

Austin back in hospital for bladder issue

By MATTHEW ADAMS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Sunday was taken to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center for symptoms that point to a bladder problem, the Pentagon said.

Austin was transported at about 2:20 p.m. to the hospital in Bethesda, Md., Air Force Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's top spokesperson, said in a statement. At approximately 4:55 p.m., Austin transferred the functions and duties of the office to Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks. Air Force Gen. Charles "CQ" Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the White House and Congress have been notified.

Late Sunday night, doctors at Walter Reed said in a statement Austin was admitted to a critical care unit after a series of tests and evaluations.

"At this time, it is not clear how long Secretary Austin will re-

main hospitalized. The current bladder issue is not expected to change his anticipated full recovery," said John Maddox and Gregory Chesnut, doctors at the medical facility. "His cancer prognosis remains excellent. Updates on the Secretary's condition will be provided as soon as possible."

On Monday, Austin canceled his trip to Brussels to meet with NATO ministers and work on Ukraine military aid, two defense officials said. Austin had been scheduled to travel to Brussels on Tuesday to attend a regular meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group, a gathering of about 50 countries to coordinate military aid for Kyiv. That meeting will now be held virtually.

Austin had surgery in December for prostate cancer and was later hospitalized in January for complications from the procedure.

However, he failed to provide proper notification to appro-

priate government officials.

Austin returned to the Pentagon on Jan. 29 after being absent from the building for nearly a month because of his health. The secretary had been released from Walter Reed on Jan. 15 after spending about two weeks there following the surgery, which was conducted Dec. 22.

But Austin faced public scrutiny after he failed to notify President Joe Biden and other government officials about his illness and hospitalization. His actions have sparked several reviews of what took place.

Austin was scheduled to testify before the House Armed Services Committee on Feb. 29 about his failure to notify the needed officials about his illness.

He did address reporters at the Pentagon on Feb. 1 and apologized for not disclosing his prostate diagnosis, the surgery that followed and complications that led to an extended hospital stay.

"I want to be crystal clear, we did not handle this right. I did not

handle this right," he said. "I should have told the president about my cancer diagnosis. I should have told my team and the American people, and I take full responsibility."

His cancer was discovered during a regular health screening in early December. He was admitted to the hospital about three weeks later for surgery, which required general anesthesia. He left the hospital the following morning.

On Jan. 1, Austin returned to Walter Reed after experiencing pain in his abdomen, hip and leg. He was later found to have a urinary tract infection, and Austin spent days in the intensive care unit before he was moved to a private section of the hospital.

But during Austin's medical treatments, no one at the Defense Department notified the White House, Hicks, Congress or the public for several days.

On Jan. 2, Austin transferred some of his more pressing responsibilities to Hicks.

Navy adds new sexual harassment reporting option

By ALISON BATH
Stars and Stripes

A new sexual harassment reporting option for Navy sailors allows them to keep their identity confidential but still receive counseling and other support, according to the service.

The confidential reporting also doesn't trigger an investigation or disciplinary action, according to a Navy administrative order released Wednesday.

A sailor's commanding officer must be notified within 24 hours after the complaint is received, but the service member's identity and any personal identifying information are

withheld, according to the order from Vice Adm. Richard Cheeseman Jr., chief of naval personnel.

Confidential sexual harassment reports can be made only to a command climate specialist or a command-managed equal opportunity program manager. Affected sailors qualify for victim advocacy, safety assessments and other services, the Navy said.

The victim's identity would be revealed only if the person who takes the complaint is called to testify in a court-martial or administrative hearing related to the sexual harassment claim.

It also would not be protected if an assessment reveals a high risk to the health and safety of the involved sailor or another person, according to the order.

Previously, sailors could make only formal, informal and anonymous complaints when alleging sexual harassment, with the process for each varying.

For example, the identity of sailors who make formal or informal complaints is not protected. Formal complaints must be investigated, whereas informal complaints are not investigated and are resolved at the lowest appropriate level, according to the Navy.

Sailors who make a confidential sexual harassment report can later change to a formal or informal complaint, but their identity wouldn't be protected, the order states.

They also can change to an anonymous report but are prohibited from identifying themselves. In those cases, commanders determine whether there is enough information in the anonymous report to investigate, according to the Navy.

Anyone with questions about the policy can call the Navy's advice hotline at 800-253-0931 or email mill_navy_eo_advice@navy.mil.

Trump rhetoric shows why NATO should worry

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Former President Donald Trump's statement over the weekend that he would encourage Russia to attack NATO allies that don't spend enough on defense exposes critical vulnerabilities that a second Trump term would bring for the 75-year-old alliance.

At a campaign event Saturday in South Carolina, Trump repeated his long-held view that American willingness to defend NATO members hinges on whether they're "delinquent" on defense spending.

But his invitation to Russia took things a step further this time.

"No, I would not protect you," Trump said he once told an unidentified European head of state. "In fact, I would encourage (the Russians) to do whatever the hell they want. You've got to pay. You got to pay your bills."

