Dem-led House may thwart Trump plans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrats have regained control of the House from President Donald Trump's Republican Party in the midterm elections , powered by a suburban revolt that has threatened what's left of the president's governing agenda.

But the GOP added to its Senate edge and prevailed in some key races for governor Tuesday, beating back the potential of big Democratic gains across the board. The "blue wave" that some had feared from Election Day never fully materialized.

The mixed verdict in the first nationwide election of Trump's presidency showed the limits of his hard-line immigration rhetoric in America's evolving political landscape, where college-educated voters in the suburbs rejected his warnings of a migrant "invasion." But blue-collar voters and rural America embraced his aggressive talk and stances.

The new Democratic House majority will end Republican dominance in Washington for the final two years of Trump's first term with major questions looming about health care, immigration and government spending.

House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi of California, who would be in line to become the next speaker, spoke of "a new day in America." Trump, in a tweet, said that "in all fairness" Pelosi "deserves" to return to her former role as speaker, despite some rumblings in her party. "She has earned this great honor!"

But the Democrats' edge is narrow. With 218 seats needed for a majority in the 435-member House, Democrats have won 220 and the Republicans 193, with winners undetermined in 22 races.

Trump addressed the results at a post-election news conference scheduled for midday Wednesday.

The president's party will maintain control of the executive branch of the government, in addition to the Senate. But Democrats suddenly have a foothold that gives them subpoena power to probe deep into Trump's personal and professional missteps — and his long-withheld tax returns.

Early Wednesday, Trump warned Democrats against using their new majority to investigate his administration.

"If the Democrats think they are going to waste Taxpayer Money investigating us at the House level," Trump tweeted, "then we will likewise be forced to consider investigating them for all of the leaks of Classified Information, and much else, at the Senate level. Two can play that game!" It wasn't clear what "leaks" he was referring to.

It could have been a much bigger night for Democrats, who suffered stinging losses in Ohio and in Florida, where Trump-backed Republican Ron DeSantis ended Democrat Andrew Gillum's bid to become the state's first black governor.

The elections also exposed an extraordinary political realignment in an electorate defined by race, gender, and education that could shape U.S. politics for years to come.

The GOP's successes were fueled by a coalition that's decidedly older, whiter, more male and less likely to have college degrees. Democrats relied more upon women, people of color, young people and college graduates.

Record diversity on the ballot may have helped drive turnout.

Voters were on track to send at least 99 women to the House, shattering the record of 84 now. The House was also getting its first two Muslim women, Massachusetts elected its first black congresswoman, and Tennessee got its first female senator.

Three candidates had hoped to become their states' first black governors, although just one — Georgia Democrat Stacey Abrams — was still in the running.

Overall, women voted considerably more in favor of congressional Democratic candidates — with fewer than 4 in 10 voting for Republicans, according to VoteCast, a nationwide survey of more than 115,000 voters and about 20,000 nonvoters conducted for The Associated Press by NORC at the University of Chicago.

In suburban areas where key House races were decided, female voters skewed significantly toward Democrats by a nearly 10-point margin.

Democrats celebrated a handful of victories in their "blue wall" Midwestern states, electing or re-electing governors in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Minnesota and in Wisconsin, where Scott Walker was defeated by the state's education chief, Tony Evers.

The road to a House majority ran through two dozen suburban districts that Hillary Clinton won in 2016. Democrats flipped seats in suburban districts outside Washington, Philadelphia, Miami, Chicago and Denver. Democrats also reclaimed a handful of blue-collar districts carried by both former President Barack Obama and Trump.

The results were more mixed deeper into Trump country.

In Kansas, Democrat Sharice Davids beat a GOP incumbent to become the first gay Native American woman elected to the House. But in Kentucky, one of the top Democratic recruits, retired Marine fighter pilot Amy McGrath, lost her bid to oust three-term Rep. Andy Barr.

Trump sought to take credit for retaining the GOP's Senate majority, even as the party lost control of the House. In a tweet Wednesday, he referred to the election results as a "Big Victory."

History was working against the president in both the House and the Senate. A president's party has traditionally suffered deep losses in his first midterm election, and 2002's was the only midterm election in the past three decades when the party holding the White House gained Senate seats.

Democrats' dreams of the Senate majority, always unlikely, were shattered after losses in top Senate battlegrounds: Indiana, Missouri, Tennessee, North Dakota and Texas.

Some hurt worse than others.

In Texas, Sen Ted Cruz staved off a tough challenge from Democrat Beto O'Rourke, whose record-smashing fundraising and celebrity have set off buzz he could be a credible 2020 White House contender.

Nearly 40 percent of voters cast their ballots to express opposition to the president, according to VoteCast, while one-in-four said they voted to express support for Trump.

Overall, 6 in 10 voters said the country was headed in the wrong direction, but roughly that same number described the national economy as excellent or good. Twenty-five percent described health care and immigration as the most important issues in the election.

Nearly two-thirds said Trump was a reason for their vote.

The president found partial success despite his current job approval, set at 40 percent by Gallup, the lowest at this point of any first-term president in the modern era.

Dems gain control of key military panels

By Claudia Grisales
and Nikki Wentling
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The fate of an ongoing military buildup, war oversight, veterans affairs and decisions on who can enlist in the service now rests with a split Congress following the results of Tuesday's midterm elections.

By early Wednesday, Democrats won control of the House, shifting leadership of key committees that direct military and veteran issues. However, Republicans retained control of the Senate.

