

FBI seizes data from retired 4-star in probe

Associated Press

The FBI has seized the electronic data of a retired four-star general who authorities say made false statements and withheld “incriminating” documents about his role in an illegal foreign lobbying campaign on behalf of the wealthy Persian Gulf nation of Qatar.

New federal court filings obtained Tuesday outlined a potential criminal case against former Marine Gen. John R. Allen, who led U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan before being tapped in 2017 to lead the influential Brookings Institution think tank.

It’s part of an expanding investigation that has ensnared Richard G. Olson, a former ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan who pleaded guilty to federal charges last week, and Imaad Zuberi, a prolific political donor now serving a 12-year prison sentence on corruption charges. Several members of Congress have been interviewed as part of the investigation.

The court filings detail Allen’s behind-the-scenes efforts to help Qatar influence U.S. policy in 2017 when a diplomatic crisis erupted between the gas-rich Persian Gulf monarchy and its neighbors.

“There is substantial evidence that these

FARA violations were willful,” FBI agent Babak Adib wrote in a search warrant application, referring to the Foreign Agents Registration Act.

Allen also misrepresented his role in the lobbying campaign to U.S. officials, Adib wrote, and failed to disclose “that he was simultaneously pursuing multimillion-dollar business deals with the government of Qatar.”

The FBI says Allen gave a “false version of events” about his work for Qatar during a 2020 interview with law enforcement officials and failed to produce relevant email messages in response to an earlier grand jury subpoena.

The 77-page search warrant application appears to have been filed in error and was removed from the docket Tuesday after The Associated Press reached out to federal authorities about its contents.

Allen declined to comment on the new filings. He has previously denied ever working as a Qatari agent and said his efforts on Qatar in 2017 were motivated to prevent a war from breaking out in the Gulf that would put U.S. troops at risk.

Allen spokesperson Beau Phillips told AP last week that Allen “voluntarily cooperated with the government’s investigation into this

matter.”

Allen, who was a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution prior to becoming president, used his official email account at the think tank for some of his Qatar-related communications, the affidavit says.

Brookings did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Qatar has long been one of Brookings’ biggest financial backers, though the institution says it has recently stopped taking Qatari funding.

Olson was working with Zuberi on another matter involving Qatar in mid-2017 when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries announced a blockade of Qatar over its alleged ties to terror groups and other issues.

Shortly after the blockade was announced, then-President Donald Trump appeared to side against Qatar.

The court papers say Allen played an important role in shifting the U.S.’s response. Specifically, authorities say Allen lobbied then-national security adviser H.R. McMaster to have the Trump administration adopt a more Qatar-friendly tone.

The Qatar Embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ukrainian forces could pull back from eastern city

Associated Press

BAKHMUT, Ukraine — Ukrainian forces battling Russian troops in a key eastern city appeared on the cusp of retreat Wednesday, though the regional governor insisted they are still fighting “for every centimeter” of the city.

The urban battle for Sievierodonetsk testified to the painstaking, inch-by-inch advance by Russian forces as they close in on control of the entire Luhansk region, one of two that make up the industrial heartland known as the Donbas.

After a bungled attempt to overrun Kyiv in the early days of the war, Russia shifted its focus to the region of coal mines and factories. The Donbas has been partly controlled by Russia-backed separatists since 2014, making supply lines shorter and allowing Moscow to tap those separatist forces in its offensive there.

But Russia also faces Ukraine’s most battle-hardened troops, who have been fighting the

separatists for eight years there.

The result is a slog in which both sides exchange artillery barrages that seemingly inflict heavy losses, but neither appears to have the clear momentum.

“Ukraine has been pursuing a policy of flexible defense, giving ground where it makes sense to do so instead of holding on to every inch of the territory,” said Keir Giles, a Russia expert at London think tank Chatham House.

But he cautioned against drawing grand conclusions from the daily give and take, since Russian President Vladimir Putin could decide at any time that his objectives have been met — and the West could also pressure Ukraine to accept their losses.

