

Austin now backs independent prosecutors

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has for the first time thrown his support behind removing decision-making from military commanders over prosecution in cases of sexual assault.

In a statement issued Tuesday, Austin said the Pentagon would work with Congress to amend the Uniform Code of Military Justice by removing the prosecution of sexual assaults and similar offenses from the military chain of command.

The statement comes a day

after Austin received the final recommendations of the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment, which he established Feb. 26.

“The IRC recommended the inclusion of other special victims’ crimes inside this independent prosecution system, to include domestic violence,” Austin said in the statement. “I support this as well, given the strong correlation between these sorts of crimes and the prevalence of sexual assault.”

Austin said that in coming days, he would provide Presi-

dent Joe Biden specific recommendations from the findings.

The about-face on removing such prosecutions from the chain of command comes after the Pentagon’s long-held opposition to the idea.

Austin said in his statement that addressing and solving sexual assault and harassment in the military will require both reforming accountability and “changes to our approach on prevention, command climate, and victim services.”

“I am reviewing the full scope of the commission’s recommendations in these areas, but gen-

erally they appear strong and well-grounded,” he said. “I have directed my staff to do a detailed assessment and implementation plan for my review and approval.”

Whatever changes are ultimately decided upon, the Defense Department will need adequate funding to implement them, Austin said.

“We will most assuredly require additional resources, both in personnel and in funding,” he said. “But it may take us some time to determine how much and where they are most wisely applied.”

House merging high-profile measures to fight sexual assault

By **NIKKI WENTLING**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers introduced a bill Wednesday that combines two high-profile measures to combat military sexual assault and harassment.

The new legislation would remove the decision to prosecute serious crimes in the military from the chain of command. Instead, the decision would fall to trained, independent military prosecutors. This would apply to non-military, felony-level crimes, such as murder, rape, domestic violence and sexual assault.

“The time has come,” said Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., lead sponsor on the bill. “Today we have broad, bipartisan support to make a critical and fundamental change to the military justice system.”

The bill, titled the Vanessa Guillen Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act, is being introduced as the House version of a bill by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y. After nearly a decade of pushing for the change, Gillibrand’s Military Justice Improvement Act has been gaining momentum in the Senate.

Gillibrand’s bill now has a filibuster-

proof level of support from 66 senators, including 43 Democrats, 21 Republicans and two independents. However, Senators Jack Reed, D-R.I. and Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., respectively the chair and ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, have blocked the legislation from advancing.

In a split with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin threw his support Tuesday behind removing decision-making from military commanders over prosecution in cases of sexual assault.

“It’s historic to have the first secretary of defense to agree with us that sexual assault should be taken out of the chain of command,” Gillibrand said. “That is a monumental step forward. It’s validation that our approach is the right approach.”

Gillibrand’s bill, though, goes beyond sexual assault and would send cases of all non-military, serious crimes to independent prosecutors. In letters last month, the Joint Chiefs of Staff argued that the bill went too far.

“It is my professional opinion that removing commanders from prosecution decisions, process and accountability may have an adverse effect on readiness, mission accomplishment, good order and dis-

cipline, justice, unit cohesion, trust and loyalty between commanders and those they lead,” Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley wrote.

The legislation introduced Wednesday combines Gillibrand’s bill with the I Am Vanessa Guillen Act, a House bill that would change the reporting process for sexual harassment and assault in the military and allow service members who are victims to seek monetary damages from the Defense Department. It was named for Spc. Vanessa Guillen, a 20-year-old small arms repair soldier who was sexually harassed before she was killed by a fellow service member last year.

Speier sponsored the I Am Vanessa Guillen Act and will now lead the new Vanessa Guillen Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act. Natalie Khawam, the attorney for the Guillen family, said she and the family supported the new measure, believing it could get passed through Congress quicker than the I Am Vanessa Guillen Act.

“We’re doing it this way because we have the votes. We’ve got the Senate votes and the House votes,” Khawam said. “We’re making sure this can now get passed immediately and codified into law.”

Navy sails ship through Taiwan Strait again

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

A week after China flew a record sortie of 28 fighter jets into Taiwan's air defense zone, the U.S. Navy on Tuesday sent a guided-missile destroyer through the narrow strait dividing the island from mainland China.

The guided-missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur's "routine" transit through the Taiwan Strait "demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," the Navy said in a news release Tuesday.

It was the sixth time this year that a Navy surface ship passed through the politically sensitive channel. The Curtis Wilbur made the most recent transit on May 18.

Navy warships passed through the Taiwan Strait 11 times in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, according to a report by the Congressional Research Service.

China's sortie of fighter jets that flew into Taiwan's air space on June 15 included 14 J-16 and six J-11 planes, The Associated Press said in a report, citing Taiwan's Minis-

try of National Defense as the source.

Taiwan deployed its combat air patrol forces in response to the incursion on the southwestern part of the island's air defense identification zone, according to the report.

