

NATO speeds its defense spending pace

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Military spending in Europe last year increased at its fastest pace in nearly three-quarters of a century, according to a new analysis that also showed American expenditures declining in 2025.

While the United States remains by far the biggest individual military spender, its total of \$954 billion marked a 7.5% drop from 2024, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute said in its annual report published Monday.

The decline was primarily related to a halt in new military assistance to Ukraine last year, the report said.

But it may be short-lived, with a new U.S. budget proposal calling for defense spending of \$1.5 trillion.

Globally, military outlays climbed to \$2.8 trillion, accounting for 2.5% of gross domestic product overall. The top three spenders — the United States, China and Russia — accounted for 51% of that total, with a combined figure of \$1.4 trillion, the report said.

Meanwhile, European defense expenditures drove much of the global increase, the report said.

“In 2025 military spending by European NATO members rose faster than at any time since 1953, reflecting the ongoing pursuit of European self-reliance alongside increasing pressure from the United States to strengthen burden sharing within the alliance,” researcher Jade Guiberteau Ricard said.

NATO’s European members spent a combined \$559 billion in 2025. Germany led the way with

a 24% year-on-year increase to \$114 billion. It also spent more than 2% of GDP on defense for the first time since 1990.

The rise of Germany as a military power is a marked turnaround from just a few years ago when the country was regarded as a defense spending laggard and free rider by its critics.

President Donald Trump frequently singled Germany out for criticism over the issue.

Now, top Defense Department officials have heaped praise on Germany, which last week issued a new defense strategy calling for development of Europe’s strongest land force in the next decade.

The push comes amid fears that Russia could turn its attention to NATO’s eastern flank once its war in Ukraine ends.

Worries about a drawdown of U.S. forces or reduction in the

level of American commitment to NATO also have added to the sense of urgency.

As spending has ramped up, so has Germany’s defense industrial base, with manufacturers opening new factories and converting old ones to churn out ammunition.

Armin Papperger, CEO of German weapons producer Rheinmetall, said last week the company has increased its production capacity for trucks from 600 to 4,500 per year, for medium-caliber ammunition from 800,000 to more than 4 million rounds and for artillery from 70,000 to 1.1 million rounds.

Germany now has more production capacity for conventional ammunition than the United States, Papperger told the crowd at an event in Hamburg, as quoted by the German Press Agency.

Iran official meets with Putin as US talks stalled

Bloomberg News

Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told President Vladimir Putin he’s committed to strengthening the country’s partnership with Russia, as talks with the U.S. on ending an eight-week war remain at an impasse.

Araghchi said on a visit to Russia that the Iranian people are able to resist “U.S. aggression and will be able to overcome it,” Iran state-owned Nour News said on Monday.

The Russia trip comes after an Axios report that said Tehran has signaled it might accept an interim deal whereby it reopens the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for Washington ending its blockade of Iranian ports.

Iranian media said Sunday that Araghchi would convey to mediator Pakistan that the conflict could end if the Americans lift their naval blockade, agree to a new legal framework for traffic going through the strait and guarantee there will be no future military action against the Islamic Republic.

Iran told Pakistan that negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program could be dealt with later, Axios reported, citing a U.S. official and two people with knowledge of the matter.

The U.S. hasn’t commented on Iran’s idea, though President Donald Trump acknowledged a new plan from Tehran on Saturday. A White House spokesperson said in a statement to

Bloomberg that the U.S. “holds the cards and will only make a deal that puts the American people first, never allowing Iran to have a nuclear weapon.”

Trump told journalists Saturday that after he called off a trip by his envoys to Pakistan, Iran sent a “much better” proposal.

He did not elaborate but stressed that one of his conditions is that Iran “will not have a nuclear weapon.” Iran insists its program is peaceful, but the U.S. wants to remove Tehran’s stockpile of highly enriched uranium, which could be used to build a bomb, should Tehran choose to pursue one.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz disagreed with Trump’s assessment, telling a

group of students the U.S. is being “humiliated” by Iranian leaders and that he can’t figure out what exit the Americans are pursuing.

“The problem with conflicts like these is always the same: It’s not just about getting in. You also have to get out,” Merz said.

An interim deal would echo what many Middle East analysts have said — that the U.S. and Iran should reopen the strait as soon as possible to lower fuel prices and ease pressure on the global economy, while leaving issues such as Iran’s nuclear program for later talks.

The White House has said the blockade is putting pressure on Iran to make concessions by choking off its oil exports.

SOUTHCOM leans into autonomous warfare

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

The leader of U.S. Southern Command has directed the establishment of the SOUTHCOM Autonomous Warfare Command, the combatant command announced Tuesday. It will focus on the use of drones and emerging technology to counter threats.

“From the seafloor to space and across the cyber domain, we fully intend to leverage the clear superiority of the American defense ecosystem by de-

veloping cutting-edge innovation and working ever closer with our enduring partners in the region to outmatch those who threaten our collective peace and security,” Marine Corps Gen. Francis Donovan said in a statement.

The statement did not say how long it would take to establish the warfare command; SOUTHCOM did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

“Once fully established, the new command will be dedicated

to employing autonomous, semiautonomous and unmanned platforms and systems to counter threats and challenges across domains, linking tactical missions to long-term strategic effects,” the statement said.

