

Biden: Defending allies 'sacred obligation'

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

President Joe Biden arrived in Brussels on Monday with a message that defending allies in Europe was a "sacred obligation," as NATO's leaders gathered for a summit that will result in a new strategy that accounts for the rise of China, climate change and threats in space.

"I want to make it clear, NATO is critically important to U.S. interests in and of itself. If there weren't one (NATO), we'd have to invent one," Biden said upon his arrival at alliance headquarters.

Flanked by NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, Biden also described NATO's Article 5 provision that an attack on one member is regarded as an attack on all, as a "sacred obligation." "I want all of Europe to know that the United States is there," Biden said.

For allies, Biden's talk of NATO solidarity comes after four years of angst in Brussels over the U.S. commitment to the alliance. NATO was frequently criticized by former President Donald Trump, who openly questioned the relevance of a security pact that dates to the early days of the Cold War.

"I welcome the fact that we have a pres-

ident of the United States who is strongly committed to NATO, to North America and Europe, working together in NATO," Stoltenberg said at the start of the summit.

At the top of the conference agenda is NATO's 2030 plan, which calls for adapting the alliance to take on new threats. Allies also will agree to launch a new "Strategic Concept," which hasn't been updated since 2010 and doesn't currently take into account China's growing military power.

"China is coming closer to us. We see them in cyberspace. We see China in Africa, in the Arctic, but we also see China investing heavily in our own critical infrastructure and trying to control it," Stoltenberg said.

In a communiqué issued after talks, NATO leaders raised concerns about China's "coercive policies" that pose a challenge to "the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security."

"China is rapidly expanding its nuclear arsenal with more warheads and a larger number of sophisticated delivery systems to establish a nuclear triad. It is opaque in implementing its military modernization and its publicly declared military-civil fusion strategy," the communiqué stated. "It

is also cooperating militarily with Russia, including through participation in Russian exercises in the Euro-Atlantic area."

The old Strategic Concept also came before Russia's 2014 military intervention in Ukraine. Regarding relations with Moscow, they are now "at its lowest point since the end of the Cold War," Stoltenberg said. "This is due to Russia's aggressive actions."

The new Strategic Concept, which also will deal with the security implication of climate change, will be drafted this year and approved at NATO's 2022 summit.

The 30 member states also agreed to a new cyber defense policy to strengthen coordination and counter increasingly frequent and severe threats from malicious cyber activity perpetrated by state and non-state actors.

Stoltenberg, speaking on the sidelines of the summit at an event hosted by the German Marshall Fund think tank, said that allies also agree to recognize that an attack on allied interests in space could trigger an Article 5 response. Article 5 is the cornerstone of the organization's collective defense, stipulating that an attack against a single ally is considered as an attack against all member states.

Combat controller awarded Airman's Medal for heroism

By CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

For Master Sgt. Daniel Keller, bravery isn't confined to the battlefield.

The airman earned the highest Air Force award for noncombat bravery for rescuing a motorist from a burning SUV in Kentucky, a little over a year after earning the service's second-highest award for heroism on the battlefield in Afghanistan.

The combat controller with the 123rd Special Tactics Squadron received the Airman's Medal during a ceremony Saturday at the Kentucky Air National Guard Base in Louisville, the 123rd Airlift Wing said in a statement.

Keller was driving home from work Nov. 16, 2018, when he came up on the aftermath

of a crash on a narrow bridge outside Louisville and jumped out of his truck to help. After assisting a man and his son from one vehicle, he enlisted bystanders to stop traffic so he could rescue the unconscious driver of the SUV.

In 2017, Keller's courage in a grueling battle with Islamic State militants in Afghanistan earned him the Air Force Cross — which he received about a year after the crash. Despite suffering a traumatic brain injury from a nearby blast, he'd directed critical airstrikes that killed dozens of enemy fighters, then risked his life to help evacuate wounded troops.

During the incident in Louisville, smoke inside the vehicle forced him to hold his breath, and when he reached the driver, he

found the man's foot was trapped and he couldn't be pulled out away from the burning engine compartment.

With the help of an unnamed woman, he squeezed between the burning SUV and the bridge railing to pull the driver out a side window and move him away from the burning wreck.

He had to go back to help the woman, who had gotten trapped alongside the burning vehicle, and then they began performing CPR. That's when Keller heard the familiar pop of gunfire.

Realizing ammunition inside the burning SUV was cooking off, he moved everyone back behind cover and continued providing medical care until emergency crews arrived.

1991 eruption ended troops' stay in Philippines

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

Ash, smoke and mayhem descended onto Clark Air Base when nearby Mount Pinatubo erupted three decades ago in the Philippines.

In the hours after the eruption on June 15, 1991, Susan Kreifels, Stars and Stripes' Philippines bureau chief who lived on the base, was stuck in a snarl of traffic on her way to Manila. Her driver inched through the dusk created by the mushroom cloud of ash that blotted out the sun.

As the car ground to a halt in the congestion, a man walked up to Kreifels' open window, plopped a crying baby into her arms and hastily disappeared.

