

US, Iran standoff in strait intensifies

BY LARA KORTE

Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump's extension of a ceasefire with Iran may have paused fighting in the Middle East, but it also intensifies a high-stakes standoff over the Strait of Hormuz, with both sides rushing to ratchet up pressure as global fuel prices surge.

The question now is, who will blink first?

ANALYSIS

Even as U.S. forces have decimated its navy, air defenses and munition supplies, Iran has managed to keep the strait in a chokehold for nearly two months, threatening oil tankers and reducing traffic in one of the world's most important shipping lanes to a virtual standstill.

Weeks of bombing and threats of escalation have failed to loosen Iran's grip, leading the U.S. to take a different ap-

proach: a naval blockade on oil and cargo tankers bound for Iranian ports. U.S. forces have so far turned around 28 ships and boarded at least two, and U.S. officials say Iran is starting to feel the pain.

"Iran is collapsing financially!" Trump said in a late-night post to Truth Social on Tuesday. "They want the Strait of Hormuz opened immediately — Starving for cash!"

Iranian officials have maintained a defiant posture. Mahdi Mohammadi, a senior adviser to Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, said the ceasefire extension means nothing, arguing that the "losing side cannot dictate terms," in a post to X.

But Iran is still economically vulnerable. Oil exports are its main source of revenue and some experts suggest leaders in Tehran are growing increasing-

ly concerned about long-term erosion of their strategic abilities.

Hamidreza Azizi, a visiting fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, noted that the ceasefire and blockade leave Iran in an uneasy limbo, one that gives the U.S. more leverage and narrows Iran's path forward.

"Trump's extension of the ceasefire is not interpreted as a face-saving exit from the conflict but rather as a recalibration of the war's form and shape, which lowers costs for the United States while increasing them for Iran," Azizi wrote on X.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said Tuesday that it will only be a matter of days before Iran's oil storage facilities are full. But hopes for a quick return to normalcy are dwindling as European officials

warn of jet fuel shortages and scramble to fend off a looming energy crisis.

German airline carrier Lufthansa said Tuesday it is canceling 20,000 short-haul flights through October in anticipation of a fuel shortage.

Experts say they expect more oil rationing to take place in the coming weeks.

Trump has repeatedly stressed that the U.S. does not rely on Hormuz oil flow as much as other countries, but the Iran war has driven up prices for many Americans, impacting the president's approval ratings ahead of critical midterm elections this fall.

An AP-NORC poll conducted April 16-20 showed the president's economic approval rating remained low among independents and has dropped among Republicans — 62% down from 74% last month.

Trump extends ceasefire with Iran amid deadlock

Bloomberg News

The U.S. and Iran are locked in a battle for control of the Strait of Hormuz after failing to meet for a fresh round of peace talks, with both sides using blocks to the waterway to gain leverage during an extended ceasefire.

President Donald Trump said the truce agreed April 7 would stay in place indefinitely while Washington waits for Iran to submit a new peace proposal, though Tehran says it has no plans to take part in negotiations imminently. Vice President JD Vance had been prepared to fly to Islamabad on Tuesday to resume discussions, before it be-

came clear Iran would not send its own delegation.

The U.S. maintained a naval blockade on ships going to and from Iran's ports to pile pressure on the Islamic Republic, a move Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called a violation of the ceasefire.

At the same time, Iran is keeping Hormuz closed to almost all other international traffic, and the country's gunboats fired on commercial ships in the strait on Wednesday.

Trump's ceasefire extension represented a climb down from threats to resume the bombing of Iran in the event a deal couldn't be reached by a

Wednesday deadline, a move that would have revived a war that's killed thousands of people and sent energy prices soaring.

Hormuz was the subject of multiple reports of shipping attacks on Wednesday.

The U.K. Maritime Trade Operations, a naval liaison with the shipping industry, said on X that a cargo ship and a container ship came under Iranian fire in the waterway.

Iranian state TV reported later that the country's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps had seized two ships — identified as the MSC Francesca and Epaminondas — in Hormuz and brought them to shore for in-

spection. The Wall Street Journal reported that both came under attack, as well as a third, the Euphoria.

The U.S. Navy fired upon and seized an Iranian cargo ship in the Gulf of Oman on Sunday.

At least two fully laden Iranian tankers have sailed out of the Persian Gulf and past the U.S. blockade this week. The exit of the tankers demonstrates the limits of U.S. efforts to curb Tehran's crude exports.

Figures from data intelligence firm Vortexa suggest at least 34 Iran-linked tankers and natural gas carriers have made their way through the strait and the U.S. blockade line.

Navy's \$377B request includes 34 new ships

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is asking for the biggest slice of the record-setting financial pie the Pentagon is requesting from Congress for the defense budget for 2027 released Tuesday.

The sea service would get \$377.5 billion — a 24.3% increase over last year — to pay for everything from more ballistic missile submarines to new military housing projects.

"We are a maritime nation, and a maritime nation needs the strongest Navy in the world," said Rear Adm. Ben Reynolds, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy.

At the top of the wish list are two brand-new kinds of ships — a BBG (X), the first

"Trump-class" guided-missile battleship, and the FFX, the first of a new type of frigate based on a Coast Guard cutter design.