The grinding war has left thousands dead and driven millions from their homes — and its consequences are felt in many countries where it is driving up the price of food since critical shipments of Ukrainian grain are

trapped inside the country.

After meeting with Russia’s foreign minister Wednesday, Turkey’s top diplomat said he thought a plan to create a secure shipping corridor to resume exports of that grain was “feasible.”

Luhansk Gov. Serhiy Haidai acknowledged the difficulties in Sievierodonetsk on Wednesday, telling The Associated Press that “maybe we will have to retreat, but right now battles are ongoing in the city.”

“Everything the Russian army has — artillery, mortars, tanks, aviation — all of that, they’re using in Sievierodonetsk in order to wipe the city off the face of the Earth and capture it completely,” he said.

Earlier, on the Telegram messaging app, he said Ukrainian forces were still fighting “for every centimeter of the city.”

Haidai indicated they could pull back to positions that are easier to defend.

Airmen sue after being denied vaccine exemptions

By **KYLE ALVAREZ**
Stars and Stripes

Nine unvaccinated airmen who were denied exemptions from the federal COVID-19 inoculation mandate are asking a court to prevent the Defense Department from punishing them for their violation of a presidential order.

Their class-action lawsuit, filed in the Dallas-based U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, claims that the denial of their exemptions violates their First Amendment right to free exercise of religion. Named in the lawsuit are Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall.

The complaint seeks a restraining order and a preliminary injunction barring the Air Force from enforcing penalties against the plaintiffs, who it says lost out on previously announced promotions and were put on no-pay sta-

tus. They are among the 3% of Air Force members who have not complied with the order, the lawsuit says.

Among other contentions, the plaintiffs argue that the vaccine requirement is “not the least restrictive means of accomplishing the government’s purported interest.”

They base that argument on the Air Force’s 97% vaccination rate and the fact that people inoculated against COVID-19 can still transmit the disease or become infected with it.

A spokesperson for Kendall’s office said the Air Force doesn’t comment on pending litigation.

The airmen are represented by the First Liberty Institute in Texas and the Washington, D.C., law firm Schaerr Jaffe.

No court date has been set yet for the lawsuit, which was filed May 27. The First Liberty Insti-

tute is expecting a hearing or possibly a preliminary order once the Air Force has filed its response, said Mike Berry, the group’s director of military affairs.

Two of the airmen in the lawsuit also sought exemption from the vaccination order on medical grounds, citing allergies as the reason. The Air Force rejected the allergy tests and told one of the plaintiffs the results were fraudulent because they came from an “illegitimate” doctor, the suit contends.

Six of the nine airmen are fighter pilots or instructors or are in training; the others work outside of aviation. The plaintiffs are 1st Lt. Mitchell Pike, Capt. Alan Sosebee, Maj. Steven Haynes, Lt. Col. Andrew Grieb, Lt. Col. Bryan Spence, Lt. Col. Tyler Stef, Lt. Col. Christopher Wu, Maj. Danielle Runyan and Maj. Ryan Corcoran.

According to the lawsuit, Cor-

coran, a reservist, is assigned to Germany’s Ramstein Air Base, but he works remotely from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, where he analyzes classified intelligence reports and other information. Corcoran’s commander told him the Air Force is preparing an official reprimand that will soon be added to his file, jeopardizing his career and retirement, the suit alleges.

President Joe Biden issued the vaccination mandate on July 29, 2021. Active-duty airmen and Space Force guardians had to be fully vaccinated by Nov. 2, 2021. Reservists were given until Dec. 2, 2021, and the deadline for Air Force National Guard members was Dec. 31, 2021.

As of June 6, only 86 Air Force members had been granted exemptions, according to the latest statistics provided by the Air Force.

Sailor arrested in connection with daughter’s death on Guam

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

A Navy petty officer was arrested Tuesday on Guam in connection with the death of her 1-year-old daughter last month.