One supporter of the Democratic shift suggested lawmakers could finally install new levels of oversight on President Donald Trump's growing list of demands for the military.

"You are going to see us put the reins on Donald Trump," said Jon Soltz, chairman of progressive political organization VoteVets, which supported a slate of Democratic military veterans running for office. "You will see more priorities that Democrats will focus on," such as addressing an end game to the overseas wars, revamping the president's war powers, boosting oversight of operations in Yemen and elsewhere and protecting veterans better.

With hundreds of congressional seats contested in the midterm elections, Republican control of the House and Senate was in question. Polls suggested Democrats had a good chance at gaining control of the House, but less so in the Senate.

By Wednesday afternoon, The Associated Press said Democrats looked to control the House by 220 to 193 seats, with nearly two dozen races yet to be decided.

"From tonight's results, it is clear that Americans are hungry for a change in leadership and a new tone in politics," said Emily Cherniack, founder and executive director of bipartisan political group New Politics.

All 435 seats in the House and 35 of the Senate's 100 seats were up for grabs. With Republicans under threat, both parties ramped up their campaign efforts.

Trump held 50 rallies for Republicans while former President Barack Obama, former Vice President Joe Biden and entertainment mogul Oprah Winfrey made appearances for Democrats in hotly contested districts and voter turnout reached unprecedented levels in competitive races across the country.

In the heat of the struggle, some Democratic lawmakers laid out a strategy for military issues should they gain control.

Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state, the ranking Democrat for the House Armed Services Committee who won re-election Tuesday, is poised to take the helm of the committee. Smith had said ahead of Tuesday's elections that defense spending, increased oversight and thwarting limits on who can serve in the military would be top priorities.

"I think the biggest difference will probably be more oversight," Smith had said. "We're not clear exactly where this administration is going with the military."

Control shifts

With Democrats capturing control of the House, they take over leadership of the key House committees of Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Appropriations. The Armed Services Committee helps shape policy and spending at the Pentagon, while the Veterans Affairs committee handles issues facing former servicemembers and the Appropriations Committee directs funding to the Pentagon.

Jeremy Teigen, a political science professor at Ramapo College of New Jersey, suggested lawmakers – even in a split Congress – will still draw more bipartisanship efforts, especially for veterans affairs.

"It's important to remember that the while the people who tend to serve on the Veterans Affairs committees and those that become chairs tend to be military veterans. It's not like the parties have very different views on veterans policies," such as addressing an end game to the overseas wars, revamping the president's war powers, boosting oversight of operations in Yemen and elsewhere and protecting veterans benefits, said Teigen, author of the book "Why Veterans Run: Military Service in American Presidential Elections, 1789-2016." "This is one area of politics where the parties have very warm accord."

However, while there might be more disagreements when it comes to the Armed Services committees in both chambers, there's still a great deal of agreement, Teigen said.

"It will certainly be less bipartisan than the warm accord in the veterans affairs committees but nowhere near as contentious as you will find in other parts" of Capitol Hill, he said.

With Smith slated to be chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, he could be swapping spots with the current Republican chairman of the panel. Texas Rep. Mac Thornberry, who was re-elected Tuesday, could move into a new role as the panel's ranking Republican next year.

At least a dozen lawmakers are slated to leave their roles on the House Armed Services committee, including several retiring members and some who lost their bids for re-election such as Oklahoma Republican Rep. Steve Russell. But several key members of the House and Senate armed services panels won re-election, including Reps. Mike Gallagher, R-Wisc., and Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., and Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y

In the upper chamber, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., is expected to remain in his role as chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Inhofe took the seat after the death of Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain in August.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said ahead of the elections that there would still be plenty of continuity on defense matters even if Democrats took control. Reed, who is in a current term that ends in 2020, pointed to support for the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, the legislation that dictates Pentagon policies and spending.

There's also Democratic opposition to a Trump-driven plan to create a costly branch of the military called Space Force to address defense for space-based endeavors. The move would cost about $13 billion for 10 years, Reed said.

New challenges

Lawmakers will need to address spending caps slated to return for the 2020 fiscal year under the Budget Control Act, or BCA, which could cut the budget to $576 billion.

That would be a dramatic slash from an initial Pentagon budget that said spending would need to be $733 billion in the new fiscal year that starts Oct. 1, 2019.

Democrats could thwart Trump-led plans for a spending spree for "low-yield" nukes, the creation of a new, the Space Force effort, boost oversight in military operations domestic and abroad, and push for legislation revamping the president's war powers.

Smith said Democrats also will be keen to address new Trump limits on who is eligible to serve in the military. Smith suggested discrimination has been driving efforts to block certain recruits to serve, including immigrants and transgender individuals.

Democrats can make "sure we don't allow bigotry to get in the way of people serving the country," Smith said.

GOP holds temper Dem gubernatorial gains

Democrats tried Tuesday to fight their way back to power in state capitals across the country by reclaiming governor's seats in several key states, marking significant steps in their nationwide strategy to reverse years of Republican gains in state capitals.

Still, their victories in Illinois, Michigan, Nevada and Wisconsin were balanced by Republicans holding onto one of the top prizes, Florida, and the governor's offices in Ohio and Arizona. All three states will figure prominently in the presidential map in two years.

The nation's other closely watched governor's race, in Georgia, remained too close to call Wednesday.

