

## Iran: Strait of Hormuz ‘completely open’

### Trump says US naval blockade against Tehran will continue in full force

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

Iran on Friday announced that all commercial shipping traffic can pass through the Strait of Hormuz for the duration of the ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, even as President Donald Trump said the U.S. naval blockade against Tehran will continue.

“In line with the ceasefire in Lebanon, the passage for all commercial vessels through Strait of Hormuz is declared completely open for the remaining period of ceasefire,” Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi said on X.

Ships must travel through a “coordinated route” announced by Iran’s maritime authorities, Araghchi said.

Crude oil prices plunged by 10% after Iran’s declaration.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump thanked Iran for opening the Strait of Hormuz but said the naval blockade against

Iran “WILL REMAIN IN FULL FORCE AND EFFECT.”

The development follows Thursday’s announcement of a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon after weeks of cross-border fighting between Israeli forces and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants. As of midday Friday, the ceasefire appeared to be holding.

In a later post, Trump said Israel “will not be bombing Lebanon any longer,” noting that it is “PROHIBITED from doing so by the U.S.A.”

Trump also said, without elaborating, that Iran “has removed, or is removing, all sea mines,” presumably from the Strait of Hormuz, with the assistance of the United States.

The strait has been effectively shut down since the launch of the joint U.S.-Israel military operation against Iran nearly two months ago. The U.S. Navy blockade aims to wrest control from Iran, whose retaliatory

measures have reduced maritime traffic there to a trickle.

The United States and Iran are reportedly negotiating a plan to end the conflict. According to Axios, one proposal under discussion would trade roughly \$20 billion in frozen Iranian funds for Tehran giving up its stockpile of enriched uranium, the report said.

The developments come as leaders in Europe also plan for a future mission in the area, as rising costs stemming from the U.S.-Iran impasse rippled through the global economy.

France and the U.K. on Friday chaired a meeting of some 40 nations to discuss how to ensure the safe passage of shipping through the strategic sea lane, through which 20% of the world’s oil usually flows.

The disruption has raised the stakes for Europe, which relies heavily on oil and gas transiting in and out of the Persian Gulf.

While gas prices have already

soared, airline industry leaders this week also warned of a jet fuel shortage that could force flights to be curtailed within weeks.

At a press conference Friday, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer praised the news that Iran is opening the strait but stressed the need for a long-lasting and workable solution.

Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron are trying to establish a multinational initiative to protect freedom of navigation through the strait. The aim is to deploy a combined military effort “as soon as conditions allow,” according to Starmer.

Allies in Europe have come under heavy pressure from Trump to help clear the waterway. However, the current plans, which are focused on assisting once security conditions allow, have been characterized by the Trump administration as too little, too late.

## Iran has limited impact of US strikes, intelligence says

*Bloomberg News*

LONDON — Prewar planning meant Iran’s military was able to mitigate the impact of U.S.-Israeli strikes on its weapons arsenal and leadership, according to Western military intelligence assessments — which also say it retains the ability to respond if the ceasefire fails.

The country has sustained massive damage to its infrastructure and its most senior leaders have been killed. But operational planning undertaken in anticipation of the con-

flict was effective in preventing the destruction of its missile and drone capabilities as well as maximizing the impact of its military response, people familiar with the assessments said, requesting anonymity discussing private reports.

These provide a much more nuanced picture of the outcomes of the U.S.-Israeli operation than that portrayed by President Donald Trump and U.S. administration officials. The effectiveness of Iran’s earlier military planning also rais-

es the prospect that it could use the current ceasefire to make preparations for any resumption of hostilities.

Plans put in place by Iran to replace senior military leaders in the event they were killed meant the country was able to minimize disruption to its command structures when they were targeted in the first days of the war, the people said.

It also appears that Iran retains solid reserves of long-range missiles, according to assessments provided by Euro-

pean and Gulf officials. It still has thousands of drones in its armory, the people added.

Iran’s missile stocks are a closely guarded secret. Some Western officials privately claim the U.S. would need to conduct around two to three more weeks of strikes to completely degrade Iranian capabilities.

But others say that may be an optimistic scenario: It could take longer, and Iran’s industrial and nuclear capabilities may still not be wiped out.

# Trump focus turns from Iran to economy

## Pivot comes as Republicans face headwinds in looming midterm elections

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump plans to take his economic pitch on the road to western U.S. states, as the White House grapples with an increasingly unpopular war with Iran ahead of the November midterm elections.

The president's trip this week to Nevada and Arizona, two swing states that Trump carried in 2024, reflects a growing recognition inside the administration and among congressional Republicans that the party must remind voters of its economic accomplishments as affordability issues weigh heavily on American households.

Trump said he would tout his cornerstone tax law during a Las Vegas roundtable event on Thursday and in a speech Friday in Arizona, and contrast his policies with those of Demo-

crat-run states.

"I think it's going to be amazing," Trump told reporters upon departing the White House. "If you look at what they're doing in New York and California, they're raising taxes and they're driving people out."

The White House's attempted domestic pivot comes as the Iran war continues to rattle financial markets and a diplomatic resolution remains elusive. Polls show a majority of Americans disapprove of the president's handling of the war and blame him for rising gasoline prices.