The Pentagon’s \$1.5 trillion budget request unveiled last Tuesday wants to triple spending on drones and related autonomous technologies to more than \$74 billion. The SOUTHCOM announcement comes after U.S. Central Command in

September said it would set up a new task force to quickly get drones and cutting-edge technology to troops in 60 days or fewer.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in July issued new policies aimed at cutting through bureaucratic red tape that limited the military’s ability to quickly purchase and field small drones with vast capabilities. Such drones could be used to gather intelligence, drop supplies to troops or deliver lethal munitions on enemy positions.

New 3D printing platform to boost sub production

AL.com

To produce the nuclear submarines that the U.S. Navy wants, it needs more suppliers producing more parts more quickly, often using cutting-edge techniques and exotic materials.

Factoring in the need to preserve national security while doing all this poses a major logistical challenge. Mobile-based Austal USA says it has the answer.

Austal announced it would demonstrate a new digital platform at Air-Sea-Space 2026, a major military-industrial trade show that was held April 20-22 in Maryland.

The platform is called Digital Secure Exchange for Additive. According to an Austal USA announcement, it will “enable trusted sharing of manufacturing data among the Navy, equipment manufacturers and certified additive manufacturing suppliers.”

Additive manufacturing is the use of 3D printing and other advanced techniques to produce parts. In the Navy’s case, they may be extremely specialized and may be required to meet precise and confidential specifications.

Austal is already heavily involved in the field: It has an advanced technology team and

leads the operation of the Navy Additive Manufacturing Center of Excellence in Danville, Va. Austal said it is “directly supporting the production of more than 70 supplier-manufactured AM parts scheduled for fleet installation.”

Austal is not the only Alabama supplier in the game. A \$2.4-billion project has begun to transform a Colbert County railcar factory into a submarine component plant.

Speaking to AL.com earlier in April, Dan Brintzinghoffer, Austal USA’s chief growth officer, said additive manufacturing promises to make specialized replacement parts availa-

ble in days rather than months. But to achieve that, the manufacturers and their processes must be validated, and the specifications for the parts must be available within a system that preserves strategic secrecy.

“One of the biggest problems that we have right now, both in terms of the new construction and in-service repair, is the availability of parts,” said Brintzinghoffer, a retired U.S. Navy captain.

Whether Austal’s Digital SEA platform will win widespread adoption remains to be seen, but Austal said the incentive is strong.

Okinawa-based commander tapped for top Marine post

By BRIAN MCELHINEY
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A senior Marine Corps general in Japan has been tapped to lead the largest operational command in the force.

Lt. Gen. Roger Turner was nominated by President Donald Trump to command Marine

Corps Forces Pacific and Fleet Marine Force Pacific, both based at Camp H.M. Smith in Hawaii, the Pentagon announced April 15.

If confirmed by the Senate, Turner will succeed Lt. Gen. James Glynn, who has led the commands since September 2024.

Turner has commanded III Marine Expeditionary Force and Marine Forces Japan since January 2024.

“I am deeply humbled by the nomination to command U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific and am looking forward to furthering the mission and bolstering our alliances and partner-

ships throughout the Indo-Pacific region,” Turner told Stars and Stripes in a statement emailed Monday by III MEF spokeswoman Capt. Sydney Murkins.

Lt. Gen. Benjamin Watson, a native of Syracuse, N.Y., has been nominated to replace Turner.

2nd 'Hinckley Hilton' attack raises concerns

Bloomberg News

WASHINGTON — An attempted attack at Saturday's White House Correspondents' Dinner is spurring fresh questions about the security around President Donald Trump and other top officials.

The armed assailant, who investigators believe was staying at the Washington Hilton where the dinner was being held, ran past a security checkpoint before being apprehended after a brief pursuit that included gunfire. Administration officials said Sunday they believe he was targeting U.S. officials, including Trump, who faced a pair of assassination attempts in 2024.

Trump and others have praised the U.S. Secret Service for the response and for successfully quelling the attack, but it may yet prompt a review of precautions and procedures as Trump wondered aloud about the vulnerabilities of the venue. The security for the event was essentially designed as a tight perimeter around the ballroom,

with the rest of the hotel largely open to the public, raising questions about how close a potential attacker could get.

"I think we have to. We have to take a look at the outer perimeter," Rep. Michael McCaul, a Republican from Texas and former chairman of the House Homeland Security panel, told "Bloomberg This Weekend" on Sunday. "I do think we'll be analyzing that."

Trump, speaking after the incident, called the Hilton "not a particularly secure building" and said again on Sunday morning that the attempted attack reinforces the need for his controversial White House ballroom project, saying that will be more secure. But it's not an obvious venue for the annual media dinner, which is hosted by the White House Correspondents' Association, not by the White House.

Nonetheless, the ordeal exposed long-standing vulnerabilities in how one of Washington's most high-profile annual events is secured, current and former

law enforcement officials said. The Hilton, in particular, is already infamous in Washington as the site where then-President Ronald Reagan was shot by gunman John Hinckley Jr. outside the hotel doors — the hotel is still referred to colloquially in Washington as the "Hinckley Hilton." Changes were made after that shooting, including building a secure entry for the president.