Iehsa Nichelle Copeland, 28, is being held at the Department of Corrections Women’s Facility on suspicion of aggravated murder, aggravated assault, family violence and child abuse, Chief of Police Stephen Ignacio said Tuesday at the Guam Police Department. The case has been forwarded to the Office of the Attorney General of Guam, Ignacio said at a news conference. An off-island autopsy was performed Sunday.

“The death has been ruled as a homicide, and the cause of death was asphyxia due to drowning,” Ignacio said.

Copeland has been stationed on Guam since March, Ignacio said.

She is an electrician’s mate 2nd class assigned to the USS Emory S. Land, a submarine tender, Lt. Cmdr. Kelli Roesch, a spokeswoman with Joint Region Marianas, said Tuesday.

Copeland was first taken into custody May 22 after threatening suicide as she stood on a 400-foot seaside cliff with her daughter in a harness strapped to her chest. The toddler appeared “unconscious, immobile and lifeless” as the police department’s crisis negotiation team attempted to coax her from the cliff, Ignacio said.

Negotiators convinced her to hand over the girl, who was taken to Guam Regional Medical City where she was pronounced dead.

Several hours later, Copeland was talked off the ledge and eventually taken to the Guam Behavioral Health and Wellness Center for assessment, Ignacio said.

China blames Canada for Pacific aircraft incidents

By **DAVID CHOI**
Stars and Stripes

CAMP HUMPHREYS, South Korea—A senior Chinese official dismissed claims that Chinese military aircraft harassed a Canadian surveillance plane flying missions in support of U.N. sanctions on North Korea.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Tuesday accused Canada of conducting “flat-out irresponsible and provocative” reconnaissance operations against China.

“China firmly rejects all moves that endanger China’s sovereignty and national security under all pretexts,” Zhao said during a press briefing. “Canada should respect objective facts, stop spreading disinformation and take real actions for the recovery and normal development of Chi-

na-Canada relations.”

A Canadian Defence Department statement on June 1 claimed Chinese military aircraft tried to divert a Canadian patrol plane from its flight path several times between April 26 and May 26. Canada’s air force deployed the CP-140 Aurora long-range patrol aircraft and crew to Japan to monitor U.N. Security Council sanctions against North Korea. Other nations have conducted similar operations in the region in recent years, including Germany, France and Australia.

The Canadian air crew felt endangered and altered course to avoid colliding with the Chinese aircraft, according to the statement. “These interactions are well-documented by our aircrew for professional internal analysis,” according to the department.

Calif. races could tip power in Congress

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — U.S. House battles took shape in heavily Democratic California that could tip the balance of power in Congress, while former Trump administration Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke was in a tight match to claim the Republican nomination for a new House seat in Montana.

In Mississippi, Republican U.S. Rep. Steven Palazzo was forced into a runoff after a congressional ethics watchdog raised questions about his campaign spending and he faced his largest-ever field of primary challengers.

Primary elections across seven states Tuesday set up November contests in dozens of races, as Democrats look to protect the party's fragile majority in the House.

In a diverse district anchored in California's Orange County, Republican U.S. Rep. Michelle Steel, a South Korean immigrant, will face Democrat Jay Chen. The district, which includes the nation's largest Vietnamese American community, is widely considered a toss-up.

In other districts in the nation's most populous state, two Republican House members were trying to surmount chal-

lenges tied to former President Donald Trump: One voted to support Trump's impeachment after the U.S. Capitol insurrection, while the other fought against it.

A look at results in key U.S. House races Tuesday:

Battleground California: In 2020, Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Garcia won a narrow victory in a Democratic-leaning district north of Los Angeles. The former Navy fighter pilot was endorsed by Trump that year, then joined House Republicans who rejected electoral votes from Arizona and Pennsylvania and opposed Trump's impeachment after the Capitol insurrection. That record will be a focus for Democrat Christy Smith, who earned a chance for a rematch with Garcia, after losing two years ago.