Democrats' toppling of Republican Scott Walker in Wisconsin completed a sweep for the party in the upper Midwest. Walker was a top target of Democrats and a polarizing figure in his state, sweeping into office during the tea party wave of 2010 and gaining national attention by leading a rollback of union rights that led to protests inside the state Capitol. He survived a recall attempt before falling short in a bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

The win by Democrat Tony Evers gives his party a chance to undo some of Walker's accomplishments, including a strict voter ID law.

Likewise, Democrats hope their victories signal a resurgence for their party in America's heartland, where President Donald Trump romped in 2016.

"I think the message is a simple one. A candidate with a moderate tone but progressive in thinking can win in the heartland," former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack, a Democrat, said. "Winning the governorships is huge in beginning the process of changing the direction of our politics."

In Michigan, Democrat Gretchen Whitmer defeated Republican Bill Schuette, upending years of GOP control in the state. The former legislative leader will become the second female governor in a state where Democrats heavily targeted other statewide and legislative offices.

Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner in Illinois lost his bid for a second term to Democrat J.B. Pritzker. The billionaire appears to have capitalized not only on Rauner's lack of popularity but broader dissatisfaction with Trump. In Kansas, Democratic state lawmaker Laura Kelly defeated Republican Secretary of State Kris Kobach, a close ally of Trump.

New Mexico also tipped into the Democratic column, as did Maine, where Democratic Attorney General Janet Mills won the race to succeed combative Republican Gov. Paul LePage, who was term-limited after eight years in office.

Democrats Andrew Cuomo in New York and Tom Wolf in Pennsylvania easily won re-election, as did two Republicans in Democratic-leaning states — Larry Hogan in Maryland and Charlie Baker in Massachusetts.

In Iowa, Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds broke the Democrats' run of Midwest success by being elected to a full term.

In all, voters were choosing 36 governors and 6,089 state legislators in general and special elections that have attracted record amounts of spending from national Democratic and Republican groups.

Republicans are in control more often than not in state capitals across the country, but Democrats were trying to pull a little closer in Tuesday's elections.

The political parties are trying not only to win now but also to put themselves in strong position for the elections two years from now that will determine which party will have the upper hand in redrawing congressional and state legislative districts.

Transgender rights, legal pot among states' wide-ranging ballot measures

NEW YORK — In the first statewide referendum on transgender rights, Massachusetts voters on Tuesday beat back a repeal attempt and reaffirmed a 2016 law extending nondiscrimination protections to transgender people, including their use of public bathrooms and locker rooms.

Voters in 37 states considered an array of intriguing ballot measures Tuesday.

Michigan voters made their state the first in the Midwest to legalize recreational marijuana by passing a ballot measure that will allow people 21 or older to buy and use the drug. A similar measure was defeated in North Dakota, meaning there are now 10 states that allow recreational use of pot. Missouri became the 31st state to approve the medical use of marijuana, while Utah was considering that step.

The outcome in Massachusetts was a huge relief to LGBT rights activists, who feared that a vote to repeal the 2016 law would prompt a wave of similar efforts to roll back protections in other states. Already, some protections at the federal level are under threat from President Donald Trump's administration.

Civil rights activists also scored a major victory in Florida, where voters approved a ballot measure that will enable more than 1 million ex-felons to regain their voting rights. That could alter the future election landscape in the nation's most populous swing state.

Floridians also approved a measure aimed at phasing out greyhound racing in the state, the last stronghold of the sport in the U.S.

In all, 155 statewide initiatives were on the ballot across the country. Most were drafted by state legislatures, but 64 resulted from citizen-initiated campaigns, including many of the most eye-catching proposals.

A minimum wage increase was approved in two states. An Arkansas measure will raise the wage from $8.50 an hour to $11 by 2021; Missouri will gradually raise the $7.85 minimum wage to $12 an hour.

Proposals to change the redistricting process so it's potentially less partisan were approved in Missouri, Colorado and Michigan. A similar proposal was on the ballot in Utah.

Medicaid expansion was another multistate topic, on the ballot because Republican-led legislatures refused to take advantage of expanded coverage offered under President Barack Obama's health care law. Nebraska and Idaho voters approved measures to expand Medicaid health coverage to tens of thousands of low-income residents; a similar measure was on the ballot in Utah, while a Montana measure would raise tobacco taxes to extend an existing expansion.

A number of initiatives dealt with criminal justice or victims' rights.

In Ohio, voters defeated an ambitious proposal to make drug possession a misdemeanor in an effort to reduce the state prison population and divert any savings to drug treatment.

With the vote in Florida, most felons will automatically have their voting rights restored when they complete their sentences or go on probation. The amendment exempts those convicted of sex offenses and murder.

In Oregon, voters upheld a law allowing use of state money to pay for low-income women to have abortions, and also reaffirmed a "sanctuary state" law.

Bangladesh, US navies work as one in CARAT

By Christian Lopez
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and Bangladesh navies are training together in a series of bilateral exercises aimed at strengthening professional skills and relationships across South and Southeast Asia.

The 24th annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training, or CARAT, began in June in Thailand, with stops also scheduled for Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Bangladesh.

This week, the U.S. and Bangladesh navies are taking part in a series of joint shore and sea drills showcasing their joint ability to provide "maritime security, stability and prosperity," a Navy statement said.