Trump's erroneous insistence that certain allies are "delinquent" and his refusal to commit to NATO's linchpin provision, that an attack on one is an attack on all, would call the feasibility of a U.S.-led NATO into question in the event he is re-elected.

■ **Could Trump withdraw the U.S. from NATO?**

Trump's frequent criticism of NATO has fueled speculation

about whether he would seek to pull the United States out of the alliance. No country in NATO's 75-year history has ever attempted such a thing.

However, there is an alliance mechanism for getting out if a country so chooses. Under Article 13, a one-year notice is required.

With Trump in mind, U.S. lawmakers have sought to make that more difficult. Last year's defense funding bill included a provision that forbids a president from pulling out of the alliance without congressional approval.

Formal withdrawal could hinge on congressional support for NATO, which has traditionally been bipartisan. Still, a president could challenge the constitutionality of that law in the courts.

■ **Is the U.S. required to defend allies that are attacked?**

Trump's ambivalence about defending all allies could undermine NATO's viability even without an American pullout. The organization's very essence is that an attack on one is an attack on all.

Traditionally, that has been understood to mean that if one ally is invaded, the attacker would face the collective force of all members.

But NATO's Article 5 provision doesn't mandate that kind of a response. Each member of

the alliance "will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked," it states.

Trump's comments about encouraging Russia underscore the potential fragility of the collective mutual defense assurance.

NATO leader Jens Stoltenberg immediately rebuked Trump, warning that any suggestion that its allies do not defend one another "puts American and European soldiers at increased risk."

In Europe, Trump's latest critiques have renewed a sense of angst that had subsided under President Joe Biden, who frequently states that the U.S. will defend "every inch" of NATO territory.

Numerous analysts have said Trump's words should serve as a call to action in Europe's capitals.

"This statement should motivate Europeans to invest more in defense with a double purpose: to make NATO Trump-proof if possible and to prepare for a post-NATO Europe," Ulrich Speck, a prominent German security analyst, said in a statement Sunday. "Hand-wringing not sufficient."

■ **What are NATO's spending rules?**

At the heart of Trump's complaints about NATO is the reality that many alliance members don't meet agreed-on defense

spending benchmarks.

But his rhetoric has created confusion about the rules. He has frequently said allies aren't making their NATO "payments" and are either "delinquent" or in arrears on their "dues."

However, NATO members do not pay dues. The crux of the issue is that countries don't invest enough in their own militaries.

The defense spending threshold is set at 2% of gross domestic product.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine almost two years ago, though, Stoltenberg and other NATO leaders have said over and over that 2% is the bare minimum now.

The point is for all members to invest enough to ensure fair burden-sharing and sufficient capability when it comes to the collective defense of members.

Currently, only about 10 of 31 members hit the 2% target. Germany, Europe's economic powerhouse, is among the countries that consistently fall short.

For that reason, many of Trump's attacks have centered on Germany, which hosts more than 30,000 U.S. troops.

While NATO countries have steadily increased defense spending since Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014, it's unclear when all allies will hit the mark.

Marines deliver food to battered Philippine island

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines are delivering supplies to an island in the Philippines that's been battered by monsoonal rains and landslides, the service announced Monday.

Members of the Okinawa-based III Marine Expeditionary Force are delivering meals to

the southern island of Mindanao to "provide temporary relief" following heavy rainfall and a major landslide in the area, the command said in a news release.

"Support to our Allies and partners, and their people in a time of need, is non-negotiable," III MEF's commander, Lt. Gen.

Roger Turner, said in the release.

Particularly hard hit is Masara in Davao de Oro province, a gold-mining mountain village where a landslide struck Feb. 6 following weeks of heavy rain, The Associated Press reported Thursday.

The landslide death toll

reached 55 on Monday, with another 32 injured people recovered, the provincial government said in a Facebook post.

The Marines are working directly with the Philippine government and military to distribute the goods, and "are prepared to support relief efforts as long as required," Kim said.

Israeli forces rescue hostages in Gaza raid

Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip — Israeli forces rescued two hostages early Monday, storming a heavily guarded apartment in a densely packed town in the Gaza Strip and extracting them under fire and covering airstrikes that local officials said killed at least 67 Palestinians.

The plight of the dozens of hostages held by Hamas has profoundly shaken Israelis, and the rescue in Rafah briefly lifted the spirits of a nation still reeling from the militant group's cross-border raid last year that started the war. Israel has described Rafah — a city on the southern edge of the Gaza Strip where 1.4 million Palestinians have fled fighting elsewhere — as the last remaining Hamas stronghold in the territory and signaled that its ground offensive may soon target the city.

In Gaza, the operation unleashed another tragedy in a war that has killed more than 28,000 Palestinians in the territory, displaced over 80% of the population and set off a massive humanitarian crisis.

More than 12,300 Palestinian minors — children and young teens — have been

killed in the conflict, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Monday. About 8,400 women were also among those killed. That means minors make up about 43% of the dead and women and minors together make up three quarters.

The ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians, provided the breakdown for The Associated Press. Israel claims to have killed about 10,000 Hamas fighters.

In Hamas' cross-border raid on Oct. 7, an estimated 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed, and militants took 250 people captive, according to Israeli authorities.

Israel says about 100 hostages remain in Hamas captivity after dozens were freed during a cease-fire in November. Hamas also holds the remains of roughly 30 others who were either killed on Oct. 7 or died in captivity. The government has made freeing the hostages a top aim of its war, along with destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities. But as the fighting drags on, rifts have emerged in Israel over how to retrieve them.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Neta-

nyahu says persistent military pressure will bring about the captives' freedom even as families of the hostages and many of their supporters have called on the government to make another deal with Hamas.

Israeli military spokesman Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari said special forces broke into a second-floor apartment in Rafah under fire at 1:49 a.m. Monday, accompanied a minute later by airstrikes on surrounding areas. He said Hamas militants were guarding the captives and that members of the rescue team shielded the hostages with their bodies as the battle erupted.

The army identified those rescued as Fernando Simon Marman, 60, and Louis Har, 70, who were abducted by Hamas militants from Kibbutz Nir Yitzhak on Oct. 7. They also hold Argentinian citizenship. They are among just three hostages to be rescued; a female soldier was rescued in November.

The rescue, which Hagari said was based on precise intelligence and planned for some time, is a morale booster for Israelis but a small step toward winning the release of the remaining hostages, who are believed to be spread out and hidden in tunnels.

Houthi rebels fire missiles at ship bound for Iran

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two missiles at a ship bound for a port in Iran on Monday, causing minor damage but no injuries to its crew, authorities said.

The attack on the Marshall Islands-flagged, Greek-operated bulk carrier Star Iris shows just how widely the Houthis now target ships traveling through the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Bab el-Man-

deb Strait connecting the two waterways.

The Star Iris had been heading from Brazil to Bandar Khomeini in Iran, the main backer of the Houthis in Yemen's war.

"The group owner and operator regularly trade bulk cargo with Iran, so this was assessed to be the likely destination," said Ambrey, a private security firm. Ambrey added that the Star Iris sustained damage to its starboard side in the attack.

The Houthis sought to describe the Star Iris as an "American" vessel, and said they targeted the ship with multiple missiles. The Star Iris' ultimate owner, Star Bulk Carriers Corp. of Athens, Greece, is traded on the Nasdaq Stock Market in New York.

It did not respond to a request for comment.

Days earlier, another ship owned by Star Bulk, the Star Nasia, came under attack from the Houthis.

Beads creating plastic disaster in NOLA during carnival

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — It's a beloved century-old Carnival season tradition in New Orleans — masked riders on lavish floats fling strings of colorful beads or other trinkets to parade watchers clamoring with outstretched arms.

It's all in good fun but it's also a bit of a "plastics disaster," says Judith Enck, a former En-

vironmental Protection Agency regional administrator and president of the advocacy group Beyond Plastics.

Carnival season is at its height this weekend. The city's annual series of parades began more than a week ago and will close out on Tuesday — Mardi Gras — a final day of revelry before Lent. Thousands attend the parades and they leave a mess

of trash behind.

Despite a massive daily cleanup operation that leaves the post-parade landscape remarkably clean, uncaught beads dangle from tree limbs like Spanish moss and get ground into the mud under the feet of passersby. They also wash into storm drains, where they only complicate efforts to keep the flood-prone city's streets dry. Tons

have been pulled from the aging drainage system in recent years.

And those that aren't removed from the storm drains eventually get washed through the system and into Lake Pontchartrain — the large Gulf of Mexico inlet north of the city. The nonbiodegradable plastics are a threat to fish and wildlife, Enck said.

Economists: US recession risks are fading

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Just a quarter of business economists and analysts expect the United States to fall into recession this year. And any downturn would likely result from an external shock — such as a conflict involving China — rather than from domestic economic factors such as higher interest rates.

But respondents to a National Association of Business Economics survey released Monday still expect year-over-year inflation to exceed 2.5% — above the Federal Reserve's 2% target — through 2024.

A year ago, most forecasters expected the U.S. economy — the world's largest — to slide into a recession as the Fed raised interest rates to fight a burst of inflation that began in 2021. The Fed hiked its benchmark rate 11 times from March 2022 to July 2023, taking it to the highest level in more than two decades.

Inflation has fallen from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.4% in December. But the economy unexpectedly kept growing and

employers kept hiring and resisting layoffs despite higher borrowing costs.

The combination of tumbling inflation and resilient growth has raised hopes — reflected in the NABE survey — that the Fed can achieve a so-called soft landing: vanquishing inflation without the pain of a recession.

"Panelists are more optimistic about the outlook for the domestic economy," said Sam Khater, chief economist at mortgage giant Freddie Mac and chair of the association's economic policy survey committee.