In a Democratic-tilting district in the state's Central Valley farm belt, Republican Rep. David Valadao is highlighting an independent streak while contending with GOP fallout for his vote to impeach Trump over the Jan. 6 insurrection. Preliminary returns showed him holding an edge over Republican Chris Mathys, who made Valadao's vote a centerpiece in his campaign to oust

him. The winner will face Democrat Rudy Salas, a state legislator.

California uses a top-two election format in which only the two leading vote-getters advance to the November general election, regardless of party.

In the Central Valley, Republican Connie Conway won a special election to complete the term of former Rep. Devin Nunes, who resigned to head Trump's media company.

Mississippi runoff: Republican U.S. Rep. Steven Palazzo of Mississippi is headed to a June 28 runoff. The congressman first elected in 2010 failed to win the GOP nomination outright on Tuesday, earning less than 50% of the vote.

His opponent will either be Jackson County Sheriff Mike Ezell, who is also campaigning on border security, or Clay Wagner, a retired banker who has said he wants to limit taxation and regulation.

A 2021 report by the Office of Congressional Ethics found "substantial reason to believe" Palazzo, a military veteran who serves on the Appropriations and Homeland Security committees, abused his office by mispending campaign funds, doing favors for his brother and

enlisting staff for political and personal errands. His then-spokesperson, Colleen Kennedy, said the probe was based on politically motivated "false allegations."

Seeking a return to Washington: Montana gained a second congressional district this year thanks to its growing population, and Zinke, an Interior Department secretary under Trump, is one of five Republicans on the primary ballot for the open seat.

Zinke's rivals have been drawing attention to his troubled tenure at the agency, which was marked by multiple ethics investigations. One investigation determined Zinke lied to an agency ethics official about his continued involvement in a commercial real estate deal in his hometown.

Zinke, a former Navy SEAL, is widely considered the de facto incumbent, since he twice won elections for the state's other House seat before stepping down in 2017 to join the Trump administration. His primary opponents include former state Sen. Al "Doc" Olszewski, an orthopedic surgeon and hard-line conservative who has tried to paint Zinke as a "liberal insider."

US sees heightened threat heading into midterms

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A looming Supreme Court decision on abortion, an increase of migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border and the midterm elections are potential triggers for extremist violence over the next six months, the Department of Homeland Security said Tuesday.

The United States was in a "heightened threat environment" already, and these factors may worsen the situation, DHS said in the latest National Terrorism Advisory System bulletin.

"In the coming months, we expect the threat environment to become more dynamic as several high-profile events could be exploited to justify acts of violence against a range of possible targets," DHS said.

It's the latest attempt by Homeland Security to draw attention to the threat posed by domestic violent extremism, a shift from alerts about international terrorism that were a hallmark of the agency following its creation after the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Indeed, the threats from over-

seas rate only passing mentions in this bulletin. It notes that al-Qaida supporters celebrated the January standoff at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas. And it mentions that the Islamic State group called on supporters to carry out attacks in the U.S. to avenge the killings of the group's leader.

DHS also warned that China, Russia, Iran and other nations seek to foment divisions within the U.S. to weaken the country and its standing in the world.

In part, they do this by amplifying conspiracy theories and

false reports that proliferate in American society.

Domestic violent extremists, however, present the most pressing and potentially violent threat, the agency said, citing, for example, the racist attack in which a white gunman killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo, N.Y., supermarket in May.

The bulletin, which is scheduled to expire Nov. 30, said calls for violence by domestic extremists directed at democratic institutions, candidates and election workers will likely increase through the fall.

Migration has top billing as Biden hosts leaders

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Migration has taken center stage at an assembly of Western Hemisphere leaders, reflecting its emergence as a top foreign policy issue amid red-carpet drama over who comes and who stays home.

