Associated Press

PARIS — France and Britain will continue to forge ahead with plans to deploy troops in Ukraine to secure an eventual peace deal with Russia but only some other nations want to take part, French President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday after a summit of countries that have been mulling the proposal.

"These reassurance forces are a French-British proposal," Macron said. "It is desired by Ukraine and noted by several member states that have expressed their willingness to join. It is not unanimous. That is known. Besides, we do not need unanimity to achieve it."

Macron said French and British military officials will work with Ukrainian counterparts to decide where the contingents could be deployed in Ukraine.

"These exchanges between military officials will define the locations, the number of troops so it is credible," he said. "There will be a reassurance force with several European nations that will deploy."

The summit hosting the leaders of nearly 30 countries plus NATO and European Union chiefs comes at a crucial juncture in the more than three-year war, with intensifying diplomatic efforts to broker ceasefires, driven by pressure from President Donald Trump to end the fighting.

But the conflict is raging on.

Before the leaders met in the luxury of the French presidential palace, Russian drone attacks overnight wounded more than 20 people and heavy shelling Thursday afternoon killed one person and knocked out electricity in parts of Kherson, Ukrainian offi-

cials said.

U.S.-brokered agreements this week to safeguard shipping in the Black Sea and last week to halt long-range strikes on energy infrastructure were greeted as a first step toward peace. But Ukraine and Russia have disagreed over the details and accused each other of deal violations, foreshadowing a long and contentious process ahead.

France and the United Kingdom are pushing a separate initiative to build a coalition of nations willing in one way or another to support the deployment of a European armed force in Ukraine, with the aim of securing any peace deal by dissuading Russia from attacking the country again.

Some European countries are more comfortable with a potential deployment than others—not least because a big unknown is

whether Trump would allow American forces and intelligence agencies to back up any European contingent with air and logistical support and other assistance. Building a force big enough to act as a credible deterrent — U.K. officials have talked about possibly 10,000 to 30,000 troops — would also be a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but are now rearming. There would also be questions to resolve about who would command the force and how it might respond to a major violation by Russia of any peace agreement.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy posted an image from inside the summit of him and other leaders standing together with the caption: "Europe knows how to defend itself. We must prove it."

Academies cut, flag a few classes after DEI purge

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Only a handful of courses at the military's service academies have been eliminated to comply with President Donald Trump's directive to scrub diversity programming from their campuses, the academies' superintendents said Wednesday.

Two classes were cut at the Military Academy, two classes were canceled at the Naval Academy and the Air Force Academy has marked three courses for potential suspension under guidelines issued by the Trump administration to end diversity, equity and inclusion content.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, acting on Trump's orders, in January mandated the prohibition of all instruction on DEI, gender ideology and critical race

theory, an academic framework that teaches racism is systemic.

The two courses eliminated at the Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., were a history course called Race, Ethnicity and Nation and an English course titled Power and Difference, Lt. Gen. Steven Gilland, the superintendent, told a subpanel of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday.

At the Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., two courses related to gender were eliminated. One was a Gender Matters leadership course and the other was an English course, Gender Sexuality Studies, said Vice Adm. Yvette Davids, the superintendent.

The academy also found 18 other classes that will need to be slightly modified to comply with executive orders, she said. A total of 870 courses were reviewed.

Fewer military families report moving delays in recent weeks

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Fewer service members have filed "inconvenience" complaints in recent weeks over late pickups and deliveries of household goods under a new relocation system being phased in by the Defense Department, the head of U.S. Transportation Command said Tuesday.

Hundreds of military households complained of botched pickups and deliveries late last year and in January under the Global Household Goods Contract, or GHC, which launched a year ago but ramped up in earnest in recent months.

Under GHC, the command is transferring oversight of the 300,000 to 400,000 annual moves for the military and Coast Guard to HomeSafe Alliance, a joint venture between Tier One Relocation and KBR, formerly Kel-

logg Brown & Root.

HomeSafe oversees all contracts for packing, trucking, shipping and storage of goods in GHC moves.

"As we continue to look at the performance and as [HomeSafe] continue to respond to the shortfalls that we had seen before, we have actually seen, within the last few weeks, the number of those claims declining, and they've resolved those claims to 100%," Gen. Randall Reed told members of a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

"And so, while there is still work to go, we are actually getting the improvements that we're seeking," he said.