The proposed budget would include \$1 billion in advance funds to begin work on the 30,000-ton battleship. It would receive another \$837 million in research-and-development funds. The Navy would ask for \$17 billion in procurement funds for the battleship next year. Plans call for three battleships in all, with the second bought for \$13 billion in FY 2030 and the third for \$11.5 billion in FY 2031.

The battleship is at the center of Trump's "Golden Fleet" plan, which also includes the new frigate to be

modeled on a modified Coast Guard National Security Cutter.

It replaces the planned Constellation-class frigate that was scuttled by Navy Secretary John Phelan late last year. Only two ships, USS Constellation and USS Congress, will be completed.

The \$65.8 billion in shipbuilding money would go toward all or portions of 18 "battle force" ships and 16 support ships. They include:

- Incremental funding for one Columbia-class nuclear ballistic missile submarine and one additional boat.

- Full funding for two Virginia-class nuclear fast attack submarines and advance procurement for another four submarines.

- Continues incremental on third and fourth Gerald R. Ford-class aircraft carriers.

- One Arleigh Burke guided-missile destroyer.

- Two AS(X) submarine tenders.

- One Explorer class ocean surveillance ship.

- Two John Lewis-class fleet oilers.

- One Landing Platform Dock.

- One America-class Landing Helicopter Assault Ship.

- Six Medium Landing Ships.

The Navy is also doubling its 2026 requests for aircraft to a total of \$34.4 billion, to include the Navy and Marine Corps. The funds would go for 123 fixed-wing, rotary-wing and unmanned aircraft.

Marine Corps eyes new amphibious assault ships

BY GARY WARNER
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps would get new amphibious landing ships and have its stocks of munitions refreshed under the defense budget request for fiscal 2027 released Tuesday.

The Marine Corps, which has an active force of 173,700 and a reserve force of 34,700, would receive \$18.9 billion to pay and support personnel.

The budget request would fund a 7% pay raise for troops in the rank of sergeant and below, a 6% pay raise for soldiers from staff sergeant to captain, and a 5% raise for officers in the rank of major and higher.

The budget request allocates \$6.5 billion for "fleet readiness" of Marine units, including field logistics, maritime prepositioning and depot maintenance.

Marine aviation squadrons

would receive 10 F-35C Lightning II fighters, the variant capable of vertical takeoff and landing from amphibious assault ships or when ashore.

While the budget intermingles much of the Navy and Marine budget, the Pentagon-issued synopsis includes \$6.3 billion for ground units, and the purchase of 241 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles. Weapons include 103 Naval Strike Missiles, 193 Javelin shoulder-launched missiles, 32 Navy/Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System Launchers and 410 Medium Range Intercept Capability Missiles. The Marines would also receive six of the Medium Landing Ships it unveiled this week as a shore-to-shore vessel that would not be required to use ports to unload its troops and cargo. The design is based on the L-100 transport by Dutch shipbuilder Damen Shipyards.

DOD budget provides \$57B to fix housing and facilities

BY MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Pentagon's \$1.5 trillion budget unveiled Tuesday includes funding to fix problems with barracks.

The proposal calls for \$57 billion across all services, requesting funds for "critical updates" to housing and facilities identified by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth's barracks task force established in October.

The budget includes \$21.5 billion targeted at eliminating all poor and failing barracks, and \$4.4 billion to go toward family housing.

"The investments in this budget will fix all substandard barracks and eliminate barracks that have been deemed poor or failing," Space Force Lt. Gen. Steven P. Whitney, director for force structure, resources and assessment, said during a news conference

at the Pentagon. "We are committed to ensuring they have access to safe, well-maintained and dignified living quarters."

The Navy will spend \$12.5 billion to improve housing for unaccompanied sailors and Marines, and for housing for service members and their families.

This includes \$1.5 billion for 19 new family housing projects worldwide.

"We are making foundational investments in quality of service ... ensuring they have the safe and modern living conditions that they deserve," said Rear Adm. Ben Reynolds, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget.

A 2023 Government Accountability Office investigation detailed an array of problems — such as raw sewage overflows, mold and rodent infestations — that undermine quality of life and overall troop combat readiness.

Virginia votes to redistrict, bolstering Dems

The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK, Va. — Democrats hoping to flip Republican control of the U.S. House of Representatives in this year's midterm elections scored an advantage Tuesday with Virginia's approval of a congressional map likely to net them four additional seats.

Virginia voters narrowly approved a ballot referendum on congressional redistricting that follows a contentious, months-long battle that drew political heavyweights from across the nation. The Associated Press called the election just before 9 p.m. EDT Tuesday with 50.3% in support of the referendum and 49.7% against it.

Democrats currently hold six congressional seats and Repu-

blicans have five. Under the maps approved Tuesday, 10 congressional districts would favor Democrats and one would favor Republicans.

The temporary measure will be in effect for the midterm elections before resuming Virginia's standard redistricting process — led by an independent commission — following the 2030 census.

Virginia lawmakers have already adopted the maps that will take effect.

The new maps will significantly shake up congressional makeups across Hampton Roads and surrounding areas. As a result, some candidates may opt to run for election in different districts.