The “Los Angeles Declaration,” to be announced while U.S. President Joe Biden meets with his counterparts from North, Central and South America on Wednesday through Friday, is expected to be a brief call to action that supporters hope will guide countries on hosting people fleeing violence and persecution and searching for more economic stability.

The United States has been a popular destination for asylum-seekers for years, posing a challenge that has stumped Biden and his immediate predecess-

sors, Donald Trump and Barack Obama.

But the U.S. is far from alone. Colombia and neighboring South American countries host millions who have fled Venezuela. Mexico fielded more than 130,000 asylum applications last year, many of them Haitians, which was triple from 2020. Many Nicaraguans escape to Costa Rica, while displaced Venezuelans account for about one-sixth the population of tiny Aruba.

“Countries are already having to do this, so rather than each country trying to sort this out and figure it out for themselves, what we’re doing is saying, ‘Let’s come together in a coherent way and construct a framework so we can all work together to make this situation more humane and more man-

ageable,’” said Brian Nichols, assistant U.S. secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

Biden was scheduled to arrive at the summit Wednesday, trailed by questions about how much progress he can make on migration and other issues when some of his counterparts from the region — most notably Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador — are boycotting the event.

The controversy has undermined the start of the summit, which is being hosted by the U.S. for the first time since the inaugural event in 1994, at a time when China has been trying to make inroads in the region.

Although Biden was heavily involved in Latin America while he was vice president, his focus

has largely been elsewhere since taking office as president last year. He’s been trying to reorient U.S. foreign policy toward Asia while rallying allies to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

Some concrete measures may be announced — perhaps funding for development banks. Nichols said in an interview Monday that discussing any specific initiatives would be premature, but officials have made clear that the agreement will be largely aspirational.

There is widespread agreement that relief must target growth and stability for entire communities in which migrants live, not just migrants.

“If you only help the migrants and not the communities around them, that’s counterproductive,” Nichols said.

Treasury Secretary expects inflation to ‘remain high’

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen acknowledged Tuesday that she and Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell “could have used a better word” than “transitory” when describing the run of inflation in the U.S. economy. She added that she was hopeful it would soon be on the decline.

“I do expect inflation to remain high, although I very much hope that it will be coming

down now,” Yellen told the Senate Finance Committee during a hearing on the agency’s latest budget request. “I think that bringing inflation down should be our number one priority.”

The Federal Reserve and Treasury Department have been increasingly blamed by legislators and the public for allowing inflation to reach record highs — notably an 8.3% leap in consumer prices over the past year.

She told CNN last week that she did not fully understand the impact that unanticipated large shocks and supply bottlenecks would have on the economy.

“I think I was wrong about the path that inflation would take,” she said.

The hearing was an opportunity for lawmakers to press Yellen on the causes for inflation, when it may decline and plans on how to reduce the pain on Americans.

Iran says 2 UN watchdog devices at nuclear site turned off

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran turned off two surveillance devices Wednesday used by U.N. inspectors to monitor the Islamic Republic’s uranium enrichment, further escalating the crisis over its atomic program as Tehran’s nuclear deal with world powers remains in tatters.

The move appeared to be a new pressure technique as Western nations seek to censure Iran at a meeting this week in

Vienna at the International Atomic Energy Agency. The censure deals with what the watchdog refers to as Iran’s failure to provide “credible information” over nuclear material found at undeclared sites across the country.

But Iran’s latest move, announced by state television, makes it even more difficult for inspectors to monitor Tehran’s nuclear program. Nonproliferation experts have warned Iran now has enough uranium en-

riched close to weapons-grade levels to pursue an atomic bomb if it chooses to do so.

The state TV report, later repeated by other Iranian media, said authorities deactivated the “beyond-safeguards cameras of the measuring Online Enrichment Monitor ... and flowmeter.” That apparently refers to the IAEA’s online monitors that watch the enrichment of uranium gas through piping at enrichment facilities.