One of the party's biggest challenges, however, is Trump himself. The president frequently strays off topic and speaks about other issues, such as the war in Iran, his political enemies, the news media and his planned White House reno-

ventions, during economic events.

Several Republicans this week — including Senate Majority Leader John Thune — have called for Trump to come up with a plan to wind down the war, noting the strain facing consumers and farmers from the closing of the Strait of Hormuz, which carries roughly a fifth of global oil supplies.

Trump's economic pitch could be a tough sell for voters already struggling with the cost of gas, health care and other goods. They are receiving tax refunds that are bigger than last year, but much smaller than Trump promised in the months leading up to filing season.

More people have collected tax refunds this year than last, and those refunds are averaging nearly \$350 higher than in 2025, according to IRS data. But

that's only about one-third of the \$1,000 average bump Trump pledged.

Trump insisted Americans were seeing the benefits, saying Thursday that "people are finding out that in their tax return, they're getting a big refund, much bigger than they thought."

There are early signs that taxpayers have barely noticed the boost. In a recent poll conducted by the Bipartisan Policy Center, only 27% of respondents said last year's tax changes benefited them, while 24% said they hurt them and 38% said they didn't see a difference.

"The reality is the tax law is a dud for the vast majority of working people," Senator Ron Wyden, the top Democrat on the Finance Committee, said Wednesday.

## Cuban Americans support military intervention in Cuba

*Miami Herald*

MIAMI — Cubans and Cuban Americans in South Florida overwhelmingly support U.S. military intervention in Cuba and reject negotiations between the Trump administration and the communist government that could result in anything other than regime change, according to a new poll conducted for the Miami Herald.

The survey asked 800 Cubans and Cuban Americans living in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach and Monroe counties whether they would support a U.S. military intervention in Cuba geared at regime change, addressing the humanitarian situation on the island, or both — or if they reject any sort of military action.

A strong majority, 79%, said they support intervention, including 36% who said they would support military action to topple the government and 38% who said they would support an intervention to change the regime and deal with the humanitarian crisis in Cuba.

At a time Americans are questioning the war on Iran, such a high level of support for an intervention surprised the pollsters.

"It might as well be 1961 once again," when Cuban exiles attempted to invade Cuba with U.S. support, said Fernand Amandi, an expert on the Cuban community and president of Bendixen & Amandi International, one of the two firms that conducted the poll. "What the

community is saying here is they're giving a green light to the Trump administration to go in militarily in Cuba and do whatever it is that they have to do to remove the regime."

The poll, conducted from April 6-10 by Bendixen & Amandi International and The Tarance Group, surveyed 800 randomly selected South Florida Cubans and Cuban Americans and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

The survey comes at an extraordinary moment in U.S. foreign policy, when President Donald Trump has embarked on military actions in Venezuela and Iran and has threatened to "take Cuba" and said that the island is "next." It also comes

amid a flurry of reporting about back-channel negotiations between the U.S. and members of the Castro family — in particular Raúl Guillermo Rodríguez Castro, a grandson of Raul Castro — and statements by Cuban leader Miguel Díaz-Canel rejecting political concessions.

The poll shows the Cuban American and Cuban exile community backs Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio on their handling of Cuba policy, blames the Cuban government for its economic crisis, and has hardened its views, supporting extreme measures to end the regime and rejecting any negotiations that could open up the economy but leave the communist government in place.

# Trump administration quietly hiring again

## A year after DOGE cuts, government job posting increased by 23% in March

*Bloomberg News*

During the first year of his second presidency, President Donald Trump dispatched a chainsaw-wielding billionaire to loudly eliminate more than 300,000 federal jobs in an unsparing attempt to shrink the government.

Now, the Trump administration is quietly hiring again.

Job announcements posted to the federal government's main hiring portal were up 23% in March from those of the previous month. The government has launched new recruiting drives targeted at tech staffers, attorneys and project managers.

And the budget proposal that Trump submitted to Congress this month would authorize a small increase in total full-time equivalent employment in 2027. Though those numbers aren't directly comparable to actual employment, they would give the government headroom to grow the workforce.

"I'm trying to be louder on hiring," Scott Kupor, the director of the Office of Personnel Management, said in an inter-

view.

Kupor, a former managing partner of Andreessen Horowitz, was confirmed by the Senate six weeks after Tesla CEO Elon Musk left the White House last year. Musk's self-styled Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, had launched a shock-and-awe campaign to vastly downsize the federal workforce through a combination of early resignation incentives, mass firings and micro-management.

Those sweeping efforts have largely run their course, and courts have struck down some Trump administration efforts to impose layoffs.

Federal government employment is now the lowest it's been since 2009, approaching the 2 million employee mark. But by the end of the second quarter, Kupor expects federal hiring to turn a corner.

"If things stay on trajectory, which I expect, we will be net positive for the year," he said.

Those top-line numbers conceal significant churn, however. Trump's 2027 budget would

dramatically reduce civilian head counts at the departments of Agriculture, Education and Labor, as well as at NASA. But other agencies would see net increases, including Commerce, Defense, Interior and Transportation.

"The areas where they're planning to hire are not the areas where they have decimated the workforce. It's different areas," said Jacqueline Simon, the policy director for the American Federation of Government Employees, the largest union of federal workers.