Several Navy ships — including the dry cargo ship USNS Pfc. Dewayne T. Williams — are joining Bangladesh navy vessels in the Bay of Bengal to practice tracking and pursuing targets and screening for potential threats. The navies will also rehearse division tactics designed to enhance communication as ships sail together in complex maneuvers. During the exercise's shore phase, sailors will share knowledge about such subjects as aviation warfare and gas-turbine maintenance, the statement added.

"The long-standing partnership between Bangladesh and the United States has contributed to peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region," Rear Adm. Joey Tynch, Task Force 73 commander, said in the statement. "These engagements reflect our shared belief that regional challenges increasingly require cooperative solutions by capable naval forces."

More Reagan sailors sanctioned in probe of steroids-LSD ring

By Caitlin Doornbos
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Additional details released this week about a drug ring run by USS Ronald Reagan sailors revealed that the number of servicemembers involved totals 15.

Stars and Stripes reported Tuesday that two Ronald Reagan sailors face charges of possession and distribution of a controlled substance, including LSD and anabolic steroids, in connection with the operation.

Another three sailors could face charges as they are "involved in the Article 32 process," said 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Joe Keiley. Article 32 hearings are similar to preliminary hearings in civilian courts used to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant a trial.

Keiley said Wednesday that an additional 10 Reagan sailors received nonjudicial punishment in the case. He could not reveal further details about those sailors as the Navy "does not discuss the outcomes of administrative actions."

Fourteen of the 15 sailors implicated in the drug operation were assigned to the aircraft carrier's nuclear reactor department, which has a staff of more than 400, Keiley said. Those suspected of involvement were taken off their duties as the investigation got underway.

Keiley said there was no evidence to suggest the sailors' alleged criminal involvement damaged their work and that "propulsion plant operations are supervised by senior personnel."

"Out of an abundance of caution, Ronald Reagan leadership reviewed the work previously performed by the accused sailors and no improper work was identified," he said. "Due to the defense in depth of the design and operation of the propulsion plants, the reactors aboard CVN 76 remain safe."

The sailors facing courts-martial are Petty Officer 2nd Class Andrew Miller, a machinist's mate, who is accused of using, possessing and distributing LSD from January to February, and Petty Officer 2nd Class Sean Gevero, an electrician's mate, who is accused of distributing LSD and possessing anabolic steroids in February, according to their charge sheets.

The three undergoing the Article 32 process include a seaman apprentice and petty officer second class. Another unnamed sailor attended an Article 32 hearing in September for wrongful use and possession of a controlled substance and is awaiting further legal proceedings.

Japanese authorities were also involved in the investigation when suspicions surfaced that the drugs were being sold to locals off base. However, they dropped the case in June.

2 MCAS Miramar pilots grounded amid investigation into phallic flight pattern

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Two military aviators have been banned from flying during an investigation into a phallic-shaped flight pattern they made last month in Southern California, the Marine Corps said Tuesday.

Officials learned the T-34C aircraft flew over the Salton Sea in a pattern resembling the shape of a penis after a Twitter post from Aircraft Spots, which tracks flight patterns, outlined the flight path on Oct. 23.

Although the pilots are grounded, they are still assisting with other duties in their squadron at Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego, according to Josef Patterson, a Marines spokesman. Any potential disciplinary action will be determined following the investigation, he said.

"The Marines and sailors of 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing will perform at the highest levels expected of professional warfighters, and uphold our core values of honor, courage and commitment," Patterson said in a statement.

This is the second time a military jet has been involved in obscene flight patterns in the past year. Last November, the U.S. Navy apologized after a crew drew a similar phallic image over Washington state. That air crew also was grounded during an investigation.

Submarine group responds to rivals' rise

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Beneath the cover of the ocean, a "handful" of nuclear-powered U.S. submarines secretly operate in areas unreachable by other vessels across the Indo-Pacific region.

For decades, the surveillance, reconnaissance and lethality the subs provide has gone unparalleled by rivals. However, a changing landscape of military power in the Pacific among adversaries presents a challenge to the Navy's long-dominant submarine force, leaders say.

A Commander's Intent issued in March outlines the force's mission, purpose and challenges, noting that "the demands (on submarine forces) continue to grow at an unprecedented rate." The document acts as "clear and concise expression of [the] operation's purpose and the desired end state" to provide "focus" and "help subordinate and supporting commanders achieve the commander's desired results without further orders," according to the Department of Defense.

"America's military remains the strongest in the world, but our advantage is shrinking due to rapid advancements by rival states," the Commander's Intent said. "… Their ever-evolving challenges demand our continued vigilance, commitment to combat readiness, ability to quickly adapt and learn in the face of change and our strict adherence to the Navy core attributes of our professional identity."

Despite the changing landscape, the leader of Submarine Group 7, which oversees operations in an area that is home to some of the United States' fiercest challengers, said the Silent Service remains competitive and vigilant in the protection of the nation and its interests.

Primary challengers

The Commander's Intent listed four nations — Russia, China, North Korea and Iran — as the U.S.' primary challengers, all of which fall under Submarine Group 7's domain, stretching from the International Dateline to the Suez Canal.

"Russia is investing in new military capabilities, including nuclear systems that remain our most significant existential threat. China is aggressively pursuing the most capable and well-funded military in the world, after our own," the Commander's Intent said. "North Korea publicly seeks the ability to attack us with nuclear weapons. Iran supports terrorist groups and openly calls for our destruction."

