

## Navy seeks to replenish \$1B in munitions

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Navy urgently needs Congress to pass a stalled national security spending plan to replenish the nearly \$1 billion in munitions spent to counter attacks by Iran and its proxies in the Middle East in the past six months, the Navy secretary said Tuesday.

Expenditures on munitions have skyrocketed since October, when the Hamas-Israeli war started in the Gaza Strip. U.S. forces continue to guard Navy and commercial ships in the Red Sea from Houthi rebel attacks, and American service members helped shoot down missiles launched over the weekend by Iran against Israel.

“It’s critical for Congress to pass a supplemental [spending bill] this week so that we could actually get the additional resources to be able to supplement those munitions,” Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said during testimony to a subpanel of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The \$95 billion package to provide aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan contains \$2.4 billion to cover the cost of replacing munitions

used to intercept enemy missiles and drones.

The Senate approved the legislation in February, but it languished in the House until Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said Monday that he will break the package into three pieces to appease members of his party. The complicated strategy could further delay the aid.

Del Toro said Tuesday that it was important to keep the packages bundled together, describing the efforts to support allies and partners against Russia, Iran and China as interrelated.

In the Middle East, “all roads lead to Iran,” he warned. The nation is a designated state sponsor of terrorism and props up Hamas militants in Gaza, the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. It has also provided weapons for Russia’s war in Ukraine.

“The over \$2 billion that’s provided for in the supplemental is entirely critical to our Navy and Marine Corps to be able to replenish those munitions and continue to provide the types of defensive measures that we have this past 6½ months now,” Del Toro said.

U.S. forces have so far countered more than 130 direct attacks by Iran-backed

Houthi militants on Navy and merchant ships in the Red Sea, he said.

Two Arleigh Burke-class, guided-missile destroyers operating in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea — the USS Carney and USS Arleigh Burke — shot down at least six Iranian ballistic missiles during Iran’s aerial attack on Israel on April 13 and April 14, according to Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine. The U.S. also intercepted more than 80 drones.

“The fact that less than 1% of the weapons reached their targets this weekend in Israel does not in any way reflect to lack of effort or malign intent by Iran,” she said. “Rather, it is a testament to the service members who successfully deployed modern missile defense capabilities.”

Those capabilities are expensive, costing millions of dollars per missile. The Navy has been firing SM-2 missiles, SM-6 missiles and most recently SM-3 missiles to counter the ballistic missile threat from Iran, Del Toro said.

“We are now closely approaching a billion dollars in expenditures for munitions that we need paid back by the supplemental,” he said.

## Navy leaders try to boost frigate program support

BY GARY WARNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Top Navy officials rallied around the service’s delay-plagued new frigate program last week by focusing on the symbolic welding of the first plate of the keel on the first of the Constellation-class, guided-missile ships.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro and Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations, attended the April 12 event at the Fincantieri shipyard in Marinette, Wis.

“The USS Constellation and Constellation-class frigates are a critical next step in the modernization of our surface ship inventory, increasing the number of ‘players on the field’ available

globally,” Del Toro said.

The ceremony came near the end of a week in which congressional critics, angry over its delays and cost overruns, excoriated the USS Constellation.

“In a time of constrained budgets, this reflects the gross inefficiencies and problems in our shipbuilding program,” Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Calif., chairman of the House Appropriations Committee’s subpanel on defense, said during an April 10 hearing on the Navy budget.

A Pentagon report obtained by Bloomberg News showed the shipbuilder’s labor needs were worse than officially reported earlier this year. The shipyard requires 1,600 skilled workers in 2025 and has only 900 today,

Bloomberg reported.

The American unit of Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri S.p.A. won a 2020 competition to build new frigates for the Navy. The ships were to be built by Fincantieri’s shipyard in Green Bay in northeast Wisconsin, about 170 miles north of Milwaukee. The original contract calls for the French shipbuilder Naval Group to build some later ships.

The frigate will be a modified version of the “European multipurpose frigate” now in service with France and Italy. The ships are projected to have a top speed of 26 knots and carry a crew of 200 sailors and officers. It can fire anti-aircraft, anti-ship, and ship-to-shore missiles.

The contract called for the first frigate to be delivered to the Navy by April 2026. However, the Navy has recently pushed the first ship delivery date to 2027, with some internal Pentagon estimates putting the latest date in early 2029.

The recently released Navy shipbuilding budget for 2025 is smaller than previous budgets. Del Toro, Franchetti and budget planners want to slow purchases of the frigates and Virginia-class attack submarines to use the savings for an across-the-board infusion of funds into improving the sprawling subcontractor supply chain and beefing up the recruiting and retention of skilled workers at defense industry plants.

# China scrambles jets after Navy flies over Taiwan Strait

BY ALEX WILSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

Chinese fighters tracked a U.S. Navy surveillance plane making a flight over the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, a day after the U.S. defense chief talked for the first time to his Chinese counterpart.

The P-8A Poseidon flew south through the 110-mile-wide channel that separates mainland China from Taiwan, entering from the East China Sea and exiting over the South China Sea, 7th Fleet spokeswoman Lt. j.g. Sarah Merrill told Stars and Stripes by email Wednesday.