"Can these people turn around and apply for a new federal job? Yeah, they can start all over again — but only after a period where they have no rights and are probationary employees all over again," she added. "It's not an attractive prospect."

So Kupor's job is to recruit top talent to a federal government that is simultaneously growing and eliminating jobs as it's being disrupted by the same technology and demographic trends upending the broader U.S.

workforce. And he has to do it against a political backdrop of Trump's attacks on the civil service, which the president says is part of a "Deep State" undermining his administration.

After a cavalcade of DOGE headlines, Kupor acknowledged that tension.

He describes last year's reductions as part of a "reshaping" that includes getting rid of low performers but also hiring for the skills the government needs.

Civil service advocates say the administration's efforts to strengthen the workforce are an improvement, but don't show that they've learned the lessons of last year's chaotic cuts.

"They fired — in a nonstrategic, arbitrary way — a huge number. And they demolished the morale of those that remain," said Max Stier, the president of the Partnership for Public Service. "So they're at best trying to recoup lost ground that they created, that they caused. And they're not yet fully grappling with the importance of valuing the workforce itself."

## ICE acting director to leave in May after tumultuous tenure

*Bloomberg News*

The acting head of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement will leave the agency at the end of May after a tumultuous year managing President Donald Trump's mass arrest and deportation campaign.

Todd Lyons has been the agency's acting head since March 2025. During his tenure, he oversaw the rapid expansion of ICE ranks, while repeatedly defending the use of force in raids across the country. He was also a vocal defender of agents wearing masks, saying they needed to conceal their identities for safety.

In a statement, Homeland Se-

curity Secretary Markwayne Mullin said Lyons is expected to move to the private sector after leaving the agency on May 31.

"Director Lyons has been a great leader of ICE and key player in helping the Trump administration remove murderers, rapists, pedophiles, terrorists, and gang members from American communities," Mullin said.

ICE is the lead Department of Homeland Security agency managing the Trump administration's mass deportation campaign and has become a target of growing criticism from the public and lawmakers.

In January, ICE agents shot

and killed Renee Good, a U.S. citizen, during an encounter in Minnesota, the first of two fatal shootings there that set off a wave of protests.

Lyons' departure was announced the same day an ICE agent was charged with two counts of felony assault in Minnesota after being accused of waving a gun at passing motorists during a surge operation there in February.

Last year, at a border security conference in Phoenix, Ariz., Lyons forecast the agency's move to overhaul its immigration detention and deportation system, saying the agency needs to "get better at treating

this like a business, where this mass deportation operation is something like you would see and say, like Amazon trying to get your Prime delivery within 24 hours."

ICE has spent more than \$850 million to buy warehouses in at least nine locations. Mullin, who took command of DHS last month after former Secretary Kristi Noem was fired, has said he would review those plans.

Lyons is a U.S. Air Force veteran and a career law enforcement officer who joined ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations division in 2007. CBS News first reported his departure.

# RFK Jr.: Vaccine might have stopped child measles death

*Bloomberg News*

WASHINGTON — U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. acknowledged that vaccination may have saved the 6-year-old Texas child who died from measles last year, even as he defended the Trump administration's controversial policies at a hearing on Capitol Hill Thursday.

Kennedy's questioning before the House Ways and Means Committee forced the nation's top health leader to discuss immunizations, even after the administration issued a directive to avoid talking about the changes that are deeply unpopular with the American public. It was the first in a series of seven annual budget hearings Kennedy faces.

The Health Secretary was also asked difficult questions about his stewardship of the department at a separate hearing later in the day in front of a House Appropriations Committee subcommittee. Agencies under his purview, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Food and

Drug Administration, have faced severe staff cuts and frequent shake-ups among the top leadership.

The CDC only had a formal leader for 29 days before she was fired by Kennedy. Separately on Thursday, the White House named Erica Schwartz, a U.S. deputy surgeon general during the first Trump administration, to run the agency. She will need to be confirmed by the Senate, though she's seen as a more conventional pick for the role.

Kennedy also said HHS will be rebuilding its workforce with a "better group of people who are actually going to address chronic health" after thousands were fired by DOGE.

Last year, HHS went to 62,000 employees from 82,000, according to the secretary. It's since hired 10,000 and will add 12,000 more.

While Kennedy's remit is touting President Donald Trump's budget priorities — like the creation of the Administration for a Healthy America — his rhetoric on immunization policy in the past year has

drawn heavy scrutiny.

In an exchange with Representative Linda Sánchez, a California Democrat, he acknowledged the possibility that the first U.S. measles death in more than a decade may have been averted by vaccination.

"Do you agree with the majority of doctors that the measles vaccine could have saved that child's life?" Sánchez asked.

"It's possible, certainly," Kennedy responded.

The two also sparred over how the U.S. has fared in addressing the recent record-breaking measles outbreak. Sánchez argued the country has faced a dramatic increase during the second Trump administration, while Kennedy said other countries like Mexico are experiencing more infections.

In a later hearing, Representative Madeleine Dean, a Pennsylvania Democrat, asked Kennedy whether he believed the measles vaccine is safe and effective. "Yes, it's safe for most people," he said and agreed with her assertion that getting the measles vaccine is safer than getting measles.

