

Path to ending partial shutdown uncertain

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — Lawmakers and the White House offered no signs of compromise Sunday in their battle over oversight of federal immigration officers that has led to a pause in funding for the Department of Homeland Security.

A partial government shutdown began Saturday after congressional Democrats and President Donald Trump's team failed to reach a deal on legislation to fund the department through September.

Democrats are demanding changes to how immigration operations are conducted after the fatal shootings of U.S. citizens Alex Pretti and Renee Good by federal officers in Minneapolis last month.

Congress is on recess until Feb. 23, and both sides appear dug into their positions. The impasse affects agencies such as the Transportation Security Administration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, the Secret Service, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The work at ICE and CBP goes on unabated because Trump's tax and spending cut law from 2025 provided billions more to those agencies that can be tapped for deportation operations. About 90% of DHS employees were to continue working during the shutdown without pay — and missed paychecks could mean financial hardships. Last year there was a record 43-day government shutdown.

White House border czar Tom Homan said the administration was unwilling to agree to Democrats' demands that federal officers clearly identify themselves, remove masks during operations and display unique ID numbers.

"I don't like the masks, either," Homan said. But, he said, "These men and women have to protect themselves."

Democrats also want to require immigration agents to wear body cameras and mandate judicial warrants for arrests on private property.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats are only asking for

federal agents to abide by rules followed by law enforcement agencies around the country.

"And the question that Americans are asking is, 'Why aren't Republicans going along with these commonsense proposals?'" Schumer said. "They're not crazy. They're not way out. They're what every police department in America does."

Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., said he could back Democrats calls to equip immigration officers with body cameras and would support efforts to bolster training. But he balked at their demands that federal officers remove masks and clearly identify themselves, noting some officers taking part in immigration enforcement operations have faced doxing and other harassment.

"What are you going to do, expose their faces so you can intimidate their families?" Mullin said. "What we want is ICE to be able to do their job. And we would love for local law enforcement and for states to cooperate with us."

Republican Sen. Katie Britt of Alabama, a Trump ally who had

pushed for a two-week extension of DHS funding while negotiations continued, said it was "shortsighted of Democrats to walk away" from talks.

Trump made enforcement of the nation's immigration laws a centerpiece of his 2024 campaign for the White House and he promised to be aggressive in detaining and deporting people living in the United States without legal permission.

DHS reports it has deported more than 675,000 migrants since Trump's return to office last year and claims some 2.2 million others have "self-deported" as the Republican president has made his immigration crackdown a priority.

"President Trump is not going to back away from the mission, the mission that American people said they wanted him to complete, and that is securing our border and making sure that we actually do interior enforcement," Britt said.

Homan was on CBS' "Face the Nation," Schumer and Mullin appeared on CNN's "State of the Union" and Britt was interviewed on "Fox News Sunday."

Border czar: 'Small' security force to remain in Minn.

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — White House border czar Tom Homan said Sunday that more than 1,000 immigration agents have left Minnesota's Twin Cities area and hundreds more will depart in the days ahead as part of the Trump administration's drawdown of its immigration enforcement surge.

A "small" security force will stay for a short period to protect remaining immigration

agents and will respond "when our agents are out and they get surrounded by agitators and things got out of control," Homan told CBS' "Face the Nation."

He did not define "small."

He also said agents will keep investigating fraud allegations as well as the anti-immigration enforcement protest that disrupted a service at a church service.

"We already removed well

over 1,000 people, and as of Monday, Tuesday, we'll remove several hundred more," Homan said. "We'll get back to the original footprint."

Homan announced last week that 700 federal officers would leave Minnesota immediately, but that still left more than 2,000 in the state.

He said Thursday that a "significant drawdown" was already underway and would continue through this week.

Homan said enforcement would not stop in the Twin Cities and that mass deportations will continue across the country.

Officers leaving Minnesota will either being required to report back to their stations or be assigned elsewhere.

When asked if future deployments could match the scale of the Twin Cities operation, Homan said "it depends on the situation."

Iranian diplomat meets with UN nuclear watchdog head

Associated Press

GENEVA — Iran's top diplomat met with the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency on Monday, ahead of a second round of negotiations with the United States over Tehran's nuclear program.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and said he would also meet with Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi of Oman, which is hosting the U.S.-Iran talks in Geneva on Tuesday.

"I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal," Araghchi wrote on X. "What is not on the table: submission before threats."

As President Donald Trump ordered an additional aircraft

carrier to the region, Iran on Monday launched a second naval drill in weeks, state TV reported. It said the drill would test Iran's intelligence and operational capabilities in the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

Just before the talks, Iran announced its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard started the drill early Monday morning in the waterways that are crucial international trade routes through which 20% of the world's oil passes.

