

Trump comes back, wins presidency again

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States on Wednesday, an extraordinary comeback for a former president who refused to accept defeat four years ago, sparked a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, was convicted of felony charges and survived two assassination attempts.

With a win in Wisconsin, Trump cleared the 270 electoral votes needed to clinch the presidency. He won Michigan on Wednesday afternoon, sweeping the “blue wall” along with Pennsylvania — the one-time Democrat-leaning, swing states that all went for Trump in 2016 before flipping to President Joe Biden in 2020.

The victory validates his bare-knuckle approach to politics. He attacked his Democratic rival, Kamala Harris, in deeply personal — often misogynistic and racist — terms as he pushed an apocalyptic picture of a country overrun by violent migrants. The coarse rhetoric, paired with an image of hyper-masculinity, resonated with angry voters — particularly men — in a deeply polarized nation.

“I want to thank the American people for the extraordinary honor of being elected your 47th president and your 45th president,” Trump told throngs of cheering supporters in Florida even before his victory was confirmed.

In state after state, Trump outperformed what he did in the 2020 election while Harris failed to do as well as Joe Biden did in winning the presidency four years ago. Upon taking office again, Trump will also work with a Senate that will now be in Republican hands,

while control of the House hadn’t been determined.

“We’ve been through so much together, and today you showed up in record numbers to deliver a victory,” Trump said. “This was something special and we’re going to pay you back,” he said.

In his second term, Trump has vowed to pursue an agenda centered on dramatically reshaping the federal government and pursuing retribution against his perceived enemies.

The results cap a historically tumultuous and competitive election season that included two assassination attempts targeting Trump and a shift to a new Democratic nominee just a month before the party’s convention. Trump will inherit a range of challenges when he assumes office Jan. 20, including heightened political polarization and global crises that are testing America’s influence abroad.

His win against Harris, the first woman of color to lead a major party ticket, marks the second time he has defeated a female rival in a general election. Harris, the current vice president, rose to the top of the ticket after Biden exited the race amid alarm about his advanced age. Despite an initial surge of energy around her campaign, she struggled during a compressed timeline to convince disillusioned voters that she represented a break from an unpopular administration. Harris planned to deliver a concession speech Wednesday afternoon at Howard University.

Trump is the first former president to return to power since Grover Cleveland regained the White House in the 1892 election. He is the first

person convicted of a felony to be elected president and, at 78, is the oldest person elected to the office. His vice president, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, 40, will become the highest-ranking member of the millennial generation in the U.S. government.

There will be far fewer checks on Trump when he returns to the White House. He has plans to swiftly enact a sweeping agenda that would transform nearly every aspect of American government. His GOP critics in Congress have largely been defeated or retired. Federal courts are now filled with judges he appointed. The U.S. Supreme Court, which includes three Trump-appointed justices, issued a ruling earlier this year affording presidents broad immunity from prosecution.

Trump’s language and behavior during the campaign sparked growing warnings from Democrats and some Republicans about shocks to democracy that his return to power would bring. He repeatedly praised strongman leaders, warned that he would deploy the military to target political opponents he labeled the “enemy from within,” threatened to take action against news organizations for unfavorable coverage and suggested suspending the Constitution.

Some who served in his first White House, including Vice President Mike Pence and John Kelly, Trump’s longest-serving chief of staff, either declined to endorse him or issued dire public warnings about his return to the presidency.

While Harris focused much of her initial message around themes of joy, Trump channeled a powerful sense of anger

and resentment among voters.

He seized on frustrations over high prices and fears about crime and migrants who illegally entered the country on Biden’s watch. He also highlighted wars in the Middle East and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine to cast Democrats as presiding over — and encouraging — a world in chaos.

It was a formula Trump perfected in 2016, when he cast himself as the only person who could fix the country’s problems, often borrowing language from dictators.

“In 2016, I declared I am your voice. Today I add: I am your warrior. I am your justice. And for those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution,” he said in March 2023.

Perhaps the defining moment came in July when a gunman opened fire at a Trump rally in Butler, Pa. A bullet grazed Trump’s ear and killed one of his supporters. His face streaked with blood, Trump stood and raised his fist in the air, shouting “Fight! Fight! Fight!” Weeks later, a second assassination attempt was thwarted after a Secret Service agent spotted the barrel of a gun poking through the greenery while Trump was playing golf in Florida.

Trump’s return to the White House seemed unlikely when he left Washington in early 2021 as a diminished figure whose lies about his defeat sparked a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. He was so isolated at the time that few outside of his family bothered to attend the send-off he organized for himself at Joint Base Andrews, Md., complete with a 21-gun salute.

Europe looks to change NATO with Trump back

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Donald Trump's imminent return to the White House will likely transform the U.S. military's mission in Europe, alter its relationship with NATO and upend the Pentagon's whole strategy for assisting Ukraine in its war against Russia.

Trump, who won Tuesday's presidential election in a dominant showing that also saw Republicans retake the Senate, is now in prime position to settle business unfinished during his first term from 2017 to 2021.

Pressure will intensify on allies in Europe to ramp up defense spending and prepare to take on the bulk of the security load on the Continent, where the United States has long been

seen as the ultimate security underwriter.