"Routine U.S. transits through the Taiwan Strait demonstrate the U.S. commitment to a stable, free and open Indo-Pacific, and confirm that the U.S. Navy flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows," she said.

The flight was not tied to any specific event, Merrill added.

Beijing responded by scrambling fighter jets to monitor the Poseidon's transit, China's Eastern Theater Command said Wednesday in a post on Weibo.

"Troops in the theater remain on high alert at all times and resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and security, as well as regional peace and stability," wrote Chinese navy Col. Li Xi.

The Chinese army hailed the Poseidon but "all communications were consistent with international norms and did not impact the operation," Merrill said.

The flight happened a day after Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Chinese National Defense Minister Adm. Dong Jun via video conference.

It was Austin's first call with a Chinese defense minister since November 2022. It marked a step toward reestablishing military-to-military communications that Beijing ended after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., visited Taiwan in August 2022.

The U.S. routinely sends warships and, less frequently, aircraft, through the strait. The Navy typically describes the transits as a routine means of traveling between the South China Sea and East China Sea.

# Tricare touts lower costs for specialty drugs with firm's home-delivery deal

BY KELLY AGEE  
*Stars and Stripes*

Tricare beneficiaries may now receive specialty drugs at lower copays through Tricare Home Delivery, according to the military health care provider.

The Defense Health Agency contracted with Accredo, a nationally accredited specialty pharmacy, last month to provide mail order services for specialty drugs and enhanced clinical services, DHA spokesman Peter Graves said.

Tricare Home Delivery was previously administered by Express Scripts Pharmacy. Some patients with a combination of non-specialty and specialty prescriptions will receive their drugs mail order from both Accredo and Express Scripts.

Beneficiaries will save money with home delivery compared to purchasing their prescriptions from a retail network pharmacy, according to Tricare's website. Copays through home delivery are \$2 to \$4 less than those at retail pharmacies.

Tricare lists 1,326 specialty drugs, which typically treat chronic conditions such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and hepatitis, in its collection. They are high-cost self-administered, injectable or oral medications that

may require clinical training for the administrator, the website states.

"Specialty drugs are essential for a lot of our beneficiaries," Cmdr. Teisha Robertson, who heads up the U.S. Public Health Service, said in a Tricare news release Feb. 6. "These updates to Tricare's pharmacy network will give military families with complex and chronic health conditions more support in managing their drugs."

Those who obtain their specialty drugs from Accredo also receive personalized clinical services for complex and chronic conditions through Therapeutic Resource Centers, managed by the pharmacy, Graves said.

Approximately 45,500 beneficiaries transitioned to home delivery once Accredo became part of Tricare Home Delivery on March 1, he said. Patients with active refills for a specialty medication were automatically transferred from Express Scripts to Accredo.

"This automatic and seamless transition to Accredo minimized the risk of missed therapy for beneficiaries taking specialty medications to manage chronic and complex conditions," he said.

# Revived Air Force program sends plastic surgeon to Japan

BY JEREMY STILLWAGNER  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Nearly three dozen patients were treated through a program that brought a plastic surgeon to this airlift hub in western Tokyo for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Athena program sends volunteer Air Force plastic surgeons to overseas bases on a

more-or-less regular schedule, sometimes twice a year.

After being screened, patients from bases across Japan began arriving at Yokota the first week of April for appointments with Dr. Bryan Curtis, an Air Force colonel and chief of plastic and reconstructive surgery for the 60th Surgical Operations Squadron at Travis Air Force Base, Calif.

"To allow these services to occur here, in a home location for a patient, relieves a lot of burden and a lot of stress," he told Stars and Stripes at the 374th Medical Group on Friday. "Surgery in and of itself is a stressful time for patients, so anything we can do to alleviate that stress is beneficial."

Any Tricare beneficiary in Japan can apply for an Athena

appointment. The military health care plan for service members, retirees and their families will cover plastic surgeries that address an issue caused by birth defects or physical trauma.

Cosmetic surgeries such as breast augmentations, rhinoplasties and liposuction are not covered by Tricare and must be paid for out of pocket.

# House aid bill moves on as Johnson battles

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Mike Johnson, facing a choice between potentially losing his job and advancing aid for Ukraine, forged ahead Wednesday toward a vote later this week on a package of funding that also includes Israel and Taiwan.

After agonizing over how to proceed on the package for days, the Republican speaker texted GOP lawmakers that he will start a dayslong push to hold votes on three funding packages for Ukraine, Israel, and allies in the Indo-Pacific, as well as a several other foreign policy propos-

als in a fourth bill.

Johnson said he was proposing that some of the aid for Ukraine be structured as loans, along with greater oversight, but the decision to support Ukraine at all has angered populist conservatives in the House and given new energy to a threat to remove him from the speaker's office.

"By posting text of these bills as soon as they are completed, we will ensure time for a robust amendment process," Johnson wrote in his message, which was shared by two Republican lawmakers.

The votes on the package are

expected Saturday evening, Johnson said. But he faces a treacherous path to get there.

The speaker will almost certainly need Democratic support on the procedural maneuvers to advance his complex plan of holding separate votes on each of the aid packages.

It was not clear whether Democrats would assist Johnson. They were still awaiting the details of the legislation and have become increasingly impatient with his deliberations.