Beijing considers Taiwan a renegade province that must, at some point, be unified politically with the mainland.

Leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized nations — the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan —

after meeting earlier this month issued a statement calling for "peace and stability" across the Taiwan Strait.

China maintains that such statements interfere in the nation's internal affairs.

Taiwan, which enjoys a functioning democracy, has garnered greater international attention as the Communist Party of China has squelched Hong Kong's semi-autonomy by imposing a national security law last summer that has been used to silence and imprison dissenters.

Senators grill Navy heads on budget to deter China

By **CAITLIN DOORNBOS**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — As the Navy sailed a guided-missile destroyer through the Taiwan Strait on Tuesday, senators on Capitol Hill hounded the service's top leaders on whether their proposed 2022 budget will be enough to deter an increasingly aggressive China.

One issue was that the Navy 2022 budget proposed canceling the previously planned construction of a second destroyer, meaning only one of the ships used to patrol contentious waterways, protect aircraft carriers and strike down enemy missiles is included in the new budget.

The service would need an additional \$1.66 billion on top of its proposed \$211.7 billion budget to fund the second destroyer, which it is under contract to have built by Ingalls Shipbuilding and General Dynamics Bath Iron Works.

Canceling construction of

one ship would be an overall cost savings, though the Navy would have to pay a \$33 million breached-contract penalty for doing so, Adm. Mike Gilday, the chief of naval operations, told the Senate Armed Services Committee at its hearing on Navy force posture.

Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, the ranking Republican on the committee, said he wants to see more ships built — not fewer. Fewer ships sends adversaries the message that "we're not willing to do what it takes to defend ourselves, our allies and our partners," he said.

"While China is growing its fleet, our Navy is struggling to avoid shrinking," Inhofe said.

China has about 350 ships compared with 296 for the United States. Congress in 2018 mandated that the Navy work toward a 355-ship fleet as soon as possible, but little progress has been made toward that goal so far.

UK denies claim that Russia fired warning shots on ship

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia said one of its warships in the Black Sea fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs Wednesday to force a British destroyer out of an area near Crimea that Moscow claims as its territorial waters, but Britain denied that account and insisted its ship wasn't fired upon.

It was the first time since the Cold War that Moscow acknowledged using live ammunition to deter a NATO warship, reflecting the growing risk of military incidents amid soaring tensions between Russia and the West.

The Russian Defense Ministry said a patrol ship fired warning shots after the HMS Defender had ignored a notice against intrusion and sailed 1.6 nautical miles into Russia's territorial waters near Sevastopol, the main Russian naval base in Crimea. It said a Russian Su-24 bomber also dropped four bombs ahead of the vessel to persuade the Defender to change course. Minutes later,

the Defender left Russian waters, the ministry said.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova denounced the "rude British provocation that defies international law," and said London's ambassador was being summoned. The Defense Ministry said it also called in the U.K. military attache in Moscow to protest the destroyer's "dangerous move" and urged British authorities to investigate the crew's actions.

Britain's Ministry of Defense denied the Defender had been fired on or was in Russian waters, but had been in Ukrainian waters.

"No warning shots have been fired at HMS Defender," it said in a statement. "The Royal Navy ship is conducting innocent passage through Ukrainian territorial waters in accordance with international law."

Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014, a move not recognized by most countries, gaining access to its long Black Sea coast.

GOP filibuster blocks voting rights bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Democrats' sweeping attempt to rewrite U.S. election and voting law suffered a major setback in the Senate on Tuesday, blocked by a filibuster wall of Republican opposition to what would be the largest overhaul of the electoral system in a generation.

The vote leaves the Democrats with no clear path forward, though President Joe Biden declared, "This fight is far from over."

The bill, known as the For the People Act, would touch on virtually every aspect of how elections are conducted, striking down hurdles to voting that advocates view as the Civil Rights fight of the era, while also curbing the influence of money in politics and limiting partisan influence over the drawing of congressional districts.

But many in the GOP say the

measure represents instead a breathtaking federal infringement on states' authority to conduct their own elections without fraud — and is meant to ultimately benefit Democrats.

It failed on a 50-50 vote after Republicans, some of whom derided the bill as the "Screw the People Act," denied Democrats the 60 votes needed to begin debate under Senate rules. Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Black woman to hold her office, presided over the chamber as the bill failed to break past that filibuster barrier.

Biden praised Senate Democrats for standing together "against the ongoing assault of voter suppression that represents a Jim Crow era in the 21st Century." In a statement from the White House, he said that in their actions, though unsuccessful on Tuesday, they "took the next step forward in this contin-

uous struggle."

The rejection forces Democrats to reckon with what comes next for their top legislative priority in a narrowly divided Senate. They've touted the measure as a powerful counterweight to scores of proposals advancing in GOP-controlled statehouses making it more difficult to vote.

"Once again, the Senate Republican minority has launched a partisan blockade of a pressing issue," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said from the chamber floor. He vowed that the vote was the "starting gun" and not the last time voting rights would be up for debate.