"I didn't know what to do," recalled Kreifels, now the media program manager for the East-West Center in Honolulu. "I didn't know what to do with that poor crying baby."

"All I could think about was how scared people had to be to leave their baby with a stranger."

Such was the power of Pinatubo's eruption, ripping a hole in the earth, tearing a community apart and, ultimately, severing America's longtime ties with Clark.

Within a year, the United States would abandon the base devastated by thick ash from "the most powerful eruption of the 20th century that occurred in a populated area," as Kreifels wrote on the day of the eruption.

Anyone living at Clark had a clear vista of Pinatubo, only 14 miles west of the installation. But few had a better view of the simmering volcano than Lou Arthur after it began belching steam in early April 1991.

Then an Air Force staff sergeant, Arthur worked in communications and handled mobile radios for the base.

Volcanologists from the U.S. Geological Survey and the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology arrived at Clark in April to begin monitoring with mountainside seismographs.

Arthur was tasked with accompanying them in a Huey helicopter as they checked the equipment and flew over Pinatubo to monitor sulfur releases and other clues about a pending eruption.

"The level of confidence in the team to be able to predict when the thing would go off was, I would say, not very high," Arthur recalled during a recent phone interview from his home in Den-

ver. He recalled overhearing their conversations discussing "what type of equivocating language to use" in reporting to the general and his staff.

The appearance of a magma dome inside Pinatubo set in motion the massive Operation Fiery Vigil on June 10, when about 15,000 active-duty troops and civilians were evacuated to Naval Base Subic Bay.

On June 12, Pinatubo "cleared its throat" with an immense 12-mile-high column of ash, Hanne-man said, describing it as hitting him as a whoosh of pressure as he stood outside at Subic with other agents burning classified documents in 55-gallon drums.

Three days later, on June 15, Pinatubo released its full fury, exploding with a force eight times greater than the Mount Saint Helens eruption a decade before.

As the eruption continued, Kreifels was just outside Clark gathering information for a story — beset with anxiety.

Kreifels routinely hired a local man, Virgilio, to drive her around because of the complexity and risks of navigating Philippine roads. She wanted Virgilio to drive her down to Manila that day to submit a news story, but

she said he told her to go on by herself because he needed to return to his family at nearby Angeles City.

She directed him instead to drive to his home, where they picked up his wife, children and his pregnant sister.

It was with this packed car — they had picked up a few elderly women as they drove — on their way out of the eruption zone that the stranger plopped the baby in Kreifels' lap.

Virgilio advised the panicked journalist to give the infant to one of the elderly women they were driving to an emergency shelter outside the eruption zone.

Three decades later, Kreifels said she still agonizes over whether baby and parents were ever reunited.

The eruption claimed the lives of more than 800 Filipinos, most of whom died from collapsed roofs.

Within the first 24 hours of eruption, a typhoon swept through the northern Philippines, turning the ash into sticky, heavy mud. On Clark alone, more than 100 buildings collapsed from the weight, with 200 more seriously damaged by it.

Marine sentenced for sex assault, assault on Okinawa

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**
Stars and Stripes

NAHA, Okinawa — A Marine found guilty of sexually assaulting a woman in a parking lot and shoving a police officer was given a four-year suspended sentence by a Japanese court Monday.

Pfc. Marvin Earl James Jr., 24, a transmission systems operator with the 3rd Marine Division at Camp Courtney, pleaded guilty on April 21 to forcible indecency and interfering with the public duties of police.

Prosecutors alleged that James

forced himself on the Japanese woman in the early hours of Jan. 31 and later shoved a police officer attempting to question him.

James acknowledged during his first hearing April 21 that he did not have the proper consent for sexual contact.

Naha District Court Judge Koji Oohashi sentenced James to two years and six months in a Japanese prison with hard labor, but suspended the sentence for four years. James will likely serve no additional jail time unless he commits another crime in Japan.

"The manner of the crime is audacious and malicious," Oohashi told the court. "It is understandable that she could not resist from fear as she was suddenly attacked by the defendant, who was much bigger, and it gave her great psychological distress."

James looked dazed and shaken during the short, two-day trial. The court heard how the intoxicated Marine approached the woman on a Naha street at 5:05 a.m., took her into a nearby parking lot, kissed her, pulled down her shorts and, after laying her on

the hood of a car, penetrated her with his finger, "knowing that it could be against her will," Oohashi said Monday as he read the facts of the case.

James fled when the woman threatened to call police, a Naha police spokesman told Stars and Stripes after the arrest.

James was also accused of shoving an officer in the chest in the Kumoji area of Naha at 6:28 a.m. The officer, responding to the sexual assault call, spotted James walking alone and attempted to question him.

Novavax says study finds vaccine is 90% effective

Associated Press

Vaccine maker Novavax said Monday its shot was highly effective against COVID-19 and also protected against variants in a large, late-stage study in the U.S. and Mexico.

The vaccine was about 90% effective overall and preliminary data showed it was safe, the company said.

While demand for COVID-19 shots in the U.S. has dropped off dramatically, the need for more vaccines around the world remains critical. The Novavax vaccine, which is easy to store and transport, is expected to play an important role in boosting vaccine supplies in the developing world.