While there is evidence that challengers are bolstering their undersea capabilities, Submarine Group 7 commander Rear Adm. James Pitts said the force remains ready to "compete, deter and defend."

"Our competitors are rapidly accelerating their capabilities, their reach and their operations, so our job here at Submarine Group 7 is to ensure that we use the forces that are provided to us to stay ready, to stay ahead of our competitors and to stay aware of what it is that they're doing," he said.

Those skills are what submariners "routinely execute through our missions, exercises and training out here in the Indo-Pacific," Pitts added.

A changing security environment will rely more heavily on sea-based operations. According to the 2018 National Defense Strategy, "the central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the re-emergence of long-term strategic competition."

"It is increasingly clear that China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model — gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic and security decisions," the paper said.

China "will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future," it added.

China has the largest navy in the region by number of ships, with more than 300 in its People's Liberation Army Navy, according to the 2018 Department of Defense report to Congress on Chinese military and security developments.

China plans to build its submarine fleet from 56 to "between 69 and 78" by 2020, it said. However, all but nine of their submarines run on diesel.

All American submarines are nuclear-powered, meaning the vessels can stay underwater far longer without the need to surface to refuel. U.S. submarines typically stay underwater for about three months before resurfacing to restock sailors' food supplies.

Russia is also boosting its submarine force. Adm. James Foggo, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe and Africa, told Stars and Stripes in June that the country is deploying more submarines to the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and North Atlantic than at any time since the Cold War.

Foggo said Russia is also upgrading its submarine forces and improving its missile capabilities.

The growth is happening in the face of an April Congressional Research Service report that said the Navy's fleet of fast-attack submarines is scheduled to shrink from 52 to 42 by 2028.

'Tyranny of distance'

One of the greatest challenges to overcome is the commonly referenced "tyranny of distance" — the role the U.S.' proximity to the Western Pacific plays in conducting operations in the area, Pitts said. Add on that "things that happen undersea seem to happen relatively slowly," and Pitts said strategizing the Silent Service's movements is onerous.

"That's one of the biggest challenges that we collectively face on a day-to-day basis — how to posture and position our forces to be in the right positions to execute their missions and with having that responsibility of basically from the Suez Canal to the International Dateline," he said.

The challenge is made more difficult by the declining number of submarines since the pause in submarine procurement after the Cold War. A 2016 study on the Navy's force structure concluded it needed 66 nuclear-powered attack and guided missile submarines. As of April, the service had 53 of the former and just four of the latter, according to a recent Naval Analysis graphic.

"As a result of decisions made many years ago, the number of submarines has begun a long-sustained reduction that will increase these demands on each ship and crew," the Commander's Intent said.

Pitts said that at any given time, the U.S. has a "handful" of submarines operating in the Western Pacific. That's why he said being stationed in Yokosuka, Japan, and having access to four forward-deployed submarines in Guam is an advantage.

The positioning also helps build relationships with allies and neighboring navies. Pitts said he routinely works with naval and submarine forces from South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, India and Australia. He also has Royal Australian Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force liaisons on his staff who help work with their home countries.

"It's pooling the power and strength of those submarine forces and navies as part of us as a team to maintain free trade, international order and be ready should potential adversaries challenge us," Pitts said. "My job is to continue strengthening those relationships and showing them the commitment that we are there for them and we are ready to integrate and interoperate with them at a moment's notice."

Pitts said so far during his five-month tenure, Submarine Group 7 "has always delivered and executed their operations effectively." Still, he said, to maintain sharpness, submariners consistently review their work for areas of improvement.

Freshmen lead Duke rout of Kentucky

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Zion Williamson and fourth-ranked Duke were well on their way to a blowout victory when the high-flying freshman blocked a shot to start yet another Blue Devil fastbreak.

Williamson dribbled up the left side, whipped a pass through traffic to classmate RJ Barrett, then met him under the basket with a hearty chest bump after Barrett fought off a foul to finish his layup.

Duke's fabulous freshman weren't just ready for their first turn in the spotlight.

"They were magnificent," coach Mike Krzyzewski said.

Barrett scored 33 points and Williamson added 28 as both players broke the school record by points in a freshman debut, and the Blue Devils romped over No. 2 Kentucky 118-84 on Tuesday night in the season-opening Champions Classic.

"To play this well on this stage, right away against Kentucky is surprising," Krzyzewski said after picking up victory No. 1,101 for his career. "I'm really proud of my freshmen."

They were almost flawless.

Barrett was 13-for-26 from the field with six assists and four rebounds, and Williamson went 11-for-13 from the field with seven rebounds.

Duke won for the eighth time in the last 10 meetings between two of the nation's four winningest programs, and this time handed coach John Calipari his first opening-night loss at Kentucky and his most lopsided loss since taking the job a decade ago.

The teams set a Classic record for most combined points, set hours earlier in No. 1 Kansas' 92-87 victory over No. 10 Michigan State.

Duke's newcomers never doubted they could win this convincingly.

"We weren't surprised we were winning by so much," Barrett said. "We know what we have. We see it every day."

Keldon Johnson scored 23 points to lead Kentucky and graduate transfer Reid Travis added 22 for the Wildcats.

But the freshmen made sure this highly-anticipated game was never close.

Duke led by 10 after six minutes and extended the lead to 34-13 less than 10 minutes into the game.