At the hotel on Saturday, guests and members of the public were able to enter the hotel with relative ease, such as by flashing an invitation, and did not have to go through security — magnetometers, similar to those at an airport or major sporting event — until they were moving toward the ballroom, two levels down from the main floor.

Current and former law enforcement officials said the single checkpoint was not as thin as it appears — every other point of entry into the ballroom was frozen and manned by standing agents, making the magnetome-

ters the only viable path in. In addition, the U.S. Secret Service's primary role is to safeguard the president, his family and key dignitaries, and the gunman didn't make it into the ballroom where they were.

The suspect, Cole Tomas Allen, apparently was surprised by what he described as lax security. "I expected security cameras at every bend, bugged hotel rooms, armed agents every 10 feet, metal detectors out the wazoo," he wrote in a manifesto to family members and seen by Bloomberg. "What I got (who knows, maybe they're pranking me!) is nothing."

Allen was taken into custody after the shooting on Saturday night and is being charged in federal court in Washington.

Secret Service Director Sean Curran defended the agency's response in a statement Sunday. "That individual, when he charged a checkpoint, was apprehended," Curran said. "It shows that our multi-layered protection works."

Dinner chaos offset by clip of man enjoying his salad

New York Daily News

As guests dove for cover and Secret Service agents spirited high-level federal officials out of the White House Correspondents' Dinner on Saturday, one man could be seen casually finishing his salad.

Michael Glantz, a senior agent with Creative Artists Agency, appeared unperturbed amid the chaos as Secret Service agents swirled around him and freaked-out fellow diners huddled under their tables.

Elsewhere in the room, one journalist could be seen pouring himself another glass of wine and other guests apparently grabbed bottles on their way out. But Glantz was the only one to go viral.

The approximately 2,000 atten-

dees had barely dug into their salad when apparent gunshots rang out on the other side of the doors to the ballroom at the Washington Hilton. Heavily armed Secret Service agents burst in yelling at everyone to get down.

Glantz remained upright at his otherwise empty table, and his nonchalant noshing was caught on a CNN livestream of the room.

Social media went wild, dubbing him "the salad man," according to The New York Times. CNN chief media analyst Brian Stelter identified him as Glantz.

Glantz pleaded curiosity. He didn't want to miss a second of the action, he told TMZ.

"Not every day you see something like that go down," Glantz said.

Deadly tornado confirmed as storms hit North Texas

The Dallas Morning News

Two people were killed when a strong storm brought tornados through Parker and Wise counties in Texas on Saturday night, officials confirmed.

The National Weather Service confirmed Sunday that a tornado hit the Runaway Bay area in Wise County, bringing wind gusts of up to 135 mph.

A person was killed and at least six people were treated or transported by first responders for storm related injuries, Wise County Judge J.D. Clark said at a news conference Sunday morning.

The extreme weather caused hazardous conditions and affected first responders' access due to debris, blocked roadways

and downed utilities, he said. At least 20 families have been displaced, according to Clark.

The weather service also confirmed Sunday that a tornado hit the Springtown area in Parker County, bringing wind gusts of up to 105 mph.

A state of disaster was expected to be issued in Springtown around noon Sunday, said Springtown Assistant City Administrator Christina Derr.

Parker County Emergency Services Assistant Fire Chief David Pruitt confirmed to The Dallas Morning News that a person died in the storm just south of Springtown. The person died in a structural collapse in a mobile home outside the town, according to Pruitt and Derr.

Report: UK must rethink reliance on US

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

The United Kingdom needs to rethink its long-standing strategic reliance on the United States for defense, according to a new British parliamentary report.

It warns of potential implications for NATO allies, saying the trans-Atlantic partnership is entering a more uncertain and transactional era.

Britain must “banish the sentimental illusion” of a permanent “special relationship” with Washington and instead prepare for a future in which U.S. priorities may not align as closely with Europe, the report said.

In terms of defense, the relationship has resulted in “a dependency culture that has led to the atrophying of U.K. capabilities,” the International Relations and Defense Committee in the House of Lords, the upper chamber of Parliament, said in the report released Wednesday.

It comes nearly two months after the U.S. and Israel began airstrikes targeting Iran’s nuclear and military facilities, and as President Donald Trump has stepped up criti-

cism of European allies, including the United Kingdom, for what he considers insufficient support for U.S. efforts in the Middle East.

The U.K. has allowed the U.S. to use British bases for “defensive operations” against Iran, but the Trump administration has suggested that London should do more.

An internal Pentagon email said the U.S. was considering options to punish NATO allies it views as unsupportive of the war, including seeking Spain’s suspension from the alliance and reviewing the American position on the U.K.’s claim to the Falkland Islands, Reuters reported Friday.

The release comes as King Charles III begins a visit to the United States on Monday, an effort British officials hope will help reinforce ties between the two allies even as tensions rise.

Against that backdrop, the committee warned that the nature of the U.S.-U.K. relationship is already shifting.

“Political priorities in the U.S. will give rise to a relationship that, while still close, will be far more transactional and interest-

based than previously,” the report said. “The U.K. must respond by strengthening alternative partnerships and rebuild its own capacity to act without U.S. support where feasible and in its interests.”