Whatever Democrats decide, they will likely be confronted with the same challenge they faced Tuesday when minority Republicans used the filibuster — the same tool that Democrats employed during Donald Trump's presidency — to block

consideration of the bill.

Republicans showed no sign of yielding. Republican leader Mitch McConnell called the bill a "a solution looking for a problem" and vowed to "put an end to it." Texas Sen. Ted Cruz dismissed it as "partisan legislation, written by elected Democrats, designed to keep elected Democrats in office."

Pressure has been mounting on Democrats to change Senate rules or watch their priorities languish. A group of moderate Democratic senators, however, including Sens. Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, have ruled that out, denying the votes needed to make a filibuster change.

Biden has vowed what the White House calls the "fight of his presidency" over ensuring Americans' access to voting. But without changes to Senate rules, key planks of his agenda, including the voting bill, appear stalled.

Pelosi signals new panel to investigate Capitol riot

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is signaling that she is poised to create a new committee to investigate the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, pushing closer to a partisan investigation of the attack after Senate Republicans blocked the creation of an independent probe.

A person familiar with the matter said after a meeting with Democrats that Pelosi had told her colleagues that she would create a select panel. The person spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the private remarks. But Pelosi later denied that, telling reporters, "No, I did not make that announcement."

The new committee would come after the Senate voted earlier this month to block legislation to form a bipartisan, independent

commission investigating the attack by former President Donald Trump's supporters. Pelosi said afterward that the House would step up investigations of the riot, in which a violent mob overran police, broke into the building and hunted for lawmakers to try to stop the certification of Joe Biden's election victory.

A new select committee would put majority Democrats in charge of the investigation. More than three dozen Republicans in the House and seven Senate Republicans said they wanted to avoid a partisan probe, and they supported the legislation to form a commission. Still, those numbers weren't strong enough to overcome GOP opposition in the Senate, where support from 10 Republicans is needed to pass most bills if all Democrats vote yes.

Biden urges more young adults to get vaccinated

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. government is stepping up efforts to get younger Americans vaccinated for COVID-19 as the White House acknowledges it will miss two key vaccination benchmarks and as concern grows about the spread of a new variant that threatens to set the country back in the months ahead.

The delta variant, first identified in India, in the last two weeks has come to represent more than 20% of coronavirus infections in the U.S., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Tuesday. That's double what it was when the CDC last reported on the variant's prevalence.

The White House on Tuesday acknowledged that President Joe Biden will fall short of reaching his goal of vaccinating 70% of all American adults with at least one

shot by Independence Day. Biden also expects to miss a second goal — fully vaccinating 165 million adult Americans by July 4. White House COVID-19 coordinator Jeff Zients projected it will take several weeks to hit that number. On Monday, the U.S. crossed 150 million fully vaccinated.

Officials said they were redoubling their focus on vaccinating Americans age 18-26, who have proved to be least likely to get a vaccine when it's available.

"The reality is many younger Americans have felt like COVID-19 is not something that impacts them, and they've been less eager to get the shot," Zients said. "However, with the delta variant now spreading across the country, and infecting younger people worldwide, it's more important than ever that they get vaccinated."

150 hospital workers fired, quit over vaccine

Associated Press

DALLAS—More than 150 employees at a Houston hospital system who refused to get the COVID-19 vaccine have been fired or resigned after a judge dismissed an employee lawsuit over the vaccine requirement.

A spokesperson for Houston Methodist hospital system said 153 employees either resigned in the two-week suspension period or were terminated on Tuesday.

The case over how far health care institutions can go to protect patients and others against the coronavirus has been closely watched. It's believed to be the first of its kind in the United States, but it won't be the end of the debate.

Earlier this month, a federal judge threw out the lawsuit filed by 117 employees over the requirement. The hospital system's decision in April to require the vaccine for workers made it the first major U.S. health care system to do so.

The Houston Methodist em-

ployees who filed the lawsuit likened their situation to medical experiments performed on unwilling victims in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes called that comparison "reprehensible" and said claims made in the lawsuit that the vaccines are experimental and dangerous are false.

Hughes, who dismissed the lawsuit on June 12, said that if the employees didn't like the requirement, they could go work elsewhere.

Those who filed the lawsuit have already appealed the judge's dismissal to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The hospital system had required employees to complete their immunization by June 7. The next day, 178 employees were suspended for two weeks without pay for not complying.

Jennifer Bridges, a registered nurse who is the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit against Houston Methodist, said her director

called her Tuesday to ask if she'd gotten the vaccine yet or made any effort to do so. She said that when she replied "absolutely not," she was told that she was terminated.

"We all knew we were getting fired today," said Bridges, 39. "We knew unless we took that shot to come back, we were getting fired today. There was no ifs, ands or buts."

She had worked for 6 ½ years at the medical-surgical in-patient unit at Houston Methodist's hospital in the suburb of Baytown.