Democrats have demanded that the foreign aid bill hew closely to a \$95 billion foreign aid

package the Senate passed in February.

That legislation would fund the U.S. allies, as well as provide humanitarian aid for civilians in Gaza and Ukraine.

As part of the foreign aid push, Johnson also said House members would have an opportunity to vote on a raft of foreign policy proposals, including allowing the United States to seize frozen Russian central bank assets, placing sanctions on Iran, Russia and China, and potentially banning the popular video app TikTok if its China-based owner doesn't sell its stake.

## First 7 jurors chosen for Trump hush money trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The first seven jurors for Donald Trump's hush money trial were seated Tuesday after lawyers grilled the jury pool about their social media posts, political views and personal lives to decide who can sit in fair judgment of the former president.

The panelists who were selected are an information technology worker, an English teacher, an oncology nurse, a sales professional, a software engineer and two lawyers.

Eleven more people still must be sworn in before opening statements begin as early as next week in the first criminal trial of a former commander in chief. It's a moment of reckoning for Trump, who has tried to put off his prosecutions until after the November election and has cast himself as the victim of a politically motivated justice system.

The trial puts Trump's legal problems at the center of his closely contested race against President Joe Biden. It's the first of Trump's four criminal cases to reach trial, and it may be the only one to return a ver-

dict before voters decide whether to elect the presumptive GOP presidential nominee.

The methodical process unfolding in the Manhattan courtroom highlights the challenge of finding people who can fairly judge the polarizing defendant in the city where he built his real estate empire before being elected president in 2016.

Even so, jury selection moved quicker than expected Tuesday afternoon. It was set to resume Thursday.

On his way out of the courthouse, Trump stopped in the hallway to rail against the case to reporters, accusing Judge Juan Merchan of "rushing" the trial. He has denied any wrongdoing.

"We are going to continue our fight against this judge," said Trump, who pushed unsuccessfully to have Merchan removed from the case.

During an appearance later Tuesday at a bodega in Harlem, Trump was asked what he thought of the jurors he had seen. He said it was "a little bit early to see," adding, "We'll see what happens."

## Dems plan quick dismissal as Mayorkas impeachment starts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Wednesday opened the impeachment trial of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas over his handling of the U.S.-Mexico border, swearing in senators as jurors while Democrats said they wanted to end the trial before arguments even begin.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said he will move to dismiss the trial, arguing that House Republicans' two impeachment articles "fail to meet the high standard of high crimes and misdemeanors" and could set a dangerous precedent.

"For the sake of the Senate's integrity and to protect impeachment for those rare cases we truly need it, senators should dismiss today's charges," Schumer said as he opened the Senate.

An outright dismissal of House Republicans' prosecution of Mayorkas, with no chance to argue the case, would be an embarrassing defeat for House Republicans and embattled House Speaker Mike Johnson, who made the impeachment a priority. And it is likely to

resonate politically for both Republicans and Democrats in a presidential election year when border security has been a top issue.

Republicans have argued that President Joe Biden has been weak on the border as arrests for illegal crossings skyrocketed to over 2 million people during the last two years of his term, though they have fallen from a record-high of 250,000 in December amid heightened enforcement in Mexico. Democrats have said that instead of impeaching Mayorkas, Republicans should have accepted a bipartisan Senate compromise aimed at reducing the number of migrants who come into the United States illegally.

The House narrowly voted in February to impeach Mayorkas for his handling of the U.S.-Mexico border, arguing in the two articles that he "willfully and systematically" refused to enforce immigration laws. House impeachment managers appointed by Johnson, R-La., delivered the charges to the Senate on Tuesday, standing in the well of the Senate and reading them aloud to a captive audience of senators.



# Russian missiles hit northern Ukraine

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Three Russian missiles slammed into a downtown area of the northern Ukrainian city of Chernihiv on Wednesday, hitting an eight-floor apartment building and killing at least 14 people, authorities said.

At least 61 people, including two children, were wounded in the morning attack, Ukrainian emergency services said. Chernihiv lies about 90 miles north of the capital, Kyiv, near the border with Russia and Belarus, and has a population of around 250,000 people.

The latest Russian bombardment came as the war approached what could be a critical juncture as a lack of further military support from Ukraine's Western partners increasingly leaves it at the mercy of the Kremlin's bigger forces.

Through the winter months, Russia made no dramatic advance along the 620-mile front line, focusing instead on attritional warfare. Ukraine's shortage of artillery ammunition, troops and armored vehicles, however, has allowed the Russians to gradually push forward, military analysts have said.

A crucial element for Ukraine is the holdup

in Washington of approval for an aid package that includes roughly \$60 billion for Ukraine. House Speaker Mike Johnson said Sunday that he would try to move the package forward this week.

Ukraine's need is now acute, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

"The Russians are breaking out of positional warfare and beginning to restore maneuver to the battlefield because of the delays in the provision of U.S. military assistance to Ukraine," the ISW said in an assessment late Tuesday.