British lawmakers delayed the publication of the report to incorporate evidence from the early stages of the Iran war, assessing what developments through April 15 revealed about the state of U.S.-U.K. relations.

The lack of consultation ahead of the Iran strikes and “an unpredictable and, at times, antagonistic diplomatic style” are among several factors that have put the U.S.-U.K. relationship under its greatest strain since World War II, the report said.

“The U.K. must reframe its relationship with the U.S. and adopt a more balanced approach to hedge against a less dependable ally whose strategic priorities are shifting,” the report said.

In addition, it’s imperative for the U.K. to invest more in its own sovereign capabilities and work with European partners to develop the means required to collectively deter Russian aggression, the report authors said.

Legionella bacteria found in hospital water system

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

NAPLES, Italy — Water at the Navy’s largest installation in Italy recently tested positive for a potentially deadly bacterium, officials said.

Legionella was found in the water system at U.S. Naval Hospital Naples on April 20, according to a Facebook post Friday.

The bacteria can cause Legionnaires’ disease, a serious form of pneumonia that can be fatal. Symptoms appear two to 14 days after exposure and include a cough, fever and headaches. It also can cause Pontiac fever, a mild illness whose symptoms include muscle aches, headaches and fever.

There have been no reported or confirmed cases of infections caused by the bacteria, which is commonly found in water systems, the Facebook post said.

Legionella typically becomes a health concern only when it grows within building plumbing, the statement continued, adding that the illness generally isn’t contracted through drinking infected water or person-to-person contact.

It isn’t clear exactly where in the hospital’s water system the bacteria was found, how far it had spread or what caused the bacteria to infiltrate the facility’s water supply.

It also isn’t known what steps the hospital is taking to eradicate Legionella from its water or whether the problem has already been fixed. The hospital did not immediately respond to questions Monday.

“Risk management and remediation actions are already underway,” the statement said. Further updates will be given when more information is available, it added.

Many still without power in the Northern Marianas

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

Nearly two weeks after a powerful typhoon plowed into the Northern Marianas, the U.S. military continues moving supplies, generators, fuel and water onto the islands, which are still in recovery mode.

On Guam, which missed the full brunt of Super Typhoon Sinlaku, civilian authorities on the U.S. territory are cleaning up leftover debris after restoring essential services like power and water.

Military engineers, aircrews and warships worked in conjunction with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and local authorities to bring full recovery to Saipan and Tinian, northeast of Guam, according to information from the Guam government and military commands over the weekend.

Guam was spared the worst of

Sinlaku, a slow-moving storm that passed 100 miles northeast of the island on April 14 and brought flooding and winds of 84 mph.

The typhoon made landfall over northern Tinian the following day, with maximum sustained winds of 145 mph, according to records from NASA.

More than 15,000 people on nearby Saipan were still without power and only 33% of the island’s water services were restored as of Sunday, according to an update that day from the islands’ Joint Information Center.

Tinian’s water supply was operating at 98% capacity, but the island’s entire power supply was offline as of Sunday, leaving more than 1,000 people in the dark, the center said.

Guam had restored 99% of its critical infrastructure, the Office of the Governor of Guam said in a Saturday news release.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Serial killer' pleads guilty to murdering 3 women

NY NEW YORK — An accused serial killer who treated his building within a Brooklyn NYCHA complex as a hunting ground, brutally killing three elderly neighbors, pleaded guilty to the murders before a Brooklyn judge on Friday, according to law enforcement officials.

Kevin Gavin, 71, pleaded guilty to committing the killings, all in the same Powell Avenue building in Brownsville between 2015 and 2021. In exchange for his plea, the court agreed to give Gavin 30 years to life in prison at his sentencing on May 20, said Brooklyn District Attorney Eric Gonzalez.

A local handyman, Gavin gained his victims' trust by fixing things around their apartments in the Carter G. Woodson Houses, where they all lived.

Sloth World won't open after dozens of deaths

FL ORLANDO — A planned International Drive attraction called Sloth World will not open following dozens of animal deaths, conservation groups said late Friday, as its 13 remaining sloths were placed in the care of animal experts at Central Florida Zoo & Biological Gardens.

The 13 sloths arrived Friday and are in quarantine at the Sanford zoo, said Richard E. Glover, CEO of the zoo. Sloth World owner Ben Agresta reached out to zoo officials, Glover said.

In a joint statement, the Sloth Conservation Foundation and the Sloth Institute, two international conservation groups that

had been critical of the attraction, said Sloth World would be closing permanently. It had been announced in December as a guided, walk-through tour with an emphasis on conservation and education. It was initially scheduled to begin public tours in February, and reportedly has sold many advance VIP tickets at \$49 each.

Officer killed, another hurt in hospital shooting

IL CHICAGO — One Chicago police officer was killed and another critically injured after they were shot at Endeavor Health Swedish Hospital on Saturday morning by a man they brought in for treatment at the emergency room, according to police and hospital officials. The suspect was taken into custody.

Chicago Police Superintendent Larry Snelling said an officer was shot and killed while transporting the suspect inside the Lincoln Square hospital. Another officer was also shot and remains in critical condition Saturday afternoon, he wrote.

While officials haven't yet named either officer, Snelling said at a news conference that the officer who died was 38 years old and had been with the department for a decade.