Bridges said Tuesday was also her first day at her new job at a company that sends nurses into people's homes.

"I'm hoping if we win this at a federal level, then they're going to create laws to protect employees from having to go through this anywhere else in the country," said Bridges, who said she does not have confidence in the vaccine's safety.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said that

while a small number of health problems have been reported, COVID-19 vaccines are safe and highly effective.

Other hospital systems around the country, including in Washington, D.C., Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania and most recently New York, have followed Houston Methodist and have also gotten pushback.

Legal experts say such vaccine requirements, particularly in a public health crisis, will probably continue to be upheld in court as long as employers provide reasonable exemptions, including for medical conditions or religious objections.

Harris Methodist has said some employees got medical or religious exemptions, and some were deferred for pregnancy or other reasons.

But Houston Methodist's president and CEO, Marc Boom, has said nearly 25,000 of the system's more than 26,000 workers have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

US to review Native American boarding schools' dark history

Associated Press

The federal government will investigate its past oversight of Native American boarding schools and work to "uncover the truth about the loss of human life and the lasting consequences" of policies that over the decades forced hundreds of thousands of children from their families and communities, U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland announced Tuesday.

The unprecedented work will include compiling and reviewing records to identify past boarding schools, locate known and possible burial sites at or near those schools, and uncover the names and tribal affiliations of students, she said.

"To address the intergenerational impact of Indian boarding schools and to promote spiritual

and emotional healing in our communities, we must shed light on the unspoken traumas of the past no matter how hard it will be," Haaland said.

Haaland outlined the initiative while addressing members of the National Congress of American Indians during the group's midyear conference. She said the process will be long, difficult and painful, and will not undo the heartbreak and loss endured by many families.

Starting with the Indian Civilization Act of 1819, the United States enacted laws and policies to establish and support Indian boarding schools across the nation. For over 150 years, Indigenous children were taken from their communities and forced into boarding schools that focused on assimilation.

Poll: Half of Dems want more US support for Palestinians

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A new poll on American attitudes toward a core conflict in the Middle East finds that about half of Democrats want the United States to do more to support the Palestinians, showing that a growing rift among Democratic lawmakers is also reflected in the party's base.

The poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds differences within both the Democratic and the Republican parties on the U.S. approach toward Israel and the Palestinians, with liberal Democrats wanting more support for the Palestinians and conservative Republicans seeking more support for the Israelis.

The survey also examined Americans' opinions on the Biden administration's handling of the

Israel-Palestinian conflict. The survey was conducted about three weeks into a cease-fire following a devastating 11-day war last month between Israel and the Gaza Strip's Hamas militant rulers.

The poll shows Americans overall are divided over U.S. policy toward Israel and the Palestinians. It also shows more Americans disapprove of President Joe Biden's approach to the conflict than approve of it.

Among Democrats, 51% say the U.S. is not supportive enough of Palestinians. The feeling jumps to 62% among Democrats who describe themselves as liberal. On the other hand, 49% of Republicans say the U.S. is not supportive enough of the Israelis, a number that rises to 61% among those who say they're conservative.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Rail traffic stops so cops can corral cows

WV BLUEFIELD — Trains had to be stopped along a stretch in southern West Virginia as authorities tried to coax three cows off of railroad tracks.

The cows appeared on the tracks in the city of Bluefield, the Bluefield Daily Telegraph reported. Witness Angie Sharp said the cows came from a wooded area and made their way down a street into downtown Bluefield.

Bluefield police used a livestock trailer to try to corral the cows. The cows broke away at one point before being herded back toward the trailer.

Officers finally caught the cows after darkness fell, the newspaper reported.

Lost hard hat found in time for Father's Day

MA FAIRHAVEN — A Massachusetts man said he received an unexpected gift just in time for Father's Day when his lost hard hat was washed ashore on a Portuguese island.

In 2014, Conrad Roy Jr. was working a New Bedford site job with his son, Conrad Roy III. During the job, Roy Jr. lost his hard hat when it fell into the water, WCVB reported. Conrad Roy III died by suicide a year later.

On Father's Day, Roy saw a Facebook post about a hard hat washing up on Azores, an archipelago off the Portuguese coast. The hard hat had a New Bedford sticker on it, the news station said.

Roy Jr. said the discovery of the hat 2,000 miles away felt like his son sent him a Father's Day gift.

Fireworks blast inside of pickup injures man

PA EMMANUS — A fireworks explosion inside a pickup critically injured a man in eastern Pennsylvania, authorities said.

Police in Emmaus said the 35-year-old man was sitting inside the truck when the fireworks detonated. He was rushed to Lehigh Valley Hospital in critical condition with injuries that Chief Troy Schantz called "severe."

Investigators determined that the man had purchased the fireworks about a year ago and wasn't involved in their manufacture.

Rattlesnake found in metro neighborhood

VA ALEXANDRIA — A rattlesnake was spotted slithering through a neighborhood in northern Virginia, a local animal services group said.