After making it 59-42 at halftime, Duke kept pulling away throughout the second half. Barrett's dunk with 16:11 remaining made it 72-47, Alex O'Connell's three-pointer with 11:45 remaining made it 91-54 and Duke topped the 100-point mark on another dunk by Barrett with 7:36 left.

Kentucky never got closer than 27 the rest of the game.

"If that is who they are, they aren't going to lose many games," Calipari said. "I haven't lost faith in my guys. We've still got a good group."

Kentucky: It was an embarrassing performance for the Wildcats, who weren't physical enough against Williamson and couldn't keep up with Barrett. Most teams don't have that kind of combination, but it's clear Kentucky needs to improve dramatically to keep up with the nation's top teams.

Duke: The Blue Devils seem to have it all — athletes, scorers, defenders and rebounders. Still, you can bet Krzyzewski will try to fix his team's flaws and make Duke an even more difficult matchup.

Top 25 roundup

Top-ranked Kansas holds off Michigan State

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Kansas' Quentin Grimes and Dedric Lawson made quite an impression Tuesday night.

They produced basket after basket, big play after big play. If they keep playing this way, No. 1 Kansas might just stay on top of the college basketball world.

Grimes scored 21 points in his college debut and Lawson added 20 points in his first game with the Jayhawks, helping Kansas stymie No. 10 Michigan State's late charge for a 92-87 victory in the season-opening Champions Classic.

"He (Grimes) came out with a free mind and played his game," Lawson said. "He was the best player on our team tonight."

Lawson finished with 14 rebounds and six assists after sitting out last season following his transfer from Memphis.

No. 3 Gonzaga 120, Idaho State 79: Rui Hachimura scored 33 points to help host Gonzaga beat Idaho State.

No. 5 Virginia 73, Towson 42: Ty Jerome scored 20 points and De'Andre Hunter had 13 and 10 rebounds for host Virginia.

No. 6 Tennessee 86, Lenoir-Rhyne 41: Jordan Bone scored 18 points, Kyle Alexander added 16 and host Tennessee opened the season with a blowout over Lenoir-Rhyne.

No. 7 Nevada 86, Brigham Young 70: Caleb Martin scored all 21 of his points in the second half and Jordan Caroline tied a career high with 16 rebounds to help host Nevada beat Brigham Young.

No. 8 North Carolina 78, Wofford 67: Luke Maye had 24 points, Cameron Johnson provided a huge spark in the second half and visiting North Carolina avenged an upset loss to Wofford last year.

No. 9 Villanova 100, Morgan State 77: Eric Paschall scored 26 points, Phil Booth had 17 and host Villanova opened its national championship defense.

No. 11 Auburn 101, South Alabama 58: Jared Harper had 20 points, 13 assists and six three-pointers to lead host Auburn over South Alabama.

No. 14 Oregon 84, Portland State 57: Payton Pritchard scored 22 points while Paul White added 15 and host Oregon opened its season with a rout.

No. 16 Syracuse 66, Eastern Washington 34: Oshae Brissett had 20 points and eight rebounds, and host Syracuse held Eastern Washington to 22 percent shooting.

No. 17 Florida State 81, Florida 60: P.J. Savoy scored 20 points with five three-pointers, Trent Forrest added 13 points and Florida State opened the season with a victory.

No. 19 Michigan 63, Norfolk State 44: Jon Teske had 13 points, eight rebounds and four blocks as host Michigan gave John Beilein his 800th career coaching victory.

No. 21 UCLA 96, Fort Wayne 71: Kris Wilkes scored a career-high 27 points, Moses Brown had a double-double in his collegiate debut.

No. 22 Clemson 100, The Citadel 80: Marcquise Reed had 20 points and a career-high 13 rebounds as host Clemson reached 100 points for the first time in nine years.

No. 23 LSU 94, Southeastern Louisiana 63: Naz Reid had 17 points to lead six players in double figures and host LSU opened its season with a victory.

No. 24 Purdue 90, Fairfield 57: Carsen Edwards scored 30 points and made seven three-pointers as host Purdue opened its season with a victory.

No. 25 Washington 73, Western Kentucky 55: Noah Dickerson scored 16 of his 18 points in the second half, and Jaylen Nowell added 17.

Michigan climbs to No. 4 in CFP ranks

Michigan moved into the fourth spot of the College Football Playoff rankings Tuesday night, behind Alabama, Clemson and Notre Dame.

Georgia was next at five, followed by Oklahoma.

The playoff picture cleared up after a weekend where several contenders asserted themselves. The top-four teams in the final rankings Dec. 2 will play in the national semifinals.

The Crimson Tide easily dispatched LSU from the top four, beating the Tigers 29-0. LSU, though, only dropped to No. 7 after its second loss, ahead of Washington State, West Virginia and Ohio State — all with only one loss.

Selection committee chairman Rob Mullens noted LSU's three victories against teams the committee has ranked this week (Mississippi State, Auburn and Georgia).

"Their defense is extremely strong," said Mullens, the Oregon athletic director. "Their two losses come against No. 1 Alabama, on the road to Florida."

Unbeaten Notre Dame moved up one spot to No. 3, and Michigan jumped a spot after a 42-7 victory against Penn State.

With four weeks left in the season, nine of the top 10 teams are serious contenders. LSU is basically out, because the Tigers have no chance to win a conference title.

Assuming the top three unbeaten teams would get in by winning out, here are the paths to the playoff.