That help is still months away, however. The company says it plans to seek authorization for the shots in the U.S., Europe and elsewhere by the end of September and be able to produce up to 100 million doses a month by then.

"Many of our first doses will go to ... low- and middle-income countries, and that was the goal to begin with," Novavax Chief Executive Stanley Erck told The Associated Press.

While more than half of the U.S. population has had at least one COVID-19 vaccine dose, less than 1% of people in the developing world have had one shot, according to Our World In Data.

Novavax's study involved nearly 30,000 people ages 18 and up in the U.S. and Mexico. Two-thirds received two doses of the vaccine, three weeks apart, and the rest got dummy shots.

There were 77 cases of COVID-19 — 14 in the group that got the vaccine and the rest

were in volunteers who received dummy shots. None in the vaccine group had moderate or severe disease, compared to 14 in the placebo group.

The vaccine was similarly effective against several variants including the one first detected in the U.K. that's dominant in the U.S., and in high-risk populations including the elderly and people with other health problems.

Side effects were mostly mild — tenderness and pain at the injection site. There were no reports of unusual blood clots or heart problems, Erck said.

Novavax reported the results in a press release and plans to publish in a medical journal, where it will be vetted by independent experts. The Maryland-based company previously released findings from smaller studies in Britain and South Africa.

COVID-19 vaccines train the body to recognize the coronavirus, especially the spike protein that coats it, and get ready to fight the virus off. The Novavax vaccine is made with lab-grown copies of that protein. That's different from some of the other vaccines now widely used, which include genetic instructions for the body to make its own spike protein.

Novavax previously announced manufacturing delays due to supply shortages. The company now expects to reach production of 100 million doses a month by the end of September and 150 million doses a month by December.

The company has committed to supplying 110 million doses to the U.S. over the next year and a total of 1.1 billion doses to developing countries.

Judge tosses hospital workers' vaccine dispute

Associated Press

HOUSTON — A federal judge threw out a lawsuit filed by employees of a Houston hospital system over its requirement that all of its staff be vaccinated against COVID-19.

The Houston Methodist Hospital system suspended 178 employees without pay last week over their refusal to get vaccinated. Of them, 117 sued seeking to overturn the requirement and over their suspension and threatened termination.

In a scathing ruling Saturday, U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes of Houston deemed lead plaintiff Jennifer Bridges' contention that the vaccines are "experimental and dangerous" to be false and otherwise irrelevant.

Hughes also ruled that making vaccinations a condition of employment was not coercion, as Bridges contended.

"Bridges can freely choose to accept or refuse a COVID-19 vaccine; however, if she refuses, she will simply need to work somewhere else. If a worker refuses an assignment, changed office, earlier start time, or other directive, he may be properly fired. Every employment includes limits on the worker's behavior in exchange for remuneration. That is all part of the bargain," Hughes concluded.

Jared Woodfill, a Houston lawyer representing Bridges and the other clients, promised an appeal.

"What is shocking is that many of my clients were on the front line treating COVID-positive patients at Texas Methodist Hospital during the height of the pandemic," Woodfill said in a statement. "As a result, many of them contracted COVID-19. As a thank you ... Methodist Hospital awards them a pink slip and sentences them to bankruptcy."

6 virus cases at US bases in Japan, none in S. Korea

By ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — Two U.S. military bases in Japan reported six new COVID-19 cases between Friday and Monday evenings, while commands on the Korean peninsula had no infections to report.

Kadena Air Base on Okinawa announced Saturday that five people are in isolation after testing positive for the coronavirus respiratory disease. Three pa-

tients were identified as close contacts of known positives and were already in quarantine, according to a post on the installation's Facebook page.

Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni released a statement Monday announcing one new patient. That individual tested positive while in quarantine upon arrival to the installation, the Marines said.

New daily infections across Japan remain in the thousands, with 1,387 cases

reported on Sunday by national broadcaster NHK. Of those, 304 were from the Tokyo metropolitan area.

U.S. Forces Japan announced Friday that installations will start administering coronavirus vaccines to local employees on a volunteer basis.

USFJ and the Japanese government reached the decision after noting declining cases on U.S. military bases, the release said.

DOJ official resigns amid subpoena uproar

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department's top national security official is resigning from his position after revelations that the department secretly seized records from Democrats and members of the media.

John Demers will leave his position by the end of next week, a Justice Department official told The Associated Press on Monday. The official could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity.

A second person familiar with the matter said Demers had planned for weeks to leave the department by the end of June. He was sworn in a few weeks after the subpoena for the Democrats' records and is one of the few Trump appointees who has remained in the Biden adminis-

tration. The official and the person could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on the condition of anonymity.

The resignation comes amid questions about what Demers knew about the Justice Department's efforts to secretly seize the phone data from House Democrats and reporters as part of the aggressive investigations into leaks.

News emerged last week that the Justice Department had secretly subpoenaed Apple for metadata from House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff and another Democratic member of the panel, California Rep. Eric Swalwell, in 2018, as their committee was investigating then-President Donald Trump's ties to Russia. Schiff at the time was the top Democrat on the panel, which was led by Republicans.