Complaints from service members prompted several U.S. senators to launch inquiries earlier this month into the transition to GHC.

Court refuses to halt rehiring order

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An appeals court in California has refused to halt a judge's order requiring the Trump administration to rehire thousands of federal workers who were let go in mass firings.

A split 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel turned back an emergency motion late Wednesday to pause the order from U.S. District Judge William Alsup in a case brought by labor unions and nonprofits as Republican President Donald Trump moves to dramatically downsize the federal workforce. Alsup is one of two judges who found legal problems with the

way the firings of probationary workers were carried out.

Two of the three judges on the panel ruled against the request for an emergency stay. The dissenting judge said the government had a strong argument against reinstating the workers.

The government has appealed Alsup's order to the Supreme Court, arguing that judges cannot "micromanage" federal worker policies or force the rehiring of more than 16,000 workers.

Alsup ordered six departments to offer job reinstatement to employees terminated in mid-February: the departments of Veterans Affairs, Agricul-

ture, Defense, Energy, the Interior and Treasury.

The judge, who was nominated by Democratic President Bill Clinton, said the firings were an attempt by the administration to sidestep laws and regulations governing a reduction in workforce by going after probationary workers, who have fewer protections.

Alsup said he was appalled that employees were told they were being fired for poor performance despite receiving glowing evaluations just months earlier.

Probationary workers have been targeted for layoffs across the federal government be-

cause they are usually new to the job and lack full civil service protection.

Lawsuits over the firings are among the many faced by the administration.

Within hours of Alsup's ruling, a judge in Baltimore found separate legal problems with the handling of the firings. In a lawsuit brought by nearly two dozen states affected by the layoffs, U.S. District Judge James Bredar said the administration did not follow laws set out for large-scale layoffs. That case involved a wider range of agencies, and the plaintiffs estimate about 24,000 probationary workers are affected.

HHS to cut 10,000 jobs in major restructuring effort

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a major overhaul, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services will lay off 10,000 workers and shut down entire agencies, including ones that oversee billions in funds for community health centers across the country.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. criticized the department he oversees as an inefficient "sprawling bureaucracy"

in a video announcing the restructuring Thursday. He faulted the department's 82,000 workers for a decline in Americans' health.

Kennedy acknowledged that it will be a "painful period" for the nation's top health agencies, which are responsible for monitoring infectious diseases, inspecting foods and hospitals and overseeing insurance for nearly half the country.

Overall, the department will

downsize to 62,000 positions — losing 10,000 jobs through layoffs and another 10,000 workers who took early retirement and separation offers.

Here's the breakdown of cuts for the Food and Drug Administration, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services:

- 3,500 jobs at the FDA, which inspects and sets safety

standards for medications, medical devices and foods.

- 2,400 jobs at the CDC, which monitors for infectious disease outbreaks and works with public health agencies nationwide.

- 1,200 jobs at the NIH, the world's leading public health research arm.

- 300 jobs at CMS, which oversees the Affordable Care Act marketplace, Medicare and Medicaid.

Social Security to let some confirm identities by phone

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Social Security Administration is partially backtracking on a plan that would require all new and existing beneficiaries to travel to a Social Security field office to verify their identity.

The Social Security Administration on Wednesday said that people applying for Social Security Disability Insurance, Medicare or Supplemental Security Income who are not able to use the agency's online portal

can complete their claim entirely over the phone instead of going to an office in person.

Other SSA applicants will still be required to verify their identities at a field office.

The changes will apply to all beneficiaries beginning April 14, instead of the previously announced date of March 31st.

"We have listened to our customers, Congress, advocates, and others, and we are updating our policy to provide better customer service to the country's

most vulnerable populations," said Lee Dudek, SSA's acting commissioner of Social Security in a statement.

Last week SSA announced a plan to require in-person identity checks for millions of new and existing recipients while simultaneously closing 47 field offices in 18 states.

The new requirements would have impacted anyone who needed to verify their bank information, as well as families with children who receive So-

cial Security benefits and cannot verify information online.

The changes are intended to combat fraud and waste within the system, which President Donald Trump has claimed are widespread.