# US jobless claims fall to 207,000

*Bloomberg News*

Applications for U.S. unemployment benefits fell last week, indicating that layoffs remain largely limited.

Initial claims decreased by 11,000 to 207,000 in the week ending April 11, marking the biggest one-week drop since February, according to Labor Department data released Thursday. Claims data can be volatile around holidays, and the latest period included Easter. The four-week moving average of new applications, a metric that helps smooth out volatility, was little changed last week.

Thursday's figures add to other recent data that suggests the labor market is stabilizing. Separate figures released earlier this month showed job growth rebounded in March and the unemployment rate fell.

The Federal Reserve's Beige Book survey of regional business contacts also showed most districts recently described labor demand as "stable" with minimal layoffs.

Continuing claims, a proxy for the number of people receiving benefits, rose to 1.82 million in the week ending April 4.

# Xi welcomes slew of world leaders as Trump fights allies

*Bloomberg News*

President Xi Jinping is wrapping up what's been an unusually busy week of diplomacy in Beijing, showcasing the fervent interest of world leaders to develop ties with China while the U.S. is embroiled in a conflict with Iran.

Xi has held at least five high-profile tête-à-têtes, despite the lack of any formal gathering in China's capital this week. Excluding weeks the country hosted major summits, it's the quickest tempo since July 2024.

The roster has ranged from a U.S. NATO ally — Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez — to a Middle East representative — Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohammed. The meetings were followed by a visit from the leader of neighboring Vietnam — To Lam, the nation's president and Communist Party chief, who recently secured a fresh five-year term.

Xi has been positioning his nation as a source of stability and bulwark of respect for in-

ternational rules, against the backdrop of President Donald Trump's threat to bomb Iran "back to the Stone Ages." Left unclear: whether China's leaders, who have long promised benefits from deeper ties to the world's No. 2 economy, will offer concrete help for countries facing the current energy crisis.

Trump, by contrast, has spent the week deepening his isolation on the global stage, by openly lambasting one-time close allies including Italy's Giorgia Meloni and the U.K.'s Keir

Starmer. He also launched a broadside against Pope Leo XIV, calling the popular and highly visible spiritual leader "terrible for foreign policy."

Italy's foreign minister this week visited Beijing, where officials pledged to deepen ties with Rome.

China's most concrete public action so far has come alongside its "no-limits" friendship with Moscow. Xi again touted the stability of ties with Russia and pledged deeper bilateral coordination.

# Guilty plea expected in NBA gambling sweep

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Former NBA player and assistant coach Damon Jones is expected to become the first person to plead guilty in a gambling sweep that led to the arrests of more than 30 people, including reputed mobsters and other basketball figures.

A change-of-plea hearing for Jones is scheduled for April 28 in Brooklyn federal court, according to a court filing Thursday. It was originally set for May 6, but was moved at the request of the parties.

Jones, 49, had previously pleaded not guilty to separate indictments charging him with profiting from rigged poker games and providing sports bettors with non-public information about injuries to stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

Jones is charged in both cases with wire fraud conspiracy and money laundering conspiracy.

A message seeking comment was left for his lawyer, Kenneth Montgomery. He told a judge at Jones' arraignments in November that they "may be engaging in plea negotiations."

Jones, a onetime teammate of James, was arrested last October along with Portland Trail Blazers head coach and Basketball Hall of Famer Chauncey Billups and Miami Heat guard Terry Rozier, and others, including a sports bettor accused of cashing in on injury information.

Jones was one of three people charged in both the poker and sports betting schemes. He remains free on bail.

A native of Galveston, Texas, Jones earned more than \$20 million playing for 10 teams in 11 seasons from 1999 to 2009. He and James played together in Cleveland from 2005 to 2008 and Jones served as an unofficial assistant coach for James' Los Angeles Lakers during the 2022-2023 season.

According to prosecutors, Jones sold or attempted to sell non-public information to bettors that James was injured and wouldn't be playing in a Feb. 9, 2023, game against the Milwaukee Bucks, texting an unnamed co-conspirator: "Get a big bet on Milwaukee tonight before the information is out."

James wasn't listed on the Lakers' injury report at the time of the text message, but the NBA's all-time scoring leader was later ruled out of the game because of a lower body injury, according to prosecutors, and the Lakers lost the game 115-106.

On Jan. 15, 2024, prosecutors said, sports bettor Marves Fairley paid Jones approximately \$2,500 for a tip that Davis, the Lakers' forward and center at the time, would see limited playing time against the Oklahoma City Thunder because of an injury.

Fairley then placed a \$100,000 bet on the Thunder to win, prosecutors said, but the tip was wrong.

Davis played his usual minutes, scored 27 points and collected 15 rebounds in a 112-105 Lakers win, prompting Fairley to demand a refund of his \$2,500 fee, prosecutors said.

In the poker scheme, according to prosecutors, Jones was among former NBA players used to lure unwitting players into poker games that were rigged using altered shuffling

machines, hidden cameras, special sunglasses and even X-ray equipment built into the table.

According to the indictment, Jones was paid \$2,500 for a game in the Hamptons where he was instructed to cheat by paying close attention to others involved in the scheme.

His instructor likened those people to James and NBA All-Star Steph Curry, prosecutors said. When in doubt, Jones was told to fold his hand, prosecutors said.