The Trump administration is seeking a deal to limit Iran's nuclear program and ensure it does not develop nuclear weapons. On Sunday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi signaled that Tehran could be open to compromise on

the nuclear issue, but is looking for an easing of international sanctions led by the United States.

"The ball is in America's court. They have to prove they want to have a deal with us," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC.

Oman hosted a first round of indirect talks between the U.S. and Iran on Feb. 6.

Trump initially threatened military action over Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month, but then shifted to a pressure campaign in recent weeks to try to get Tehran to make a deal over its nuclear program.

The direct meeting with Grossi is a significant step after Iran suspended all cooperation with the IAEA following the June war with Israel.

US military hits another alleged drug boat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military said Friday that it has carried out another deadly strike on a vessel accused of trafficking drugs in the Caribbean Sea.

U.S. Southern Command said on social media that the boat "was transiting along known narco-trafficking routes in the Caribbean and was engaged in narco-trafficking operations." It said the strike killed three people.

A video linked to the post shows a boat moving through the water before exploding in flames.

Friday's attack raises the death toll from the Trump administration's strikes on alleged drug boats to 133 people in at least 38 attacks carried out since early September in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth declared last week that "some top cartel drug-traffickers" in the region "have decided to cease all narcotics operations INDEFINITELY due to recent (highly effective) kinetic strikes in the Caribbean."

However, Hegseth did not provide any details or information to back up this claim, made in a post on his personal account on social media.

President Donald Trump has said the U.S. is in "armed conflict" with cartels in Latin America and has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs.

But his administration has offered little evidence to support its claims of killing "narcoterrorists."

Marine receives medal for saving driver

Stars and Stripes

A Marine stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif., on Friday was awarded a Navy and Marine Corps medal for saving another Marine's life after a severe vehicle accident two years ago.

The medal received by Staff Sgt. Billy Scafidel, an armory chief with 7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group, is the Navy Department's highest non-combat decoration for heroism, a service news release said.

"Nothing really prepared me for a situation like this, it's just in my nature, when I see someone in danger, I want to help out. That's what Marines do," Scafidel said.

On Sept. 1, 2024, while working on his car outside of his home near the Del Mar Boat Basin, Scafidel heard a loud splash in the nearby water and found a truck lying on its side, half-submerged.

Scafidel and U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Andrew James, who was nearby, rushed to the scene and found a driver trapped in a vehicle being submerged in water.

Without hesitation, Scafidel rushed into the water and quickly began smashing the front windshield with a hammer.

As he worked to break the windshield, Sgt. Jason Baughman, a military police officer, arrived and assisted, enabling

them to pull the trapped driver to safety.

The driver was transported to the Naval Hospital and fully recovered.

The release noted that Fire Department personnel assisting Scafidel noticed his hands were cut up from the rescue effort, which Scafidel said he "didn't even realize."

"In the face of adversity when a life was on the line, Staff Sgt. Scafidel, without care for his own safety, put himself in a position to make a difference," said U.S. Marine Corps 1st Sgt. Marc McGlothlin, senior enlisted leader of Headquarters and Service Company, 7th Engineer Support Battalion, 1st Marine Logistics Group.

Board of Peace to give \$5B to rebuild Gaza

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump said Sunday that members of his newly created Board of Peace have pledged \$5 billion toward rebuilding war-ravaged Gaza and will commit thousands of personnel to international stabilization and police forces for the territory.

The pledges will be formally announced when board members gather in Washington on Thursday for their first meeting, he said.

“The Board of Peace will prove to be the most consequential International Body in History, and it is my honor to serve as its Chairman,” Trump said in a social media posting announc-

ing the pledges.

He did not detail which member nations were making the pledges for reconstruction or would contribute personnel to the stabilization force.

But Indonesia’s military said Sunday that up to 8,000 of its troops are expected to be ready by the end of June for potential deployment to Gaza as part of a peace mission.

It’s the first firm commitment that the Republican president has received.

Rebuilding the Palestinian territory will be a daunting endeavor. The United Nations, World Bank and European Union estimate that reconstruction of the territory will cost \$70 billion. Few places in the Gaza

Strip were left unscathed by more than two years of Israeli bombardment.

The ceasefire deal calls for an armed international stabilization force to keep security and ensure the disarming of the militant Hamas group, a key demand of Israel.

Thus far, few countries have expressed interest in taking part in the proposed force.

The Oct. 10 U.S.-brokered ceasefire deal attempted to halt a more than 2-year war between Israel and Hamas. While the heaviest fighting has subsided, Israeli forces have carried out repeated airstrikes and frequently fire on Palestinians near military-held zones.

It is not clear how many of the

more than 20 members of the Board of Peace will attend the first meeting. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is not expected to be there.

Trump’s new board was first seen as a mechanism focused on ending the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza.

But it has taken shape with his ambition for a far broader mandate of resolving global crises and appears to be the latest U.S. effort to sidestep the United Nations as Trump aims to reset the post-World War II international order.