The policy change has sparked furor among lawmakers, advocacy groups and program recipients who say the Trump administration is placing unnecessary barriers in front of an already vulnerable population.

25% tariff is placed on imported autos

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said he was placing 25% tariffs on auto imports, a move the White House claims would foster domestic manufacturing but could also put a financial squeeze on automakers that depend on global supply chains.

"This will continue to spur growth," Trump told reporters Wednesday. "We'll effectively be charging a 25% tariff."

The tariffs, which the White House expects to raise \$100 billion in revenue annually, could be complicated as even U.S. automakers source their components from around the world.

The tax hike starting in April means automakers could face

higher costs and lower sales, though Trump argues that the tariffs will lead to more factories opening in the United States and the end of what he judges to be a "ridiculous" supply chain in which auto parts and finished vehicles are manufactured across the United States, Canada and Mexico.

To underscore his seriousness about the tariffs directive he signed, Trump said, "This is permanent."

The president reiterated his willingness to challenge allies by saying Thursday on social media that if the European Union coordinated with Canada, tariffs "far larger than currently planned" would be placed on them in retaliation.

Trump has long said that tariffs against auto imports would be a defining policy of his presidency, betting that the costs created by the taxes would cause more production to relocate to the U.S. while helping narrow the budget deficit.

But U.S. and foreign automakers have plants around the world to accommodate global sales while maintaining competitive prices — and it could take years for companies to design, build and open the new factories that Trump is promising.

"We're looking at much higher vehicle prices," said economist Mary Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. "We're

going to see reduced choice. ... These kinds of taxes fall more heavily on the middle and working class."

She said more households will be priced out of the new car market — where prices already average about \$49,000 — and will have to hang on to aging vehicles.

The tariffs on autos would start being collected on April 3, Trump said.

If the taxes are fully passed onto consumers, the average auto price on an imported vehicle could jump by \$12,500, a sum that could feed into overall inflation. Trump was voted back into the White House last year because voters believed he could bring down prices.

Noem visits El Salvador prison housing Venezuelans

Associated Press

TECOLUCA, El Salvador — U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem on Wednesday visited the high-security El Salvador prison where Venezuelans who the Trump administration alleges are gang members have been held since their removal from the United States.

The tour included two crowded cell blocks, the armory and an iso-

lation unit.

Noem's trip to the prison — where inmates are packed into cells and never allowed outside — comes as the Trump administration seeks to show it is deporting people it describes as the "worst of the worst."

The Trump administration is arguing in federal court that it was justified in sending the Venezuelans to El Salvador, while ac-

tivists say officials have sent them to a prison that is rife with human rights abuses while presenting little evidence that they were part of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua gang.

Noem notably dodged questions by the press about if the Venezuelan deportees were going to be in the prison indefinitely and if the Venezuelans could ever be brought back to the U.S. if a court

orders the administration to do so.

"We're going to let the courts play out," she told reporters following the visit.

Noem also met with El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, a populist who has gained right-wing admiration in the U.S. due to his crackdown on the country's gangs, despite the democratic and due process implications that have come with it.

Carolina wildfires persisting despite some progress

Associated Press

Firefighters announced progress Wednesday night on containing two of the largest wildfires burning in the North Carolina mountains, but they warned that fire danger remained from dry and windy conditions.

The news was worse in South Carolina, where two fires nearly doubled in size Wednesday, but crews kept the blazes away from homes and other structures.

Hundreds of people have

been asked to leave their homes in North Carolina and South Carolina as a half-dozen large fires are burning in the Blue Ridge Mountains, spreading smoke into places like Greenville.

Millions of fallen trees from September's Hurricane Helene are both providing fuel for the wildfires and hindering firefighters' use of logging roads and paths to contain the blazes.

The North Carolina Forest Service said that the Black

Cove Fire and Deep Woods Fire were each more than 10% contained on Wednesday night, after days of reporting zero containment for the two blazes.

The fires have scorched nearly 10 square miles combined, but the size of the area burned has largely remained the same since the previous day.

About 250 homes have been evacuated in Polk County, where the fires are centered. About two dozen homes and outbuildings have been de-

stroyed in Polk County, spokesperson Kellie Cannon said.

Firefighters have managed to save most of the structures near the fires.

Only one injury has been reported — a firefighter in North Carolina got his leg caught under a tree, officials said.