The officer "fighting for his life" is 57 and has more than 20 years with the department, he said.

After 20 years, state may resume executions

NV LAS VEGAS — Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson remains uncertain about the possibility of an execution in Nevada, even after saying he wanted three

convicted killers put to death.

"I am a gambler, but I'm not sure how much I bet on this one," he said.

Wolfson said executions are more likely now than in previous years because of increased access to lethal injection drugs, though he said he expected additional legal challenges and delays.

The Nevada ACLU's legal director, Chris Peterson, questioned the district attorney's move to seek warrants and schedule dates for the executions of Zane Floyd, 50; Donald Sherman, 62; and Sterling Atkins, 52.

"We need to take very seriously the county's decision to seek a death warrant," Peterson said. "The prior history related to when the DAs have sought death warrants is concerning."

Nevada has not carried out an execution since Darryl Mack's death in 2006, though the death penalty is legal.

Protester arrested after 'chemical agent' sprayed

CA LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Police Department said a protester was arrested after spraying a chemical agent on two officers outside the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown Los Angeles.

The department said on X that the incident occurred early Saturday when LAPD officers were trying to clear debris from the road and were surrounded by protesters.

The detention center has been the center of ongoing protests against federal immigration authorities and the Trump administration's mass deportation campaign.

In an effort to deescalate the situation early Saturday, the department said the officers got in their vehicle and were starting to drive away when a protester "reached in and sprayed a chemical agent, which nearly caused a traffic collision."

The officers were able to leave the area safely and call for an ambulance, according to the social media post.

Mother faces charges for digging up baby's grave

TX LUFKIN — A 33-year-old Texas woman is facing a felony charge after authorities said she dug up her newborn daughter's grave and removed the child's remains from a cemetery in Angelina County, KTRE reports.

Tamisha Cheyniece Drake was booked into the Angelina County Jail on a charge of abuse of a corpse following an investigation that began Thursday when deputies responded to a report of a disturbed gravesite at Davis Memorial Gardens in Lufkin.

Deputies arrived to find the grave of a newborn infant had been opened, KTRE said. Both the baby's body and burial container were gone from the site.

The investigation led authorities to Drake, who is the child's mother. During questioning, Drake admitted to digging up the grave and directed detectives to the location of the remains, according to the Angelina County Sheriff's Office.

Deputies recovered the burial container and infant's body from the driveway of an unoccupied residence. The baby did not survive childbirth in February, authorities said.

— From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Raptors defeat Cavs to tie series at 2

Associated Press

TORONTO — Scottie Barnes hit the go-ahead free throws in the final minute and scored 23 points, Brandon Ingram also added 23 points and the Toronto Raptors beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 93-89 on Sunday, tying the Eastern Conference first-round playoff series at two games apiece.

The best-of-seven series shifts to Cleveland for Game 5 on Wednesday.

RJ Barrett scored 18 points and Collin Murray-Boyles had 15 points and 10 rebounds for Toronto, which won despite shooting 4 for 30 from 3-point range.

Barnes added nine rebounds and six assists.

Donovan Mitchell scored 12 of his 20 in the fourth quarter and James Harden added 19, but the Cavaliers couldn't overcome an 18-turnover performance.

Mitchell missed two shots in the final 25 seconds, including a 3-pointer that would have tied the game. He finished 6 for 24

overall and made 4 of 12 shots from long range.

Sam Merrill scored 14 points and Jarrett Allen had 15 rebounds for Cleveland, which was outscored 10-2 in the final 1:54 of the fourth.

Spurs 114, Trail Blazers 93: Victor Wembanyama had 27 points, 11 rebounds and seven blocks in his return from a concussion, and visiting San Antonio took a 3-1 lead in their first-round series against Portland with a victory.

De'Aaron Fox added 28 points for the Spurs, who will return home to San Antonio for Game 5 on Tuesday night.

The Spurs announced about an hour before the game that Wembanyama would play after clearing the league's concussion protocol.

The Spurs trailed the Blazers by 17 points at the half, but the game was knotted at 74 going into the fourth quarter. Fox and Keldon Johnson hit back-to-back 3-pointers to put the Spurs up 90-77 with 7:14 left.

Johnson's dunk with 4:31 left made it 101-81 for San Antonio and all but sealed the win.

Deni Avdija led the Trail Blazers with 26 points. There was tense moment with 2:13 left when Avdija and Stephon Castle exchanged shoves. They were given offsetting technical fouls.

Celtics 128, 76ers 96: Payton Pritchard hit six of visiting Boston's 24 3-pointers and scored 32 points and Jayson Tatum had 30 points and 11 assists to help the Celtics spoil Joel Embiid's return from an appendectomy and beat Philadelphia for a 3-1 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Game 5 is Tuesday night in Boston.

Jaylen Brown scored 20 points for the Celtics, who thumped the 76ers by 20-plus points for the second time in the series.

Embiid scored 26 points in 34 minutes just 17 days after having an appendectomy. Embiid wasted little time scoring in his first game since April 6. The

two-time NBA scoring champion sank two free throws for Philadelphia's first points of the game, added a monster two-handed jam and scored the team's first eight points.

Tyrese Maxey added 22 points for the Sixers.