Iran is also enriching urani-

um at its underground Fordo facility, though the IAEA is not known to have installed these devices there.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has so far had extensive cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency,” state TV said in its report Wednesday. “Unfortunately, the agency, without considering this cooperation ... not only did not appreciate this cooperation, but also considered it a duty of Iran.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police: 7,700 pounds of pies lost after crash

IL JOLIET — About 7,700 pounds of frozen pies were damaged after a semitrailer hauling them rolled over southwest of Chicago.

The truck was westbound on Interstate 80 near Joliet when it entered the median and turned over on its side after the vehicle's headlights allegedly malfunctioned, state police said.

Both lanes of the freeway were closed about five hours. No injuries were reported, but the pies were lost, WLS-TV reported.

Two knocked from bridge by passing train

MI ANN ARBOR — A man and woman were injured after being knocked from a bridge in Ann Arbor by a passing train.

One fell into the Huron River and was in critical condition at a hospital, Ann Arbor fire officials said.

The other person landed on the riverbank and suffered serious injuries. Officials said the pair was trespassing on the railroad bridge.

Mother charged after toddler shoots father

FL ORLANDO — A 2-year-old boy fatally shot his father in an accident after finding a gun, and the boy's mother is now facing criminal charges, authorities in Florida said.

Reggie Mabry, 26, was fatally shot last month while he was playing a video game. The gun was fired by his 2-year-old son in the home Mabry, his wife,

Marie Ayala, 28, and their three young children, according to an Orange County Sheriff's Office report. Ayala was charged with manslaughter by culpable negligence, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, possession of ammunition by a convicted felon and violation of probation, Orange County Sheriff John Mina said.

Both Ayala and Mabry had been on probation for child neglect and narcotics possession.

Causeway removal meant jump in juvenile salmon

WA INDIAN ISLAND — The return of young salmon to the eelgrass beds of the tidelands below Indian Island's sandstone-stacked bluffs has been swift following the removal of an earthen causeway that opened fish passage.

For the past 75 years, the causeway's two small culverts were the only way saltwater — and the life traveling in it — traversed Oak Bay north to Kilsut. But in 2020, a \$12.6 million state project replaced the causeway with a concrete girder bridge.

Only six juvenile salmon were found during seining in the five years before the bridge opened. During this year's seining, over two days in May, volunteers netted close to 1,000 juvenile salmon.

Order exempts funeral processions from tolls

NH CONCORD — Vehicles traveling in funeral processions no longer have to pay tolls on New Hampshire highways.

Gov. Chris Sununu signed an executive order exempting vehicles that are part of a funeral

procession from tolls. He said the idea came from representatives from the Veterans of Foreign Wars as a way to help grieving families traveling to pay final respects.

Under the order, the lead car in any funeral procession must stop, identify themselves and inform the toll attendant of how many vehicles are part of the procession.

Partly treated sewage found running into river

RI WOONSOCKET — Environmental officials were urging residents to avoid a stretch of the Blackstone River after finding that sewage was leaking into the river from a wastewater treatment plant.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management said it's investigating the discharge of partly treated wastewater from the Woonsocket Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility.

The plant is operated by the private firm Jacobs, and treats about 10 million gallons of sewage a day, according to the department. The agency said it previously issued letters of non-compliance to the facility regarding "operations and maintenance concerns."

Weapons seized after man fires on officers

MD HAGERSTOWN — A Maryland man was arrested and weapons and ammunition were seized from his home after authorities said he fired nearly two dozen shots at law enforcement officers.

The incident began after police received a 911 call from a fe-

male who reported being threatened by a male at a home in Hagerstown, the Herald-Mail reported.

Officers heard yelling from inside the home and tried to get the man to come to the door, but he refused, according to a news release from the Washington County Sheriff's Office. The man then fired rounds through a window at the deputies. A woman later exited the home, and the 42-year-old suspect eventually surrendered.

Firearms and ammunition were seized from his residence, including an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, according to the release.