"Ukraine cannot hold the present lines now without the rapid resumption of U.S. assistance, particularly air defense and artillery that only the U.S. can provide rapidly and at scale," it said.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has pleaded with Western countries to provide his country with more air defense equipment, including more surface-to-air Patriot guided missile systems. He said the Chernihiv strike "would not have happened if Ukraine had received enough air defense

equipment and if the world's determination to counter Russian terror was also sufficient."

Zelenskyy told PBS in an interview broadcast earlier this week that Ukraine recently ran out of air defense missiles while it was defending against a major missile and drone attack that destroyed one of Ukraine's largest power plants, part of a recent Russian campaign targeting energy infrastructure.

Ukrainian forces are digging in, building fortifications in anticipation of a major Russian offensive that Kyiv officials have said could come as early as next month.

Ukraine has used long-range drone and missile strikes behind Russian lines designed to disrupt Moscow's war machine.

Russia's defense ministry said Wednesday that a Ukrainian drone was shot down over the Tatarstan region early Wednesday. That's the same area that was targeted in early April by Ukraine's deepest strike so far inside Russia, about 745 miles east of Ukraine.

Ukrainian drone developers have been extending the weapons' range.

## Bill seeks quarterly VA abortion data

By SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs would be required to submit detailed data on abortions performed at its facilities under a bill introduced Tuesday by Sen. Tommy Tuberville.

The legislation is the latest effort by Tuberville, R-Ala., to clamp down on federal support for abortion access. He blocked senior military promotions for much of last year in a failed bid to force the Defense Department to drop its abortion access policy.

"Our veterans deserve a VA that is 100% focused on ensuring they receive timely and quality care, not on implementing [President] Joe Biden's abortion-on-demand agenda," Tuberville said in a statement.

The bill would force the VA to submit quarterly reports on the number of abortions it facilitates, the method through which the abortions are being conducted and the number of gestational weeks at which the abortions are occurring.

A companion bill was introduced in the House by Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, R-Iowa. Tuberville's bill is co-sponsored by eight fellow Republican senators.

The VA told lawmakers last year that it provided 88 abortions — 60 medical and 28 surgical — in the first year that it offered the procedure, from Sept. 9, 2022, to Sept. 30, 2023. The VA has refused to release updated data since then, according to Tuberville.

The VA began offering abortions to veterans and eligible dependents after the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion in 2022 and several states either banned or severely restricted access to the procedure. Abortions facilitated by the VA are only available in cases of rape or incest or if the mother's life or health is at risk because of the pregnancy.

Some Republicans have argued the VA's allowance of abortions for health risks violates the Hyde Amendment, which does not include a risk to health as a permissible reason to use federal funds for abortions.

The VA has not defined the health risks that would qualify a veteran for an abortion but has maintained it is not one of the government agencies subject to the Hyde Amendment.

Of the 88 abortions performed from September 2022 to September 2023, 64 were because the pregnancy threatened the mother's health.

## Tornadoes strike in Kansas, Iowa

*Associated Press*

ST. LOUIS — Strong storms caused damage in parts of the middle United States on Tuesday and spawned tornadoes in Kansas and Iowa, including one that left two people hurt.

An EF-1 tornado touched down shortly after 6 a.m. near the northeastern Kansas town of Richland, the National Weather Service said. The twister reached speeds of up to 100 mph and was on the ground for about 20 minutes, the service said.

Two people were injured when their RV flipped over during the tornado. Details about the injuries were not immediately available. Buildings and trees were also damaged in the neighboring town of Overbrook.

In central Iowa, a barn was demolished and other buildings were damaged after a tornado touched down in a rural area of Dallas County. The weather service also reported ping pong ball-sized hail in Bloomfield, just north of the Missouri line. There were no immediate reports of injuries.

The weather service said the central U.S. was under threat of severe weather through Tuesday.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Man killed Uber driver after scam targets both

**OH** SOUTH CHARLESTON — An elderly Ohio man who authorities said fatally shot an Uber driver who he thought was trying to rob him after a scam caller deceived them both has been indicted on a murder charge.

William Brock, 81, also faces counts of kidnapping and felonious assault in the indictment by a Clark County grand jury.

The shooting occurred at Brock's home in South Charleston. Officers from the county sheriff's office responded there after Brock called 911 and said he had shot someone who was trying to rob him.

Brock had received scam calls from someone pretending to be an officer from the local court who began making threats and demanding money, authorities said.

The victim, Loletha Hall, 61, was an Uber driver who had been told to retrieve a package from Brock's home, a request authorities said apparently was made by the same scam caller or an accomplice.

## Pilot of experimental plane fell out, hit the tail

**PA** HANOVER TOWNSHIP — The pilot of an experimental aircraft fell out of the plane and hit the tail, causing the plane to crash in northeastern Pennsylvania in 2022, killing him and a pilot-rated passenger, according to federal investigators.

The National Transportation Safety Board said the "experimental amateur-built" Bearhawk Patrol airplane crashed at

a farm near Hanover Township in October 2022. The Luzerne County coroner's office identified the two victims as Michael Bowen, 59, of Jonestown; and Ronald Snyder 76, of Bernville.

The probable cause of the accident was the pilot unlatching his seat belt during flight — possibly to examine some rigging he mentioned having a problem with earlier, investigators said in their final report. Being unbuckled allowed him to be thrown from the aircraft and hit the tail.