In Europe, Trump's win was widely met with an awareness of a looming onus on NATO's militaries to do more.

"The right response for Europe is not to cry publicly, but to take a deep breath and return with a wise plan for rebalancing in NATO to save it," Jakub Janda, director of the European Values Center for Security Policy in Prague, said Wednesday.

Regarding weapons support for Ukraine, Europe must also prepare to carry the load "like now," he said in a statement.

Marko Mihkelson, a parliamentarian in Estonia, which is vulnerably positioned on NATO's eastern flank and borders Russia, said Wednesday that NATO's "toughest years lie ahead."

"Regardless of the fact that the next president of the USA is most probably Donald Trump, Europe must do everything to preserve the transatlantic alliance," Mihkelson, chairman of Estonia's foreign affairs committee, said in a statement.

During the campaign, Trump made it clear that he opposes arming Ukraine and considers Kyiv at least partially responsible for Russia's invasion.

He also asserted that a peace deal can be reached with Russia, although it's unclear whether that is possible or what the terms of an agreement would look like.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, whose country has depended on American support to fight Russia for nearly three years, was among the first

world leaders to congratulate Trump, saying that he looked forward to working with him.

"I appreciate President Trump's commitment to the 'peace through strength' approach in global affairs," Zelenskyy said, adding that this principle "can practically bring a just peace in Ukraine closer."

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, who had a reputation for working well with Trump when he was prime minister of the Netherlands, struck a similar tone Wednesday.

"His leadership will again be key to keeping our alliance strong. I look forward to working with him again to advance peace through strength through NATO," Rutte said in a statement.

Abortion rights measures pass in 7 of 10 states

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Voters in Missouri cleared the way to undo one of the nation's most restrictive abortion bans in one of seven victories for abortion rights advocates, while Florida, Nebraska and South Dakota defeated similar constitutional amendments, leaving bans in place.

Abortion rights amendments also passed in Arizona, Colorado, Maryland and Montana. Nevada voters also approved an amendment, but they'll need to pass it again in 2026 for it to take effect. Another that bans discrimination on the basis of "pregnancy outcomes" prevailed in New York.

The results include firsts for the abortion landscape, which underwent a seismic shift in 2022 when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, a ruling that ended a nationwide right to abortion and cleared the way for bans to take effect in most Republican-controlled states.

They also came in the same election that Republican Donald Trump won the presidency. Among his inconsistent positions on abortion has been an insistence that it's an issue best left to the states. Still, the president

can have a major impact on abortion policy through executive action.

In the meantime, Missouri is positioned to be the first state where a vote will undo a ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with an amendment that would allow lawmakers to restrict abortions only past the point of a fetus' viability — usually considered after 21 weeks, although there's no exact defined time frame.

But the ban, and other restrictive laws, are not automatically repealed. Advocates now have to ask courts to overturn laws to square with the new amendment.

"Today, Missourians made history and sent a clear message: decisions around pregnancy, including abortion, birth control and miscarriage care are personal and private and should be left up to patients and their families, not politicians," Rachel Sweet, campaign manager of Missourians for Constitutional Freedom, said in a statement.

Roughly half of Missouri's voters said abortion should be legal in all or most cases, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of more than 2,200 of the state's voters. But only about 1 in 10 said abortion should be illegal in

all cases; nearly 4 in 10 said abortion should be illegal in most cases.

Bans remain in place in three states after votes.

Florida, Nebraska and South Dakota became the first states since *Roe* was overturned where abortion opponents prevailed on a ballot measure. Most voters supported the Florida measure, but it fell short of the required 60% to pass constitutional amendments in the state. Most states require a simple majority.

The result was a political win for Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican with a national profile, who had steered state GOP funds to the cause. His administration has weighed in, too, with a campaign against the measure, investigators questioning people who signed petitions to add it to the ballot and threats to TV stations that aired one commercial supporting it.

Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the national anti-abortion group SBA Pro-Life America, said in a statement that the result is "a momentous victory for life in Florida and for our entire country," praising DeSantis for leading the charge against the measure.

'Fat Leonard' Francis sentenced to 15 years

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Former military defense contractor Leonard "Fat Leonard" Francis was sentenced Tuesday to 15 years in prison for masterminding a decade-long bribery scheme that swept up dozens of U.S. Navy officers, federal prosecutors said.

U.S. District Judge Janis L. Sammartino also ordered Francis to pay \$20 million in restitution to the Navy and a \$150,000 fine, according to a statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office. He was also ordered to forfeit \$35 million in "ill-gotten proceeds from his crimes," the statement said.

Prosecutors said the sentence resulted from Francis' first guilty plea in 2015 concerning bribery and fraud, his extensive cooperation with the government since then and another guilty plea Tuesday for failing to appear for

his original sentencing hearing in 2022.

Shortly before he was due to be sentenced in September 2022, Francis cut off a GPS monitor he was wearing while under house arrest and fled the country. He was later arrested in Venezuela and brought back to the United States in December 2023.

Sammartino sentenced him to more than 13½ years for the bribery and fraud charges, plus 16 months for failing to appear. The sentences are to be served consecutively.