The Fed has stopped raising rates and has signaled that it expects to reduce rates three times this year.

But a growing share of business forecasters worry that the Fed is keeping rates unnecessarily high: 21% in the NABE survey called the Fed's policy "too restrictive," up from the 14% who expressed that view in August. Still, 70% say the Fed has it "about right."

What worries respondents are the chances of a conflict between China and

Taiwan even if it isn't an outright war: 63% consider such an outcome at least a "moderate probability." Likewise, 97% see at least a moderate chance that conflict in the Middle East will drive oil prices above \$90 a barrel (from around \$77 now) and disrupt global shipping.

Another 85% are worried about political instability in the United States before or after the Nov. 5 presidential election.

The respondents are also increasingly concerned about U.S. government finances: 57% say budget policies — which have created a huge gap between what the government spends and what it collects in taxes — need to be more disciplined, up from 54% in August.

They say the most important objectives of government budget policy should be promoting medium- to long-term growth (cited by 45% of respondents) and reducing the federal deficit and debts (42%). Coming in a distant third — and cited by 7% — is the goal of reducing income inequality.

Woman killed after she opened fire in Osteen's megachurch; 2 injured

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A woman in a trenchcoat opened fire with a long gun Sunday inside celebrity pastor Joel Osteen's megachurch in Texas, sending worshippers rushing to find safety while two off-duty officers confronted and killed the shooter. Two other people were shot and injured, including a 5-year-old boy who was in critical condition.

The shooter was carrying an AR-style rifle, according to search warrant documents released by a prosecutor's office on Monday. The woman was identified Monday as 36-year-old Genesse Ivonne Moreno in an affidavit seeking a search warrant for a home in Conroe.

The violence erupted shortly before the Houston church's 2 p.m. Spanish service was set to begin, just as the rest of the country was preparing for the Super Bowl.

The shooter entered the enormous Lakewood Church — a building with a 16,000-person capacity that was previously an arena for the NBA's Houston Rockets — with the boy who was later hurt in the shootout with police. A man in his 50s was also wounded.

A motive for the attack remains unclear. It's also unknown what relationship, if any, the woman had to the boy, and who actually shot

him and the man.

"I will say this," Houston Police Chief Troy Finner told reporters during a news conference outside the church. "That female, that suspect, put that baby in danger. I'm going to put that blame on her."

The boy was in critical condition at a children's hospital, while the man was stable at a different hospital with a hip wound.

The shooting happened between services at the megachurch that is regularly attended by 45,000 people every week, making it the third-largest megachurch in the U.S., according to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Osteen said the violence could have been much worse if it had happened during the earlier, larger 11 a.m. service.

Witnesses told reporters that they heard multiple gunshots. Christina Rodriguez, who was inside the church, told Houston television station KTRK that she "started screaming, 'There's a shooter, there's a shooter,'" and then she and others ran to the backside of a library inside the building, then stood in a stairway before they were told it was safe to leave.

Osteen said Sunday that his congregation is "devastated." It was not clear where he was at the time of the shooting.

Trump in court for classified docs hearing

Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. — Former President Donald Trump arrived Monday morning at a federal courthouse in Florida for a closed hearing in his criminal case charging him with mishandling classified documents.

The hearing was scheduled to discuss the procedures for the handling of classified evidence in the case, which is currently set for trial on May 20. Trump faces dozens of felony counts accusing him of hoarding highly classified records at his Mar-a-Lago estate and obstructing FBI efforts to get them back.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon expected to hear arguments in the morning from defense lawyers and in the afternoon from prosecutors, each outside of the other's presence. "Defense counsel shall be prepared to discuss their defense theories of the case, in detail, and how any classified information might be relevant or helpful to the defense," Cannon wrote in scheduling the hearing.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Family of mob boss's son charged with assault

NY LATTINGTOWN — The wife and daughter of John Gotti Jr., the namesake son of the notorious New York mob boss John “Dapper Don” Gotti, are facing assault charges stemming from a fistfight with a woman at a high school basketball game on Long Island.

Kimberly Gotti, 55, and her daughter Gianna Gotti, 25, are accused of assaulting the woman after she asked them to stop cursing at players from the bleachers. John and Kimberly Gotti's son Joseph was on the court playing for Oyster Bay High School against rival Locust Valley High School.

The woman said Kimberly and Gianni Gotti punched her and pulled off her hat and wig, “which was held on by three clips and Velcro,” according to court papers cited by multiple news organizations. The woman said she “felt as if my scalp was going to be ripped off” and described how additional people joined in and knocked her to the ground.

Governor nominates ex-partner for court seat

MA BOSTON — Gov. Maura Healey nominated an appeals court judge and former romantic partner, with whom she shared a home for several years, to an open seat on the state's highest court.

Massachusetts Appeals Court Associate Justice Gabrielle R. Wolohojian would serve as an associate justice of the Supreme Judicial Court if her nomination

is approved. Wolohojian is Healey's second nomination to the state's highest court.