In response, according to prosecutors, Jones texted: "y'all know I know what I'm doing!!"

The poker scheme often made use of illegal poker games run by New York crime families that required them to share a portion of their proceeds with the Gambino, Genovese and Bonnano crime families, according to prosecutors.

Members of those families, in turn, also helped commit violent acts, including assault, extortion and robbery, to ensure repayment of debts and the continued success of the operation, officials said in court documents.

# UFC champ Ulberg loses title belt while celebrating

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Carlos Ulberg fought through an injured right knee to capture the light heavyweight title in UFC 327.

He says he lost it hours later, literally.

The 35-year-old from New Zealand defeated Jiri Prochazka in the main event at UFC 327 by knockout this weekend in Miami to become the new

champion of the light heavyweight division. He told Fox Sports Australia on Monday that he misplaced his golden title belt while celebrating his victory.

"I've lost the belt, bro," Ulberg told Fox Sports. "Initially after winning, the plan was to not have a drink. But you know how these things go, right? First, someone gives you a cham-

pagne to celebrate. Then one thing leads to another and you're doing shots."

His knee injury could keep him sidelined for a year, meaning he will have to give up his champion status anyway, with UFC holding an interim title fight to take his place.

But Ulberg said he's fairly confident his belt will be found before he heads to Las Vegas to

get further evaluation from doctors there on his knee. He then plans to spend time at the UFC Performance Institute before returning to New Zealand to be with family.

"I didn't want to be carrying the belt around so I think it's still there at the apartment somewhere. One of the boys probably has it in bed with him," Ulberg said.

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# Trout boosts Angels with 5th homer of series

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mike Trout hit his fifth homer of the series and the Los Angeles Angels overcame a homer by Aaron Judge in their 11-4 victory over the New York Yankees on Thursday afternoon for a four-game split.

Trout, who recently made a mechanical adjustment, went 6 for 16 with five homers and nine RBIs in the series. Trout hit his latest homer with one out in the seventh inning when he sent a 2-2 slider from reliever Angel Chivilli about halfway up the left field bleachers for a 7-4 lead.

Trout homered in his fifth straight game at Yankee Stadium and became the fourth to hit five homers in a series against the Yankees. The others were Jimmie Foxx (1933), Darrell Evans (1985) and George Bell (1990), according to MLB researcher Sarah Langs.

Trout's latest homer contributed to a rare loss for the Yankees when Judge and Giancarlo Stanton homered in the same game. Including the postseason, New York is 53-8 when the duo both connect.

Jo Adell added a grand slam in the eighth for the Angels, who lead the AL with 32 homers.

Judge hit his 89th career first-inning homer and Stanton hit a two-run shot to give the Yankees a 3-2 lead in the fourth before the Angels scored four runs in the sixth off Max Fried (2-1) and Fernando Cruz. Ben Rice also homered in the sixth.

Trout walked three times and scored the tying run in a four-run sixth on a double by Oswald Peraza, who also hit a two-run homer in the first.

**Giants 3, Reds 0:** Landen Roupp allowed one hit in six innings and Matt Chapman had an RBI double to spark a three-run rally in the seventh and help San Francisco beat Cincinnati.

Roupp (3-1) didn't allow a hit until No. 9 batter P.J. Higgins led off the sixth with a single.

That ended up being the Reds only hit of the day.

Roupp hit TJ Friedl with a pitch, but Matt McLain struck out and Elly De La Cruz grounded into a double play to end the threat. Roupp walked two, struck out six and left after 87 pitches.

Ryan Walker pitched the seventh and Keaton Winn struck out two in the eighth. Erik Miller struck out the side in the ninth for his first career save.

**Brewers 2, Blue Jays 1:** Garrett Mitchell scored the go-ahead run as Milwaukee bunted three straight times in the seventh inning to break a tie and beat Toronto.

Aaron Ashby (5-0) faced only two batters and got the final out in the seventh to take over the major league lead in wins.

Toronto stranded the potential tying run at third when Kazuma Okamoto grounded out against Angel Zerpa, who earned his second save.

**Nationals 8, Pirates 7, 10 innings:** James Wood singled to score automatic runner Jorbit Vivas in the 10th inning and Washington beat Pittsburgh.

Reliever Clayton Beeter (1-0) got his first career win despite giving up the ninth-inning run that sent the game to an extra inning. Brandon Lowe hit an infield single to score Jake Mangum, whom Beeter walked.

Dennis Santana (2-1) pitched the top of the 10th for the Pirates.

Orlando Ribalta earned his first career save.

**Rays 5, White Sox 3:** Junior Caminero homered and Tampa scored twice on bases-loaded walks in the ninth inning, rallying for a win over Chicago.

The Rays trailed by one run three times before pulling ahead against White Sox relievers Seranthony Dominguez and Lucas Sims, extending their winning streak to six games.

Dominguez entered with a one-run lead after Everson Pereira homered in the eighth in-

ning, his second long ball in seven at-bats since returning from a sprained ankle. But Dominguez exited to boos with the bases loaded and one out after allowing Caminero's leadoff home run, a single, a walk, a hit batter and a wild pitch.