No. 1 Alabama (9-0): The Tide is already locked into the SEC championship game and has built up enough equity that even a regular-season loss to Mississippi State or Auburn won't keep Tua Tagovailoa and Co. out of the playoff. Now if they lost twice ... yeah, that's probably not happening. The only intrigue involving Alabama is whether the Tide could lose the SEC championship game, finish 12-1 and still get in? The chances are probably decent.

No. 2 Clemson (9-0): Like Alabama, the Tigers have some room for a regular-season misstep, but their position is not as strong as the Tide's. With a loss to ACC Atlantic rival Boston College on Saturday, Clemson would be at risk of being shut out of the conference title game. Ohio State and Alabama both made the playoff at 11-1, without even playing for a league title the last two seasons. The Tigers could, too, but it is no slam dunk.

No. 3 Notre Dame (9-0): The Irish finish with three winnable games, but no locks. Notre Dame fans believe their team holds a trump card against Michigan, with that season-opening victory in South Bend. That could buffer the Irish against one loss in their final three games, but with no conference title and some struggling marquee teams on their schedule such as Virginia Tech and Stanford, Notre Dame is not a lock if it gets into a resume contest with other one-loss teams. Even one it beat.

No. 4 Michigan (8-1): The Wolverines have to feel good about controlling their path to the playoff. Winning out, including at Ohio State, puts Jim Harbaugh's team at 12-1 with a Big Ten title. That's a résumé with victories against Michigan State, Wisconsin and Penn State, and a seven-point road loss to Notre Dame. One loss and Michigan is out, right? Not so fast. Take a quick glance at the rankings and notice how many highly ranked teams still have to play each other. It won't take more than one or two mild upsets to have the selection committee sifting through a bunch of two-loss teams to fill the final playoff spot. Figure the ones with conference championships will have the edge.

No. 5 Georgia (8-1): Simple: Win out, get in. Oh, and beat Alabama. The good news for the Bulldogs is beating Alabama to win the SEC championship would almost certainly make up for a second regular-season loss. Georgia has got a little leeway when it faces Auburn and Georgia Tech.

No. 6 Oklahoma (8-1): UCLA did the Sooners no favor by being terrible and depriving Oklahoma of a quality nonconference victory. Still, the Sooners are probably the Big 12's best bet to win an argument against a one-loss Big Ten champion or Notre Dame with one loss. Maybe.

NBA roundup

McCollum scores 40, leads Blazers over Bucks

PORTLAND, Ore. — In search of his jump shot, CJ McCollum watched every single three-pointer he took last season looking for what he lost.

Fortunately for the Portland Trail Blazers, he found it.

McCollum scored 40 points and Portland beat Milwaukee 118-103 on Tuesday night to hand the Bucks their second loss in 10 games this season.

"Whether I play well or not, I know how much time I spend preparing," McCollum said. "The only thing I saw was I had a lot of in-and-outs and I was shooting with a dead wrist. That was the only thing I no-ticed. I wasn't locking my wrist out, so I just tried to lock my wrist out."

The result was a dazzling performance against one of the NBA's best teams early this season.

"A lot of credit to CJ. He had a heck of a night," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said. "Any time we made a bit of a run or felt like the momentum might be changing, McCollum hit a big shot."

McCollum, who entered shooting well below his career averages, went 17-for-26 from the field and added six assists.

"It was tough," Milwaukee big man Brook Lopez said. "He made some huge plays and some tough shots that definitely were contested."

Evan Turner had 16 points and 11 rebounds off the bench for the Blazers (8-3).

Giannis Antetokounmpo led the Bucks with 23 points and nine rebounds. Lopez shot 6-for-10 from three-point range and finished with 22 points.

In the third quarter, McCollum put on a show. He scored 19 points and made Bucks rookie guard Donte DiVincenzo fall down on a crossover move before hitting a basket.

Hornets 113, Hawks 102: Kemba Walker had 29 points and seven assists, extending his strong start to the season as host Charlotte beat Atlanta.

Marvin Williams added 20 points for the Hornets (6-5), who won for the third time on a four-game homestand. Walker has scored 25 or more seven times in 11 games.

Mavericks 119, Wizards 100: Luka Doncic scored 23 points and Dennis Smith Jr. made three key plays down the stretch as host Dallas ended a six-game losing streak.

It was the Mavericks' 16th win in their last 17 meetings with the Wizards. John Wall led the Wizards with 24 points.

Nets 104, Suns 82: Caris LeVert scored 26 points, D'Angelo Russell added 15 and Brooklyn beat struggling host Phoenix.

NHL roundup

Lightning speed past Oilers

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Nikita Kucherov had two goals and an assist, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 33 saves and the Tampa Bay Lightning beat the Edmonton Oilers 5-2 on Tuesday night.

Steven Stamkos had a goal and two assists, and Brayden Point and Yanni Gourde also scored for the Lightning, who have the best record in the NHL at 11-3-1.

Oilers coach Todd McLellan had high praise for the Lightning.

"They've got a fun team to watch," McLellan said. "We're all chasing them right now, but I think we can get there."

Edmonton got goals from Ryan Strome and Leon Draisaitl, and Mikko Koskinen stopped 30 shots. Connor McDavid was kept off the scoresheet for just the second time this season as his eight-game point streak ended (six goals, five assists).

Vasilevskiy made a diving stop on Ty Rattie, who got his scoring chance in the first period off a nifty pass from McDavid. Vasilevskiy also had an in-close save on McDavid shortly after Edmonton kept the puck in the offensive zone for all two minutes of a second-period power play.