The records of at least 12 people connected to the House intelligence panel were eventually shared with the Justice Department by Apple after the subpoena was issued in 2018.

The subpoena, issued Feb. 6, 2018, requested information on 73 phone numbers and 36 email addresses, Apple said. It also included a non-disclosure order that prohibited the company from notifying any of the people and was renewed three times, the company said in a statement.

On Sunday, a person familiar with the matter said that Apple informed former Trump White House counsel Don McGahn and his wife that the DOJ had subpoenaed information about accounts belonging to them in 2018. It's not clear yet why the Trump administration sought the McGahns' records.

Demers will be temporarily

replaced by Mark Lesko, the acting U.S. attorney in the Eastern District of New York, the official said, until President Joe Biden's official pick, Mark Olsen, is approved by the Senate. Olsen is an Uber executive with experience in the Justice Department. He has served as director of the National Counterterrorism Center and as general counsel for the National Security Agency.

The Justice Department's inspector general has launched a probe into the matter after a request from Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. Inspector General Michael Horowitz said he would examine whether the data subpoenaed by the Justice Department and turned over by Apple followed department policy and "whether any such uses, or the investigations, were based upon improper considerations."

High court defers Harvard case on race in admissions

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With abortion and guns already on the agenda, the conservative-dominated Supreme Court is considering adding a third blockbuster issue — whether to ban consideration of race in college admissions.

The justices on Monday put off a decision about whether they will hear an appeal claiming that Harvard discriminates against Asian American applicants, in a case that could have nationwide repercussions. The court asked the Justice Department to weigh in on the case, a process that typically takes several months.

The presence of three appointees of former President Donald Trump could prompt the court to take up the case, even though it's only been five years since its last decision in a case about affirmative action in higher education.

In that Texas case, the court

reaffirmed in a 4-3 decision that colleges and universities may consider race in admissions decisions. But they must do so in a narrowly tailored way to promote diversity, the court said in a decision that rejected the discrimination claims of a white applicant. Schools also bear the burden of showing why their consideration of race is appropriate.

Two members of that four-justice majority are gone from the court. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died in September, and Justice Anthony Kennedy retired in 2018.

The three dissenters in the case, Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, remain on the court. Roberts, a moderating influence on some issues, has been a steadfast vote to limit the use of race in public programs, once writing, "It is a sordid business, this divvying us up by race."

Americans admit helping Nissan's Ghosn to escape

Associated Press

TOKYO — Two Americans charged with helping former Nissan chairman Carlos Ghosn flee Japan while he was facing accusations of financial misconduct agreed Monday that they took part in a scheme for him to escape the country.

Statements by Michael Taylor and his son, Peter, on the opening day of their trial in Tokyo suggest the pair don't plan to fight charges of assisting a criminal. That carries a possible penalty of up to three years in prison.

Keiji Isaji, one of the attorneys for the Taylors, told The Associated Press after the court session that he wants the trial to "proceed efficiently." He said ending the trial quickly is "in the best interests of his clients." He declined to confirm his team was hoping for a suspended sentence if they are convicted, meaning no time would be served. He

stressed the decision was up to the judge.

Prosecutors read a statement accusing Michael Taylor, a former Green Beret, and Peter Taylor of arranging to hide Ghosn in a box for musical equipment. It was loaded onto a private jet that flew him from the western city of Osaka to Lebanon via Turkey in December 2019.

Ryozo Kitajima, one of the prosecutors, said Peter Taylor met with Ghosn at a hotel several times in 2019 and introduced Ghosn to his father. He said Peter Taylor also received \$562,500 in two transfers to pay for chartering the jet and other expenses. Peter Taylor arranged for Ghosn to change his clothing at a Tokyo hotel. His father and another man, George-Antoine Zayek, later accompanied Ghosn to the Osaka airport, Kitajima said. Zayek has not yet been arrested.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

County seeks to rename highway for abolitionist

VA ARLINGTON — A northern Virginia county near the nation's capital is paving the way to rename a major highway that currently shares a name with Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee.

The Arlington County Board said that it plans to vote next month to rename Lee Highway for abolitionist John Langston, who also was the first Black person to be elected to Congress from Virginia.

The five-member board voted unanimously to defer a final vote to July 17. In a news release, the board said the extra month will allow for additional community engagement and refining the cost estimate.

History museum manager defends Juneteenth plans

NC HUNTERSVILLE — The manager of a historical museum in North Carolina is defending himself from criticism that an event he planned offered a sympathetic portrayal of slave owners.

Ian Campbell, site manager of the Latta Historic Plantation in Huntersville, posted a statement on the plantation's website saying that he will never glorify the Confederacy, white supremacy or plantation owners. He accused the media of a rush to judgment.

Latta canceled its Juneteenth program "Kingdom Coming" after complaints emerged about a promotion for the event. The event description seemed in parts to mirror the perspective of a reenactor who says attendees "will hear stories from the

massa himself" and offered sympathetic commentary about a white overseer who no longer had slaves to oversee.

The event was canceled amid criticism of the event by Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles and others.