As Virginia Democrats push

to flip districts long represented by Republicans, some districts in the area are top of the list, including the 1st District, which would be unrecognizable from its current shape. People living in James City County, York County and Williamsburg would be moved into the new 8th District, which would stretch from York to through Spotsylvania County, with a narrow stretch encompassing parts of Northern Virginia, including Alexandria.

The new 8th District would favor Democrats 63.1% to Republicans' 36.9%, based on 2025 election results, according to the Virginia Public Access Project. The current 1st District leans Republican.

The district is currently rep-

resented by U.S. Rep. Rob Wittman, a Republican who's held the seat since 2007.

The 2nd District, represented by Republican U.S. Rep. Jen Kiggans, currently leans Republican but would tilt in favor of Democrats. The proposed district is made up of 54.5% Democrats to 45.5% Republicans, according to VPAP.

Chesapeake would see significant reshuffling of voters with new boundaries drawn between the 2nd and 3rd districts. The city is split between the two districts.

The 3rd district, represented by Democratic U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott, would remain a safe seat for the congressman. The 3rd District would also gain Poquoson.

Secretary: More funding needed for air traffic control

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Efforts to modernize the nation's air traffic control system are moving along with the support of funds provided in last year's reconciliation law, but the Transportation Department will need even more money from Congress to finish the job, Secretary Sean Duffy said Tuesday.

Congress authorized \$12.5 billion in funds to update the U.S. air traffic control system in the July 2025 reconciliation law, an amount Duffy said could help reduce the number of delays, cancellations and other complications in the aviation industry.

Since that law was implemented, the Transportation Department and the Federal Aviation Administration have replaced nearly half the copper wires in the nation's air traffic control system with fiber optic cables, converted about 270 radio sites, installed new surface awareness systems for 54 air-

ports and moved 17 towers from using paper to electronic flight strips, the agencies said Tuesday during a briefing at DOT headquarters. Other efforts the department is undertaking with the funds include a hiring surge of air traffic controllers and an overhaul of the more than 4,600 FAA sites across the country.

The president's budget request for fiscal 2027, released early this month, sought \$4.9 billion for a modernized air traffic control system.

While he noted bipartisan support for aviation concerns, Duffy added, "They're going to have to find a pathway to get us the rest of that money. It's gonna take us time to develop it, deploy it, debug it, train on it, and so getting that software started now — hopefully as our build completes with all the infrastructure — we'll have the technology of the software ready to meet up in two and a half years and have a brand new system for America to use."

FBI probes scientists' deaths, disappearances

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Amid growing national security concerns, the FBI said Tuesday it has launched a broad investigation in the deaths or disappearances of at least 10 scientists and staff connected to highly sensitive research, including four from the Los Angeles area.

"The FBI is spearheading the effort to look for connections into the missing and deceased scientists. We are working with the Department of Energy, Department of War, and with our state and state and local law enforcement partners to find answers," the agency said in a statement.

The FBI's announcement comes after the House Oversight Committee announced that it would probe reports of the disappearance and deaths of the scientists, sending letters seeking information from the agencies involved in the federal probe as well as NASA, which owns the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada Flintridge,

where three of the missing or dead scientists worked.

"If the reports are accurate, these deaths and disappearances may represent a grave threat to U.S. national security and to U.S. personnel with access to scientific secrets," James Comer, R-Ky., chairman of the committee, and Eric Burlison, R-Mo., wrote in the letters.

President Trump told reporters last week that he had been briefed on the missing and dead scientists.

He said at the time that he expected to have some answers on whether the deaths were connected, "in the next week and a half."

Michael David Hicks, who studied comets and asteroids at JPL, was the first of the scientists who disappeared or died. He died on July 30, 2023, at the age of 59. No cause of death was disclosed.

There is no evidence at this point that the deaths and disappearances are connected.

House Dem resigns ahead of sanctions

Miami Herald

Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D-Fla., resigned Tuesday afternoon, minutes before a scheduled Ethics Committee hearing and vote on what sanctions she should face for the more than two dozen counts of misconduct her colleagues charged her with last month.

In a public statement, Cherfilus-McCormick called the committee's two-year-long investigation into her a "witch hunt" and decried the committee for not holding off proceedings until after her criminal trial over fed-

eral charges accusing her of stealing COVID relief funds. She has pleaded not guilty to those charges.

"I simply cannot stand by and allow my due process rights to be trampled on and my good name be tarnished," the Democratic lawmaker wrote on social media.

In a letter to House Speaker Mike Johnson, she said her resignation would take effect at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday. "After careful reflection and prayer, I have concluded that it is in the best interest of my constituents and the institution that I step aside at this

time," she wrote.

The Ethics Committee determined 25 counts of misconduct by Cherfilus-McCormick had been "proven by clear and convincing evidence," including accepting improper campaign donations, money laundering, commingling personal and campaign funds and various other violations.

"This was not a rush to judgment as some would claim," Ethics Committee Chairman Rep. Michael Guest said Tuesday. The committee issued 59 subpoenas, reviewed 33,000 docu-

ments and interviewed 28 witnesses during the course of the investigation.

Republicans have been calling for her resignation for months, and a growing number of Democrats publicly said they would have backed her expulsion had the Ethics Committee recommended it Tuesday, Axios reported.