The Animal Welfare League of Alexandria received a call Sunday about a snake in the Old Town section of the city.

The poisonous reptile was "apprehended" by animal services officers and transported to a wildlife facility, according to a statement from the organization.

Timber rattlesnakes are rare in the Washington metropolitan region, the welfare league said, but it isn't impossible for them to live in the area's climate. They are endangered and will

usually avoid contact with humans.

Man gets convicted of murder for 4th time

WA MOUNT VERNON — A jury convicted a Washington state man, who stood trial on robbery and murder charges, for the fourth time, officials said. The state Court of Appeals overturned the previous three convictions on procedural grounds.

Terrance Jon Irby, 63, was found guilty of first-degree murder and first-degree robbery in the death of James Rock in 2005, the Skagit Valley Herald reported.

Irby was arrested after attempting to flee during a traffic stop, police said. Authorities said he was found with guns that witnesses identified as belonging to Rock, and boots that had Rock's blood on them.

He is scheduled to be sentenced in July.

Boy injured on roller coaster may lose legs

MO BRANSON — The grandmother of an 11-year-old Tennessee boy who was injured on a roller coaster in Missouri says doctors are concerned his legs might have to be amputated.

Aalondo Perry, who is visually impaired, was injured when he fell while getting off The Branson Coaster, said his grandmother Shelandra Ford.

Ford said she was told Aalondo fell when he tried to get off after the roller coaster stopped. When the ride restarted, he was trapped under the rails.

His legs and right arm were

crushed, and doctors don't know if they will be able to save his legs, Ford said.

AG: 14 indicted on over 120 criminal charges

DE WILMINGTON — Fourteen alleged members of a Wilmington-area gang were indicted on more than 120 criminal charges, including murder, after a six-month investigation involving federal, state and local agencies, Delaware's attorney general announced.

Members of the gang identified as NorthPak are accused of dozens of crimes since 2018, according to a news release. All 14 are charged with illegal gang participation and seven are charged in six killings.

The News Journal reported that the defendants ranged in age from 15 to 23 at the time of the crimes.

Police: Boy Scouts found human remains

FL PENSACOLA — Some Boy Scouts who were conducting a cleanup operation as part of an Eagle Scout project found human remains under a building in Florida's Panhandle, police said.

The medical examiner's office concluded the remains found are human and an investigation is underway, the Pensacola Police Department said in a statement.

Anthropologists from the University of West Florida are assisting in the investigation, the statement said.

— From wire reports

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Last-second alley-oop propels Suns

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Devin Booker sat in a chair with a crooked and swollen nose, complete with tape over three fresh stitches.

He also had a big smile on his face, remembering Jae Crowder's pass, Deandre Ayton's tip-in dunk and a play that will live in Phoenix Suns lore for a long, long time.

Ayton jammed an alley-oop pass from Crowder with 0.7 seconds left, lifting the Suns to a 104-103 win over the Los Angeles Clippers on Tuesday night in Game 2 of the Western Conference finals.

It was a game that looked as if it was all but over, but Booker's Suns were not going to be denied.

"I believed it could happen," Booker said. "One-hundred percent."

The Suns were down one with 0.9 seconds left when Crowder lofted a high pass on an out-of-bounds play on the baseline. A

soaring Ayton came down the lane and stuffed it through the net over L.A.'s Ivica Zubac as the crowd roared in disbelief. Booker — playing with a stitched-up nose following a collision with Clippers guard Patrick Beverley — had a key screen on Zubac on the final play, which helped free Ayton.

"The celebration and reaction were a little shaky," Ayton said. "Because I wasn't sure what I did. I wasn't sure if it counted."

The referees spent about a minute reviewing the play before ruling the basket was good and Booker spent some time jawing with Clippers players Rajon Rondo and Demarcus Cousins in the aftermath. The Clippers couldn't get a shot off in the final 0.7 seconds.

"Those are my Kentucky guys," Booker said with a grin. "I told them 'Go Big Blue.'"

The Suns now have a 2-0 lead in the series heading to Los Angeles for Game 3 on Thursday

night. The Clippers will be fighting from a 2-0 deficit for the third time in these playoffs after rallying to beat the Mavericks and Jazz.

The Crowder-to-Ayton connection negated a Clippers rally that was led by Paul George, who had 26 points.

George made a layup with 31 seconds left to give the Clippers a 101-100 lead for their first advantage since early in the third quarter. He added a 22-footer on their next offensive possession for a 103-102 lead.

But there was a lot more action left.

George — an 85% career free-throw shooter — missed two free throws with 8.2 seconds remaining and the Suns had a chance to win, but it looked as if it wouldn't happen when Mikal Bridges missed a corner three-pointer and the ball was deflected out of bounds.

Instead, it set up Crowder's heave to Ayton, who was dom-

inant in the paint all game long.

Even with his big late shot-making, George's missed free throws loomed large.