There is rain in the forecast for the weekend, but it isn't the kind of soaking downpour that can knock a fire out on its own, said National Weather Service meteorologist Ashley Rehberg in Greer, S.C.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of trying to kill teen delivery driver

PA RICHLANDTOWN — A Pennsylvania man is accused of trying to kill a teen delivery driver over a late order.

The suspect, Keilan McKeever, 32, of Richlandtown in Bucks County, was arrested Monday on charges of attempted homicide, aggravated assault and reckless endangerment after allegedly shooting at DoorDash driver Khalik Lewis, 19.

Lewis was reportedly delayed while delivering McKeever's food order Saturday. He told Philadelphia's ABC 6 Action News that he dropped off the order around 9:30 p.m. and was then followed back to his car by an irate McKeever, who demanded to know why he was late. When McKeever got even closer, Lewis said he started honking and driving away.

McKeever then shot at the car, shattering the rear window, with the bullet going into Lewis' sweatshirt, he said.

Lewis escaped and called 911.

State adds protections for children of influencers

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Utah on Tuesday added new protections for the children of online content creators following the child abuse conviction of Ruby Franke, a mother of six who dispensed parenting advice to millions on YouTube before her 2023 arrest.

Gov. Spencer Cox signed a law under the encouragement of Franke's now ex-husband Kevin that gives adults a path to scrub from all platforms the digital content they were fea-

tured in as minors and requires parents to set aside money for kids featured in content.

The Franke's launched the now-defunct "8 Passengers" channel on YouTube in 2015 and began chronicling daily life as a seemingly tight-knit Mormon family in Springville, Utah.

In 2012, Ruby Franke stopped posting to the family channel and began creating parenting content with therapist Jodi Hildebrandt, who encouraged her to cut contact with Kevin Franke and move her two youngest children into Hildebrandt's southern Utah home.

The women were arrested on child abuse charges after Ruby Franke's emaciated 12-year-old son Russell escaped through a window and knocked on a neighbor's door. The neighbors called 911. Officers then found 9-year-old Eve, the youngest Franke child, sitting cross-legged in a dark closet in Hildebrandt's house with her hair buzzed off.

The women were each sentenced to up to 30 years in prison.

Ruling: Biden couldn't cancel oil and gas leases

AK JUNEAU — A federal judge in Alaska on Tuesday ruled the Biden administration lacked the authority to cancel seven oil and gas leases that had been issued for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

U.S. District Court Judge Sharon Gleason said terms of a 2017 tax law that set the stage for the first-ever lease sale in the refuge's coastal plain in early 2021 suggested that leases could only be canceled by a court order. She sent the matter

back to the Department of Interior for further action.

President Donald Trump upon his return to office in January signed an Alaska-specific executive order that among other things had sought to rescind the lease cancellation.

The tax law called for two lease sale offerings by late 2024 in the refuge's coastal plain, a roughly 1.5 million acre swath of the vast refuge that borders the Beaufort Sea and is home to such wildlife as polar bears, caribou and birds.

8 new Corvettes missing from plant are found

KY LOUISVILLE — Thieves took eight Corvettes from the lot of a Kentucky automobile plant where the legendary muscle car is built, but officers recovered the vehicles and made an arrest, police said.

The cars were taken from the GM Bowling Green Assembly plant. The eight cars were valued at \$1.2 million, police said.

A 21-year-old man later arrested and charged the theft of three cars said while being booked into jail that if he "would have made it back to Michigan, I would have been paid big," according to a police report.

Schools probed over transgender athlete

OR PORTLAND — The U.S. Department of Education said in a news release Tuesday that it has opened an investigation into Portland Public Schools, Oregon's largest school district, over allowing a transgender athlete to compete on a high school girls' track-and-field team.

The federal agency said it was

investigating whether this violated Title IX, a 1972 law barring sex discrimination in education. The Trump administration has been using the law to push against schools that provide accommodations for transgender students.

President Donald Trump also signed an executive order last month intended to ban transgender athletes from competing in girls' and women's sports.

The department said it also sent a letter to the Oregon School Activities Association notifying it of an investigation into its "gender identity participation" policy.

The department said its investigation was based on a complaint that said the district and OSAA allowed a high school transgender athlete to compete in the girls' track and field division over the last two seasons, according to the news release.