Many of America’s top allies in Europe and elsewhere have declined to join what they suspect may be an attempt to rival the Security Council.

FBI: DNA recovered from glove found near Nancy Guthrie’s home

Associated Press

A glove containing DNA found about two miles from the house of “Today” show host Savannah Guthrie’s mother appears to match those worn by a masked person outside her front door in Tucson the night she vanished, the FBI said Sunday.

The glove, discovered in a field beside a road, was sent for DNA testing. The FBI said in a statement that it received preliminary results Saturday and was awaiting official confirmation. The development comes as law enforcement gathers more potential evidence as the search for Guthrie’s mother heads into its third week. Authorities had previously said they had not identified a suspect.

On Sunday night, Savannah Guthrie posted a video in which she issued an appeal to whoever abducted her mother or anyone who knows where she is being

kept. “It is never too late to do the right thing,” Guthrie said. “And we are here. And we believe in the essential goodness of every human being, that it’s never too late.”

Nancy Guthrie, 84, was last seen at her Arizona home on Jan. 31 and was reported missing the following day. Authorities say her blood was found on the front porch.

The discovery was revealed days after investigators had released surveillance videos of the masked person outside Guthrie’s front door. A porch camera recorded video of a person with a backpack who was wearing a ski mask, long pants, jacket and gloves.

On Thursday, the FBI called the person a suspect. It described him as a man about 5 feet, 9 inches tall with a medium build. The agency said he was carrying a 25-liter “Ozark Trail Hiker Pack” backpack.

Storm sweeps across Southeast triggering tornado watches, winds

Associated Press

ATLANTA — A weekend storm system sweeping across the Southeast brought tornado warnings to Mississippi and Louisiana, and then took aim at parts of Georgia and Florida, as people in the Northeast were finally getting a reprieve from weeks of bitterly cold temperatures.

Some of the fiercest weather in the South was reported near Lake Charles, La., where high winds from a thunderstorm overturned a horse trailer and a Mardi Gras float, damaged an airport jet bridge and flung the metal awning from a house into power lines.

The damage was documented by National Weather Service employees who surveyed the area.

Power poles were snapped and toppled near the Louisiana towns of Jena, Cheneyville and Donaldsonville, the weather

service reported.

No deaths or serious injuries were reported, but the damage reports came as the storm system continued into parts of south Georgia and the Florida Panhandle, which were under tornado watches on Sunday.

The storms led to some power outages across the southern states, but nowhere near the massive number of outages caused by ice storms late last month in northern Mississippi and Nashville, Tenn.

By Sunday evening, a few thousand customers were still without electricity in Florida, Louisiana, Kentucky and Virginia, according to PowerOutage.us, which tracks outages nationwide.

On the West Coast, much of California braced for a powerful winter storm that was expected to bring drenching thunderstorms, damaging winds and heavy snow in mountain areas.

Expectations low for latest Ukraine talks

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — A Ukrainian delegation was headed to Geneva on Monday for another round of U.S.-brokered talks with Russian officials, ahead of next week's fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbor.

There was no anticipation of any significant progress on ending the war at the Tuesday-Wednesday meeting in Switzerland as both sides appear to be sticking to their negotiating positions on key issues, despite the United States setting a June deadline to reach a settlement. The future of Ukrainian land that Russia occupies or still covets is a central issue.

Ukrainian defenders remain locked in a war of attrition with Russia's bigger army

along the roughly 750-mile front line. Ukrainian civilians endure Russian aerial barrages that repeatedly knock out power and smash homes, while Ukraine has developed drones that can fly deep into Russian territory and strike oil refineries and arms depots.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday that the talks in Geneva will deal with a "broader range of issues related to the territories and other issues connected to the demands that we have."

He didn't elaborate on the issues.

A year of peace efforts by President Donald Trump's administration has failed to stop the fighting. Western officials and analysts say Russian President Vladimir Putin believes that time is on his side, that

Western support for Ukraine will peter out and that Ukraine's resistance will eventually collapse under pressure.

Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff, posted a photograph on Telegram showing himself standing next to a train with other members of the negotiating team, which is due to be led in Geneva by Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council chief.

Entering or leaving Ukraine entails a long overland journey, even for VIPs, as the country's airspace is closed because of the war.

Putin's adviser Vladimir Medinsky, who headed Moscow's team of negotiators in the first direct peace talks with Ukraine in Istanbul in

March 2022 and who has forcefully pushed Putin's war goals, is returning to lead Moscow's delegation.

Igor Kostyukov, the head of Russian military intelligence, and Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Galuzin, along with other officials, will also be in the delegation, Kremlin spokesman Peskov said.

It was not clear which American officials would be in Geneva. At recent talks in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, the Trump administration was represented by envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner.