Lightning fire disrupts a live theater performance

KS WICHITA — A fire disrupted opening night at the Crown Uptown Theatre in Wichita after lightning appeared to strike the nearly 100-year-old building.

General manager Max Wilson told The Wichita Eagle that the fire in a breaker in the basement interrupted a performance of "Come Together: A Beatles Review." Wilson said actors who were rehearsing for another show at the church across the street saw lightning hit the theater.

Wilson said he ran into the basement and used an extinguisher to put out a breaker that was on fire as an alarm warned performers and the audience of about 100 people to exit the building.

State will increase some penalties for DWI crashes

NH CONCORD — A New Hampshire bill aimed at strengthening penalties for repeat drunken drivers is headed to the governor's desk.

The House agreed to the Senate's version of Tyler Shaw's Law, named for a 20-year-old Concord man who died in 2018 when a repeat drunken driver sped off a highway exit, through a stop sign and into Shaw's truck.

The bill, which Gov. Chris Sununu said he will sign, would in-

crease penalties to 10 to 20 years in jail for drunken drivers who kill or maim someone after a prior driving while intoxicated conviction.

Police: Man threatened businesses, wanted day off

AL EUFAULA — A man accused of making threats that resulted in two businesses temporarily shutting down for searches in southeast Alabama apparently did so because he wanted a day off, police said.

Richie Earl Smith, 24, of Eufula, was jailed on four charges of making terroristic threats, Police Chief Steve Watkins said in a statement released on social media.

Two businesses got "threatening communications" that resulted in them being evacuated and searched, Watkins said.

"Smith's apparent motive was desiring a day off from work," he said.

Police didn't say where Smith worked or if his employer was one of the businesses that was threatened.

Couple on hook for \$1.4K for illegally selling crab

OR HERMISTON — An eastern Oregon couple was sentenced to pay \$1,200 in restitution after illegally selling recreationally caught crab on the commercial market in Hermiston, according to the Oregon State Police.

Shawna and Gerald Wilson of Hermiston also will pay \$100 each to the Turn In Poachers Line fund, and they are barred from obtaining a fishing or shellfish license for three years, the East Oregonian reported.

The couple on Facebook listed the crab as free of charge, but with a suggested donation of \$11 per pound to skirt marine fisheries laws that prohibit people from selling their personal limits of crab and other marine life on the commercial market, according to law enforcement.

Doughnuts lure bear into trap after stroll in city

MS NATCHEZ — Doughnuts from a local store were the key to capturing a large black bear that had been spotted wandering near downtown Natchez — he couldn't resist them, authorities said.

Officers used doughnuts from The Donut Shop to lure the bear into a barrel-shaped trap, The Natchez Democrat reported.

Authorities said the bear would be relocated to a wooded area.

Monkey that escaped may not be returned to owner

NV RENO — Records show a pet monkey that escaped from its home in Reno last month and injured four people might not be returned to its owner.

Gebbe, a pigtailed macaque, was captured after injuring four neighbors and was placed under a 10-day quarantine. Authorities say Gebbe didn't show any symptoms of rabies.

A county inspection officer told the monkey's owner that her exotic pet permit for Gebbe could be revoked because the monkey injured neighbors. The Washoe County District Attorney's Office filed a criminal citation against the owner for having an unrestrained animal.

— From wire reports

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Suns advance to conference finals

Associated Press

Jae Crowder received all sorts of quizzical text messages for his decision to sign with the Phoenix Suns in the offseason.

What was he thinking? The Suns hadn't been to the playoffs in a decade and the West was stacked.

"I look like a genius, huh?" cracked Crowder, who took his talents to the Suns after helping Miami reach the NBA Finals last season. "I knew the type of group these guys were. I felt like they were hungry. They wanted to do some special things and I wanted to be a part of it."

Behind the brilliant backcourt of Chris Paul and Devin Booker and steady contributions from the likes of Crowder, the Suns are roaring into the Western Conference Finals for the first time since 2010, the last year they reached the postseason.

The Suns completed a four-game sweep of the short-handed Denver Nuggets with a 125-118 win Sunday night in a testy game in which MVP Nikola Jokic was ejected in the third quarter for a flagrant foul on Cameron Payne.

It was the seventh straight win for Phoenix — the longest playoff winning streak in team history.

After bouncing LeBron James and the defending champion Lakers in six games

during the first round, the Suns made even quicker work of Jokic and the Nuggets.

Now they get to rest up before playing either top-seeded Utah or the Los Angeles Clippers. The Jazz lead that series 2-1 heading into Game 4 on Monday night in Los Angeles. Phoenix was 1-2 against the Clippers in the regular season and 3-0 against the Jazz.

"Everybody at this point is banged up and can use that kind of recovery," Phoenix coach Monty Williams said. "We earned it and we want to take advantage of it."

"But right now, I'm not even thinking about that. I'm just happy about what these guys have accomplished."

Crowder has become quite a postseason catalyst, with his teams going 22-9 over his last 31 playoff games. Before the 2020 season, his teams were 20-31 in playoff games.