## Funeral home holding 190 bodies charged with fraud

**CO** DENVER — A couple who owned a Colorado funeral home where authorities last year discovered 190 decaying bodies were indicted on federal charges that they misspent nearly \$900,000 in pandemic relief funds on vacations, cosmetic surgery, jewelry and other personal expenses, according to unsealed court documents.

The indictment reaffirms accusations from state prosecutors that Jon and Carrie Hallford gave families dry concrete instead of cremated ashes and alleges the couple buried the wrong body on two occasions.

The indictment alleges the couple used \$882,300 in pandemic relief funds to buy items that also included a vehicle, dinners, tuition for their child and cryptocurrency.

## NASA: Item that crashed into roof came from ISS

**FL** NAPLES — NASA confirmed that a mysterious object that crashed through

the roof of a Florida home was a chunk of space junk from equipment discarded at the International Space Station.

The cylindrical object that tore through the home in Naples was subsequently taken to the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral for analysis.

The space agency said it was a metal support used to mount old batteries on a cargo pallet for disposal. The pallet was jettisoned from the space station in 2021, and the load was expected to eventually fully burn up on entry into Earth's atmosphere, but one piece survived.

The chunk of metal weighed 1.6 pounds and was 4 inches tall and roughly 1½ inches wide.

Homeowner Alejandro Otero told television station WINK at the time that he was on vacation when his son told him what had happened. Otero came home early to check on the house, finding the object had ripped through his ceiling and torn up the flooring.

## State fined for foster care abuse allegations

**TX** CORPUS CHRISTI — A federal judge is fining Texas \$100,000 per day for routinely neglecting to adequately investigate allegations of abuse and neglect raised by children in the state's struggling foster care system.

U.S. District Judge Janis Graham Jack in Corpus Christi ruled that the Texas Health and Human Services agency has shown contempt of her orders to fix the way the state investigates complaints by children in its care.

This is the third such contempt finding in a case that be-

gan with a 2011 lawsuit over foster care conditions at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the child welfare arm of HHS.

In a 427-page ruling, the judge cited a "continued recalcitrance" by the agency's Provider Investigations unit to conduct thorough, accurate and timely probes of allegations of abuse, neglect and exploitation.

## Women's prison known as 'rape club' closing

**CA** DUBLIN — The federal Bureau of Prisons said it will close a women's prison in California known as the "rape club" despite attempts to reform the troubled facility after an Associated Press investigation exposed rampant staff-on-inmate sexual abuse.

Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters said in a statement to the AP that the agency had "taken unprecedented steps and provided a tremendous amount of resources to address culture, recruitment and retention, aging infrastructure — and most critical — employee misconduct."

"Despite these steps and resources, we have determined that FCI Dublin is not meeting expected standards and that the best course of action is to close the facility," Peters said. "This decision is being made after ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of those unprecedented steps and additional resources."

Since 2021, at least eight FCI Dublin employees have been charged with sexually abusing inmates.

— From wire reports

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# Lakers overcome Williamson, Pelicans

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — LeBron James, Anthony Davis and their supporting cast have the Los Angeles Lakers looking like a tougher out in the playoffs than they appeared to be just a few weeks earlier.

The New Orleans Pelicans, meanwhile, find themselves on the brink of elimination and wondering about the health of star power forward Zion Williamson, whose dominant NBA postseason debut was cut short by an injury in the final minutes of a tight game.

James had 23 points, nine assists and nine rebounds, and the Lakers secured a playoff berth with a 110-106 victory over the Pelicans in the Western Conference play-in tournament on Tuesday night.

"Tonight we showcased what we were able to do both offensively and defensively," said James, whose team enters the playoffs having won 12 of 15 games. "We've got a good group going right now, good rotation,

good plan and guys are coming in ready to go."

Williamson had 40 points and 11 rebounds. But shortly after tying the game at 95 on a driving layup with 3:19 to go, Williamson went to the locker room, throwing a towel to the floor in disgust as he walked into the tunnel with an apparent injury.

After the game, Pelicans coach Willie Green said Williamson had "left leg soreness."

"He's going to have some imaging on it tomorrow and we'll figure out more," Green said.

Soon after Williamson went out, James hit a jumper, Davis dunked Austin Reaves' alley-oop lob, DeAngelo Russell hit a 3 and Davis grabbed a crucial offensive rebound, after which he hit two free throws to help the Lakers hold on.

The Pelicans "threw some heavy blows at us," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "They kept swinging. We kept fighting back.

"It revealed a lot about us and

what we're made of," he added.

Davis finished with 20 points and 15 rebounds. Russell scored 21, hitting five times from deep. James was 10-for-10 on free throws and Davis 8-for-10.

The Lakers advance to face defending champion Denver in the first round in a rematch of last season's Western Conference finals, a sweep by the Nuggets. Game 1 is Saturday night.

The Pelicans will host Sacramento on Friday, with the winner earning the No. 8 seed in the West. The Kings eliminated Golden State in the later play-in game on Wednesday night.

"Obviously a tough loss for us," said Green, whose team could have secured the sixth seed in the playoffs on Sunday but lost at home to the Lakers, 124-108, setting up the rematch in the play-in. "We've got to feel this one tonight and regroup and get ready for another one."