The Russian and Ukrainian delegations were to report back to their leaders before any possible compromises discussed in Geneva could be accepted.

Obama puts end to buzz and denies alien contact

Associated Press

Former President Barack Obama said he did not see evidence that aliens "have made contact with us," after sending social media abuzz by saying aliens were real on a podcast over the weekend.

During a lightning round of questions with podcast host Brian Tyler Cohen, Obama was asked, "Are aliens real?"

"They're real," he answered, continuing: "But I haven't seen them. And, they're not being kept in Area 51."

On Sunday, the former president released a statement on Instagram, appearing to clarify what he meant by his comments that have since gone viral.

"I was trying to stick with the spirit of the speed round, but since it's gotten attention let me clarify. Statistically, the universe is so vast that the odds are good there's life out there.

But the distances between solar systems are so great that the chances we've been visited by aliens is low, and I saw no evidence during my presidency that extraterrestrials have made contact with us. Really!"

Secrecy around Area 51, a top-secret Cold War test site in the Nevada desert, has long fueled conspiracy theories among UFO enthusiasts.

In 2013, the CIA acknowledged the existence of the site, but not UFO crashes, black-eyed extraterrestrials or staged moon landings.

Declassified documents referred to the 8,000-square-mile installation by name after decades of U.S. government officials refusing to acknowledge it.

The base has been a testing ground for a host of top-secret aircraft, including the U-2 in the 1950s and later the B-2 stealth bomber.

N. Korea opens housing area for families of its soldiers killed in Ukraine

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea said Monday it completed a new housing district in Pyongyang for families of North Korean soldiers killed while fighting alongside Russian forces in Ukraine, the latest effort by leader Kim Jong Un to honor the war dead.

State media photos showed Kim Jong Un walking through the new street — called Saepyo Street — and visiting the homes of some of the families with his increasingly prominent daughter, believed to be named Kim Ju Ae, as he pledged to repay the "young martyrs" who "sacrificed all to their motherland."

In recent months, North Korea has intensified propaganda glorifying troops deployed to fight in Russia's war against

Ukraine, such as establishing a memorial wall and building a museum. Analysts see it as an effort to bolster internal unity and curb potential public discontent.

Kim in recent months has sent thousands of troops and large quantities of military equipment, including artillery and missiles, to fuel Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, as the leaders align in the face of their separate confrontations with Washington.

South Korea's National Intelligence Service told lawmakers last week it estimated 6,000 North Korean troops have been killed or wounded during their deployment in the war, but did not provide a breakdown of fatalities.

The agency said last year it believed roughly 600 had died.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

7 couples picked to tie the knot at market

PA PHILADELPHIA — Tucked in between a fish market, a bakery, and a honey stand, seven couples tied the knot among family, friends and perfect strangers on Saturday.

“It’s amazing,” said Beth Esposito-Evans, who officiated the ceremony. “What could be more Philly than Reading Terminal Market?”

Esposito-Evans, a vendor at the market, said she helped relaunch the “Married at the Market” Valentine’s Day wedding last year after she became an ordained minister.

It’s her second year officiating a group ceremony that blended traditional elements with plenty of love for the market.

Fifty-seven couples applied, according to event promoter London Faust. The seven lucky couples selected for the wedding were treated to decor, a violin player and the location, all paid for by Reading Terminal Market.

Faust said “the Reading Terminal team began an outreach process loosely prioritizing those who had strong ties to the market in their love story.” The celebration is free of charge for those accepted.

Authorities bust network of brothels

CA LOS ANGELES — A massive Southern California brothel ring was busted by authorities, leading to two arrests, officials said.

Detectives from the Ventura County Sheriff’s Office Special

Crimes Unit conducted a year-long investigation into a brothel ring, according to a Ventura County Sheriff’s Office news release.

Kebin Dong and Wei Nie, Los Angeles residents, were identified as the owners and operators of a sex services website, according to the release. Detectives found more than 30 residential and hotel brothels throughout California.

More than 60 female sex workers were also found on the website.

Dong and Nie allegedly helped schedule appointments at the brothels.

Dong and Nie were arrested at their home in Hacienda Heights and booked on suspicion of pimping, pandering and conspiracy. They are being held on \$200,000 bail.

Teachers and district reach deal to end strike

CA SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco teachers reached a tentative agreement Friday with the school district to end their strike, the first such walkout in nearly 50 years.

The strike by about 6,000 public schoolteachers started Feb. 9 and the district closed all 120 of its schools and said it would offer independent study to some of its 50,000 students.

The two-year tentative deal will give teachers the equivalent of a 5% raise over two years and, in a big win for the United Educators of San Francisco, the district will offer fully-funded health care for dependents starting on Jan. 1, 2027.

The union said San Francisco teachers receive some of the lowest contributions to their

health care costs in the Bay Area, with some having to pay at least \$1,200 a month for a family health care plan, pushing many to leave.