Superintendent Kimberlee Armstrong said the district is in full compliance with Oregon state law.

Phoenix flirts with 2025's first triple-digit heat

AZ PHOENIX — Phoenix flirted with its first 100-degree day of the year Tuesday, falling just short of the milestone.

Forecasters had signaled the temperature at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport could hit 100, marking what would have been the earliest date on record for the city to hit triple digits. The airport ended up one degree shy at 99 degrees Tuesday afternoon.

On average, Phoenix doesn't reach 100 until May 11, the National Weather Service said.

— From wire reports

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Wilson expects to start at QB for Giants

Associated Press

Russell Wilson bounced around the NFL the past few years — a one-time Super Bowl winner without a consistent home, facing doubts and critics about his play.

The 36-year-old quarterback is officially at his latest stop after signing a one-year contract with the New York Giants on Wednesday, a day after agreeing to terms on the deal with what is his third team in as many years and fourth in five years.

But with the Giants, Wilson has his sights set on one thing.

"I expect to be the starter and to be able to come here and rock and roll every day," Wilson said during a Zoom call Wednesday. "I think this team's really looking for somebody to lead them in every way — in terms of the process, in the offseason, during the season, our habits and our thought process and how we create a great winning culture.

"How do we continue to establish that and to really build on things that we do well and the

things that we continue to need to do?"

A person with knowledge of the contract told The Associated Press it's worth up to \$21 million with \$10.5 million guaranteed. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the team didn't announce financial terms.

Wilson joins a quarterback room that includes veteran Jameis Winston, who signed a two-year contract last week, and Tommy DeVito, an exclusive rights free agent who was re-signed on March 8. New York also has the No. 3 overall pick in the NFL Draft next month and could still target a quarterback.

"The great part about professional sports is constant change, constant movement," Wilson said. "If we draft a quarterback, we'll make sure he does everything he can to be ready to go and be prepared with his mentality.

"But for me, I'm focused on winning — what I can do as a quarterback of the New York Giants to help us win and do ev-

erything we can to lead?"

Wilson, a 10-time Pro Bowl selection, helped Pittsburgh make the playoffs last season and threw for 2,482 yards with 16 touchdown passes and five interceptions and a 96.5 passer rating. But the Steelers lost five in a row at the end of the season after starting 6-1 with him.

The Steelers allowed Wilson to become a free agent, as they did with Justin Fields — who signed with the Jets. While there was a chance Wilson could be back in Pittsburgh, the Steelers also met last week with Aaron Rodgers — who remains a possibility to sign there if he wants to play a 21st NFL season.

Meanwhile, Wilson met with the Giants and felt the fit was right.

"First of all, Aaron Rodgers is a tremendous football player," Wilson said. "He's done some amazing things in this league. I've been fortunate that I've been able to do some great things, too. What I'm focused on right now is what we can do here. That's been my focus

since I signed.

"Also, too, along the way is finding a place that will continue to believe in you."

Wilson called Pittsburgh "a special, special place" for him, and praised his former Steelers teammates, including T.J. Watt and Cam Heyward.

"But coming here and being in New York is an exciting place to play," Wilson said. "It's a place that wants to win and knows how to win is and has won before. For me, it's bringing everything I know, all the experiences and touchdowns, all the wins, and also all the love and passion for the game to the locker room. That's what I'm really excited for."

"It's going to be a special, special thing and we've got to go work for it every day and go do it."

Wilson played two disappointing seasons in Denver following 10 years in Seattle, which he helped win a Super Bowl in February 2014 at MetLife Stadium — Wilson's new home stadium.

Clippers prevent Knicks from clinching playoff spot

Associated Press

NEW YORK — James Harden had 29 points, six rebounds and six assists, Kawhi Leonard scored 27 points and the Los Angeles Clippers prevented the New York Knicks from clinching a playoff berth with a 126-113 victory Wednesday night.

Norman Powell added 19 points and Ivica Zubac finished with 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Clippers, who improved to 41-31 and tied Golden State for sixth place in the Western Conference, the final guaranteed postseason place.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 34 points and 13 rebounds for the Knicks, who were looking to follow Cleveland and Boston and become the third team to wrap up a spot in the East.