Vasilevskiy has allowed two or fewer goals in eight of 11 games.

"He's undoubtedly the reason why we win a lot of hockey games," Stamkos said. "He was outstanding again tonight."

Kucherov put Tampa Bay ahead 4-1 off a pass through the slot by Stamkos with 1:01 to go in the second.

"We look for each other, we get open for each other," Kucherov said. "That's the point of this game and that's what we're doing."

Senators 7, Devils 3: Mark Stone had two goals and three assists, Colin White scored twice and host Ottawa beat New Jersey in the Senators' first game since the emergence of an embarrassing viral video.

The clip showed seven players during an Uber ride in Phoenix last month insulting the team and assistant coach Martin Raymond. Earlier in the day, Stone dismissed the latest Senators drama as a "hiccup" and said the team is already repairing the frayed relationship between players and coaches that was laid bare in the video.

Blue Jackets 4, Stars 1: Sergei Bobrovsky made 27 saves to lead host Columbus past Dallas.

Anthony Duclair, Markus Nutivaara, Nick Foligno and Ryan Murray scored for the Blue Jackets, who snapped a two-game skid.

Jamie Benn scored for the Stars, who lost their second straight after winning three in a row.

Rangers 5, Canadiens 3: Neal Pionk scored the tiebreaking goal on a sensational, end-to-end rush late in the third period and host New York rallied to beat Montreal for its fourth straight win.

Mika Zibanejad and Chris Kreider each had a goal and an assist for New York, which trailed 3-1 early in the second period before scoring the last four goals — three in the third.

Red Wings 3, Canucks 2 (SO): Dylan Larkin scored the only goal in a shootout to give host Detroit a comeback win over Vancouver.

Justin Abdelkader and Gustav Nyquist scored in regulation for the Red Wings, who have won four of five. Jimmy Howard stopped 40 shots before denying Elias Pettersson, Nikolay Goldobin and Bo Horvat in the tiebreaker.

Blues 4, Hurricanes 1: Ryan O'Reilly had his first NHL hat trick and Robby Fabbri added his first goal in almost two years, sending host St. Louis over Carolina.

Chad Johnson, starting his second game of the season, made 38 saves.

Maple Leafs 3, Golden Knights 1: Frederik Andersen made 36 saves to lift host Toronto over Vegas.

Connor Brown, Mitch Marner and Nazem Kadri scored for the Maple Leafs.

Kings 4, Ducks 1: Ilya Kovalchuk had a goal and two assists, and host Los Angeles opened the tenure of interim coach Willie Desjardins with a win over Anaheim.

Dustin Brown and Kyle Clifford scored first-period goals, while Jack Campbell made 30 saves and picked up his first career assist as the Kings comfortably won the first Freeway Faceoff of the season for these two struggling Southern California rivals.

Desjardins has run just one practice since getting his new job Sunday.

Sharks 4, Wild 3: Marcus Sorenson had a goal and two assists as host San Jose beat Minnesota.

Barclay Goodrow's second goal of the season broke a 3-all deadlock at 7:25 of the third period. Goodrow also had an assist and Martin Jones made 23 saves for the Sharks.

Minnesota (8-4-2) had won seven of eight overall.

Harvick loses spot in finale

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Kevin Harvick's bid for a second NASCAR title suffered a massive setback Wednesday when he was stripped of his berth in the championship race because his winning car failed inspection after Texas Motor Speedway.

The discovery of an illegally modified spoiler, made during a detailed post-race inspection after the No. 4 Ford returned to NASCAR's Research and Development Center following Sunday's race, negates the automatic berth Harvick earned into the final four. The rule violated states that spoilers must be used exactly as supplied from the manufacturer and not altered.

On top of losing his spot in next weekend's finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway, Harvick must also close out the final two races of the season without crew chief Rodney Childers and car chief Robert Smith. Both were suspended for two races, and Childers also was fined $75,000.

Harvick was docked 40 driver points, and Stewart-Haas Racing was docked 40 owner points as well. Harvick enters this weekend's race at Phoenix fourth among the remaining eight playoff drivers, three points above the cutline. Should there be a tie for the final transfer spot, Harvick would not be eligible to use the Texas victory in the tiebreaking procedure.

Greg Zipadelli, vice president of competition at SHR, said the team will not appeal the penalties. Tony Gibson will be Harvick's interim crew chief and Nick DeFazio will be interim car chief.

"We work tirelessly across every inch of our race cars to create speed and, unfortunately, NASCAR determined we ventured into an area not accommodated by its rule book," Zipadelli said. "We will not appeal the penalty. Instead, we will direct our immediate focus to this weekend's event in Phoenix and control our destiny on the racetrack."

Harvick's win at Texas was his series-leading eighth in 2018 and qualified him for Homestead along with Joey Logano. Now, three spots in the finale will be up for grabs Sunday in Phoenix.

Harvick won the 2014 Cup Series championship and went to Phoenix that season in a must-win situation to race for the title. He pulled it off and is a nine-time winner at Phoenix, including earlier this year.

Harvick has been in NASCAR's finale three of the last four years.

The penalty is disastrous for SHR, which went into the third round of the playoffs with all four of its drivers eligible for the championship. Logano grabbed the first spot, which meant the best SHR could do was qualify three cars for Homestead.