Rockets 115, Lakers 96: Amen Thompson scored 23 points, Tari Eason added 20 and host Houston avoided elimination with a rout of Los Angeles in Game 4 of the Western Conference playoff series.

Game 5 is Wednesday night in Los Angeles.

The Rockets got their first win in the series after falling into an 0-3 hole despite missing Kevin Durant for a third game thanks to a balanced scoring attack. Durant sat out a second straight game with a sprained left ankle after missing Game 1 with a bruised right knee.

Houston's entire starting lineup scored at least 16 points with Alperen Sengun adding 19, Reed Sheppard 17 and Jabari Smith Jr. 16.

Korda dominates at Chevron to claim third major title

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Nelly Korda is back to No. 1 in the world and looks every bit the part.

Korda was so untouchable at The Chevron Championship that no one got within four shots of her the entire weekend. She played her last 29 holes at Memorial Park in even par and still won by five, the largest margin at this major in 18 years.

And it was one of the toughest times she ever had.

"It's not easy going in with that big of a lead," said Korda, "I think that was the challenging point with like, where do I still play like Nelly and where do I play a little defensive?"

That's why there was as much relief as joy when she holed a 7-foot par putt to close with a 2-un-

der 70 to capture her third major championship and return to No. 1 in the women's world ranking for the first time since August.

She celebrated in the best manner possible — a cannon ball into the 4½-foot pool built to the right of the 18th green to keep with the tradition at this major that dates to 1988 when the winner jumped into Poppie's Pond at Mission Hills in the California desert.

"Feet first," she said with a smile, dressed in the winner's white robe. "I knew it was 4 feet, so I was expecting to hit the ground very fast."

Staked to a five-shot lead at the start, Korda was efficient as ever with two early birdies, and two more on the back nine that put the final touches on this masterpiece.

Playing it safe left her a couple

of par putts in the 6-foot range, the ones that had given her fits in the third round. She made one on the 11th. She left the next one short, and her lead was down to four shots.

Her caddie told her she should play well short of the pin on the heavily contoured green at the 13th. Korda had other ideas.

"I actually just sent it at the pin and I had a tap-in birdie," she said.

Korda followed by hammering a 3-wood to just short of the green for a simple up-and-down for birdie. And then it was back to playing it safe — so conservative that instead of hitting a mid-iron onto the par-5 16th over water, she opted to lay up with a gap wedge and then hit lob wedge to 25 feet for a two-putt par.

The victory was Korda's 17th on the LPGA and 21st worldwide. Not since Meg Mallon in 2000 had an American reached three majors in her career. She has played in the final group in all five of her tournaments, winning twice and being runner-up the other three times. And then she won a major by leading the final 57 holes of the tournament.

About the only drama in the final hour was whether Korda could break Dottie Pepper's 72-hole scoring record that has stood since 1999. Korda was playing it safe with a big lead, hitting to the fat of the green and settling for pars, along with another three-putt bogey.

She finished at 18-under 270, one short of Pepper's record at Mission Hills.

Hagel, Lightning even series with Canadiens

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Brandon Hagel scored his NHL playoffs-leading fifth and sixth goals in the third period and the Tampa Bay Lightning rallied to beat the Montreal Canadiens 3-2 on Sunday night in Game 4 to tie the series.

After the first three games in the first-round series went to overtime, Tampa Bay overcame a two-goal deficit to end it in regulation.

Hagel gave the Lightning the lead with 4:43 left, deflecting linemate Nikita Kucherov's shot past Jakub Dobes. Hagel scored minutes after the Lightning had a 5-on-3 man advantage for 1:11.

"He's definitely become the straw that stirs our drink," Lightning coach John Cooper said about Hagel. "Even when we went down 2-0, he stood up

and looked both ways and, literally I think, captivated the bench with what he was saying and the message he was delivering."

Tampa Bay held on after the Canadiens got a power-play chance with 2:33 left when Kucherov was called for slashing.

Lightning top-line center Jake Guentzel had a goal and assist, and Kucherov and defenseman J.J.

Game 5 is Wednesday night in Tampa.

Avalanche 5, Kings 1: Nathan MacKinnon had two goals and an assist, Nicolas Roy and Devon Toews scored in the third period, and top-seeded Colorado swept Los Angeles out of the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs with a road victory in Game 4.

Cale Makar also scored and

Scott Wedgewood made 24 saves as the Presidents' Trophy-winning Avs ended the 20-year career of Kings captain Anze Kopitar, who announced his pending retirement in September.

The Slovenian center is the top scorer in franchise history and a two-time Selke Trophy winner, and he was a star on the Kings' two Stanley Cup championship teams in 2012 and 2014 before spending the past decade as their captain.

Ducks 4, Oilers 3 (OT): Ryan Poehling scored 2:29 into overtime, and Anaheim pushed Connor McDavid and Edmonton to the brink of first-round elimination with a home victory in Game 4.

The Ducks won when Poehling's sharp-angled shot reluctantly trickled under Edmonton

goalie Tristan Jarry, who had played well in his first playoff start for his new team. An extensive video review revealed no reason to overturn the judgment on the ice that the puck had barely crossed the goal line underneath Jarry's skate.

Game 5 is Tuesday night in Edmonton.