Williamson, Green said, was "fantastic."

"He settled into the game. He just continued to attack. He

found seams. He rebounded the ball. He played fast," Green continued. "(If) we have him for a few more minutes, maybe we have a chance to pull this thing out."

The Lakers went 14-for-35 from 3-point range. The Pelicans hit 9 of 29 from deep and Williamson didn't get a lot of help from the Pelicans' usual high scorers. Brandon Ingram — in his second game back from a 12-game absence because of a knee injury — missed 8 of 12 shots and finished with 11 points after spending the final few minutes on the bench.

"I just like the group that was on the floor at that time," Green said. "BI is still getting back, he's still finding his rhythm. So, I didn't want to force the issue."

CJ McCollum missed 11 of 15 shots and scored nine points.

Trey Murphy III scored 12, hitting two 3s from beyond 28 feet in the second half to help New Orleans come back from an 18-point second-half deficit to tie it.

## Kings get revenge, eliminate Warriors to stay alive

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The chants of "Light the Beam!" started midway through the fourth quarter as the Sacramento Kings kept piling on the Golden State Warriors.

A year after having their season ended by their neighbors, the Kings dealt the Warriors a bit of payback in emphatic fashion with a victory that might have signaled the end of a dynasty.

Keegan Murray scored 32 points, De'Aaron Fox added 24 and the Kings stayed alive in the play-in tournament, eliminating the Warriors with a 118-94 victory on Tuesday night.

"We knew what was on the line," Fox said. "This was just another obstacle in our way. We have to get over this hump. Ob-

viously, losing to this team last year and obviously facing this team now, it's like, of course we have to face this team."

Sacramento advanced to play at New Orleans on Friday night with a chance to return to the playoffs as the eighth seed in the Western Conference after snapping an NBA-record 16-year playoff drought last season.

The Kings avenged a Game 7 loss at home to Golden State in last year's first round by playing cleaner and being quicker to loose balls against the older Warriors in what was one of the most consequential wins for the franchise in two decades.

The loss kept Golden State out of the playoffs for the third time in the past five seasons, including two eliminations in the play-in tournament. The Warriors

committed 16 turnovers, gave up 15 offensive rebounds and way too many open 3-pointers, looking nothing like the dynastic team that won four titles from 2015-22.

"I was a sophomore in high school watching them win championships," Fox said. "We've been watching this team for a long time. If it is the end, it is what it is. I'm glad we're able to beat this team at this at this moment but, they definitely had a hell of a run."

Klay Thompson missed all 10 shots from the field in what could have been his final game with the Warriors as he heads to unrestricted free agency this summer and a potential breakup of the championship trio of Thompson, Stephen Curry and Draymond Green.

"We need Klay back. I know he had a tough night tonight," coach Steve Kerr said. "I know I speak for everyone in the organization, we want him back. Obviously there's business at hand and that has to be addressed. ... But what Klay has meant to this franchise, as good as he is, we definitely want him back."

With Thompson struggling, Curry didn't get nearly enough help. Curry finished with 22 points but was hounded for much of the game by Keon Ellis.

The undrafted Ellis, who was on a two-way contract until February, added 15 points to go with his strong defense. Harrison Barnes scored 17.

"For the most part, they just took it to us the whole game," Curry said. "There's really no way around it."



# Late wild pitch helps Tigers top Rangers

Associated Press

DETROIT — Gio Urshela had an RBI single and Matt Vierling scored on a wild pitch in the eighth inning to put Detroit ahead, and the Tigers' pitchers continued their solid play to beat the Texas Rangers 4-2 on Tuesday.

Andrew Chafin (1-0) worked 1½ hitless innings with three strikeouts. Jason Foley retired pinch-hitter Adolis Garcia with two on in the ninth for his fifth save of the season.

Detroit's bullpen improved to 8-2 on the season with a 1.69 ERA.

"I do like that we are going to play our 27 outs," Tigers manager A.J. Hinch said. "And I do not mean that as a cliché, but as a competitiveness that we are never out of it, because this pitching staff is going to keep us close."

Casey Mize, making his first home start since April 9, 2022, went six innings, allowing two runs and five hits. Mize missed most of the 2022 season and all of the 2023 campaign after undergoing Tommy John surgery and a back operation.

"Left the game tied," Mize said. "Obviously, I'd always prefer to leave with a lead. Leaving it tied, I feel good about our bullpen against anybody."

Jose Urena (0-2) took the loss for the Rangers.

**Phillies 5, Rockies 0:** Ranger Suárez pitched a seven-hit shutout, Bryce Harper homered and host Philadelphia beat Colorado.

Suárez struck out eight and walked one in the majors' second complete game this season. It was the first shutout for a Philadelphia pitcher since Michael Lorenzen's no-hitter against Washington on Aug. 9.

Harper hit an RBI double in the sixth inning and a two-run shot in the eighth.

**Orioles 11, Twins 3:** Gunnar Henderson, Jordan Westburg and Ryan O'Hearn homered,

Grayson Rodriguez pitched six solid innings and host Baltimore trounced Minnesota.

Colton Cowser had two more hits for the Orioles, who have taken the first two games of this series. Rodriguez (3-0) allowed two runs and four hits. He walked three and struck out six.