"Leonard Francis lined his pockets with taxpayer dollars while undermining the integrity of U.S. Naval forces," U.S. Attorney Tara McGrath said in Tuesday's statement. "The impact of his deceit and manipulation will be long felt, but justice has been served today."

Email and phone messages

seeking comment were left Tuesday for William Douglas Sprague, an attorney for Francis.

Sprague, who sought a sentence of just under nine years, argued that his client's cooperation should warrant a lesser sentence, 10 News San Diego reported.

Sprague also said Francis' company provided the Navy with exemplary services for many years.

Prosecutors said Francis' actions led to one of the biggest bribery investigations in U.S. military history, which resulted in the conviction and sentencing of nearly two dozen Navy officials, defense contractors and others on various fraud and corruption charges.

An enigmatic figure who was 6-foot-3 and weighed 350 pounds at one time, Francis owned and operated his family's ship servicing business, Singapore-based

Glenn Defense Marine Asia Ltd. or GDMA, which supplied food, water and fuel to vessels. The Malaysian defense contractor was a key contact for U.S. Navy ships at ports across Asia for more than two decades. During that time, Francis wooed naval officers with Kobe beef, expensive cigars, concert tickets and wild sex parties at luxury hotels from Thailand to the Philippines.

In exchange, officers, including the first active-duty admiral to be convicted of a federal crime, concealed the scheme in which Francis would overcharge for supplying ships or charge for fake services at ports he controlled in Southeast Asia. The officers passed him classified information and even went so far as redirecting military vessels to ports that were lucrative for his Singapore-based ship servicing company.

S. Korea reportedly eyeing short-range missile launch

By DAVID CHOI

Stars and Stripes

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — South Korea plans to test-fire a domestically made, short-range ballistic missile in response to the North recently launching an intercontinental ballistic missile, according to a South Korean news report.

The Missile Strategy Command may test its Hyunmoo-2 ballistic missile this week in reply to North Korea "escalating its provocations" Oct. 31 by launching an ICBM, an unnamed military official said in a Yonhap News report published Wednesday.

The South Korean missile is "capable of striking North Korea in a contingency" and serves as a "warning to the North," the official reportedly said.

North Korea's ICBM flew 620 miles eastward from the Pyongyang area at a maximum altitude

of 4,350 miles, according to Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani. It was the first launch of its kind since Dec. 18.

The North's state-run Korean Central News Agency reported the launch broke the flight records of previous missiles and hailed the ICBM, called the Hwasongpho-19, as a "milestone" achievement.

The communist regime also fired at least seven short-range ballistic missiles Tuesday, according to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff and Japan's Ministry of Defense. They flew roughly 250 miles before coming down in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, the Joint Chiefs said.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's administration has often responded to the North's missile launches with shows of military force, sometimes in concert with the United States and Japan.

Discharge granted to soldier who went AWOL from Bavaria

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — A U.S. soldier who disappeared from his Bavarian base last year and turned up at a military hospital under a false name is being allowed to exit the Army without charge after a judge dismissed the case against him.

Staff Sgt. Jonathan Lane, 31, requested a discharge in lieu of military court-martial during a pretrial hearing Oct. 30 at Rose Barracks in Vilseck, 7th Army Training Command spokeswoman Lacey Justinger said Tuesday.

He had been charged with one count each of attempted voluntary manslaughter, child endangerment and desertion. His court-martial was scheduled for February, and he would have faced up to 31 years in prison if convicted on all counts.

After reviewing the evidence, judge Lt. Col. Tom Hynes agreed to the request by Lane, who re-

ceived an other than honorable discharge and was reduced in rank to private.

Lane was released from custody and is processing out of the Army, Justinger said. He was a helicopter repairer assigned to the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade at U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach.

On June 27, 2023, Lane was reported missing after not showing up for duty. Four days earlier, he had been spotted trying to access Ramstein Air Base and Landstuhl Regional Medical Center under the name David Hersher.

Army officials declined to say whether he received treatment at the hospital, citing medical privacy rules. Ramstein is about 125 miles west of Lane's former duty station.

He was caught April 5 near the southwestern city of Trier.

The charges will be officially withdrawn and dismissed on the date of Lane's separation from active duty, Justinger said.

Flooding blamed for 5 deaths in Missouri

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — A couple in their 70s who served as election poll workers were among at least five people killed in Missouri after torrential rains caused flash flooding across the state.

Up to 8 inches of rain fell over two days in parts of Missouri, leading to widespread flooding and dozens of water rescues. It was part of a storm system that also spawned tornadoes in Oklahoma and Arkansas.

In Wright County, Mo., a county of about 19,000 residents 210 miles southeast of Kansas City, a 70-year-old man and 73-year-old woman were in a vehicle swept away by flooding at

Beaver Creek around 4:30 a.m. Tuesday, the state patrol said. The bodies of the couple from Manes, Mo., were found more than four hours later.

Wright County Clerk Loni Pedersen confirmed that both of the people who died were poll workers.

"This is a tragic loss for Wright County," Pedersen said in an email. "They were dedicated citizens who valued fair and honest elections."