Sabres 6, Bruins 1: Josh Doan had a goal and an assist during Buffalo's four-goal first-period, and Alex Lyon stopped 21 shots to lead the Sabres to a 6-1 road victory over the Boston Bruins on Sunday for a 3-1 lead in their first-round playoff series.

Peyton Krebs, Zach Benson and Bowen Byram also scored to help Buffalo open a 4-0 lead against a Boston team that needed a win at home to avoid moving to the brink of elimination.

Hocevar outpaces Buescher for first NASCAR Cup victory

Associated Press

TALLADEGA, Ala. — Carson Hocevar ensured the Talladega Superspeedway fans who witnessed his first NASCAR Cup Series win would remember it.

After outdueling Chris Buescher with a last-lap pass Sunday, Hocevar celebrated with one of NASCAR's most unconventional victory laps. While sitting on the windowsill of his No. 77 Chevrolet to salute the crowd with fist pumps and waves, the lanky Hocevar managed to keep his left hand on the wheel while driving down the frontstretch.

He steered the car nose-first into the outside wall to perform a burnout before climbing onto the roof.

"He looked like Shamu hanging out the window," said Jeff Dickerson, a co-owner of Hocevar's Spire Motorsports car.

The unique revelry was appropriate for the rising star who has made headlines by angering veterans with aggressive moves.

"I've had this thought up for a while," Hocevar said after becoming the 13th driver to earn his first Cup win at Talladega. "I've messed it up every which way to not be able to do it. I was going to figure out how to do it. It took me a while.

"I'm so thankful. This is the biggest dream I've ever thought of. Thank you, ev-

erybody. I couldn't have done it any better way."

Hocevar joined Ty Gibbs (who won two weeks ago at Bristol Motor Speedway), as the second first-time winner this season by winning his 91st start in NASCAR's premier series. The 23-year-old from Portage, Mich., used a drafting push from Alex Bowman's No. 48 Chevrolet to edge past Buescher's No. 17 Ford by 0.114 seconds.

Buescher had been getting drafting help from Erik Jones, who spun after contact from Hocevar while battling for second with seven laps remaining. Jones' No. 43 Toyota stalled to bring out the final yellow and set up a three-lap shootout in which Buescher and Hocevar ran side by side virtually all the way to the checkered flag.

Bowman finished third (his best finish since missing four races with vertigo), followed by Chase Elliott and Zane Smith.

Big wreck

With tight packs at nearly 200 mph, Talladega is known for massive wrecks, and some contact at the front involved 26 of the 40 cars in the field.

Bubba Wallace was leading on Lap 115 when he lost control of his No. 23 Toyota on a push by the No. 1 Chevrolet of Ross Chas-

tain. Ryan Blaney, Joey Logano, Brad Keselowski and Kyle Larson were among those eliminated from contention in the crash, along with Wallace, who finished outside the top 30 for the third time in five races.

Mileage still matters

In an attempt to blunt the fuel conservation strategies that have become prevalent at superspeedways, NASCAR instituted a 98-lap first stage that covered more than half the race distance (which is typically the length of the final stage). The change resulted in an opening segment that ran for 85 minutes under green as drivers cautiously raced well below their maximum speeds to achieve optimum mileage.

They opened the second stage at full throttle, and the big pileup erupted only 10 laps later.

New deal

Points leader Tyler Reddick announced on the Fox prerace show that he had finalized a multiyear contract extension with 23XI Racing. Team co-owner Denny Hamlin had recently guaranteed the return of Reddick, who has 10 of his 13 career wins (including five this season) since joining 23XI Racing in 2023.

Thomas, Royals walk off Angels in 10 for sweep

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — With runners on second and third, Lane Thomas delivered a three-run homer in the 10th inning to lift the Kansas City Royals over the Los Angeles Angels 11-9 and sweep the series.

It was Thomas' first home run of the season and the first walk-off RBI of his career.

Joey Lucchesi (0-1) took the loss, facing four batters in the final frame. Lucas Erceg (2-1) earned the win.

Los Angeles held a 7-4 lead when the game was delayed in the bottom of the seventh for severe weather. Kansas City had two on and no outs with Bobby Witt Jr. at bat. It resumed after one hour and 29 minutes, and the Royals tacked on one run with a sacrifice fly to center by Vinnie Pasquantino.

Salvador Perez pushed another run across in the top of the ninth, and Jac Caglianone, who entered the game as a reserve in the eighth inning, tied the score with a two-out, two-run homer that landed just inside the right-field foul pole.

Rockies 3-3, Mets 1-0: Chase Dollander (3-2) held New York to five hits in seven innings in his first start this year, and visiting Colorado beat the Mets in a doubleheader nightcap to complete a three-game sweep that sent spiraling New York to its 15th loss in 17 games.

Hunter Goodman hit a two-run homer that helped chase Kodai Senga in the third.

In the opener, the Rockies avoided falling behind when an ABS challenge changed Brett Baty's bases-loaded walk to an inning-ending called third strike in the first.

Jose Quintana (1-2) got his first win of the season, allowing two hits and striking out five in a season-high 5 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings.

Diamondbacks 12, Padres 7: Tim Lincecum hit a grand slam to highlight Arizona's six-run seventh inning, Ildemaro Vargas homered to extend his hitting streak

to 23 games and the Diamondbacks rallied Sunday to defeat San Diego and split the two-game series at Alfredo Harp Helú Stadium in Mexico City.