**Tigers 10, Royals 9:** Riley Greene doubled home two runs to tie the score with two outs in the ninth inning, and Colt Keith followed with the winning single as streaking Detroit rallied past Kansas City in a wild game delayed twice by rain.

Dillon Dingler launched a two-run homer and Greene finished with three hits for the Tigers, who squandered a five-run lead but recovered to win their sixth straight.

Salvador Perez drove in four for the Royals, including a three-run homer to cap a six-run seventh that gave them an 8-6 lead. Vinnie Pasquantino also went deep, his first homer this season, and Bobby Witt Jr. had three hits and scored three times.

**Rangers 9, Athletics 6:** Joc Pederson hit a go-ahead single in a four-run ninth inning and Texas rallied last in a victory over the Athletics to earn a split of its four-game series.

Nick Kurtz blooped a three-run double that Wyatt Langford couldn't chase down in left field to give the Athletics a 6-5 lead with two outs in the eighth.

Jake Burger and Josh Jung singled to start the ninth against Justin Sterner (0-2). Kyle Higashioka was safe when Sterner fielded his bunt and threw it over the head of Darel Hernaiz at third for an error, allowing Burger to score the tying run. Pederson gave the Rangers the lead, and Ezequiel Duran added to it with a two-run single.

**Guardians 4, Orioles 2:** Parker Messick took a no-hitter into the ninth inning, José Ramírez homered for the third time in four games and Cleveland opened a seven-game homestand with a win over Baltimore.

Making his 11th major league start, Messick (3-0) faced one batter more than the minimum through eight innings before Leody Taveras led off the ninth with a grounder that just eluded diving second baseman Juan Brito and went into right field for a single.

Blaze Alexander followed with a line-drive single to center before the rookie left-hander was removed to a standing ovation from the crowd of 14,748.

**Padres 5, Mariners 2:** Fernando Tatis Jr.'s two-run single capped a four-run rally in the second inning, Walker Buehler earned his first win with San Diego and the Padres beat Seattle for their eighth straight win and 11th in 12 games.

Mason Miller struck out the side on 14 pitches in the ninth for his sixth save and to extend his scoreless innings streak to 30 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings, the longest active streak in the majors. He passed Randy Jones (30 innings in May 1980) for second-longest in Padres history and trails only Clá Meredith (33 $\frac{1}{3}$  innings, July-September 2006).

Buehler (1-1) took a two-hit shutout into the sixth before allowing three straight singles. He was chased by Cal Raleigh's RBI single, and Julio Rodríguez greeted reliever Bradgley Rodríguez with another run-scoring base hit. The Mariners had the bases loaded with one out before Adrian Morejon came on and retired the side.

**Rockies 3, Astros 2:** Hunter Goodman homered and doubled to help Colorado snap a six-game skid with a victory over Houston.

Goodman's solo shot tied it in the fourth inning and Colorado took the lead in the fifth on an RBI single by Tyler Freeman, who had three hits.

Chase Dollander (2-1) took over with two outs in the first and pitched 5 $\frac{1}{3}$  scoreless innings for the win. He struck out nine and allowed only one hit.

# Preview of NBA Eastern Conference playoffs

Associated Press

The NBA's No. 8 seed in the Eastern Conference — which will play the top-seeded Detroit Pistons — will be decided tonight when Charlotte plays Orlando. Here's a look at the other three first-round series:

## **No. 2 Boston Celtics (56-26) vs. No. 7 Philadelphia 76ers (45-37)**

Season series: Tied, 2-2

Story line: This is by far the most frequent matchup in NBA postseason history, the rivals about to meet in a playoff series for the 23rd time. The edge for a couple of generations now has been with Boston — the Celtics have won the past six series between the clubs, mostly recently a seven-gamer in 2023, and Philadelphia hasn't eliminated Boston in a playoff matchup since 1982. For Philadelphia, much hinges on how quickly

Joel Embiid can return from his appendectomy.

Key matchup: Derrick White vs. Tyrese Maxey. White is one of the best on-ball defenders in the league, and Maxey averaged 30 points per game in the four 76ers-Celtics games this season. It's never going to be about a 1-on-1 matchup, but if Maxey gets rolling it's going to create issues for the Celtics. Then again, if Embiid isn't back or isn't effective, the 1-2 Boston punch of Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum might render whatever Maxey does moot anyway.

Prediction: Celtics in 6

## **No. 3 New York Knicks (53-29) vs. No. 6 Atlanta Hawks (46-36)**

Season series: Knicks, 2-1

Story line: The Knicks hope to start another long playoff run against an Atlanta team that has played far better than a No. 6

seed for the last two months. The Hawks went 20-6 after the All-Star break to finish with their best record in a decade.

Key matchup: Jalen Brunson vs. Dyson Daniels. Brunson has eight 40-point games in the postseason since joining the Knicks in 2022, most in the NBA. The All-Star guard just scored 30, including 17 in the fourth quarter, to get the Knicks past the Hawks on April 6 in Atlanta. Daniels figures to get the assignment of trying to slow him. Already one of the NBA's best defensive guards, Daniels was second in the league in steals while also improving offensively, shooting a career-best 51.7% from the field.