Shortly before her resignation, the congresswoman's chief of staff told the Miami Herald she planned to campaign to return to her congressional seat — even if she were expelled by the House.

House speaker willing to 'lead' misconduct overhaul

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — As revelations of sexual misconduct continue to ripple through Congress, calls for change are dominating the halls — so much so that House Speaker Mike Johnson said he'd lead the cause himself.

"We are looking at every potential avenue to tighten up the rules and make sure that women have an avenue to report," Johnson, R-La., said at a press conference Tuesday. "So if there are ways to tighten the rules, or suggestions, we're seeking that from all members, we're open to that. ... And I will lead that myself."

A report released Tuesday from the National Women's Defense League, a nonprofit dedicated to preventing sexual harassment, found that 30 members of Congress since 2006 specifically have been publicly accused of sexual harassment in the workplace, with at least 53 accusations.

That number jumps when you include accusations outside of the workplace and instances that took place prior to serving in Congress — at least 137 accusations against 49 members of Congress, the report found.

Roughly 97% of the members

with accusations against them are men, and most target women. Staffers are also the most frequent targets, making up 77% of the public allegations collected by NWDL.

"Governments lack transparent tracking and reporting mechanisms, and actual instances are likely three times higher than what appears in the public record," said Emma Davidson Tribbs, founding director of NWDL. "While we saw a reporting surge during Me Too, the number of reports had begun to decrease."

The report comes on the heels

of a release by the Ethics Committee on Monday saying the panel has, since 2017, initiated 20 investigations into matters involving allegations of sexual misconduct by a member. The committee only named 15 of those members in an attached list.

It's not clear how and when the committee decides to make such probes public. According to the Ethics Committee's statement, the panel has "consistently publicly announced its investigations into publicly reported allegations of sexual misconduct and has announced any findings in those matters."

Southern Poverty Law Center faces 11 fraud charges

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Justice Department announced bank fraud charges against the Southern Poverty Law Center related to \$3 million in payments the civil rights group allegedly made to informants of extremist groups including the Ku Klux Klan.

A federal grand jury in Alabama returned an 11-count indictment charging SPLC with six counts of wire fraud, four counts of bank fraud and one

count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche and FBI Director Kash Patel said at a press conference Tuesday.

Blanche said the group created bank accounts under fictitious organization names to hide the source of payments between 2014 and 2023. As a nonprofit, the civil rights organization is required to operate with transparency and honesty but misled donors and banks about its fun-

draising and spending, he said.

Instead of dismantling extremist groups, SPLC was "manufacturing the extremism it purports to oppose by paying sources to stoke racial hatred," Blanche said.

The civil rights group disputed the claims.

"We are outraged by the false allegations levied against SPLC — an organization that for 55 years has stood as a beacon of hope fighting white supremacy and various forms of injustice to

create a multi-racial democracy where we can all live and thrive," Interim Chief Executive Officer Bryan Fair said in a statement.

According to the indictment, the payments went to eight individuals affiliated with the Klan, United Klans of America, National Socialist Movement, the Aryan Nations affiliated Sadistic Souls Motorcycle Club, the Nationalist Socialist Party of America and the neo-Nazi organization the National Alliance.

Top admiral leans into shore-side upgrades

Caudle has prioritized work-life balance through ‘Sailors First’ initiative

By ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

HOUSTON — The Navy’s top officer has a problem — and he’s pretty happy about it.

The service is seeing record retention and recruiting levels for a second year in a row, a “dream problem” for a chief of naval operations, said Adm. Daryl Caudle, who stepped into the role in August after leading Fleet Forces Command.

Nearly all ships are filled at about 90% or higher and nearly as many sailors are matched to their specific job on the ship, leaving him the breathing room to tackle other challenges within the service, Caudle said during an interview April 15 as the Navy hosted its first Fleet Week in a Texas city.

Caudle has leaned into keeping and incentivizing the best, most technically skilled sailors to remain in the service and is making sure their experience with the military is “world-class.”

Now eight months into the job, Caudle has prioritized work-life balance through a “Sailors First” initiative. It is focused on life challenges that can be exacerbated by the nature of military service, such as access to affordable child care, a variety of healthy meals, reliable internet access and smartphone-compatible administrative systems and housing that is not on the ship where a sailor is assigned to duty.

That work begins with bringing in clear-eyed new recruits who know what the Navy is about, he said. Recruiting is about 1 to 2 percentage points

ahead of where it was this time last year, which saw the service enlist 44,096 future sailors — a number not seen since the early 2000s.

The fact that about 90% of all enlistees make it to their first afloat unit shows that recruiters are finding the right folks for the job and the service’s prep course and initial trainings are effective, he said.

One of the first things Caudle focused on for those new, younger sailors is making sure they have a place to live off the ship when not underway. Dubbed “No Sailor Lives Afloat,” the initiative has moved roughly 5,900 sailors into barracks instead of berthing, according to Navy Installation Command.

To do this, the service authorized more senior sailors to receive a housing allowance to live off base and free up space in the barracks, Caudle said.