"Obviously, it was an opportunity that was missed," George said. "Pat made an unbelievable play that put me in the position to extend the lead. I am always confident at the free-throw line. I have always been very successful in clutch moments at the free-throw line. Tonight, I was just unsuccessful."

Phoenix has won a franchise-record nine straight games in the playoffs.

The Suns were led by Cameron Payne, who was brilliant while subbing for All-Star Chris Paul. He finished with a career-high 29 points. Ayton had 24 points and 14 rebounds, while Booker added 20 points.

"We just had no answer for Cameron Payne," Lue said. "He got downhill all night. His speed and his quickness really hurt us all night."

Pistons win lottery, get No. 1 pick in NBA Draft

Associated Press

Newly selected Basketball Hall of Famer Ben Wallace tapped his fist on the table a few times, then clapped his hands and pointed one finger skyward.

After one of the worst seasons in franchise history, Detroit has something to celebrate.

The Pistons won the NBA Draft lottery on Tuesday night, meaning they'll have the No. 1 pick on July 29 — and, presumably, the chance to take Oklahoma State guard Cade Cunningham.

"We get to add another young player to the restoration process," Detroit general manager Troy Weaver said. "We're excited to be in this position. But it means that we've got a lot of work to do. We're going to be diligent about it, but it always helps to be able to add a No. 1 pick from a talented group of players to choose from."

Houston — which basically had 50-50 odds of picking in the top four — got the No. 2 pick. Cleveland will pick No. 3 and Toronto will pick No. 4, after both of those fran-

chises got some lottery luck to move up in the order.

But the big winners were the Pistons, with Weaver saying the team will take a look at five players before deciding on the No. 1 selection. Unless Detroit moves the pick, it will be picking No. 1 overall for the first time since taking Bob Lanier in 1970.

And, as if there was any doubt, Weaver said Cunningham — just the fourth player to win Big 12 Player and Freshman of the Year honors in the same season, after averaging 20.2 points per game in his lone collegiate season — is at the "top of the list."

"It's going to mean a lot. It's going to mean a lot for this team," Wallace said on the ESPN telecast of the lottery, after he served as the team's virtual representative for the event that took place in Secaucus, N.J. "I think the team is headed in the right direction."

Orlando will get the No. 5 and No. 8 selections, with Oklahoma City picking No. 6 and Golden State also with two lottery slots — No. 7, as part of a trade with Minnesota, and

the Warriors' own pick at No. 14.

The rest of the lottery results: Sacramento picks No. 9, New Orleans No. 10, Charlotte No. 11, San Antonio No. 12, and Indiana No. 13.

The lottery — 14 ping-pong balls, all numbered 1 through 14, placed into a hopper — technically only determines the first four picks. The rest then default to a preestablished order of finish; Golden State, for example, had only a 2.4% chance of its own pick being anything other than the No. 14 selection.

And form held through the first six picks that were unveiled. The No. 8 pick, which was slotted to Chicago, winds up with the Magic as part of the Nikola Vucevic trade from this season. That's when the first significant buck-the-odds move happened, when Toronto's 31.9% chance of cashing in to a top-four slot delivered.

The Thunder will have three first-round picks, but none higher than No. 6. That's good news for them, and really good news for Houston.

Franco shines but Rays lose again

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — As advertised, Wander Franco got off to a tremendous start for the Tampa Bay Rays with his production — and prediction.

Franco hit a three-run homer and doubled in his big-league debut for the Rays, who lost their seventh straight in falling to the Boston Red Sox 9-5 in 11 innings Tuesday night.

The 20-year-old Franco, considered the best prospect in the minor leagues, connected in the fifth off Eduardo Rodriguez and drew his first curtain call in the majors.

“In that at-bat I actually knew I was going to hit a home run because that was the pitch I was looking for,” Franco said through an interpreter. “I ended up getting the pitch that I was looking for and I was able to help the team out.”

Franco pointed toward his father, who was at the game, while crossing the plate. He got the ball back and plans to display it at his home in the Dominican Republic.

“I felt super good,” Franco said. “God sent me a surprise with all this.”

Praised Tampa Bay manager Kevin Cash: “Pretty electric

player.”

“Win or lose, we’re trying to win them all, obviously, but it had to be a great day for Wander and his family. A talented player that’s going to be fun to watch in the coming months,” he said.

Franco doubled in the seventh and finished 2-for-4 with a walk. The switch-hitting infielder came up with one out and a runner on first in the ninth, and grounded out to the mound.

“What a good player he is,” Boston manager Alex Cora said. “The way he controls the at-bat for how young he is. They have a special one.”

Rafael Devers hit a hard grounder that went between first baseman Yandy Díaz’s legs for a two-run double during Boston’s four-run 11th off Pete Fairbanks (1-3).

Darwinzon Hernandez (2-2) went 1½ scoreless innings, retiring Brandon Lowe with two on and two outs in the 10th.