It was the fourth straight game Baltimore homered at least three times, the first time the team has had a streak that long since 2013.

**Marlins 6, Giants 3:** Ryan Weathers struck out a career-high 10 before departing because of cramps in his left hand, and host Miami beat San Francisco.

Weathers (2-1) allowed two runs and five hits in six innings. The left-hander warmed up for the seventh, but was replaced by Burch Smith.

Luis Arraez had two hits and two RBIs for the Marlins, who improved to 4-14. Josh Bell also had two hits and scored a run.

**Mets 3, Pirates 1:** Jose Hernandez barked home the go-ahead run in the seventh inning, Jeff McNeil added an RBI double and host New York beat Pittsburgh.

Joey Wendle came off the bench and delivered a tying double in the seventh for the Mets, who have won nine of 12 following an 0-5 start to move over .500 for the first time since early June last year.

New York came back to beat the Pirates for the second consecutive night and has won four straight series after dropping its first two.

**Blue Jays 5, Yankees 4:** Vladimir Guerrero Jr. reached base four times and had two RBIs, Yusei Kikuchi won for the first time this season and host Toronto beat New York.

Bo Bichette hit an RBI single and Justin Turner added a sacrifice fly as the Blue Jays became the first opponent to win a series against the Yankees this year. New York had won its

first five series for the third time in franchise history, matching its starts of 1926 and 2010.

Guerrero went 2-for-3.

**Rays 7, Angels 6 (13):** Amed Rosario drove in the winning run with an infield single and host Tampa Bay scored twice in the 13th inning to complete a late comeback and beat Los Angeles.

Each team scored once in the 10th and 11th innings and the Angels moved ahead in the top of the 13th.

Richie Palacios got the Rays even at 6 with a two-out double in the bottom half of the inning against Carson Fulmer (0-1). Rosario then had a bases-loaded hit down the third-base line that scored Palacios and won it.

**Padres 6, Brewers 3:** Dylan Cease pitched six strong innings, Ha-Seong Kim hit a three-run homer and visiting San Diego beat Milwaukee.

Fernando Tatis Jr. had three hits and scored twice as the Padres handed the Brewers their first series loss of the season. San Diego will try to complete a three-game sweep Wednesday afternoon.

Sal Frelick had three of the Brewers' six hits, and William Contreras drove in two runs.

**Guardians 10, Red Sox 7 (11):** José Ramírez hit a tie-breaking RBI single in the 11th inning, and visiting Cleveland beat Boston.

With no outs and runners on first and second, Ramírez hit a low liner back up the middle against Josh Winckowski (1-1). After Brayan Rocchio sacrificed and Bo Naylor was walked intentionally, Estevan Florial added a two-run single.

**Braves 6, Astros 2:** Reynaldo López struck out seven over six scoreless innings, Orlando Arcia homered and visiting Atlanta beat Houston.

López (2-0) allowed four hits and walked one in his third straight sterling outing to start the season. He has given up one

run in 18 innings for an ERA of 0.50.

**Cardinals 3, Athletics 2:** Lance Lynn earned his first win for visiting St. Louis in seven years with a victory over Oakland.

Lynn (1-0) allowed two runs — one earned — and five hits in seven innings, lowering his ERA to 2.18 in four starts. The 36-year-old right-hander went 72-47 for the Cardinals from 2011-17. After pitching for five other teams, he returned to St. Louis during the offseason for an \$11 million, one-year contract.

**Mariners 3, Reds 1:** Logan Gilbert allowed three hits in 6½ innings of one-run ball, Julio Rodríguez made two highlight defensive plays in the seventh inning to preserve his team's lead, and host Seattle beat Cincinnati.

Jonatan Clase had an RBI double in his second major league game and Mitch Haniger added a key two-out RBI single. But Gilbert was overpowering for most of the night and got help from Rodríguez in the field.

**Dodgers 6, Nationals 2:** Mookie Betts tied his career high with five hits, doubling twice and driving in two runs to lead host Los Angeles over Washington.

Betts raised his average to a major league-leading .388. It was the third five-hit game of Betts' big league career, the first since Aug. 23 against Cleveland.

**Diamondbacks 12, Cubs 11 (10):** Ketel Marte hit a tying solo homer with two outs in the ninth, and Randal Grichuk won it with a pinch-hit RBI double in the 10th, lifting host Arizona to a wild victory over Chicago.

Grichuk ripped the second pitch he saw from Drew Smyly (2-2) into the left-center gap, easily scoring Christian Walker from second as D-backs players poured onto the field to celebrate.

# Panthers clinch Atlantic Division title

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Sam Bennett and Sam Reinhart scored 10 seconds apart midway through the second period, and the Florida Panthers beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-2 on Tuesday night.

With the victory and Boston's 3-1 loss to Ottawa, Florida clinched the Atlantic Division title. The Panthers (52-24-6) finished the season with a four-game winning streak to make up a five-point deficit in the standings.

"It's been a crazy year," Panthers forward Matthew Tkachuk said. "I feel like, throughout the whole year, us and Boston were in the driver's seat leading the division and it's kind of gone back and forth the last few months. ... It means a lot to get home ice because it shows that we had a solid season and I'm glad there's something to show for it."