"Very impressive how locked in we are as a unit," Crowder said. "We have great leadership. We have great coaching putting us in a position to succeed right now."

"I definitely feel like we're connected as a group and it shows."

Right after the final horn, Paul and Booker — who combined for 71 points — made their way through the post-series handshakes and hugs near the Nuggets logo.

Waiting on the side was Williams. He

shared a heartfelt embrace with each one.

Williams is close with Paul from their coach/guard time together in New Orleans. They have a strong bond away from the court, too, and Paul was there for Williams when he lost his wife from injuries in a car accident in 2016.

"Monty has been through things in his life that a lot of people don't necessarily come back from," said Paul, who scored 13 of his 37 points in the fourth quarter. "Basketball aside, he means so much to me and my family. So to be on this journey with him and to see it paying off is nice. We're a lot alike. We stay locked in. I don't feel good until the buzzer sounds. Monty's the same way. When the series is over, and the game is over, it's nice to share those moments."

The last time the Suns were this far was 2010 behind a cast that included the likes of Amar'e Stoudemire, Steve Nash, Jason Richardson and Grant Hill. They fell to Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers 4-2.

"The emotions are happy, grateful, tired, relieved," Williams said of advancing to the conference finals. "It's one of those moments for me that quite frankly I never thought I'd have a chance to experience. For me, I have a level of gratitude I can't even explain."

Bucks even up series as Nets lose Irving

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo and Khris Middleton finally are getting a little more help, while Kevin Durant keeps seeing his superstar cohorts get hurt.

And now, a second-round playoff series that once looked like a Brooklyn Nets runaway suddenly is up for grabs.

Antetokounmpo scored 34 points and the Bucks rolled to a 107-96 Game 4 victory Sunday to tie the series, while the Nets, lost Kyrie Irving to a sprained right ankle.

The Bucks erased a 2-0 deficit by winning two straight in Milwaukee. Game 5 is Tuesday night at Brooklyn.

"We're very happy, but we've got to keep getting better, keep playing together and

hopefully we can go into Brooklyn and take one," Antetokounmpo said.

The Nets' immediate concern is the health of its superstar trio.

Irving was hurt midway through the second quarter and didn't return. Brooklyn is already missing nine-time All-Star and 2018 MVP James Harden, who hasn't played since the opening minute of Game 1 due to right hamstring tightness.

That puts even more pressure on Durant, who has carried the Nets this series and provided 28 points and 13 rebounds Sunday. The only other player on the team in double figures was Irving, who had 11 points before leaving.

Brooklyn coach Steve Nash

said X-rays taken on Irving's ankle were negative and that the seven-time All-Star's status for Game 5 is uncertain at this point.

"We'll have to see how it goes," Nash said. "We'll cross our fingers."

After Irving made a basket in the paint to cut the Bucks' lead to 44-40 midway through the second quarter, his left leg hit the right leg of Antetokounmpo on his way down. Irving landed awkwardly, his ankle rolled and he clutched at it as play briefly continued on the other end of the floor.

When play stopped due to a change of possession, team officials went to check on Irving, who appeared in pain on the floor before walking to the locker room. The Nets an-

nounced at halftime that Irving wouldn't return.

The Bucks had already taken the lead for good even before Irving's injury.

They got more balance Sunday after eking out an 86-83 victory in Game 3, when Middleton and Antetokounmpo combined for 68 points, 79% of the Bucks' scoring output. That marked the highest percentage of a team's points that a duo had combined to score in any NBA playoff game ever.

Middleton scored 19 points, Jrue Holiday had 14, P.J. Tucker got 13 and Bryn Forbes added 10 for the Bucks. Holiday had nine assists and Middleton had eight.

"At this stage, it's whatever it takes to win the game," Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer said.

Blue Jays smash Red Sox with 8 HRs

Associated Press

BOSTON — Teoscar Hernández hit a pair of three-run homers over the Green Monster — two of Toronto's eight longballs — as the Blue Jays routed the Boston Red Sox 18-4 on Sunday.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr., Bo Bichette, Lourdes Gurriel Jr., Cavan Biggio, Rowdy Tellez and Marcus Semien also went deep for the Blue Jays, a day after they had five homers in a 7-2 victory. Guerrero leads the major leagues with 21 homers.

The eight home runs were the most ever allowed in a game by the Red Sox.

Bichette had four of Toronto's season-high 20 hits. The Jays also reached a season high for runs.

Braves 6, Marlins 4: Drew Smyly (3-3) allowed two runs in five innings on his 32nd birthday to help visiting Atlanta stop a four-game slide.

Nationals 5, Giants 0: Washington's Kyle Schwarber became the sixth player in the history of the Washington franchise to homer in both the first and second innings, driving in four runs in a win over visiting San Francisco.

Joe Ross (3-6) allowed five hits in eight innings as the Nationals gained a four-game split.

Phillies 7, Yankees 0: Aaron Nola (5-4) allowed three hits and struck out nine in 7 2/3 innings, and host Philadelphia completed a two-game sweep that moved the

team back over .500 at 32-31.