Healey and Wolohojian, who met when they both worked at the Boston law firm Hale & Dorr, had been together for eight years when Healey began her first term as attorney general in 2015, according to a Boston Magazine profile.

Schools told to out trans kids to parents

KS TOPEKA — Kansas' attorney general is telling public schools they're required to tell parents their children are transgender or non-binary even if they're not out at home, though Kansas is not among the states with a law that explicitly said to do that.

Republican Kris Kobach's action was his latest move to restrict transgender rights, following his successful efforts last year to temporarily block Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly's administration from changing the listings for sex on transgender people's birth certificates and driver's licenses to reflect their gender identities. It's also part of a trend of GOP attorneys general asserting their authority in culture war issues without a specific state law.

Kobach maintains that failing to disclose when a child is socially transitioning or identifying as non-binary at school violates a parents' rights.

State bill would ban all plastic shopping bags

CA SACRAMENTO — California would ban all plastic shopping bags in 2026 under a new bill announced in

the state Legislature.

California already bans thin plastic shopping bags at grocery stores and other shops, but shoppers at checkout can purchase bags made with a thicker plastic that purportedly makes them reusable and recyclable.

Democratic state Sen. Catherine Blakespear said people are not reusing or recycling those bags. She points to a state study that found the amount of plastic shopping bags trashed per person grew from 8 pounds per year in 2004 to 11 pounds per year in 2021.

“It shows that the plastic bag ban that we passed in this state in 2014 did not reduce the overall use of plastic. It actually resulted in a substantial increase in plastic,” Blakespear, a Democrat from Encinitas, said.

Couple sues town after forced to close food truck

VA PARKSLEY — A married couple who fled Haiti for Virginia achieved their American dream when they opened a variety market on the Eastern Shore, selling hard-to-find spices, sodas and rice to the region's growing Haitian community.

When they added a Haitian food truck, people drove from an hour away for freshly cooked oxtail, fried plantains and marinated pork.

But Clemene Bastien and Theslet Benoit are now suing the town of Parksley, alleging that it forced their food truck to close. The couple also said a town councilman cut the mobile kitchen's water line and screamed, “Go back to your own country!”

A federal lawsuit claims the

town passed a food truck ban that targeted the couple, then threatened them with fines and imprisonment when they raised concerns.

The town council is pushing back through a law firm it hired, Pender & Coward, which said its own investigation found many allegations “simply not true.”

The couple failed to apply for a conditional use permit and chose to sue instead, the law firm countered. It said the council member cut an illegal sewage pipe — not a water line — after the food truck dumped grease into Parksley's sewage system, causing damage.

\$50K offered for info on endangered wolves' deaths

OR PORTLAND — A federal agency is offering a \$50,000 reward for information about the deaths of three endangered gray wolves from the same pack in southern Oregon.

The collars from two gray wolves sent a mortality signal Dec. 29. State wildlife officials responded and found three dead wolves, two with collars and one without, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said in a statement.

The collared wolves were an adult breeding female and a subadult from the Gearhart Mountain Pack. The other wolf killed was also a subadult.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife said it is aware of seven wolves remaining in the pack, including a breeding male.

Officials did not indicate in the statement how the wolves died.

— From wire reports

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and Military News

Chiefs win second straight Super Bowl

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Patrick Mahomes, Travis Kelce and Andy Reid have made the Kansas City Chiefs a dynasty.

They're already thinking three-peat.

First, they had to become the first back-to-back Super Bowl champions in 19 years.

Mahomes made sure of it, leading another super comeback on the NFL's biggest stage in America's showcase capital.

Mahomes threw a 3-yard touchdown pass to Mecole Hardman in overtime, and the Chiefs rallied to beat the San Francisco 49ers 25-22 on Sunday, becoming the NFL's ninth repeat Super Bowl champs.

With pop star Taylor Swift watching boyfriend Kelce from a suite, the Chiefs won their third title in five years, a run that puts them among the NFL's greatest franchises.

"Well, you know the goal has always been to get three," Kelce screamed on stage after sharing a kiss with Swift. "But we couldn't get here without getting that two, and having that target on our back all year. ...

How about that. We get a chance to do it three times in a row."

The NFL's first Super Bowl in Las Vegas was a sloppy, mistake-filled affair that was mostly boring until the back-and-forth fourth quarter and OT. It was the second of 58 Super Bowls to be tied after regulation, and the first played under new overtime rules that ensured both teams got the ball.

The Chiefs (15-6) trailed 22-19 after Jake Moody kicked a 27-yard field goal on the first possession of overtime, but Mahomes rallied the Chiefs, completing another impressive comeback in a rematch of the Super Bowl four years ago.

Mahomes ran 8 yards on fourth-and-1 to keep the Chiefs' chances alive and then scrambled 19 yards to set up the winning score, which came 14:57 into the extra period — just before what would have been the second OT.