Hunter Renfroe homered for the AL East-leading Red Sox. Rodriguez allowed five runs and seven hits over six innings, and had his winless streak reach eight games.

Renfroe had an RBI single and Kike Hernández hit a sacrifice fly in the 11th.

Scherzer passes checks as Nationals edge Phillies

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Max Scherzer threw his glove and hat to the grass, then stared down Phillies manager Joe Girardi after getting checked for a third time by umpires for sticky stuff as the Washington Nationals beat Philadelphia 3-2 Tuesday night.

Scherzer (6-4) looked sharp in his return to the rotation after missing a start due to a groin injury, striking out eight in five innings. Girardi apparently didn’t like what he saw.

In the fourth, Scherzer threw high and inside to Alec Bohm, sending him sprawling to the ground before striking him out. Prior to the next batter, Girardi asked the umpires to check Scherzer.

Scherzer already had been checked by second-base umpire Alfonso Marquez after the first and third innings. So, when he was approached for a third time, this time at Girardi’s request, Scherzer threw his glove and hat to the ground, unbuckled his belt and appeared ready to take his pants off.

Yan Gomes had a pair of RBI singles for the Nationals, who have won three straight and eight of nine. Scherzer allowed two hits and two runs, one of them unearned.

Bryce Harper and Rhys Hoskins hit home runs for Philadelphia, which has lost five of seven.

Phillies starter Zack Wheeler (5-4) lasted just three innings in his worst start of the season. The right-hander allowed three runs on six hits with four strikeouts and a walk.

Royals 6, Yankees 5: Gerrit Cole’s strikeouts and spin rate dropped as he pitched for the first time since MLB’s crackdown on sticky substances, and Ryan O’Hearn and Kansas City rallied for four runs in the eighth inning to win at New York.

Cole allowed two runs and three hits in seven innings, showing his usual velocity but without his explosive strikeout pitches.

Braves 3, Mets 0: Charlie Morton (7-3) struck out 11 in seven innings of one-hit ball for his 100th major league win, and Atlanta recorded its second straight shutout at New York.

Dansby Swanson hit a three-run homer in the third for the Braves, who have won two of three in the four-game series.

Cubs 7, Indians 1: Kyle Hendricks (10-4) dominated over six scoreless innings to win his eighth straight start, Kris Bryant homered and host Chicago avoided a two-game sweep by beating Cleveland.

Willson Contreras and Patrick Wisdom also went deep, and the Cubs won for only the third time in nine games.

Blue Jays 2, Marlins 1: Cavan Biggio and Lourdes Gurriel Jr. doubled on consecutive pitches to break a ninth-inning tie, and Toronto won at Miami.

The hits came with one out against Yimi García (3-6), who entered the game after Sandy Alcantara stymied the Blue Jays while throwing only 86 pitches in eight innings.

Padres 3, Dodgers 2: Jake Cronenworth

and rookie Kim Ha-seong homered off Clayton Kershaw (8-7), Blake Snell (3-3) pitched five scoreless innings and host San Diego won its third straight over Los Angeles.

Astros 3, Orioles 1: Zack Greinke (8-2) took a four-hitter into the eighth inning, Myles Straw homered and drove in two runs, and Houston won at Baltimore for its ninth straight win.

Pirates 6, White Sox 3: Pinch-hitter Erik Gonzalez’s two-run single highlighted a four-run rally in the seventh inning as host Pittsburgh beat skidding Chicago.

Tigers 8, Cardinals 2: Jonathan Schoop and Jake Rogers each drove in three runs, leading host Detroit over St. Louis.

Athletics 13, Rangers 6: Matt Chapman and Ramon Laureano hit two-run home runs in the first two innings and Cole Irvin (5-7) earned his second straight win as Oakland raced to an early nine-run lead in a win at Texas.

Giants 5, Angels 0: Anthony DeSclafani (8-2) allowed three hits in seven sharp innings, Wilmer Flores homered during a four-run first and San Francisco won at Los Angeles.

Mariners 2, Rockies 1: Shed Long Jr. hit a solo homer with one out in the eighth inning that lifted host Seattle to its fifth straight victory.

Brewers 5, Diamondbacks 0: Burly slugger Daniel Vogelbach hobbled home on one leg when Arizona’s defense fell asleep, and Milwaukee won on the road.

Price, Habs move one win from Final

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — No team has been to the Stanley Cup Final more than the Montreal Canadiens. Now they stand one victory away from a 35th appearance and their first in 28 years.

Carey Price made 26 saves to lead Montreal to a 4-1 victory over the Vegas Golden Knights on Tuesday night, putting the Canadiens one step closer to the Stanley Cup Final.

"You know, it's the oldest cliché in hockey, but the fourth one's going to be the hardest and we're fortunate to have the opportunity at home and we'll be ready to go in Game 6," said Eric Staal, whose second-period goal held up as the game-winner.

The Canadiens, who last won the Stanley Cup in 1993, lead Vegas 3-2 in their best-of-seven series, with Game 6 scheduled for the Bell Centre in Montreal on Thursday.