Odubel Herrera, Jean Segura and J.T. Realmuto combined to go 7-for-13 with a double, a triple, four runs scored and five RBIs to lead the Phillies.

Reds 6, Rockies 2: Eugenio Suárez hit a two-run homer and host Cincinnati won for the 10th time in 13 games to move over .500 for the first time since it was 9-8.

Colorado was swept on the road for the fifth time this year, following wipeouts at the Los Angeles Dodgers, San Francisco, San Diego and St. Louis. The Rockies are 13-19 at home but 5-27 on the road, on pace to surpass the 1935 Boston Braves' 13-65 for the worst road record in a season.

Padres 7, Mets 3: Fernando Tatis Jr. hit a tiebreaking grand slam off Jacob Barnes in the seventh inning, his 19th homer this season, and Manny Machado followed with a home run as San Diego stopped a four-game slide with a win at New York.

Mariners 6, Indians 2: Seattle won on the road as Jake Fraley homered off AL Cy Young Award winner Shane Bieber (7-4) after replacing Mitch Haniger, who was helped from the field after bruising his left knee when he fouled off a pitch in the first inning.

Rays 7, Orioles 1: Randy Arozarena hit his first career grand slam, Tampa Bay relievers threw seven no-hit innings, and Baltimore suffered its 15th consecutive road loss, the club's worst road skid since it

moved from St. Louis to Baltimore in 1954.

White Sox 4, Tigers 1: Carlos Rodón (6-2) took a no-hit bid into the seventh before Eric Haase's one-out double, and Chicago completed a three-game sweep at Detroit.

Brewers 5, Pirates 2: Avisail García hit a two-run homer off David Bednar (0-1), Christian Yelich added a pinch-hit sacrifice fly on his bobblehead day and host Milwaukee completed a three-game sweep to win for the 14th time in 16 games.

Astros 14, Twins 3: Michael Brantley had his second four-hit game of the series, with three doubles and four RBIs. Houston had a season-high 20 hits and took two of three at Minnesota.

Dodgers 5, Rangers 3: Walker Buehler pitched six scoreless innings of five-hit ball to remain unbeaten since 2019, and Mookie Betts homered and scored three runs as host Los Angeles held off Texas.

Athletics 6, Royals 3: Chris Bassitt escaped a scary line drive to win his seventh straight decision and Matt Olson homered twice to lead Oakland to a home win.

Angels 10, Diamondbacks 3: Max Stassi hit a two-run homer in the first, Patrick Sandoval pitched four-hit ball into the seventh and Los Angeles won at Arizona.

Cubs 2, Cardinals 0: Zach Davies tossed two-hit ball into the seventh inning to out-duel Carlos Martinez, and host Chicago completed a three-game sweep.

NC State ousts No. 1 Arkansas, locks up CWS spot

Associated Press

North Carolina State, Texas, Tennessee and Arizona locked up spots in the College World Series on Sunday, with the Wolfpack knocking out No. 1 national seed Arkansas.

Two days after losing its NCAA super regional opener by 19 runs, Jose Torres hit a tiebreaking home run in the top of the ninth inning off SEC pitcher of the year Kevin Kopps and NC State beat the Razorbacks 3-2 in the deciding Game 3.

Tennessee defeated LSU 15-6 and Texas beat South Florida 12-4 to complete two-

game sweeps, and Arizona won a three-game series with a 16-3 victory over Mississippi.

Virginia beat Dallas Baptist 4-0 and Notre Dame defeated Mississippi State 9-1 to force deciding third games Monday.

No. 2 Vanderbilt and No. 9 Stanford were the first teams to claim spots in the CWS, which opens Saturday in Omaha, Nebraska.

Two CWS openers are set: NC State-Stanford and Arizona-Vanderbilt. Texas will play Notre Dame or Mississippi State and Tennessee faces Dallas Baptist or Virginia.

This marks the 21st straight NCAA Tournament the No. 1 seed will not win the national title. It's the eighth time since the tournament went to its current format in 1999 that the top seed hasn't reached the CWS.

Arkansas (51-13) had been the consensus No. 1 team in the polls most of the season, hadn't lost a best-of-three series since May 2019 and swept the SEC regular-season and tournament championships.

But NC State (35-18), which lost 21-2 on Friday, held down the Razorbacks' potent offense while winning two straight

one-run games. Three pitchers combined to limit them to four hits on Sunday.

Torres homered in all three games for the Wolfpack, who opened 1-8 in Atlantic Coast Conference play and 4-9 overall. They made it to the ACC Tournament final and were a No. 2 regional seed in Ruston, La., where they swept three games by a combined 30-11.

"They're a really good group of players and committed to one another," coach Elliott Avent said. "They believed early on when we were 1-8 that we could rebound, and they stuck with it."

Islanders slip by Lightning in Game 1

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Semyon Varlamov and the New York Islanders are on a roll.

The veteran goaltender made 30 saves to outplay Andrei Vasilevskiy, and the Islanders got goals from Mathew Barzal and Ryan Pulock to hold off defending champion Tampa Bay 2-1 in Game 1 of the Stanley Cup semifinals.