Zoo announces its new baby elephant’s name

DC WASHINGTON — The Smithsonian’s National Zoo announced Friday that its less than 2-week-old female Asian elephant has been named Linh Mai, Vietnamese for spirit blossom.

The 308-pound calf was the first elephant born at the zoo in almost 25 years and only the third elephant birth in the zoo’s 136-year history.

The calf’s parents are 12-year-old mother Nhi Linh and 44-year-old father Spike.

Zoo fans were invited to vote for their favorite name by making a donation of \$5 or more on the zoo’s website. Linh Mai won, with donations of \$22,885, the zoo said in a statement. The total raised was \$58,892.

States reliant on river fail to find consensus

AZ PHOENIX — The seven Western states that depend on the Colorado River missed a deadline for the second time Saturday to agree on a plan addressing record drought and water shortages.

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs, California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Nevada Gov. Joe Lombardo released a joint statement calling on Upper Basin states to offer more concessions.

Those states include Colorado, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

“The Colorado River is essen-

tial to our communities and economies, and our states have conserved large volumes of water in recent years to stabilize the basin’s water supplies for years to come,” the governors said.

“Our stance remains firm and fair: all seven basin states must share in the responsibility of conservation.”

Arizona, California and Nevada have offered to decrease Colorado River allocation by 27%, 10% and 17%, respectively, according to those states.

4 dead in small plane crash near ski resort

CO DENVER — Four people are dead after a small plane crashed Friday on a mountain near the Colorado ski resort community of Steamboat Springs, authorities said.

An Epic E1000, a six-seat turboprop plane, crashed around 12:20 a.m. with four people on board, the Federal Aviation Administration said. Four people died at the scene, Routt County coroner Mitch Locke said.

The plane crashed in a very remote part of Emerald Mountain, a mountain with hiking and biking trails just across the Yampa River from Steamboat Springs, Routt County Sheriff Doug Scherar said.

The plane crashed into mountainous terrain in unknown circumstances, according to preliminary information, the National Transportation Safety Board said.

The FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board both said they are investigating the crash.

From wire reports

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Reddick wins Daytona 500 in Jordan-owned car

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Michael Jordan, six-time NBA champion, is now a Daytona 500 winner, too.

Tyler Reddick won “The Great American Race” on Sunday with a last-lap pass at Daytona International Speedway that sent Jordan into a frantic celebration. The NBA Hall of Famer bear-hugged Reddick in victory lane and then jointly hoisted the Harley J. Earl trophy with the 23XI Racing driver.

Jordan, who turns 63 on Tuesday, will get a Daytona 500 ring for his birthday and made it known in victory lane he wears a size 13.

“It feels like I won a championship, but until I get my ring, I won’t even know,” Jordan said.

The moment captured the message team co-owner Denny Hamlin — who finished 31st in Sunday’s bid to become the third driver in history to win four Daytona 500s — delivered to 23XI employees in a team

meeting ahead of NASCAR’s season opener.

“He loves his race team,” Hamlin said, adding he reminded the team of the fulfillment they saw in Jordan when Reddick won at Talladega in 2024. “I was like ‘You know, you guys understand the responsibilities you have, that you have the power to bring joy to Michael Jordan. You have that power and nobody else can do it.’”

“There’s nothing else that can bring him the joy that seeing what his team can do and they took it to heart.”

Reddick, in a Toyota, led only one lap Sunday: the one to the checkered flag. He was the 25th different driver to lead a lap for a new Daytona 500 record.

“Just incredible how it all played out. Just true Daytona madness,” Reddick said. “I’ve already lost my voice from screaming. Never thought I’d be Daytona 500 champion.”

Reddick, a 30-year-old from Corning, Calif., won for the ninth time in the Cup Series and first time since late in the 2024

season. Winless last year, he was primarily focused on his infant son, who was found to have a tumor in his chest that affected his heart. Reddick opened last year with a runner-up finish in the Daytona 500.

He snapped the 38-race losing streak by finishing one place higher Sunday and winning to start a celebration that included multiple stars of NASCAR. It included Jordan, a global icon, and Hamlin, at 45 the oldest full-time driver in the Cup Series.

Reddick is teammates with Bubba Wallace, who went to victory lane in tears after leading a race-high 40 laps before finishing 10th. Jordan wrapped his arms around Wallace from behind and spoke closely into Wallace’s ear in a brief speech of encouragement.

“I don’t want my emotions to take away from the monumental day they just accomplished. Happy birthday, MJ. That’s a massive birthday present,” Wallace said. “I thought this was our week, the best 500 I’ve ever had,

and come up short, sucks.

“Led a lot of laps, lap leader, I believe. It was a good day for us, but damn. Try again next year.”