Jesper Kotkaniemi, Cole Caufield and former Golden Knight Nick Suzuki also scored for the Canadiens, whose 11th playoff victory is the franchise's most in one post-season since the 1993 championship run, also the last time a Canadian-based team won the title.

Montreal, which rallied from a 3-1 series deficit in the first round against Toronto and

swept Winnipeg in the second round, shook off Sunday's home loss in Game 4 to win for the second time in Las Vegas.

"I think that's what our mindset has been this whole playoff, is getting to do what we do, regardless of what happens," Staal said. "I don't think we change much. We do what we do every single shift, every moment we have, every opportunity we have to try and be difference makers for our team."

Meanwhile, as Max Pacioretty was the only one to score for the Golden Knights, the storyline remained the same with Vegas struggling to find its offense against the Canadiens' suffocating tactics, in limiting space and dominating the neutral zone. The Golden Knights had 56 shot attempts, with 12 missing the target and 17 others being blocked.

Marc-Andre Fleury, the league's active leader in playoff wins (90) and games played (162), made 22 stops in front of an announced crowd of 17,969 that were left stunned with Vegas on the brink of elimination.

The Golden Knights, who have scored 11 goals in the series, have gotten just four from their forwards.

"You can point to a lot of things — we just weren't sharp in our execution, in our deci-

sions and it cost us," Vegas coach Peter DeBoer said. "We've got to find a way. You've got to find a way this time of year against the good teams, and against pressure, and against tension, against a good goalie. Those are the teams that end up standing at the end of the day."

Montreal's forwards continued to stand tall, scoring all four goals in the win.

Kotkaniemi was the beneficiary of strong defensive play in the Knights' offensive zone, as Canadiens defenseman Jeff Petry and Jon Merrill created a turnover to push the puck in transition. Josh Anderson streaked past Vegas defenseman Zach Whitecloud and pulled Fleury to his far right with a backhand that was stuffed. The rebound floated to Fleury's left, where Kotkaniemi was in position to backhand the puck into a wide-open net to give Montreal a 1-0 lead.

Suzuki, who was dealt to the Canadiens in the trade that sent Pacioretty to Vegas, set Montreal up for a two-goal lead in the second period with a perfectly timed backcheck on Jonathan Marchessault to the right of Price. At the other end, Suzuki's patience paid off, as he waited until the precise moment to feed Staal between the hashmarks for a wrist shot that beat Fleury top shelf.

Clark, Bulldogs rally, defeat Cavs

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Once Kellum Clark got that first hit, Mississippi State was on its way to another College World Series win.

Clark's eighth-inning homer ended Griff McGarry's bid for a no-hitter, and Logan Tanner went deep three batters later to lead the Bulldogs past Virginia 6-5 on Tuesday night.

The sudden turnaround gave Mississippi State (47-16) control of its bracket and left it one win away from reaching the best-of-three finals next week.

"We talked to the team about how it's hard to get the last outs in Omaha, and just to keep fighting, keep fighting, get something going, and we were able to do that," coach Chris Lemonis said.

McGarry, who was trying for the first CWS no-hitter since 1960, walked Scotty Dubrule leading off the eighth before Clark drove a 93-mph fastball into the right-field bullpen.

Clark's fourth homer of the season ended

a 22-inning shutout streak for the Cavaliers (36-26) along with McGarry's night — and marked the start of the Bulldogs' offensive push.

"I don't think it was a gut punch. I mean, that's just baseball," McGarry said. "It's a game that can go back and forth, and Mississippi State got the best of us tonight. I'm hoping we play them again."

Zach Messinger came on and surrendered a pinch-hit single to Josh Hatcher before Rowdey Jordan doubled to the wall in left-center.

Hatcher, who hadn't been in a game since May 27, inexplicably stopped at third when he could have scored easily. Jordan was forced to stop halfway to third, put his arms up in frustration, and then was able to make it back to second base.

Hatcher's baserunning error didn't matter in the end. Stephen Schoch (4-2) relieved, and Allen sent his second pitch into nearly the same spot in the right-field bullpen for a 5-4 lead.

Longhorns add to CWS stay, send Vols home

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Freshman nerves? Apparently there's no such thing to Texas relief pitcher Tanner Witt.

With the Longhorns in an elimination game at the College World Series and Tennessee on the verge of a big inning in a one-run game, Witt got the call with two runners on base and one out.

The moment was not too big for Witt. He embraced it.

"I love that big stage, big atmosphere," he said. "I feel I only get better in those situations because that's what I live for."

Witt threw 5½ innings in his longest outing as a collegian, and the No. 2 national seed Longhorns eliminated the Volunteers with an 8-4 victory Tuesday.

Silas Ardoin provided the key hit — a tie-breaking, two-run single — and was part of a crucial double play that helped Texas (48-16) pick up its first win in Omaha since 2014.