The idea that the sailors deployed for more than 10 months now on the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford — a post-Vietnam War record for a carrier — could come home and keep living on the ship “is just not right,” he said. It is small and restrictive and does not give them the reprieve from work needed to disconnect, socialize and learn independence.

“I want them to grow up a bit and be on their own, and I think they have the opportunity to do that more if they’re not on the ship,” he said.

Meeting that goal in some locations has proved more difficult because of low supplies of affordable housing near the base, such as in San Diego and

Rota, Spain, and also across Japan, Caudle said.

Once sailors are settled on a base, Caudle has reimagined galley facilities to be more like those feeding athletes on college campuses across the United States. Unlike the Army, which is outsourcing a similar effort through private contracts, the Navy is sending its cooks to the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y.

There, Navy cooks are training with professional chefs on a 35-day menu with different stations, said Rear Adm. John Hewitt, commander of Navy Region Southeast. The first transformed galley will open in his region next month at Naval Construction Battalion Center Gulfport, in Mississippi.

“I saw some pictures of them being trained by the chef and the dishes they are putting out, it was like we’ve never seen in our galleys before,” said Hewitt, who oversees 18 bases. He answered questions during a tour of the littoral combat ship the USS St. Louis in Houston.

The move to fresh, made-to-order meals is answering a call from sailors for more healthy options and more variety, Hewitt said.

Another quick fix that began in 2024 was for all gyms to stay open 24/7. It’s done, Hewitt said.

“You have to register, but once you’re registered, anytime, you can walk into any fitness center and gym. That’s huge,” he said. “That was a huge demand signal from the fleet, from our sailors, and they love it.”

An ongoing initiative to get free wireless internet to all bases is at about 85%, and Caudle said he’s now working toward smartphone-based applications for paperwork related to moving, pay and searching for a new assignment — not just a PDF that people fill out just as they would on paper.

He did acknowledge that there are facilities on Navy bases that have fallen into disrepair because of an underinvestment on infrastructure — something that has plagued all the services.

For years, the Navy funded its facility needs at about 60% to 70%, leaving some of them “brittle.” That includes hangars, roads, piers and service infrastructure for air, oil, water and power.

“You can do that for a short period of time and then prioritize and hide the fact that you’re not getting all the resources you need to sustain your facilities, but eventually it catches up, and we’re there,” Caudle said.

“I don’t want our sailors to be in a classroom with a bucket beside them because the roof leaks,” he said. “I want them to feel like they’re in a world-class environment.”

Hewitt said turning the tide in the southeast region is going to take time and the order of repair prioritizes the requirements of the fleet.

“We have to be in sync with the fleet. You can think of wharfs, piers, dry docks, airfields, unaccompanied housing, all of those things are really, really high on the list,” he said.

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Blazers rally past Spurs after Wemby exits

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Scoot Henderson scored 31 points and the Portland Trail Blazers took advantage after a scary injury to Spurs star Victor Wembanyama, rallying for a 106-103 victory over San Antonio on Tuesday night to even their Western Conference playoff series at one game apiece.

Wembanyama was diagnosed with a concussion after he tumbled face-first when he was fouled by Jrue Holiday and his jaw slammed into the floor. He did not return after the injury in the second quarter and entered the NBA's concussion protocol, which raises the possibility the versatile 7-foot-4 center could miss multiple games.

"He has a concussion. He's in the protocol," Spurs coach Mitch Johnson said after the

game. "We'll take the proper and appropriate steps."

Any extended absence by Wembanyama would be a massive blow to San Antonio, which finished with the league's second-best record behind the versatile center from France.

Under league guidelines, a player in the concussion protocol must have at least 48 hours of inactivity and recovery and then hit several benchmarks without symptoms before being cleared to play. A player must undergo neurological testing and receive a final clearance from a team doctor in consultation with the league's concussion protocol director.

Game 3 is Friday in Portland. It seems improbable that Wembanyama would be cleared by then, but Johnson wouldn't speculate about his status.

"The protocol is the protocol," Johnson said. "We'll just follow it as everyone else does and plan accordingly."

No. 2 seed San Antonio looked like it could win without Wemby, building a 14-point lead early in the fourth quarter before its offense stagnated.

Portland held San Antonio without a field goal for the final 3:37 as the Blazers closed the game on an 11-2 run. Robert Williams III converted an alley-oop dunk with 12 seconds left for a 104-101 lead after Deni Avdija muscled through the paint and fed him the ball.

"As a team, as a unit, I think that was our goal — to be aggressive," Henderson said. "Hit everybody that comes through the paint, box out and play fast. I think that was all of our success and that kind of opened the floor

for all of us."

The Spurs went 12-6 during the regular season without Wembanyama.

"We've all got to step up," Spurs guard Devin Vassell said. "We know what Vic brings to the table. We've played without him for a couple games this year. It's going to be next man up. Everybody's going to have to step up. That's a huge void to fill. We can't get bogged down by it."

Holiday had 16 points and nine assists.

Stephon Castle led the Spurs with 18 points and De'Aaron Fox added 17. Vassell had 16 points and 12 rebounds, missed a 3 with 2 seconds left.

After scoring 35 points in the Spurs' Game 1 win, Wembanyama had five points, four rebounds, one blocked shot and one assist in 12 minutes.