Hamlin, who drives for Joe Gibbs Racing, was involved in the final caution when he and teammate Christopher Bell collided with nine laps remaining. It set up the final push to the finish over the final four laps.

Chase Elliott grabbed the lead at the start of the final lap when Carson Hocevar was spun off the track. Reddick made a huge surge with an assist from teammate Riley Herbst, made contact with Elliott that caused him to crash, then sailed past to give Jordan a victory in NASCAR’s biggest event of the year.

“It’s stuff you dream of as a kid,” said Reddick. “Now, I definitely didn’t look into the future and know that I would drive for Michael Jordan. But to be able to have someone like Michael Jordan believe in me enough, someone like Denny Hamlin.

“I’m just trying to do my best to live on the promises that I made to them and vice versa.”

Edwards wins MVP, leads ‘Stars’ to NBA All-Star win

Associated Press

INGLEWOOD, Calif. — Anthony Edwards has said it boldly and confidently for years. He intends to be the best basketball player in the world.

The Minnesota Timberwolves guard got to beat the World on Sunday, thanks to the NBA All-Star Game’s intriguing new format — and then he also beat a team of his fellow Americans to cap an MVP performance.

Edwards led his “Stars” team past a “Stripes” squad featuring LeBron James and Kawhi Leonard 47-21 to win the final in this mini-tournament comprising the entertaining main event of All-Star weekend at the Los Angeles Clippers’ Intuit Dome.

The NBA’s fourth All-Star format in four years matched two teams of Americans against a team representing everywhere else, hoping to stoke nationalistic passion from players and fans during an Olympic year.

The results were solid, with three exciting mini-games in the round-robin tournament

all going down to the buzzer before the blowout finale.

“I like this format,” Edwards said. “I think it makes us compete because it’s only 12 minutes, and the three different teams separate the guys. I think it was really good.”

Along with the late-game theatrics, the event generally appeared to be played at a higher level of competitiveness than most All-Star Games in recent years, suggesting the league might have finally cracked the code on the long-standing question of how to make this midseason showcase more entertaining.

Edwards forced overtime with a clutch 3-pointer before Scottie Barnes hit a game-ending, overtime 3-pointer for his team in the opening mini-game against the World.

De’Aaron Fox hit a 3-pointer at the buzzer to win the second game for the slightly older Stripes over the slightly younger Stars.

Leonard then thrilled his home crowd with a 31-point barrage for the Stripes in the final round-robin game, including a tiebreaking 3-

pointer with 3.5 seconds left.

The Stripes appeared to be gassed in the finale, but Edwards and his teammates didn’t let up.

When asked to identify his most satisfying moment Sunday, Edwards replied: “Probably beating the World team.”

Why?

“Because they say they’re the best players in the world,” he replied. “So beating them is the best feeling in the world.”

Already a four-time All-Star at 24 years old, the six-year NBA veteran has been on the world stage before, winning an Olympic gold medal two years ago in Paris. He has also led Minnesota to the Western Conference finals in two straight seasons.

Edwards claimed his first All-Star MVP trophy — an award named for Kobe Bryant — with that tying 3-pointer to cap a 13-point effort in the first game, an 11-point performance in the second, and eight points in the anticlimactic final.

US advances to women's hockey final

Associated Press

MILAN — Aerin Frankel stopped 21 shots for her third shutout of the Olympic women's hockey tournament and the favored United States advanced to the gold-medal game by defeating Sweden 5-0 at the Milan Cortina Games on Monday.

Abbey Murphy, Kendall Coyne Schofield and Hayley Scamurra scored on consecutive shots over 2:47 late in the second period to blow the game open and put the Americans up 5-0. Cayla Barnes opened the scoring and Taylor Heise also scored.

The Americans continued their roll through the tournament by improving to 6-0, and outscoring their opponents by a combined 31-1. The U.S. has yet to trail or be tied after 0-0, and is in position to become the third

women's team to do so over the entire tournament, joining Canada in 2006 and 2010.

The U.S. also extended its shutout streak to 331 minutes, 23 seconds, going back to the Czech Republic's Barbora Jurickova beating Frankel on a breakaway in the second period of a tournament-opening 5-1 win.

The win over Sweden sets up what could well be a seventh gold-medal showdown against Canada on Thursday. The defending Olympic champion Canadians played Switzerland in the day's other semifinal game.

The U.S. already beat Canada 5-0 in a preliminary round game last week. The Americans won Olympic gold in 1998 and 2018, with Canada winning the other five tournaments.

Sweden will play for bronze Thursday in an effort to medal for the third time in team history, and first since winning silver at the 2006 Turin Games after upsetting the U.S. in the semifinals.

Ebba Svensson Traff stopped 19 of 23 shots before she was pulled after Coyne Schofield tipped in Laila Edwards' shot from the blue line with 3:50 left in the second period.