The Lightning lost a series opener for the first time this postseason. It's also the first series deficit they've faced since dropping Game 1 of last year's Cup final to the Dallas Stars.

"In our minds Varly is one of the best goalies in the league. When there is a chance against him he's been there all year for us," New York's Jordan Eberle said, adding the Islanders are building confidence by the victory.

"I think if you look at the way the play-offs have gone for us, our game has continued to get better and that's what you want to see. We're in the final four, so you should have confidence. This is obviously a good start for us, but we know they are going to come out pushing the next game."

Varlamov won his fourth straight playoff start, joining teammate Ilya Sorokin as only the third pair of goaltenders from the same team to have personal winning streaks of at least four games in a single

postseason.

Sorokin won four in a row during the Islanders' first-round victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins. Varlamov won four games in the second round, including the final three as New York rallied to eliminate the Boston Bruins.

"Goaltending is all about timely saves. We've got two that have done that for us," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "They have done it all year."

Barzal opened the scoring when he took a pass from Josh Bailey and skated in just ahead of pursuing defender Jan Rutta to slip the puck through Vasilevskiy's pads at 12:32 of the second period.

Pulock sent a shot past the Vezina Trophy finalist from just inside the blue line for a two-goal lead at 5:36 of the third.

The best-of-seven series, which continues in Tampa on Tuesday night, is a rematch of last year's Eastern Conference final won by the Lightning in six games.

Most of the players are the same, including Varlamov and Vasilevskiy, and Tampa Bay is very familiar with Trotz, who has faced them at this stage of the playoffs three of the past four seasons.

"It's frustrating to lose. ... But this team is no different than the team we basically played in the bubble," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "We just made too many

mistakes, unforced errors. Managing the puck is a big thing against this team."

New York helped itself by staying out the penalty box for most the afternoon, limiting Tampa Bay to just two power-play opportunities — the last coming with 1:38 remaining and producing the Lightning's only goal.

With Vasilevskiy on the bench, Tampa Bay, which already had six skaters on the ice when the Islanders' Brock Nelson drew a penalty for high-sticking, took advantage on 6-on-4 to get on the board with Braden Point's ninth goal this postseason with 53 seconds to go.

"We knew they were going to come out pretty hard, they always do at home," Varlamov said, adding a strong start defensively was crucial. "We didn't give up stupid penalties. ... They only had two power plays."

New York is the first team since the 1980 Philadelphia Flyers (Phil Myre, Pete Peeters) to have two goaltenders with win streaks of at least four games in the same playoff year. The Bruins (Eddie Johnston, Gerry Cheevers) were the first team in 1972.

"We dropped a few last year in the play-offs as well, including in the Final. We're fine in this position," said the Lightning's Steven Stamkos.

Kalisz, Weyant, Smith swim way to Olympics spots

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Even though he retired from swimming five years ago, Michael Phelps' impact was felt on the opening night of the U.S. Olympic trials.

Chase Kalisz, who says Phelps is like a big brother, claimed another trip to the Olympics by winning the 400-meter individual medley Sunday.

A masked-up Phelps cheered him on from the socially distanced stands, then strolled onto the deck to give his former training partner at the North Baltimore Aquatic Club a hug.

"Michael is very supportive," Kalisz said. "He'll give me a kick in the (butt) if I need it, and sometimes I need it. Michael has been an older brother to me in my life. I remember interacting with Michael when I was 6 years old — and here we are 21 years later."

Phelps was impressed with Kalisz's performance.

"His back half was great," Phelps told The Associated Press. "I thought maybe he would

go a touch faster. But he's right there. He took care of what he needed to do."

The Americans got some new blood on the women's side: 19-year-old Emma Weyant, in her first trials, held off three Olympic veterans to win a thrilling 400 IM.

Another Olympic rookie, Kieran Smith, shaved nearly 3 seconds off his previous personal best to win the 400 freestyle and claim his spot for Tokyo.

Kalisz trailed top qualifier Carson Foster after the butterfly and backstroke legs.

But Kalisz surged to the lead on the breaststroke and held it through the freestyle, winning in 4 minutes, 9.09 seconds.

"I know where I need to be to make my move off the breaststroke," the 27-year-old said.

Phelps, who retired in 2016 with a record 23 gold medals at the Olympics, said everyone at the trials should get a boost from racing before fans.

USA Swimming allowed roughly 50% capacity in the 14,000-seat arena, with card-

board cutouts occupying many of the empty seats.

"You get that electricity from the fans," Phelps said. "I got goose bumps when I walked into the arena tonight."

Another 2016 Olympian, Jay Litherland, tracked down Foster over the final 25 meters to claim the expected second spot on the Olympic team in 4:10.33.

Foster settled for third — out of the Olympics — in 4:10.86.

Kalisz took the silver in the 400 IM at the Rio Olympics, while Litherland finished fifth in that event.

Kalisz and Litherland attended the University of Georgia and still train together.

"It means the world to have my training partner with me," Kalisz said.

The pandemic-delayed Olympics turned out to be a blessing for Kalisz, who didn't even qualify for the final of the 400 IM at the 2019 world championships. He was battling a shoulder injury.