Carter Verhaeghe and Brandon Montour also scored for Florida, and Anthony Stolarz made 24 saves.

The Panthers will play the Tampa Bay Lightning in the opening round of the playoffs.

**Senators 3, Bruins 1:** Jiri Smejkal scored his first career

goal midway through the second period and Jakob Chychrun scored less than a minute later as visiting Ottawa beat Boston in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Artem Zub added an empty-net goal with 1:48 remaining and Anton Forsberg had 34 saves for the Senators, who avoided a three-game season sweep by Boston and spoiled the Bruins' hopes of clinching the Atlantic Division. The Bruins (47-20-15) led second-place Florida by a point entering Tuesday night.

**Blue Jackets 6, Hurricanes 3:** Zach Werenski had two goals and two assists, Jet Greaves made 38 saves and host Columbus beat a diminished version of playoff-bound Carolina.

Carolina finished with 111 points at 52-23-7, the second-best record in the Eastern Conference behind the division champion New York Rangers. The Hurricanes reached the postseason for the sixth straight year.

**Capitals 2, Flyers 1:** T.J. Oshie scored into an empty net in the rare situation of a team pulling its goaltender in a tie game, and visiting Washington is in the playoffs after beating Philadelphia.

Flyers coach John Tortorella pulled goalie Samuel Ersson for an extra attacker because his team needed to win in regulation to keep its hopes alive. The result allowed the Capitals to clinch a berth and eliminate the Pittsburgh Penguins — rivals for both teams finishing the regular season in Philadelphia — in improbable fashion with Oshie's goal with exactly 3 minutes left.

**Red Wings 5, Canadiens 4 (SO):** Patrick Kane scored the shootout winner in his team's win over Montreal in its regular-season finale, but visiting Detroit was eliminated from playoff contention.

The Red Wings entered the night tied with Washington for the East's second wild-card spot with 89 points. The Capitals, however, held the tiebreaker over Detroit with more regulations wins and clinched the final playoff spot with a 2-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers on Tuesday.

Detroit has missed the playoffs eight straight seasons.

**Jets 4, Kraken 3:** Kyle Connor scored twice and Tyler Toffoli broke a third-period tie to lift host Winnipeg to a key victory over Seattle.

The win clinched second

place in the Central Division for the Jets and home-ice advantage in their first-round playoff series with the Colorado Avalanche.

**Golden Knights 3, Blackhawks 1:** Brayden McNabb, Michael Amadio and Nicolas Roy scored, and host Vegas moved into third place in the Pacific Division after defeating Chicago.

The Knights, who have won three consecutive games, are one point ahead of Los Angeles. If Vegas beats Anaheim on Thursday, the Knights will clinch that spot and face Edmonton in the first round of the playoffs. The Kings host the Blackhawks in their season finale on Thursday night.

**Canucks 4, Flames 1:** Tyler Myers had a goal and an assist, Thatcher Demko stopped 39 shots in his return from a knee injury and host Vancouver beat Calgary to clinch the Pacific Division title.

Nils Hoglander, Dakota Joshua and J.T. Miller also scored to help Vancouver win a division for the first time since 2013. The Canucks are two points behind Dallas for the No. 1 spot in the Western Conference, and both teams have one game remaining.

## USA Basketball announces men's team roster for Paris

Associated Press

LeBron James is going back to the Olympics for the first time in 12 years. Stephen Curry is headed to the games for the first time. Kevin Durant will go there with his eyes on history.

And they're just part of a star-studded roster the Americans have assembled for the Paris Games.

USA Basketball announced its men's Olympic team for Paris on Wednesday — James, Curry, Durant, Bam Adebayo, Devin Booker, Joel Embiid, Jayson Tatum, Anthony Davis, Jrue Holiday, Tyrese Halibur-

ton, Anthony Edwards and Kawhi Leonard the 12 names on the current roster.

"We're giving ourselves a chance to win with the talent we have," USA Basketball managing director Grant Hill said on NBC's "Today" show. "It'll be exciting. It'll be tough. It won't be easy. We have great respect for all the other teams. But certainly, this is going to be an iconic roster."

The group has seven players with 10 combined Olympic gold medals; Durant has three, James has two, while Adebayo, Booker, Holiday, Tatum and

Booker each have one. Combined, the 12 players had averages of 24.2 points, 7.0 rebounds and 5.6 assists this season, shooting 39% from 3-point range.

"Obviously, it's a great honor to represent your country," Adebayo said. "But for me, to be in that room as part of those 12 players, part of who they think are the 12 best players to represent the United States, it takes it to a different level."

The amount of talent on the U.S. roster is staggering. Of the 12 commits, seven finished the season ranked among the

NBA's top 15 scorers per game. James is the league's all-time scoring leader, Curry the all-time leader in 3-pointers, Haliburton won the assist-per-game title this season and 10 were All-Stars this season as well.

"The goal is to win the gold," Hill said. "They know that."

The Americans have won the last four Olympic gold medals and remain ranked No. 1 in the world by FIBA even after failing to medal in the two most recent World Cups — finishing seventh at China in 2019 and fourth at Manila last summer.