Emma Soderberg took over in goal, and was beaten by Scamurra, who tapped in Britta Curl-Salemme's centering pass 1:49 later. Soderberg finished with 10 saves.

Though the Swedes kept the game close through 35 minutes, the Americans eventually wore them down. And the U.S. certainly didn't resemble a team that didn't want to play Sweden,

as coach Ulf Lundberg suggested after the Swedes beat Czechia in the quarterfinals.

Though the Swedes kept the U.S. mostly to the perimeter in the opening period, they were still outshot 13-2.

Barnes scored with a snap shot from the top of the right circle and beat Svensson Traff high on the short side. Barnes' goal was her first point of the tournament, leaving seventh defender Rory Guilday as the lone American skater to not yet register a point through six games.

Heise made it 2-0 at the 9:08 mark of the second period by one-timing in Hannah Bilka's backhand pass through the middle. Svensson Traff got her glove on the shot, but the puck deflected across her body and into the net off the inside of her stick.

Wilson's willing to fight and Canada is happy to see it

Associated Press

MILAN — Who says there's no fighting in hockey at the Olympics? Tom Wilson clearly does not care that it's shunned in international play.

Wilson dropped the gloves late in Canada's 10-2 rout of France on Sunday, going after the player who delivered a forearm to the head of teammate Nathan MacKinnon minutes earlier.

"Obviously fighting isn't a big thing in this tournament, but when a guy takes a run at one of our big guys, that's what Willy does," three-time Olympian Drew Doughty said. "I mean, he does a lot more than that, but it was great to see him step up."

Wilson fought Pierre Crinon, who was given a two-minute minor penalty and apologized to MacKinnon after the hit in the third period. Scoring 25 seconds into the ensuing power play was not good enough punishment in the eyes of Canada's players.

"We didn't like the hit: felt like it

was late and high," tournament leading scorer Connor McDavid said.

"Willy just finishes a check and the guy jumps him, and Willy's just protecting himself. That's all he can do. That's the type of guy he is, type of teammate he is. Nothing but respect for him."

Unlike the NHL, where it is a 5-minute major penalty, fighting is a game misconduct under International Ice Hockey Federation rules, so Wilson and Crinon were ejected. The outcome was already long determined, and Wilson only missed the final seven minutes of the game.

"We're used to a lot more than that happening, so it was pretty harmless in the grand scheme of things," coach Jon Cooper said. "Sticking up for his teammates, that's an easy one for him."

Wilson also had a goal and an assist, along with the fight giving him what is known in hockey as a "Gordie Howe hat trick."

The 31-year-old winger is one

of just a few new players for Canada who did not play at the 4 Nations Face-Off a year ago, when there were three fights in the first nine seconds of the team's first game against the U.S.

Wilson's fight came exactly a year after those, when Canada's Brandon Hagel, Sam Bennett and Colton Parayko fought Americans Matthew Tkachuk, Brady Tkachuk and J.T. Miller.

"Listen, I don't think we can go through this tournament without seeing one," Hagel said, smiling. "It was probably the talk about him coming to the tournament. But that's just what Willy does: He sticks up for teammates."

MacKinnon, who was slow to get up and spent some time on the bench before returning, appreciated Wilson standing up for him.

"That guy obviously didn't want to fight Tom," MacKinnon said. "He just wanted to wrestle. I wouldn't want to fight Tom either."

Wilson was undoubtedly

picked for his physicality and ability to retrieve pucks, along with producing at a high level back in North America with the Washington Capitals. He is their leading scorer with 49 points in 50 games this season.

He's likely to be the Capitals' captain when Alex Ovechkin retires, and Cooper called Wilson "outstanding in the locker room." Fighting at the Olympics only gives Wilson, who did not speak to reporters afterward, more street cred with his teammates.

"We know Willy's got our backs," Bennett said. "He's going to protect all our guys and bring the energy. We love that from Willy. He's going to do anything for our team."

Feisty goaltender Jordan Binnington, who has been known to jab a player or two with his blocker when he's displeased, loved it, too.

"I definitely wasn't surprised," Binnington said. "That's hockey, right? That's hockey."

German Lochner starts fast in 2-man bobsled

Associated Press

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy — The two-man bobsled competition at the Milan Cortina Olympics is four runs over two days, the same format the event has used for nearly a century.

Germany's Johannes Lochner might have ended this year's event in exactly 54.68 seconds.

That was Lochner's time in the first run Monday, giving him a lead that only got bigger — much bigger — as the day went along. Lochner and brakeman Georg Fleischhauer finished their two runs in 1 minute, 49.90 seconds, and nothing short of a disaster on their end should keep them from winning gold in the final two runs Tuesday night.

"Such a big lead," Fleischhauer said. "We didn't really expect that."