Edgecombe, Maxey big nights lead 76ers past Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — V.J. Edgecombe had 30 points and 10 rebounds while playing through pain after taking a hard fall on his back early in the game, Tyrese Maxey scored 29 points and the Philadelphia 76ers beat the Boston Celtics 111-97 on Tuesday night to tie their playoff series at one game apiece.

Edgecombe made six of the 76ers' 19 3-pointers. Maxey also had nine assists as Philadelphia bounced back after getting blown out 123-91 in Game 1. Edgecombe is the first rookie to record at least 30 points and 10 rebounds in a playoff game since Tim Duncan on May 5, 1998.

"I think we knew where the shots were going to come from," Edgecombe said. "We kept trusting each other. Everyone can make a play on the court. ... They wanted me to shoot the ball."

The Celtics cut a seven-point deficit at the start of the fourth

quarter to 91-89 before an 11-0 run put the 76ers back in front 102-89 with just over four minutes to play. The Celtics pulled their starters with a more than a minute left.

Jaylen Brown led the Celtics with 36 points. Jayson Tatum added 19 points, 14 rebounds and nine assists.

"I thought Edgecombe was just too comfortable," Brown said. "He's a rookie, but he can play. We've got to be better on him."

After struggling from the field in Game 1, the 76ers needed much more from Maxey and Edgecombe. They got it, with the pair carrying the load for a team that shot 47.8% from the field, including 19-for-39 from the 3-point line.

"I grab (Edgecombe) and Tyrese together a lot and remind them to be super aggressive," 76ers coach Nick Nurse said. "Fire it up there, like keep shooting no matter what."

Boston was only 13-for-47

from the 3-point line and shot 39.3% from the field overall, while committing 13 turnovers leading to 16 points by the 76ers.

Lakers 101, Rockets 94: LeBron James had 28 points, eight rebounds and seven assists, and short-handed Los Angeles outlasted visiting Houston for a victory and a stunning 2-0 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Marcus Smart had 25 points and seven assists for the Lakers, who have twice overcome the absences of Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves with a team effort led by the 41-year-old James. Los Angeles did it again in Game 2 despite the return of Kevin Durant, who scored just three of his 23 points in the second half against the Lakers' tenacious defense.

"We executed the game plan offensively and defensively, shored up some of our mistakes from Game 1, and just got into a dogfight," James said. "When

we have two big guns out like we have, we've all got to pick up our play, and that's all it's about. We're all just trying to make contributions on offense and seize the opportunity."

Luke Kennard scored 23 points for Los Angeles, which nursed a small lead throughout the fourth quarter of Game 2. Smart found James streaking down the lane for a theatrical dunk with 55 seconds to play, and Kennard added two late free throws to ice it.

Alperen Sengun had 20 points and 11 rebounds for the fifth-seeded Rockets, who again struggled offensively even with Durant making his Houston playoff debut. Jabari Smith Jr. scored 18 points and Amen Thompson had 16, but the Rockets made only 40.4% of their shots and managed just seven 3-pointers.

Three days after he missed the series opener with a right knee bruise, Durant took only 12 shots and had nine turnovers

Bruins score 3 in 2nd, pull even with Sabres

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Morgan Geekie bounced in a shot from beyond center as part of Boston's three-goal second-period surge and the Bruins beat the Buffalo Sabres 4-2 to even their first-round playoff series at 1 on Tuesday night.

Viktor Arvidsson scored twice and Pavel Zacha also scored. David Pastrnak had two assists to give him five points in the series and tie Bobby Orr for eighth on the Bruins career playoff list with 92 points.

Jeremy Swayman stopped 32 shots, and this time Boston managed to not blow a multigoal third-period lead.

Bowen Byram and Peyton Krebs scored 1:14 apart to cut Boston's lead to 4-2 with 4:52 remaining in regulation before being stymied by Swayman, who stopped the final eight shots he faced.

The Sabres opened the series with a 4-3 win in which they overcame a 2-0 third-period deficit by scoring four times in the final 7:58 of regulation on Sunday.

"A series doesn't start until

you win one on the road and that's important for us moving forward," Swayman said. "The biggest thing for our group is we left the past in the past and understood there was an opportunity tonight and seized it."

The series shifts to Boston for Game 3 on Thursday night.

Rather than carry over the momentum from Sunday, the Sabres gradually sagged due to spotty goaltending and an anemic power play. Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen finished with 15 saves and was pulled after allowing Arvidsson's second goal 16 seconds into the third period to put Boston up 4-0. Alex Lyon mopped up and finished stopping all seven shots he faced.

Luukkonen looked shaky on three of the four goals allowed.

Coach Lindy Ruff refused to blame Luukkonen specifically. He called Geekie's goal "lucky," and added: "This team has been so good about we win together, we lose together. I'm not going to sit here and criticize that goal."

And yet, Ruff didn't rule out the possibility of going with Lyon in Game 3.

Arvidsson opened the scoring

4:54 into the second period by beating Buffalo defender Mattias Samuelsson to a loose puck. He then drove in and beat Luukkonen through the legs after the goalie was late in getting his stick down.

Then came Geekie's goal some 12 minutes later. From just outside the center line, the forward flipped a high backhander at the Buffalo net. Luukkonen came out of his crease in an attempt to glove it, only to have the puck bounce past him.