Three people in two other cars swept away by the fast-rising creek were able to swim to safety, the patrol said.

Two other deaths were reported in St. Louis County. Firefighters were called Tuesday

morning after a submerged SUV was spotted near flooded Gravois Creek, near Interstate 55. Crews broke through the sunroof and pulled out a woman, who was pronounced dead, Lemay Fire Protection District spokesperson Jason Brice said.

Hours later, a man's body was found in the same flooded creek, Brice said. Authorities were investigating how the body got there. Fire crews rescued 10 other people from flooded vehicles, Brice said.

On Monday, Missouri state troopers recovered a 66-year-old man's body after a car was swept off a bridge in Ironton, about 90 miles south of St. Louis.

The National Weather Service said four likely tornadoes, and possibly more, touched down in parts of Oklahoma and Arkansas on Monday. There were no reports of deaths or injuries from the tornadoes.

Keli Cain, spokesperson for the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management, said assessments of the damage were underway.

The storms struck a day after tornadoes injured at least 11 people in the Oklahoma City area in central Oklahoma.

Cain said the department worked with the Oklahoma State Election Board to ensure that polling places were not disrupted.

Russia believed to be behind incendiary package plot

Associated Press

WARSAW, Poland — Western security officials suspect Russian intelligence was behind a plot to put incendiary devices in packages on cargo planes headed to North America, including one that caught fire at a courier hub in Germany and another that ignited in a warehouse in England.

Poland said last month that it has arrested four people suspected to be linked to a foreign intelligence operation that carried out sabotage and is

searching for two others. Lithuania's prosecutor general Nida Grunskiene said Tuesday there were an unspecified number of people detained in several countries, offering no elaboration.

The events come as Western officials say they are seeing an intensification of a hybrid war of sabotage by Russia targeting Ukraine's allies, including election disinformation and arson attacks in Europe this year. Several officials said they believe the attacks were the

work of Russian military intelligence, the GRU, although Moscow denied involvement.

Poland's Internal Security Agency, or ABW, says that incidents in Poland, as well as other European Union and NATO members, had intensified this year. ABW believes they are initiated and coordinated by the Russian special services. So far, 20 people have been charged in investigations led by the prosecutor's office, the ABW and police.

Polish Prosecutor Katarzyna

Calów-Jaszewska said the investigation focuses on foreign agents conducting acts of sabotage, including damaging industrial facilities or critical infrastructure such as airports, airplanes and other vehicles, and as well as arson using self-combustible parcels sent to EU countries and the U.K. that would ignite during road or air transport.

She added that the group tested a channel for sending such parcels to the United States and Canada.

Hurricane Rafael intensifies before getting to Cuba

Associated Press

HAVANA — Hurricane Rafael barreled toward Cuba on Wednesday, forecast to make landfall in western Cuba as a major Category 3 hurricane that forecasters warn could bring "life-threatening" storm surges, winds and flash floods.

Thousands of people in the west of the island were evacuated as a prevention measure before Rafael was expected to

slam into Cuba on Wednesday after dumping rain on Jamaica and the Cayman Islands on Tuesday.

Classes and public transport were suspended on parts of the island as authorities issued an alarm for the incoming weather for the west of the country. Workers secured buildings and cleaned up garbage along Havana's coastline in preparation for floods.

"Preparations to protect life and property should be rushed to completion," warned the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Rafael — currently classified as a Category 2 hurricane — was located about 60 miles east-southeast of the Isle of Youth and around 130 miles south-southeast of Havana on Wednesday. It had maximum sustained winds of 110 mph and

was moving northwest at 14 mph, according to the center.

Forecasters expected the storm to later weaken over Cuba before emerging in the southeastern Gulf of Mexico as a hurricane.

Cubans have already been struggling with blackouts while recovering from another hurricane two weeks ago that killed at least six people in the eastern part of the island.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Orchestra fires 2 after abuse of power claims

NY NEW YORK — The New York Philharmonic is firing principal oboist Liang Wang and associate principal trumpet Matthew Muckey after their union decided not to contest the decision, which followed renewed allegations of sexual misconduct and abuse of power.

The orchestra said it issued a notice of non-reengagement to the two effective Sept. 21, 2025.

Philharmonic executive adviser Deborah Borda said 11 women made accusations against Wang and three against Muckey during the latest investigation.

"It found that both gentlemen had been involved in sexual abuse and rape as well as abuse of power," Borda said. "This is all new information that came out and I think the reason is that people were afraid to speak up before and they are not now."

Borda said some of the allegations were made by students.

Company to sue after pot crops damaged

NM ALBUQUERQUE — State police have destroyed tens of thousands of pounds of marijuana plants at greenhouses in northwestern New Mexico, marking what regulators have said is the largest seizure and destruction of cannabis in New Mexico since new possession and cultivation laws took effect in 2021.

Authorities announced the operation Monday, saying dozens of agents were assigned to eradicate the plants in October. The state Cannabis Control Division

had started the process of revoking the license of NNK Equity LLC, having filed a noncompliance order and a default order.

The company was accused of not posting its licenses on site, failing to obtain water rights for cultivation, not having cameras that could monitor certain areas of its operation and violating sanitation and health requirements.