"With all the adversity we've been through this season to come through tonight. ... I'm proud of the guys," said Mahomes, who earned his third Su-

per Bowl MVP award. "This is awesome. Legendary."

After he connected with a wide-open Hardman, the Chiefs ran on the field as red-and-yellow confetti fell onto the turf.

Mahomes and Reid are now halfway to Tom Brady and Bill Belichick, who won six championships in 20 years together with the New England Patriots and were the most recent team to go back-to-back following the 2003-04 seasons.

The 28-year-old Mahomes becomes the fourth starting QB to win three Super Bowls — joining Brady, Joe Montana, Terry Bradshaw and Troy Aikman — and second-youngest.

"I am going to celebrate tonight, celebrate at the parade and then work my way to get back in this game next year," Mahomes said. "I am going to do whatever I can to be back in this game next year. Three-peat."

The most excitement in the first half came when a frustrated Kelce bumped Reid on the sideline, knocking the Chiefs' 65-year-old coach a few steps back after teammate Isiah Pacheco

fumbled inside the red zone during the second quarter.

"You guys saw that?" Kelce said. "I'm going to keep it between us unless my 'mic'd up' tells the world. I was just telling him how much I loved him."

The action picked up after a crucial blunder by San Francisco's special teams set up Mahomes' 16-yard TD pass to Marquez Valdes-Scantling for a 13-10 lead.

Brock Purdy and the 49ers (14-6) answered but they couldn't make enough plays, denying Mr. Irrelevant an opportunity to go from last pick in the 2022 NFL Draft to Super Bowl champion.

"We have the offense to score touchdowns and I failed to put the team in position to do that," Purdy said.

Niners wide receiver Juan Jennings threw a TD pass and caught one, joining Eagles quarterback Nick Foles six years ago as the only players to do both in the Super Bowl.

After Moody's 53-yard field goal gave the Niners a 19-16 lead with 1:53 remaining, Mahomes and Kelce went to work.

Decision to take ball first in overtime will be debated

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — It used to be one of the easiest decisions in football: If you win the toss in overtime, you take the ball.

The rules are different now, however, and that choice by San Francisco in the Super Bowl will be debated all offseason.

The 49ers took the ball and drove for a field goal, then lost 25-22 when Patrick Mahomes guided Kansas City 75 yards the other way for the winning touchdown Sunday night. San Francisco's drive ended when the 49ers kicked a field goal on fourth-and-4 from the 9.

If they'd known three points wouldn't be good enough, they

could have gone for a touchdown in that spot.

"That's something we talked about," San Francisco coach Kyle Shanahan said. "None of us have a ton of experience of it."

For many years, overtime ended as soon as one team scored. Then the rule was altered so both teams could possess the ball — unless the first team on offense scored a touchdown. In that case, the game would end on that TD, and that's what happened when New England beat Atlanta 34-28 in Super Bowl 51.

An even more recent rule change mandated that in the

postseason, both teams can possess the ball even if the first offensive team scores a touchdown. Now NFL playoff overtime even more closely resembles the college OT format, where teams alternate possessions. And in college, teams often like to have the ball second because they'll have a better sense of what they need on their drive.

This time, Kansas City had that advantage, which meant the Chiefs had no choice but to go for it on fourth-and-1 from their own 34, down three. They converted and eventually reached the end zone on a 3-yard touchdown pass from Ma-

homes to Mecole Hardman.

"There's two ways: You kick it off or you receive it," Kansas City coach Andy Reid said. "I'm not sure there's a right answer, necessarily. Ours ended up being the right one. That's what we felt was the right thing to do."

Reid's comments suggest there's no obvious consensus among coaches about what to do, but if the Chiefs had won the toss, they were prepared to kick off and play defense first.

"We talked for two weeks about new overtime rules," defensive tackle Chris Jones said. "Give the ball to the opponent. If we score, we go for 2."

Clark 8 points away from NCAA scoring record

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Caitlin Clark's pursuit of the NCAA women's career scoring record will continue for at least four more days after her 31-point performance in No. 2 Iowa's 82-79 loss to Nebraska on Sunday.

The generational talent who has brought unprecedented attention to women's basketball came into the game 39 points from passing Kelsey Plum's total of 3,527 for Washington from 2013-17.

Clark went scoreless the last 12½ minutes against Nebraska and now needs eight points to break the record. She will likely do it Thursday night in Iowa City against Michigan.

"It's not at the front of my mind right now," Clark said. "Really just getting better and getting back home and playing in front of our fans and executing the way we know we can execute is very important for this team. We'll have two practices to get ready for that. Yeah, obviously it will be special. The

biggest focus right now is just finding ways to grow and get better."

Plum, who is with Team USA playing in an Olympic qualifying tournament in Belgium, offered premature congratulations to Clark on X, formerly known as Twitter. Plum corrected herself within minutes, writing "My bad next game."

Fans began lining up in sub-freezing weather six hours before tipoff to enter Pinnacle Bank Arena. Clark has never scored fewer than 30 points in nine games against Nebraska, and many came with the hope they would see her make history.