Lakers 120, Pacers 119: LeBron James had a buzzer-beating tip-in to cap a 10-point fourth quarter, Luka Doncic scored 34 points and Los Angeles won at Indiana.

James extended his NBA-record streak of 10 or more points to 1,283 games — barely. He was 0-for-6 with three points through the first three quarters. He finished with 13 points, 13 rebounds and seven assists.

Raptors 116, Nets 96: Orlando Robinson had 23 points on 10-of-14 shooting and added 12 rebounds to help visiting Toronto rout Brooklyn.

Eleventh in the Eastern Conference, the Raptors won their second straight game and handed the 12th-place Nets their fifth straight loss.

Nic Claxton led Brooklyn with 22 points and 11 rebounds. Ziaire Williams added 13 points.

Nuggets 127, Bucks 117: Nikola Jokic had 39 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists in his first game back in nearly two weeks to lead Denver to a victory against visiting Milwaukee.

The triple-double was Jokic's NBA-leading 30th of the season. The reigning NBA MVP missed the team's previous five games with an injured left ankle.

It was the Bucks' first game since it was announced star guard Damian Lillard was diagnosed with blood clots in his right calf. Milwaukee was also without two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo (sprained left foot).

Celtics 132, Suns 102: Kris-

taps Porzingis scored 30 points, Jaylen Brown added 24 and Boston blew past host Phoenix for its seventh straight victory.

The Suns had a four-game winning streak snapped. Phoenix still has possession of the final spot in the Western Conference play-in tournament with nine regular-season games remaining.

Kevin Durant led Phoenix with 30 points on 11-of-16 shooting. Devin Booker added 14 points and 10 assists.

Wizards 119, 76ers 114: Alex Sarr scored 24 points and had seven rebounds to lead Washington to a victory over host Philadelphia that snapped a five-game skid.

Quentin Grimes scored 22 points for the 76ers.

Playoff-bound Pistons ahead of plan

Associated Press

The Detroit Pistons were three minutes into their first preseason game back in October. They were trailing by double digits against the Milwaukee Bucks. And J.B. Bickerstaff called time out to settle his team down.

He still remembers the crowd reaction.

"They booed us," the Pistons' first-year coach said.

They're not booing in Detroit anymore. The Pistons — the team that lost 28 consecutive games last season — are 41-32 after beating the Spurs on Tuesday and on the brink of clinching a winning record. They're assured of no worse than a play-in tournament berth and control their own destiny for a top-six seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs. They've increased their win total by 26 games over last season, already the biggest one-year turnaround in franchise history.

They are ahead of schedule. And they are one of the best surprises in the NBA this season.

"The plan was always to win. The plan was to be better in January than we were in November and to be better in March than we were in January," Pistons general manager Trajan Langdon said. "I always told my people, 'I don't know what that's going to mean ultimately, but that's what we're going to set out to do.'

"But to say that with 10 games left we're going to be at 40 wins, I

would have lost that bet."

They've hit all the right notes this season. Cade Cunningham, who former GM Troy Weaver insisted on making the No. 1 overall pick in 2021, made his first All-Star team, is a serious All-NBA candidate and is averaging 25.7 points and 9.2 assists per game — numbers that only nine players have finished a season with and numbers that only Denver's Nikola Jokic has so far this season.

Cunningham played in every game during that 28-game slide a year ago. He's savoring the fact that Detroit will see postseason basketball one season later.

"It's something that we had all envisioned," Cunningham said. "As young guys, we had to find a way to climb to the top of the mountain. And we had a rough go early, as everybody can see. To stay with it, to continue to dig deep, this year has been super rewarding for all of us and we're still super hungry."

Cunningham is the leader. He's the star. He's not the only reason why Detroit is winning.

Two veterans — Tobias Harris and Tim Hardaway Jr. — arrived after last season, are mainstays in the starting lineup and have been the thirtysomethings that a team of twentysomethings desperately needed. Jalen Duren, a center in his third year, is averaging a double-double and shooting 70%. Malik Beasley entered Monday 17th in the league this season in

fast-break points. And the Pistons have kept winning even while playing for basically the last three months without 17-point scorer Jaden Ivey, out with a broken leg.