Geekie smiled when asked if he ever scored a goal like that and said: "No. And I don't think ever will again. Honestly, was just trying to dump it in and got a lucky bounce."

Luukkonen took the blame on misplaying Geekie's shot.

"It's a bad bounce. There's no way around it: It can't go in. Just kind of made a bad read on it," he said. "I feel like the biggest thing for me, personally is if there's a bad bounce, bad goal, you have to stop the bleeding. But wasn't able to do that tonight."

After Zacha redirected Pastrnak's centering pass for a pow-

er-play goal with 1:50 left in the second period, Arvidsson scored by driving up the right wing and beating Luukkonen through the legs from 25 feet.

Buffalo's power play continued to struggle in going 0-of-5 on Tuesday and 0-of-9 in two games.

Ruff acknowledged the power play's struggles, but otherwise took the loss in stride.

"It's playoff hockey. Our guys have experienced very little of it. Now in a matter of few days, they've been able to experience two games," Ruff said. "There's areas we're going to have to get better at, but don't want to see one person doubting that we're not going to go into Boston and win a hockey game."

With the city still buzzing from Buffalo's stunning win in Game 1, Bills quarterback Josh Allen kicked things off by beating the drum to lead the "Let's go, Buffalo!" chants. The new father, wearing the jersey of Sabres forward and occasional golf partner Alex Tuch, then chugged a can of beer before violently throwing it to the ground to a crescendo of cheers.

Roy scores on rebound, lifting Avs to OT win over Kings

Associated Press

DENVER — Nicolas Roy scored on a rebound 7:44 into overtime and Scott Wedgewood made 24 saves, including a penalty shot, as the Colorado Avalanche beat the Los Angeles Kings to take a 2-0 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Roy put the winner through the legs of defenseman Brandt Clarke and into the net to set off a wild celebration.

The game was halted for roughly 17 minutes in the second period when a pane of glass shattered behind the Kings bench, sending pieces raining on interim coach D.J. Smith. The incident occurred right after Quinton Byfield was stopped on a pen-

alty shot by Wedgewood and fans began to celebrate by pounding on the glass. It gave way as Smith covered his head and then brushed the glass off his suit.

Colorado is 17-2 in playoff series when taking a 2-0 lead since relocating to Denver before the 1995-96 season. Los Angeles is 3-12 in postseason series when facing an 0-2 hole.

Mammoth 3, Golden Knights 2: Logan Cooley scored off a rebound with six minutes left to give Utah a road victory over Vegas, and the Mammoth will head back home with a split of the first two games in their first-round playoffs series.

Game 3 of the best-of-seven series is Friday night in Salt Lake

City.

Cooley, a 21-year-old from Pittsburgh, is the youngest U.S.-born player to score a goal in each of his first two playoff games.

It's the first playoff victory for the Mammoth since the organization relocated from Arizona two years ago.

This was the Golden Knights' first regulation defeat under coach John Tortorella (8-1-1).

Dylan Guenther had a goal and assist for the Mammoth, MacKenzie Weegar scored and Kailer Yamamoto finished with two assists.

Lightning 3, Canadiens 2: J.J. Moser scored 12:48 into overtime to give Tampa Bay a home victo-

ry over Montreal, tying the first-round playoff series at 1-1.

The series shifts to Montreal for two games, with Game 3 set for Friday night. Game 4 is Sunday.

Brandon Hagel had a Gordie Howe hat trick with a goal, assist and a fight, and teammate Nikita Kucherov also scored for Tampa Bay. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 25 shots.

The Lightning had lost four consecutive home playoff games and 10 of the past 11, dating to Game 4 against Colorado in the 2022 Stanley Cup Final.

Lane Hutson and Josh Anderson scored for the Canadiens. Jakub Dobes finished with 31 saves.

Stanton, Gil get on track for Yankees

Associated Press

BOSTON — Giancarlo Stanton hit a solo homer in the second and added a two-run double as the New York Yankees extended their winning streak to four with a 4-0 win over the Boston Red Sox on Tuesday night.

Stanton, who sat out a 7-0 win over Kansas City on Sunday after going 0-for-9 in his previous two games, drove in the first three runs for New York and gave starter Luis Gil all the offense he needed against the struggling Red Sox.

Gil (1-1) picked up his first win of the season holding Boston to just two hits as the Yankees out-hit the Red Sox 10-4 and cruised to their major league-leading fifth shutout of the season. Cody Bellinger extended his hitting streak to nine straight with a single in the eighth and scored on Randal Grichuk's double to center.

The Red Sox went without a hit from Marcelo Mayer's double in the second until Carlos Narváez singled in the eighth. Boston lost for the third time in four games.

Gil hadn't gone more than five innings in either of his previous two starts. He went 6⅓ on Tuesday with two strikeouts and three walks.

Stanton led off the second with a towering shot to left, driving a 1-0 slider from Connelly Early (1-1) over the Green Monster for his third homer of the season and New York's 19th in the last eight games.

Stanton drove in two more in the sixth with a drive off the scoreboard in left-center, bringing in Amed Rosario and Aaron Judge after the Yankees led off the inning with back-to-back walks. Stanton was robbed of another hit in the eighth when Ceddanne Rafaela made a leaping catch at the center-field wall.