The Huskers changed up their defenses on Clark. Callin Hake, Jaz Shelley and Kendall Moriarty took turns playing her straight up. They put double-teams on her up high and went to a box-and-one on her in the second half.

Clark pulled within single digits of the record when she made two free throws following a technical foul on Nebraska

late in the third quarter. She didn't score again.

Clark missed her final six shots from the field and finished 10-for-25 overall and 5-for-15 on 3-pointers.

The game had been sold out since early January, and sellers on the secondary ticket market were asking as much as \$2,000 for a seat in the lower bowl late in the week.

Five preteen girls in an end zone section, each holding up a letter to spell out "CLARK," started a "Caitlin Clark!" chant 90 minutes before tipoff.

Cheers increased in volume when Clark was first spotted in the tunnel from the locker room to the court. Fans leaning on the railing reached down in hopes of getting a hand slap as she came through. Next was a standing ovation when Clark, escorted by a security guard, stepped onto the court to begin shooting drills. She shot alone for five minutes before teammates joined her.

Kim Malone of Omaha showed up at about 8:15 a.m.

carrying a sign reading, "Feels like a great day to drop a 40 piece. Let her cook. GOAT 22."

"We're here early because we love Caitlin Clark and what she's done for women's basketball," Malone said. "I played Division II, my daughter plays, we love basketball. To watch all these people come, it's just amazing."

Malone said she admires the fearlessness with which Clark plays.

"She's like the closest thing to Kobe Bryant for us, and we love Kobe," she said. "Her work ethic and her pursuit to be the greatest is incredible, but then she doesn't get lost in that. She includes everybody. Her passes are incredible. She's one of a kind."

After Clark breaks the NCAA record, her next target will be the all-time major women's college scoring record of 3,649 by Kansas' Lynette Woodard from 1977-81. During Woodard's era, women's sports were governed by the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women.

Miller, NHL-leading Canucks edge Capitals in OT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Not much has gone wrong for the Vancouver Canucks this season, so back-to-back losses hit harder.

Like clockwork, the NHL's top team didn't let the losing linger.

This time it was J.T. Miller providing the heroics, scoring with 4.8 seconds left in overtime to give Vancouver a 3-2 victory at the Washington Capitals in the traditional Super Bowl Sunday matinee in the nation's capital, ending their brief skid.

The Canucks have not lost more than two in a row through 53 games.

"Things have gone so well this year that when you lose one, it feels like the end of the world," veteran defenseman Tyler Myers said. "But guys are doing a good job of sticking with it. Some things to clean up coming off the break, but we just have to keep pushing forward."

Despite Alex Ovechkin scoring again,

the Capitals lost for a sixth time in seven games.

Ovechkin has a goal in each of the past five games to reach 13 this season and 835 for his career — 60 away from breaking Wayne Gretzky's record — his longest such streak since March 2021.

"The puck goes in, it's a good thing," Ovechkin said. "I'll take it and move on."

Conor Garland and Nils Hoglander scored for Vancouver. Hoglander's goal came 71 seconds after Ovechkin put Washington ahead midway through the second period, and Miller scored with 4.8 seconds left in 3-on-3 OT off a turnover by Connor McMichael.

"Tough finish," Capitals coach Spencer Carbery said. "Just disappointing the way that ends. That's just a tough mistake for a young player, but we'll learn from it."

Nic Dowd scored 1:08 in to give the Capitals an early lead, the eighth goal of the season for a player whose trade value

is increasing by the game. Darcy Kuemper made 28 saves in the loss.

"It was a good game, but yeah I think we play solid, and unfortunately we lost a point, but lots of good things happened," Ovechkin said.

Blues 7, Canadiens 2: Jordan Kyrou scored twice and Torey Krug had five assists, leading visiting St. Louis past Montreal for its seventh win in eight games.

Robert Thomas had a goal and three assists and Jake Neighbours added a goal and an assist. Colton Parayko, Alexey Toropchenko and Nathan Walker also scored for the Blues. Jordan Binnington made 30 saves.

Nick Suzuki and Joel Armia scored for the Canadiens. Jake Allen stopped 29 shots. Suzuki extended his point streak to seven games as Montreal lost its second straight and fell to 1-9-0 in the second game of back-to-backs this season.

Celtics withstand late rally, beat Heat

Associated Press

MIAMI — Jayson Tatum had 26 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists and the Boston Celtics withstood a late rally to beat the Miami Heat 110-106 on Sunday.

Kristaps Porzingis had 25 points, Jaylen Brown had 20 points and Jrue Holiday scored 15 for Boston, which hit 16 of 39 3-point attempts.

“Today was fun, we have a lot of history with this team. Last time we came here we smacked them, so we knew it would be a closer game,” Tatum said of Boston’s 33-point win in Miami Jan. 25. “They came to play and we enjoy being part of games like that. Everybody’s being competitive.”