Jacob Candelaria, an Albuquerque attorney who represents NNK Equity, disputed the state's claims and accused regulators and state police of violating his client's civil rights. He said the state failed to properly serve notice of its intent to revoke the company's license and subsequently denied a request for a hearing on the merits of the case.

Teen gets life for fatal shooting near school

IA DES MOINES — Another Iowa teenager was sentenced to life in prison for a fatal 2022 drive-by shooting near Des Moines East High School.

Alex Santiago Perdomo, 17, pleaded guilty last year to first-degree murder. He was 15 at the time of the shooting, according to the Polk County prosecutor, who said Perdomo will have a chance at parole.

Police said Perdomo was among 10 teens ages 14 to 18 armed with at least six guns who drove in multiple vehicles to a neighborhood near East High School, only a half mile from the Iowa Capitol. The specifics of their plan aren't clear, but police said the teens were out to settle a grudge and fired on Jose Lopez, his sister, one of her friends and two other teens standing on a

sidewalk nearby.

The gunfire hit Lopez, his sister and their friend, killing Lopez and seriously wounding the girls.

Vigil held for beloved bear killed by vehicle

WY TETON RANGE — During her nearly three decades roaming the snowy wilderness of the Teton Range, Grizzly No. 399 became a beloved mama bear with millions of parkgoers following her yearly adventures and her ever-growing family tree.

Nature lovers are mourning the matriarch of the world-famous bear family after she was fatally struck by a vehicle Oct. 22 on a highway in western Wyoming. Dozens braved frigid weather in the picturesque ski town of Jackson on Saturday night to attend a candlelight vigil watched by some 1,300 others online.

A PBS documentary crowned the 28-year-old grizzly "Queen of the Tetons" and an Instagram account dedicated to her has amassed more than 60,000 followers. She was known for frequenting tourist-heavy spots and roadsides in Grand Teton National Park and became an ambassador for her species and a symbol for people working to conserve American public lands.

Man dies after truck pours asphalt onto him

MS JACKSON — Police in Mississippi's capital said a man died when he was trying to repair a dump truck and asphalt poured onto him.

Darrell Sheriff, 41, was under-

neath the truck working on a hydraulic line when the tailgate opened and asphalt fell on him, Jackson Police Department said in a statement.

The police department classified the death as an accident.

2 dead after two boats capsize in bay's winds

CA BODEGA BAY — Two people have been confirmed dead and several more are missing after two separate boats capsized in the past few days off Northern California's Bodega Bay amid increasingly dangerous winds.

On Saturday night around 10 p.m., officials responded to concerns about a 21-foot boat that didn't return when expected. The vessel carried three adults and three minors who had been out crabbing, according to the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office.

Crews located debris from the boat along the coast and one person was found alive and taken for medical treatment, the sheriff's office said. Another missing boater, Johnny Phommathep II, 17, was found dead.

Less than 48 hours later, around 7 a.m. Monday, officials received another call about a capsized boat in Bodega Bay, officials said. Teams were still out at sea searching for the missing boaters from Saturday's incident, allowing them to quickly respond to the second boating incident. Officials said two men were aboard this boat, one of whom was found but died soon after.

Officials said Monday that they were continuing to search for the five boaters not yet located.

— From wire reports

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Oregon, Ohio State atop CFP rankings

Associated Press

A season full of surprises didn't produce many when the first set of rankings on the road to college football's new 12-team playoff came out Tuesday.

Undefeated Oregon got top billing. The selection committee liked Ohio State just a touch more than Georgia in its top 25 — the first of six weekly polls the committee will put out.

Other than that, the panel's top 12 looked exactly like the top dozen in the most recent AP poll, which has been shaken up almost weekly thanks to a bundle of upsets that left the mighty SEC, of all conferences, without a single undefeated team.

The near mirror image of AP and the College Football Playoff polls meant Alabama, despite its two losses, would be in the bracket at No. 11 if it came out this week, as would Boise State, the leader of the Mountain West Conference, which came in at No. 12 and would earn an automatic spot as the fifth-best conference champion.

"The summary is, Boise State is an impressive team," said Michigan athletic director Warde Manuel, who serves as

chair of the selection committee.

Manuel explained Ohio State was ranked No. 2 because its only loss came by one point to Oregon. Both the Buckeyes and third-ranked Bulldogs were rated ahead of undefeated Miami most likely thanks to strength of schedules that were much tougher than that of the 'Canes, who were ranked fourth.

"We're splitting hairs as far as looking at two great teams," Manuel said.

The rankings will come out each week through Dec. 8, when the final list will decide the bracket for the playoffs. Those start Dec. 20-21, with the 5-12 seeds in action at the better seed's home field, and close with the national title game in Atlanta on Jan. 20.

The rankings don't directly correlate to where the teams would fall in the bracket. The four best-ranked conference champions receive first-round byes, which according to this ranking would belong to Oregon (ranked 1), Georgia (3), Miami (4) and BYU (9).