Prediction: Knicks in 6

## **No. 4 Cleveland Cavaliers (52-30) vs. No. 5 Toronto Raptors (46-36)**

Season series: Raptors, 3-0

Story line: Even down at the No. 4 seed, the Cavaliers have the second-best odds to win the Eastern Conference after acquiring James Harden to pair with Donovan Mitchell in the backcourt. Harden is still looking for his first NBA title. The Cavaliers beat the Raptors in the playoffs three straight years from 2016-18 on their way to the NBA Finals when LeBron James was in Cleveland.

Key matchup: Evan Mobley vs. Scottie Barnes. Barnes edged Mobley by 15 points to win the NBA Rookie of the Year award in 2022. Whoever gets the better of the matchup between forwards this time could determine which way the series swings, because the Cavaliers figure to have the advantage in the backcourt with their high-scoring stars.

Prediction: Cavaliers in 5

# Preview of NBA Western Conference playoff lineup

Associated Press

The No. 8 seed in the Western Conference — which will play the top-seeded Oklahoma City Thunder — will be decided tonight when Golden State plays Phoenix. Here's a look at the other three first-round series:

## **No. 2 San Antonio Spurs (62-20) vs. No. 7 Portland Trail Blazers (42-40)**

Season series: Spurs, 2-1

Story line: San Antonio star Victor Wembanyama's playoff debut is here. Same goes for Portland star Deni Avdija — who waited six years, and blossomed into an All-Star this season, before getting to this stage. There are some stats that suggest this is a matchup nightmare for San Antonio, such as head-to-head FG% (.440 for the Spurs, .439 for the Blazers), 3-point FG% (.344 for the Spurs, .339 for the Blazers) and rebounds per game (50 for the Spurs, 47.3 for the Blazers). But one really big point: Wemba-

nyama didn't play in any of the three games against the Blazers this season.

Key matchup: Wembanyama vs. Everybody. This is what we've all been waiting for, Wemby in the postseason. The Spurs won 62 games in a loaded West, contended for the No. 1 overall seed until the final days of the season, were a matchup nightmare for just about everyone and Wembanyama is at the center of it all — rarely looking fazed in any moment. Avdija is great, but he'll have to be otherworldly for Portland to have a real chance.

Prediction: Spurs in 5

## **No. 3 Denver Nuggets (54-28) vs. No. 6 Minnesota Timberwolves (49-33)**

Season series: Nuggets, 3-1

Story line: The Nuggets roll into the playoffs with a 12-game winning streak that vaulted them into third place in the Western Conference and a matchup with what's become a

familiar foe. Denver and Minnesota have played 28 games since 2022 and this will be the third postseason meeting in four years between the clubs. Denver beat Minnesota in the first round in 2023 en route to its first NBA championship, but the Timberwolves avenged that in a crushing way the next year when they came from 20 points down in Game 7 of the West semifinals to defeat Denver.

Key matchup: Nikola Jokic vs. Rudy Gobert. Jokic is perhaps the most well-rounded player in the game, averaging a triple-double for the second straight season and becoming the first player to lead the NBA in rebounds and assists per game. He finished with averages of 27.7 points, 12.9 rebounds and 10.7 assists. Gobert is a four-time Defensive Player of the Year winner, but it's a huge task for him or any center to slow down Jokic.

Prediction: Nuggets in 5

## **No. 4 Los Angeles Lakers (53-29) vs. No. 5 Houston Rockets (52-30)**

Season series: Lakers, 2-1

Story line: Another postseason matchup between LeBron James and Kevin Durant is the headline, but who James and the Lakers are missing is the real news. Luka Doncic, who led the NBA with 33.5 points per game, and Austin Reaves, their second-leading scorer, were both injured April 2 and won't be ready for at least the start of the series. It puts a massive burden on James, who ties Karl Malone and John Stockton for another NBA record with his 19th postseason appearance.

Key matchup: James vs. Durant. They have been Olympic teammates and NBA Finals rivals. James is the NBA's career scoring leader and Durant is No. 5, but with James now 41 and Durant 37, they are running out of time to win another title.

Prediction: Rockets in 6

# Ducks clinch Pacific Division's third seed

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Troy Terry scored on a power play with 2:54 left, and the Anaheim Ducks beat the Nashville Predators 5-4 on Thursday night helping them clinch the third seed in the Pacific Division for the post-season.

The Ducks came into the regular-season finale third in the Pacific with five different scenarios still possible to lock down the final playoff matchups.

This win, combined with Edmonton beating visiting Vancouver, means Anaheim starts the first round Monday at Edmonton.

Anaheim also took the season series against Nashville 2-1, though the Ducks go into the postseason 2-6-2 over their final 10.

Cutter Gauthier, Jackson LaCombe, Alex Killorn and Tristan Luneau scored for Anaheim. Mikael Granlund had three assists.

Steven Stamkos scored twice and had an assist for Nashville, giving him 42 goals this season. Filip Forsberg scored two goals, giving him 40, and giving the Predators a pair of 40-goal scorers. Luke Evangelista and Ryan Ufko added two assists apiece.

Gauthier scored 96 seconds into the game to put Anaheim up with a snap shot for his 41st of the season.

The Predators, eliminated from contention Monday night, answered with Stamkos scoring his 41st midway through the first off an assist from rookie Cole O'Hara, making his NHL debut.