At the helm of it all is Bickerstaff, who was fired by Cleveland after making the second round of the playoffs a year ago. He took over in Detroit after the Pistons fired Monty Williams with five years and \$65 million left on his contract. But Langdon reached out with a vision, one that owner Tom Gores clearly backs, and it didn't take long for Bickerstaff to buy in.

"Timing was important," Bickerstaff said. "At the time, I had been off for about a month, and I was just spending a ton of time with my family and going to soccer tournaments and all that stuff. But I was a little antsy. So, when Trajan called, I was excited just to see and explore what the opportunity may be."

"Looking at the roster, looking at the guys that were on the team, the young guys, it was a group that I thought my skill set and personality kind of matched. And I was intrigued."

They started 0-4. They were 9-15 in early December, 13-17 at Christmas.

And then Dec. 26 happened — a game at Sacramento where the Pistons trailed by 19 in the third quarter, by 10 with 2:45 left and won 114-113 on a four-point play from Ivey with 3.1 seconds remaining. That was part of a stretch where Detroit won 10 out

of 12, capped by a victory in Madison Square Garden over New York.

Detroit was a game under .500 in early February, then ripped off an eight-game winning streak — punctuated by a 20-point win over Boston. Just like that, the Pistons were seven games over .500. It was obvious then that the playoffs would await; the berth still isn't technically clinched, but it's happening.

"They're aware of where they are," Bickerstaff said.

"What I think they've done is a really good job of is not looking ahead and missing the moments. This team has found its consistency because it approaches every day the same, whether it's a practice day or game day. The focus is on that day, whatever our task is at hand, without looking too far ahead."

This probably isn't a one-year wonder in Detroit. Duren is 21. Ausar Thompson is 22. Ivey is 22. Cunningham is 23. The Pistons should have some cap space to play with this coming summer. It's not hard to envision this team being even better a year from now.

It is a happy group. And the best might still be yet to come.

"I have 1,000% fallen in love with this group," Bickerstaff said. "And all my focus goes into them and seeing them elevate and seeing them grow. That's the thing that I find the most joy in."

Bucks say Lillard has deep vein thrombosis in right calf

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Milwaukee Bucks guard Damian Lillard likely will be sidelined indefinitely, with the team announcing Tuesday night that he has deep vein thrombosis in his right calf and is taking blood-thinning medication.

The Bucks provided the up-

date on the seven-time All-NBA guard's status without offering a target date for his potential return. Lillard has missed the last three games for the Bucks, who close a five-game trip Wednesday at Denver.

Thrombosis is the formation of a blood clot inside a blood vessel.

"Damian's health is our No. 1 priority," Bucks general manager Jon Horst said in a statement. "We will support him as he moves through this weekly process of strict criteria to ensure that it is safe for him to return to play. Doctors have indicated that his situation is very unlikely to occur again. We are

thankful that this was identified and medicated quickly, which helps with the recovery."

Lillard, 34, is the second high-profile player to be sidelined this season because of DVT.

Victor Wembanyama of the San Antonio Spurs was diagnosed with it in his shoulder and was ruled out for the season

Blues win 7th straight in playoff push

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — The wins just keep on coming for the St. Louis Blues, and their seven-game streak has significantly improved their chances of returning to the playoffs after a two-year absence.

After beating the Montreal Canadiens 6-1 on Tuesday night, they have strung together their most consecutive victories since November 2022. It's the longest active winning streak in the NHL.

"We've just got a recipe that works and a game plan that everybody believes in," said Dylan Holloway, who has 24 goals in a breakout season. "Guys are playing for each other. It's a good vibe in here, for sure."

St. Louis has outscored opponents 36-10 and only trailed for a total of 5:24 during this winning stretch. It's just business as usual, according to Alexandre Texier.

"We've got a job to do," said Texier, who, like Holloway, scored against Montreal. "This

game is over and we think about the next game. We're not enjoying too much about this momentum. We want to be in the playoffs. We just have to do it every single night."

The Blues are 13-2-2 since the season resumed after the 4 Nations Face-Off break, outscoring opponents 70-38. No team has more points or goals in that time.

"There's a pace and a purpose to what they're doing," coach Jim Montgomery said. "They're just doing it naturally. There's smiles on their faces. They're loving doing things right."

The formula during the streak has been simple. The Blues are strong on the forecheck and work to limit transition opportunities for their opponents. They block as many shots as possible.