The committee chose Alabama over a handful of one-loss

teams, but the Tide's strength of schedule clearly helped them leap over teams like No. 13 SMU (ACC), No. 17 Iowa State (Big 12) and No. 18 Pitt (ACC), who play in weaker conferences.

The rest of the teams in the fictional first-week bracket and their rankings: No. 5 Texas, No. 6 Penn State, No. 7 Tennessee, No. 8 Indiana and No. 10 Notre Dame.

First team out was No. 13 SMU while Army, with an 8-0 record and leading the American Athletic Conference, barely squeaked into the rankings at No. 25.

What first-round games would look like

ESPN is paying billions to televise these games, so it got exclusive rights to the bracket reveal, filling the show with analysis and lots of references to "America finally finding out" — a nod to the opening rankings being released on election night. The network chose to fill in the bracket as it went along, which made things a little confusing — a second-ranked team really seeded third, and so on. But here's what those first-

round games would be (with seedings, not rankings):

No. 12 Boise State at No. 5 Ohio State: Would be the Broncos' biggest postseason game since beating Oklahoma in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl.

No. 11 Alabama at No. 5 Texas: Longhorns' win over Tide in 2023 punctured myth of Alabama invincibility.

No. 10 Notre Dame at No. 7 Penn State: Feels like we need Keith Jackson for this one. Anyone remember the 1992 Snow Bowl?

No. 9 Indiana at No. 8 Tennessee: Hoosiers entry to the big-time (football) would come in front of 100,000 on Rocky Top.

What will change after this week?

LSU is ranked 15 and hosts Alabama on Saturday in what feels like an elimination game.

Also this week, Georgia plays at No. 17 Ole Miss; the Rebels' two losses have come by a field goal — to Kentucky and LSU.

Indiana hosts Michigan and is favored by 12½, barreling toward a Nov. 23 matchup with Ohio State.

Embiid suspended three games for shoving columnist

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid was suspended by the NBA on Tuesday for three games without pay for shoving a member of the media.

Embiid's suspension will begin with the next regular-season game for which he is eligible and able to play. The 2023 NBA MVP has yet to play this season because of what the 76ers call left knee management.

The Sixers began a road trip in Los Angeles against the Clippers on Wednesday night.

Embiid shouted at and eventually shoved a newspaper co-

lumnist in a locker room altercation Saturday night.

"Mutual respect is paramount to the relationship between players and media in the NBA," league executive Joe Dumars said in a statement announcing the suspension. "While we understand Joel was offended by the personal nature of the original version of the reporter's column, interactions must remain professional on both sides and can never turn physical."

Embiid took issue with Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Marcus Hayes, who mentioned the seven-time All-Star's late

brother and his son — both named Arthur — in columns questioning Embiid's professionalism and effort not being in shape after playing in the Paris Olympics.

As reporters entered the locker room to talk to players following a 124-107 loss to the Memphis Grizzlies, the two-time NBA scoring champion stood and confronted Hayes.

"The next time you bring up my dead brother and my son again, you are going to see what I'm going to do to you and I'm going to have to ... live with the consequences," Embiid said to Hayes.

Embiid continued, with several instances of profanity in the next few sentences. Hayes offered an apology, which Embiid did not want. "That's not the f----- first time," Embiid said.

Embiid later said that he doesn't care what reporters say. "But you do," Hayes answered.

Embiid appeared to get louder at that point, and not long afterward pushed Hayes on the shoulder while the team's public relations chief got between them. Another PR person moved Tyrese Maxey's interview to the hallway outside the locker room, trying to clear reporters.

Steelers add depth at trade deadline

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH— The Pittsburgh Steelers might be in first place in the AFC North.

They're hardly coasting.

Pittsburgh added wide receiver Mike Williams and outside linebacker Preston Smith at the trade deadline on Tuesday, giving the club veteran depth at two positions of need as the stretch run looms.

The Steelers sent a fifth-round pick to the New York Jets for Williams and a seventh-round selection to Green Bay for Smith.

Pittsburgh (6-2) is coming off its bye week atop the AFC North, but begins a difficult second half of the season on Sunday at surprising NFC East-leading Washington (7-2).

Acquiring Williams gives the Steelers a proven outside threat to put opposite George Pickens. Pittsburgh is talented but thin at outside linebacker. T.J. Watt and Alex Highsmith are perhaps the best tandem in

the league. But backup Nick Herbig has been slowed by a hamstring injury, though coach Mike Tomlin said Tuesday there's a chance Herbig could be available against the Commanders.

The Steelers have been searching for a big target to complement Pickens since trading Diontae Johnson to Carolina last spring. They flirted with but couldn't land Brandon Aiyuk — who opted to resign with San Francisco — over the summer and watched Davante Adams (Jets) and DeAndre Hopkins (Chiefs) go elsewhere in the AFC.

Williams, who signed a one-year, \$10 million contract with New York in the offseason as a free agent, had just 12 catches for 166 yards in nine games with the Jets. He had only a 6-yard reception on just two targets in his past two games.

The 6-foot-4 Williams spent his first seven NFL seasons with the Chargers, for whom he caught 309 passes for 4,806

yards and 31 touchdowns. He tore the ACL in his right knee in Week 3 last year and missed the rest of the season. The Jets brought Williams along slowly throughout the offseason and in training camp, but he never seemed to click with Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers when he got onto the field.