Their margin at the midway point is 0.80 seconds. Here's some historical perspective of how absolutely one-sided that is: If you add up the halftime leads in the last nine Olympic

two-man races, combined, it comes out to 0.58 seconds. And the average halftime lead since 1964 — just 0.25 seconds.

This is a bobsled blowout.

"He might be perfect," U.S. pilot and medal contender Frank Del Duca said.

It's Germany-Germany-Germany in the top three spots, though Del Duca is right there, just one-tenth of a second from the bronze medal position.

Reigning world and Olympic two-man champion Francesco Friedrich, who has been looking up at Lochner all season in the World Cup rankings, finished two runs in 1:50.70 seconds. He's the only one within a second of Lochner; Germany's Adam Ammour is third in 1:51.14, with Del Duca and Josh Williamson fourth in 1:51.24.

Friedrich is at the Milan Cortina Games trying to become the first five-time gold medalist in Olympic bobsled history, after sweeping the two- and four-man races at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games and

the 2022 Beijing Games.

"We have to give all what we can do," said Friedrich, widely considered the best bobsled-der ever. "We want to make the best push times, the best drives tomorrow. ... The race is over when four runs are in the finish."

Technically, that's true.

In reality, though, it might be over. The race might really be for third between Ammour and Del Duca.

"Frankie Del Duca is right behind us," Ammour said. "So, yeah, there's no room for error tomorrow."

Del Duca is bidding to be the first U.S. medalist in two-man since Steven Holcomb and Steven Langton grabbed silver at the 2014 Sochi Games.

"I left quite a bit of time out there," Del Duca said. "I mean, as drivers, we always do. I don't know if someone can really walk away and say it was a perfect run. I haven't seen Lochner's runs. ... But for us to be this close, it's really just a testament to our whole system,

our people behind us, how hard everybody's been working."

Del Duca, one of the two U.S. flagbearers entering the Olympics, is driving the only two-man sled the Americans have in the competition, after officials would not let pilot Kris Horn compete because he finished four — one shy of the minimum — out of seven World Cup races this winter.

Horn will race in the four-man event later this week.

Lochner is in what he has said is his final season and won the World Cup two- and four-man overall titles this winter. He won medals in all 14 World Cup races — nine gold and five silver, never finishing worse than second. And in two-man, he was especially dominant with six wins in seven races.

He will not reconsider retirement, he said.

"I have a wife and child waiting for me at home," Lochner said.

A trip to the top of the Olympic medal podium seems to be waiting for him as well.

Favorites stumble as Hase, Volodin capture pairs lead

Associated Press

MILAN — Minerva Fabienne Hase and Nikita Volodin were the beneficiaries of another unpredictable night of Olympic figure skating.

The German pair, who have struggled with consistency themselves, made it through their short program cleanly while all of the other favorites faltered Sunday night, giving them a comfortable lead going into the free skate at the Milan Cortina Games. Performing to "El Abrazo" by French composer Maxime Rodriguez, Hase and Volodin opened with a brilliant triple twist, landed their side-by-side triple salchows, and their throw triple loop put an exclamation mark on a program that earned them 80.01 points.

"Our goal was to go out there

and feel like we do in practice and just do our job," Hase said. "So we tried to do that and then after the program we were happy that everything worked out. The crowd was amazing. They supported us a lot. So we are happy overall. But it was just the first part. So tomorrow we have to do the same again."

Anastasiia Metelkina and Luka Berulava, who made a mistake on their throw triple flip but were otherwise solid, were well behind in second place with 75.46 points as they try to give Georgia its first ever medal at the Winter Games.

Lia Pereira and Trennt Michaud of Canada were third with 74.60 in what could be a tight competition for the podium Monday night.

Riku Miura and Ryuichi Kihara,

the world champions from Japan and heavy favorites to win gold, will have to stage a big comeback after a major mistake on their lift cost them nearly six points. Miura awkwardly slid off Kihara's shoulders near the end of the element, and that error was enough to send them tumbling all the way to fifth place with 73.11 points.

By comparison, Miura and Kihara scored a career-best 82.84 points for the same program during the team event last weekend.

The defending Olympic champions, Sui Wenjing and Han Cong, went long before the rest of the favorites because the order is based partly on world rankings.

They also became the first of the favorites to stumble, as Sui fell on their opening triple toe

loop and they finished with 72.66 points.

Former world champions Deanna Stellato-Dudek, the 42-year-old from the Chicago area, and her Canadian partner Maxime Deschamps weren't even sure they would compete at these Olympics when she sustained a head injury in a recent practice fall.

They had a strong program going until Stellato-Dudek's fluke fall at the end of their reverse laso lift. They scored just 66.04.

Ellie Kam and Danny O'Shea, who helped the United States capture team gold last week, were the top American pair in seventh place with 71.87 points. Emily Chan and Spencer Akira Howe, a private first class in the U.S. Army, were ninth with 70.06 points.