Forsberg scored on a tip-in on the man advantage at 15:54 for a 2-1 lead. LaCombe's shot from near the blue line got through traffic tying it at 2 with 20.8 seconds left in the first.

Killorn's slap shot gave the Ducks a 3-2 lead at 4:33 of the second. Forsberg tied it at 14:37 with a shot from the slot, then Stamkos put Nashville up 4-3 with a wrister just outside the

left crease on the power play.

Luneau tied it at 4:17 of the third scoring off the rebound of Granlund's shot.

**Blues 5, Mammoth 3:** Logan Mailloux scored the go-ahead goal with 2:57 left to play and Robert Thomas had a hat trick as St. Louis beat Utah in the regular-season finale for both teams.

Mailloux scored unassisted on a backhand shot from 20 feet out to make it 4-3 in a back-and-forth game. Thomas' third goal, an empty-netter with 38 seconds left, capped the scoring.

Pavel Buchnevich had the other goal for St. Louis and Joel Hofer made 20 saves.

Michael Carcone, Lawson Crouse and Kailer Yamamoto scored for the Mammoth. Karel Vejmelka and Vitek Vanecek combined for 24 stops.

Clayton Keller assisted on two Utah goals to become the third NHL player this season with at least one assist in 10 straight games.

**Sharks 6, Jets 1:** Macklin Celebrini had a goal and two assists to break Joe Thornton's San Jose record for points in a season with 115, helping the Sharks rout Winnipeg in the finale for both teams.

The 19-year-old Celebrini had 45 goals and 70 assists in 82 games in his second NHL season. Thornton had 114 points in 2006-07, also playing 82 games. Last season, Celebrini had 63 points in 70 games, with 25 goals and 38 assists.

San Jose missed the playoff for the seventh consecutive season, finishing 39-35-8.

The Jets were 35-35-12 to miss the playoffs for the first time since 2021-22.

They are the fifth NHL team to win the Presidents' Trophy for the best regular-season record and not qualify for the playoffs the following season.

William Eklund also had a goal and two assists for San Jose.

Will Smith had a goal and an

assist, Collin Graf, Igor Chernyshov and Michael Misa also scored, and John Klingberg added three assists. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 25 shots.

**Oilers 6, Canucks 1:** Connor McDavid had four assists to take the NHL scoring title with 138 points and Edmonton beat Vancouver to finish second in the Pacific Division and open the playoffs at home.

Edmonton will host Anaheim on Monday night in Game 1. The Oilers were 7-2-2 in their last 11 to finish 41-30-12, while Vancouver was last in the NHL at 25-49-8.

McDavid won his sixth Art Ross title as the NHL scoring leader to tie Mario Lemieux and Gordie Howe for second — four behind Wayne Gretzky.

McDavid reached 1,220 career points, passing Jeremy Roenick, Larry Murphy and Jean Beliveau to advance to 47th on the NHL list. McDavid entered the season 71st.

Rookie Matthew Savoie had his first hat trick, Josh Samanski, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Colton Dach also scored and Evan Bouchard had three assists.

Connor Ingram made 11 saves, allowing only Ty Mueller's first career goal.

Edmonton was buoyed by the return of forward Zach Hyman and is expecting star forward Leon Draisaitl back during the opening series.

**Flames 3, Kings 1:** Arsenii Sergeev made 27 saves in his first NHL start, Zayne Parekh broke a third-period tie and Calgary beat playoff-bound Los Angeles to end the season.

The Kings learned during the game that they'd be the second wild-card in the Western Conference and face NHL regular-season champion Colorado in the first round — with Game 1 on Sunday in Denver.

Los Angeles finished 35-27-20. Earlier Thursday, Edmonton took second place in the Pacific Division with a 6-1 home

victory over Vancouver, and Anaheim won 5-4 at Nashville to finish third.

Morgan Frost and Joel Farabee also scored for Calgary. The Flames finished 34-39-9.

Kings star Anze Kopitar appeared in his final regular-season game, finishing with the seventh-most career points by a born and trained European player with 1,316. The leader of the category is Jaromir Jagr with 1,921.

Quinton Byfield scored for Los Angeles, and Anton Forsberg made 18 saves.

**Avalanche 2, Kraken 0:** Nick Blankenburg scored a second-period goal, Scott Wedgewood made 22 saves for his fourth shutout of the season and Colorado Avalanche beat Seattle to break the franchise's single-season points record.

The Avalanche won the Presidents' Trophy with 121 points, eclipsing the total of 119 points set by the 2021-22 squad that went on to win the Stanley Cup.

Colorado hosts the Los Angeles Kings on Sunday to begin the playoffs. The last time the teams played in the postseason was the 2002 conference quarterfinals when the Avalanche won in seven games.

The Kraken missed the playoffs with a final record of 34-37-11.

Blankenburg broke a scoreless game with a late second-period goal. He had a goal in the opening period overturned after Seattle challenged for offside.

Parker Kelly scored in the third period, while Valeri Nichushkin added a pair of assists. Wedgewood won his 31st game of the season.

Colorado rested several key players in the season finale, including Nathan MacKinnon, Martin Necas and captain Gabriel Landeskog.

MacKinnon finished with a career-high 53 goals to win the Rocket Richard Trophy as the league's goal-scoring leader.