Williams comes to a team that has seen an uptick in the passing game since Russell Wilson returned from a calf injury that forced him to miss Pittsburgh's first six games. While Van Jefferson and Calvin Austin III have had their moments since Wilson was reinserted into the lineup, Williams' size gives the Steelers another big body to use in the red zone alongside the 6-3 Pickens and 6-5 tight end Pat Freiermuth.

Tomlin made it a point to praise the work of his wide receiver group as a whole shortly before adding Williams.

"I just feel like we have a group that's hardworking and

capable and can't wait to show the football world those capabilities," he said. "And every time we step into a stadium, they get an opportunity to do so. And you (have) seen some examples of it already."

Just not enough for the Steelers to seek an upgrade as the franchise tries to end a playoff victory drought that stretches to the 2016 AFC championship game.

Pittsburgh has been uncharacteristically aggressive in trying to revamp its offense over the past year, jettisoning quarterbacks Kenny Pickett, Mitch Trubisky and Mason Rudolph while adding Wilson and Justin Fields.

The results have been solid if not always spectacular so far. The Steelers are a respectable 13th in scoring after finishing 28th a year ago.

Tomlin acknowledged the club was active in the trade market, calling it prudent for a team that wants to be a "world championship outfit."

Sub-.500 Cincinnati still harboring postseason hopes

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — With a healthy Joe Burrow, the Cincinnati Bengals were expected to be contenders in the AFC North.

Instead, they've been disappointing, clawing and scratching just to get to 4-5 at the halfway point. Their four victories have all come against sub-.500 teams that have a current combined record of 8-28.

Cincinnati has played two divisional games, losing to the Ravens by three points and beating the Cleveland Browns by a touchdown. The Bengals still have to play the Ravens (6-3) on Thursday, the Browns (2-7) again the week before Christmas and the division-leading Steelers (6-2) twice.

In other words, winning the

AFC North or even backing into the playoffs as a wild card is going to be a lot tougher than outplaying some of the league's weaker teams. Of Cincinnati's remaining eight games, five are against teams with winning records.

Burrow firmly believes the Bengals can still win enough games to get into the playoffs. He figures it will take 10 wins to do that, so Cincinnati has to win six of the last eight.

"I'm going to be hard on myself," he said. "I'm going to be hard on us to execute the way that I feel like we need to."

What's working

Cincinnati ended the first half of the season on a high note. The offense and defense were both

dominant in Sunday's 41-24 win over the Las Vegas Raiders. Burrow tied a career high with five touchdown passes, defensive end Trey Hendrickson had four sacks, tight end Mike Gesicki caught two touchdown passes and Cincinnati finally got its running game out of the mud, with Chase Brown rushing for a career-high 120 yards. ... Star WR Ja'Marr Chase has been as reliable as ever. He leads the NFL with seven touchdown catches, is second with 717 receiving yards and is tied for third with 55 catches.

What needs help

The Raiders are among the worst in the league at stopping the run, and it remains to be seen whether the Bengals can sustain

Sunday's effort against better teams, especially with starting left tackle Orlando Brown Jr. out with an injury. Cincinnati came into the Raiders game averaging just under 90 yards per game on the ground. Only four NFL teams were worse. Chase Brown got to be the No. 1 guy Sunday with his backfield partner Zack Moss out with a neck injury.

Injuries

Tee Higgins missed his second game with a quad injury after missing two earlier in the year with a hamstring issue. ... Orlando Brown has a right knee injury. ... TE Erick All Jr. suffered a knee injury Sunday, and DT B.J. Hill left with a hip injury. None of them practiced Monday.

Necas lifts Carolina to 7th straight win

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Martin Necas scored a go-ahead goal with 29 seconds left and the Carolina Hurricanes beat the Philadelphia Flyers 6-4 on Tuesday night.

It was the seventh straight win for the Hurricanes, who also got goals from Jack Roslovic, Jordan Martinook, Eric Robinson and Jackson Blake. Seth Jarvis added an empty-net goal in the final seconds.

Necas typically saves his game-winners for overtime, with nine in his career, but he was able to take care of business in regulation with his team-best seventh goal of the season.

Travis Konecny scored two goals and had two assists for the Flyers. Morgan Frost and Owen Tippett also scored for Philadelphia.

Aleksei Kolosov made 28 saves for the Flyers, who trailed 2-1, 3-1 and 4-3 but kept coming back. Carolina's Pyotr Kochetkov struggled in net, allowing four goals on just 16 shots.

Sabres 5, Senators 1: Bowen Byram and Tage Thompson scored 16 seconds apart to open the third period, and host Buffalo snapped a three-game skid with a win over Ottawa.

Byram scored twice, JJ Peterka had two goals and an assist and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 37 saves.

Ridly Greig converted his own rebound in cutting Buffalo's lead to 2-1 with 7:31 left in the second period. Linus Ullmark made 29 saves in dropping to 1-4 in his past five starts.

Maple Leafs 4, Bruins 0: Anthony Stolarz made 29 saves for his first shutout of the season in host Toronto's victory over Boston.