The Celtics have won all three matchups with the Heat this season and have won six of the last seven games against them. The loss came in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals last season, when Boston forced the deciding game after losing the first three.

“Late-game execution,

you’ve got to set the table,” Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. “I think our guys did that.”

Tyler Herro had 22 of his 24 points in the second half, Bam Adebayo scored 22 and Duncan Robinson and Caleb Martin finished with 15 points each for the Heat — who were short-handed to start the game and even more so by the end.

The Heat were without leading scorer Jimmy Butler, who was granted a leave of absence because of the death of a family member.

Miami lost Terry Rozier and Josh Richardson to injuries. Rozier, who finished with 13 points, landed awkwardly on his right leg after driving to the basket midway through the third quarter, clearly favoring his knee. Both players will have MRI exams on Monday, coach Erik Spoelstra said.

“It’s tough to see guys like that go down,” Robinson said. “And then Jimmy dealing with what he’s dealing with is unfortunate, to put it lightly.”

Richardson exited in the second quarter because of a right shoulder injury. He slumped to the floor in pain after his unsuccessful attempt to strip Tatum of the ball.

“I felt my shoulder pop out on the floor and then it popped back in laying on the ground, so thank goodness for that,” Richardson said. “I’ll know more tomorrow.”

Robinson also favored his left shoulder after Brown pushed him off into the stands when both tangled for position early in the fourth quarter. Brown and Robinson exchanged words.

“I just thought it was a dirty play, to be honest with you. ... Just thought it was dangerous, unnecessary and excessive,” Robinson said.

Miami rallied from a 15-point deficit in the third quarter and cut it to 106-104 on Herro’s 3-pointer with 1:49 remaining. But Porzingis and Tatum each converted two free throws to secure the win.

“I thought our group showed a tremendous amount of grit in that second half,” Spoelstra said. “There were a lot of things that weren’t necessarily going our way, including the injuries. To really fight and claw back and get this game on the ropes, it’s a credit to how hard guys were playing.”

Thunder 127, Kings 113: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 38 points and Jalen Williams scored 32 as host Oklahoma City beat Sacramento for the first time in three meetings this season.

Williams also had nine assists and seven rebounds. Lu Dort had 17 points and nine rebounds and Chet Holmgren added 14 points for the Thunder.

Domantas Sabonis had 21 points, 14 assists and 11 rebounds for the Kings. Malik Monk led the team with 26 points. Sacramento leading scorer De’Aaron Fox was held to 15 points on 6-for-17 shooting.

No. 20 Florida Atlantic tops Wichita State in OT

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. — Vladislav Goldin had 20 points and Brandon Weatherspoon scored 19 to lead No. 20 Florida Atlantic to a 95-82 overtime win against Wichita State on Sunday.

The Owls (19-5, 9-2 American Athletic Conference) dominated the overtime period, outscoring the Shockers 21-8. Florida Atlantic shot 47.2% for the game.

“We made two hustle plays to start and that set the tone in overtime,” Owls coach Dusty May said. “Without a doubt, the hustle plays helped give us the separation we needed.”

Xavier Bell finished with 25 points off the bench for Wichita State (10-14, 2-9). Colby Rogers had 21 for his fifth straight dou-

ble-figure game. The Shockers shot 50.8% from the field.

“I thought early in the game we were thinking pass way too much. We have to think shot quality,” Wichita State coach Paul Mills said. “Just knowing the nature of the defense, you have to get quality looks. I thought Rogers did that and obviously Bell did a great job of it.”

Bell hit a 3 with 42 seconds left in the second half to take a 73-72 lead. Late free throws for both teams sent the game to overtime tied at 74-74.

Florida Athletic went 0-for-6 from the floor to start the game, but managed to limit the Shockers to just nine points in that stretch. Weatherspoon was vital in getting the Owls some early momentum with eight points in

the opening six minutes.

“I knew it was an early morning game and I am a big energy guy so I just tried to get the juices flowing,” Weatherspoon said. “We just needed to stay positive, just working on getting stops and everything will be alright.”

May said Weatherspoon “doesn’t get a lot of accolades,” but the team’s success wouldn’t be what it is without him.

“Obviously his stat line is easy to talk about today, but his impact goes so much beyond that,” May said.

Turnovers plagued Wichita State and Florida Atlantic capitalized on them with 16 points off 17 Shockers turnovers.

It was the 11th time Wichita State had 14 or more turnovers

this season.

Big picture

Florida Atlantic: The Owls had 44 points inside the paint and went just 7-for-23 from the 3-point line. Free throws were key — Florida Atlantic went 20-for-22 from the free-throw line.

Wichita State: The Shockers shot the ball extremely well, but turnovers were their downfall. Wichita State entered the game with just 13 turnovers in the last two games, but ranked 273rd in the country in assist-to-turnover ratio at 0.95.

Up next

Florida Atlantic: Hosts Temple on Thursday night.

Wichita State: Visits East Carolina on Thursday night.