"It starts with the belief in this group and believing in the process and each other," said Philip Broberg, who scored a goal and had three assists

against Montreal to keep his impressive season rolling. "It's all about hard work."

Montgomery agreed, calling his team's effort professional.

"Everyone's playing well: Our top line, our top six are scoring and playing defense," Montgomery said. "Our bottom six are scoring and hanging on to pucks and protecting pucks. Our defense has been really solid. The little details have been there throughout the lineup. Everybody's doing it."

Montgomery has helped turn things around since replacing fired coach Drew Bannister on Nov. 25 after a 9-12-1 start. But the Blues were still eight points behind Vancouver for the Western Conference's second and final wild-card spot coming out of the break and had not won three in a row all season.

It looked like the playoff drought would reach three. Now it looks like that could end.

"I know it's a simple answer, but it's just guys playing hard, playing for one another and

playing together," captain Brayden Schenn said. "They haven't all been pretty, but we're finding a way and that's the most important thing this time of the year. There's definitely buzz around the city."

The Blues hold a firm grip on the second wild card in the West, four up on Calgary and five up on Vancouver. They have the Wild — holders of the first wild card — in their sights, just two points back after Minnesota lost 5-1 to Vegas.

All those teams have games in hand on the the Blues, who have nine left, compared to 12 for the Flames and 11 for the Canucks. Holloway doesn't think anyone is looking at how many games anyone has left.

"Obviously, we know it's a tight race," Holloway said. "The biggest thing is we just have to control what we can control. We can't control other teams. The biggest thing for us is to just keep playing the way we are. It works. We just have to go a game at a time."

Robertson has natural hat trick as Stars top Oilers

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Jason Robertson had a natural hat trick in the second period and the Dallas Stars held off the short-handed Edmonton Oilers on Wednesday night.

Edmonton stars Connor McDavid (lower-body injury) and Leon Draisaitl (undisclosed) sat out for the second straight game. The Oilers then lost goalie Stuart Skinner in the third period after he was inadvertently kneed in the head by Mikko Rantanen.

Robertson had his second hat trick of the season and fifth of his career. Wyatt Johnston also scored as the Stars raced to a 4-0 lead. Roope Hintz assisted on Robertson's three goals and Jake Oettinger stopped 42

shots. Dallas is 4-0-2 in its last six games.

Corey Perry, Adam Henrique and Zach Hyman scored for Edmonton in a late comeback attempt after Skinner was hit in the head and replaced by Calvin Pickard.

Canucks 5, Islanders 2: Kiefer Sherwood had two goals and an assist, Thatcher Demko finished with 26 saves and visiting Vancouver beat New York.

Aatu Raty, Derek Forbort and Teddy Blueger also scored for the Canucks.

Casey Cizikas and Tony DeAngelo scored for New York and Ilya Sorokin made 15 saves before getting pulled early in the third period. Marcus Hogberg had five saves in relief.

The Islanders remain on the outside of the Eastern Conference playoff picture after losing three of four on a four-game homestand.

Devils 5, Blackhawks 3: Luke Hughes had three assists, Jesper Bratt chipped in with two and New Jersey ended its three-game losing streak with a win at Chicago.

Nathan Bastian, Timo Meier, Ondrej Palat, Dawson Mercer and Stefan Noesen scored for the Devils. Bratt has four assists in his last three games and a career-high 84 points this season. Jacob Markstrom made 21 saves.

Nico Hischier extended his point streak to eight games with an assist on Noesen's empty-net goal. Hischier has four goals

and five assists since March 11.

Ducks 6, Bruins 2: Leo Carlsson scored twice, Jackson LaCombe had a goal and an assist and host Anaheim extended Boston's winless streak to seven games.

Nikita Nesterenko, Cutter Gauthier and Mason MacTavish also scored for the Ducks, Alex Killorn had two assists and John Gibson made 23 saves.

David Pastrnak and Morgan Geekie had goals for Boston, while Joonas Korpisalo had 31 stops.

Carlsson scored the Ducks' second short-handed goal of the season late in the first period to give Anaheim a 1-0 lead. Killorn got his 300th NHL assist on the goal. The Ducks outshot the Bruins 15-5 in first period.