With Arizona trailing 7-2 in the seventh, José Fernández, Nolan Arenado and Alek Thomas hit consecutive one-out singles against David Morgan to load the bases. Tawa followed with a liner over the left field wall for his first homer of the season to get the Diamondbacks within a run.

Bradley Rodríguez (0-1) came in and gave up a double to Vargas, who finished a single shy of hitting for the cycle. One out later, Rodríguez walked Corbin Carroll and then allowed a go-ahead two-run double to Lourdes Gurriel Jr.

Mariners 3, Cardinals 2: Rob Refsnyder successfully challenged a third strike, and then hit a go-ahead solo home run in the ninth inning to lift visiting Seattle over St. Louis.

Refsnyder was initially called out by plate umpire John Bacon on an 0-2 pitch that the replay showed was outside. After two more balls, he hit a 412-foot blast into the left-field bullpen off JoJo Romero (0-1) to give the Mariners their first lead.

Red Sox 5, Orioles 3: Willson Contreras hit his sixth home run of the season and second in as many games, and visiting Boston responded to the firing of manager Alex Cora with a victory over Baltimore.

Connelly Early (2-1) allowed two runs in 6 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings in the rubber game victory for the Red Sox. Cedanne Rafaela, Marcelo Mayer and Andruw Monasterio also had RBI hits to help Boston interim skipper Chad Tracy get a win in his MLB managerial debut.

Braves 6, Phillies 2: Chris Sale (5-1) shut down Philadelphia for the second time in nine days and won his 150th career game as host Atlanta built an early lead and beat the Phillies.

Matt Olson hit a three-run home run in the first inning and

Eli White added a two-run homer in the second for the Braves, who won for the 10th time in 12 games.

Blue Jays 4, Guardians 2: Jesús Sánchez hit a two-run home run to take the lead, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. had three hits and host Toronto beat Cleveland.

Blue Jays left-hander Patrick Corbin allowed two runs and six hits in 4 $\frac{2}{3}$ innings. He walked two and struck out four. Braydon Fisher (1-0) worked out of a bases-loaded jam to finish the fifth and completed 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ scoreless innings. Louis Varland earned his third save after working around a leadoff single in the ninth.

Tigers 8, Reds 3: Pinch hitter Hao-Yu Lee hit his first MLB home run and Spencer Torkelson homered for the fifth straight game as visiting Detroit avoided a series sweep with a win over Cincinnati.

Torkelson tied a Tigers record by homering in five consecutive games, joining Rudy York, Hank Greenberg, Vic Wertz, Willie Horton and Marcus Thames.

Nationals 2, White Sox 1 (10): CJ Abrams' sacrifice fly scored automatic runner Daylen Lile from third in the 10th inning, pinch-hitter José Tena followed with a solo homer and visiting Washington beat Chicago for its second straight extra-innings win.

The teams played nine scoreless innings before breaking through in extras. The White Sox closed within 2-1 in the bottom half of the 10th when Tristan Peters singled in automatic runner Derek Hill from second with one out. But Paxton Schultz, called up from Triple-A before the game, struck out Chase Meidroth and Miguel Vargas to earn his first career save.

Astros 7, Yankees 4: Spencer Arrighetti (3-0) allowed one run over seven innings, Christian Walker homered and drove home a season-high four runs, and host Houston snapped New York's eight-game win streak.

Aaron Judge, celebrating his 34th birthday, supplied the only blemish on Arrighetti's line when he hit a solo homer in the sixth. Judge's three birthday homers tied Yogi Berra and Graig Nettles for second-most in Yankees history, trailing only Lou Gehrig's four.

Brewers 5, Pirates 0: Kyle Harrison collected a career-high 12 strikeouts and allowed just one hit and one walk in six scoreless innings as host Milwaukee avoided a sweep by beating Pittsburgh.

The Pirates' only hits were Marcell Ozuna's single against Harrison (2-1) in the second and Nick Gonzales' double off Trevor Megill in the seventh. Pittsburgh struck out 18 times.

Dodgers 6, Cubs 0: Justin Wroblewski (4-0) tossed six scoreless innings to become the first Los Angeles pitcher since 2009 to win his first four starts, and the host Dodgers defeated Chicago in the series finale.

Miguel Rojas had a two-run double in the first and Shohei Ohtani hit a solo shot in the seventh for his first home run since April 12.

Rays 4, Twins 2: Yandy Diaz homered as part of a four-run third inning and host Tampa Bay beat Minnesota to complete a three-game series sweep.

The Rays won their four straight and were five games above .500 going into Monday. The Twins' slide continued with their fifth consecutive loss and ninth defeat in their last 10 games.

Athletics 2, Rangers 1: Carlos Cortes had a two-run triple in the first inning, reliever Justin Serner escaped a bases-loaded, no-out jam to preserve a one-run lead in the sixth and the visiting Athletics beat Texas in the rubber game of their series.

Giants 6, Marlins 3: Landen Roupp held Miami to two hits in 7 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings and Casey Schmitt hit a go-ahead home run for the second straight game as host San Francisco beat Miami.