New York's Ben Rice, who had homered in four straight games, was 0-for-4 — striking

out all four times.

Giants 3, Dodgers 1: Jung Hoo Lee and Rafael Devers each hit RBI singles in the first inning that held up to support starter Landen Roupp, and host San Francisco beat Los Angeles.

Shohei Ohtani went hitless with a pair of strikeouts in his initial three at-bats before a seventh-inning single that extended his career-best on-base streak to 53 games, tied for second place on the Dodgers' franchise list with Shawn Green.

On the 3-1 pitch from Erik Miller before his single, Ohtani challenged thinking it was a ball, but the called strike was upheld to make it full count.

Brewers 12, Tigers 4: Brice Turang drove in four runs and David Hamilton had four hits as visiting Milwaukee routed Detroit.

Despite missing their top three hitters, the Brewers put 19 runners on base and scored in double digits for the second time this season. They have won five of six.

Detroit lost its second straight after winning eight of nine.

Guardians 8, Astros 5: Chase DeLauter hit a bases-loaded triple down the left-field line in the eighth inning as Cleveland rallied for a home victory over Houston.

The Guardians' rally spoiled a milestone night for Houston's Jose Altuve, who became the third player in franchise history to reach 2,000 career games.

Nationals 11, Braves 4: James Wood homered, Luis García Jr. had four hits and host Washington snapped Atlanta's six-game winning streak.

The Nationals scored three runs before Atlanta starter Reynaldo López (1-1) retired a hitter, and the right-hander was done two batters into the second. Foster Griffin (3-0) allowed three runs and five hits in six innings.

Reds 12, Rays 6: Elly De La Cruz hit two of Cincinnati's five

home runs, rookie Sal Stewart added three RBIs to reach 24 on the season and the Reds scored the first nine runs to cruise to a road victory over Tampa Bay.

Cincinnati (16-8) has won five straight for its best start after 24 games since the 2006 team began 17-7.

Twins 5, Mets 3: Embattled Mets closer Devin Williams allowed a tiebreaking RBI single to Luke Keaschall in the ninth inning, and New York lost its 12th consecutive game, falling to visiting Minnesota.

The Mets' skid is their longest since they dropped 12 straight from Aug. 10-23, 2002. No team has made the playoffs after a season in which it lost 12 in a row.

Cardinals 5, Marlins 3: Nathan Church hit a two-run homer and Alec Burleson had two RBIs to back a strong start by Dustin May and visiting St. Louis beat Miami.

May (3-2) allowed a leadoff home run to Jakob Marsee — his first of the season — but then settled down. He left with one on and one out in the sixth, allowing a run and six hits. Justin Bruihl followed with 1⅓ scoreless innings.

Cubs 7, Phillies 4: Shota Imanaga pitched seven innings of three-hit ball in his fourth consecutive sharp start and Chicago extended its winning streak to seven games with a home win over Philadelphia.

Nico Hoerner hit a solo homer and Seiya Suzuki followed with two-run drive to the back of the left-field bleachers in the seventh inning. Chicago has outscored opponents 51-18 during its winning streak, the team's longest since an eight-game run in July 2023.

Royals 6, Orioles 5: Maikel Garcia raced home on a game-ending wild pitch as Kansas City rallied for a home win over Baltimore, snapping an eight-game losing streak.

After Garcia and Bobby Witt

Jr., drew walks to lead off the ninth, Vinnie Pasquantino struck out with runners advancing to second and third on Ryan Helsley's (0-2) wild pitch.

Rangers 5, Pirates 1: Kumar Rocker allowed a run in six innings and Evan Carter drove in the tying run before robbing Oneil Cruz of a three-run homer, leading Texas to a home victory over Pittsburgh.

Cruz singled leading off the game against Rocker (1-1). He stole second and took an extra base on Danny Jansen's throwing error. Ryan O'Hearn singled for a 1-0 lead two batters into the game.

Padres 1, Rockies 0: Randy Vásquez threw seven shutout innings to help visiting San Diego edge Colorado.

The win was the Padres' 14th in their last 16 games following a 2-5 start to the season. They improved to 15-3 since the start of last season against the Rockies, who they've defeated seven times in a row.

Blue Jays 4, Angels 2: Lenyn Sosa had a pinch-hit, two-run double during a three-run eighth inning, reliever Louis Varland bailed out struggling closer Jeff Hoffman by inducing a game-ending double-play grounder, and Toronto held on for a road win over Los Angeles.

Hoffman struck out Zach Neto to open the ninth, but Mike Trout singled and Jo Adell and Jorge Soler were hit by pitches to load the bases. Pinch-hitter Yoán Moncada's RBI single made it 4-2.

Athletics 5, Mariners 2: Shea Langeliers hit his eighth homer, Jacob Lopez pitched effectively into the sixth inning and the visiting Athletics beat Seattle.

The Athletics have won seven straight road games.

White Sox 11, Diamondbacks 5: Rookie Munetaka Murakami homered for the fourth straight game, Sean Burke won for the first time in 17 appearances, and visiting Chicago beat Arizona.