Morgan Rielly had a goal and two assists as Toronto connected three times on the power play. William Nylander and Matthew Knies added a goal and an assist each. Mitch Marner had two assists of his own.

Steven Lorentz rounded out the scoring into the empty net.

The Leafs played without captain Auston Matthews, who is listed as day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

Jeremy Swayman made 23 stops for Boston, which was coming off consecutive weekend shutouts of the Philadelphia Flyers and Seattle Kraken.

Toronto's porous, 31st-ranked power play scored for the second time in as many games at 8:44 of the second period when Rielly fired through a screen. Nylander banked in his team-leading 10th goal of the season on another man advantage 1:14 later for a 2-0 lead.

Flames 3, Canadiens 2 (OT): Matt Coronato scored twice as visiting Calgary came back to defeat Montreal in overtime.

Coronato tied the game with 2:46 remaining in regulation when he cruised into the slot and went off the post and in. He then buried the winning goal seven seconds into the extra period.

Connor Zary also scored for Calgary, which won its second game in seven outings. Dustin Wolf stopped 21 shots.

Joel Armia — with a short-handed goal — and Brendan Gallagher scored for Montreal (4-7-2). Armia also provided an assist, while Sam Montembeault made 32 saves as the Canadiens' losing streak extended to four games.

Blues 3, Lightning 2: Jordan Kyrou, Alexey Toropchenko and Oskar Sundqvist scored to help host St. Louis beat Tampa Bay.

Blues goaltender Jordan Binnington made 21 saves for his 149th career win, moving him past Jake Allen for second place in franchise history, just two wins behind Mike Liut's 151.

Nick Perbix and Victor Hedman scored, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 20 saves for the Lightning, who have lost three straight games.

Islanders 4, Penguins 3

(SO): Bo Horvat scored the only goal in a shootout and host New York rallied past Pittsburgh.

New York goalie Ilya Sorokin denied Rickard Rakell, Sidney Crosby and Kris Letang in the tiebreaker and finished with 32 saves. Kyle Palmieri had a goal and an assist for the Islanders, who trailed 3-1 midway through the third period.

Simon Holmstrom and Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored in the third for New York. Horvat had two assists.

Evgeni Malkin had a goal and an assist to lead Pittsburgh. Crosby got his 598th career goal, and Michael Bunting also scored. Rakell added two assists.

Kings 5, Wild 1: Trevor Lewis scored twice, Kevin Fiala added another on the power play and visiting Los Angeles beat Minnesota.

Warren Foegele and Quinton Byfield also scored for Los Angeles, which was playing the second night of a back-to-back after a 3-0 win in Nashville a night earlier. David Rittich made 23 saves for the Kings.

Fiala, who was traded to Los Angeles in 2022 by Minnesota for a first-round pick draft pick and defenseman Brock Faber, scored his seventh goal of the season. He now has three goals and six assists in his last seven games against the Wild.

Jets 3, Utah 0: Nino Niederreiter scored twice in his 900th NHL career game and Connor Hellebuyck made 21 saves to help host Winnipeg defeat Utah.

It was Hellebuyck's second shutout of the season and 39th of his career.

Gabriel Vilardi also scored for the Jets. Adam Lowry assisted on both goals by Niederreiter.

Utah ended a run of picking up points in three consecutive games (1-0-2).

Avalanche 6, Kraken 3: Arttu Lehkonen scored the go-ahead goal on a power play in his season debut and Nathan

MacKinnon had five assists as host Colorado beat Seattle.

Mikko Rantanen added two goals for the Avalanche, who snapped a three-game losing streak. Ivan Ivan, Nikolai Kovalenko and Chris Wagner also scored for Colorado.

Cale Makar had two assists but the star defenseman barely played in the second half of the game and appeared to be slowed by an apparent injury during a brief shift.

MacKinnon and Makar extended their season-opening point streaks to 13 games.

Canucks 5, Ducks 1: Brock Boeser, Danton Heinen and Kiefer Sherwood had a goal and an assist apiece, and Quinn Hughes recorded his 300th career assist in visiting Vancouver's victory over Anaheim.

Jake DeBrusk and Elias Pettersson also scored and Hughes had three assists for the Canucks, who have won six of eight. Kevin Lankinen made 21 saves in Vancouver's sixth consecutive win over the Ducks.

Olen Zellweger scored a power-play goal early in the first period for Anaheim, which has lost seven of nine. Lukas Dostal stopped 31 shots.

Sharks 2, Blue Jackets 1 (OT): Alex Wennberg scored 3:11 into overtime and host San Jose celebrated the return of No. 1 overall draft pick Macklin Celebrini with a win over Columbus.

Defenseman Jack Thompson scored his first career goal for the Sharks (4-8-2), who entered the night with the worst record in the NHL. San Jose has won four of five.

Celebrini, the top pick in the 2024 NHL Draft, missed 12 games with a hip injury he sustained in the season opener Oct. 10 — an injury first incurred during the preseason. Celebrini didn't score and missed a shot early in overtime.

San Jose goalie Vitek Vanecek was fantastic in net, making 49 saves.