Feds: Plumber hosed customers, cheated IRS

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts plumber who overcharged his customers and failed to pay nearly \$1.5 million in taxes was sentenced to a year in prison, federal prosecutors said.

Jared Derrico, 35, of Boxford, pleaded guilty in February to tax evasion and mail fraud. He was also sentenced to three years of probation, and ordered to forfeit \$315,000 and pay \$1.45 million in restitution to the Internal Revenue Service, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office in Boston.

Derrico, from 2015 through 2019, defrauded at least 11 customers by either overcharging them for work he performed, or billing them for work he did not perform, prosecutors said. He also misled his tax preparer about the receipts from his business to evade reporting the income on his tax returns, authorities said.

—From wire reports



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Lightning top Rangers, even East finals

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — The Tampa Bay Lightning delivered on a promise to play with a greater sense of urgency, storming back in the Eastern Conference finals against the New York Rangers and keeping their bid for a third straight Stanley Cup title alive.

Nikita Kucherov scored on a breakaway and Andrei Vasilevskiy had 33 saves Tuesday night, helping the two-time defending NHL champions shut down the Rangers 4-1 and even the best-of-seven series at two games apiece.

“We’ve got ourselves squared up in this series. It’s great, much better than the position we were in a couple days ago. But this is where it gets down to the really tough stuff,” Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said.

“These next couple of games, we have to go on the road and we have to find a way to win a game in their barn,” Stamkos added. “We’re looking forward

to that challenge, but I really like where our game is now compared to where it was a couple days ago.”

Kucherov took a pass from Ondrej Palat in the middle of the ice and skated in on goaltender Igor Shesterkin to give the Lightning a two-goal lead just over 13 minutes into the second period.

With Vasilevskiy back on his game following a slow start to the series, that turned out to be more than enough offensive support to hold off a Rangers team that’s suddenly found it difficult to score.

“They did a great job in the neutral zone. They collapsed pretty good in the ‘D’ zone. They blocked a lot of shots. They did the right things to win a hockey game,” Rangers coach Gerard Gallant said of the Lightning.

Stamkos, Palat and Pat Maroon had goals for Tampa Bay, which has rebounded from losing the first two games of the series on the road to bolster its chances of becoming the first

team in nearly 40 years to win three consecutive Stanley Cup championships.

Game 5 is Thursday night at Madison Square Garden.

“We’ve done a good job at home. I think if you look around the league a lot of teams play better in their home building,” Gallant said.

“I’m disappointed tonight. I’m sure (the players) are,” the coach added. “But it’s a best two out of three, we still have the home-ice advantage, so we have to make sure we’re ready for the next game. The next one is big.”

Vasilevskiy stopped 28 of 30 shots to win Game 3 and was even better Tuesday night, when he extended a stretch in which he did not give up a goal to nearly 67 minutes before New York’s Artemi Panarin scored on the power play at 16:27 of the third period.

Until Vasilevskiy’s bid for a shutout ended, the Rangers hadn’t scored since Chris Kreider’s power-play goal put them up 2-0 at 9:44 of the sec-

ond period in Game 3.

It has been all Tampa Bay since then, with Kucherov and Stamkos scoring to wipe out the deficit before Palat won it in the final minute.

The defending champs started faster Tuesday night, scoring on Maroon’s rebound just 2:38 into the game.

It was the third goal of the playoffs for Maroon, a 34-year-old, fourth-line forward who’s chasing a fourth consecutive Stanley Cup title after winning with St. Louis in 2019 and signing with Tampa Bay before the following season.

Stamkos’ goal built the lead to 3-0 early in the third period. Palat added an empty-netter with 8.7 seconds remaining.

“We’ve progressively gotten better, and I think we took some more positive steps tonight,” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “We had a bit of a layoff, and I think now we’re starting to find our game. Now, we just have to keep this going in New York.”

Fill-in players kept NBA season, Finals on schedule

Associated Press

Adam Silver was on his phone constantly in late December. At that time, the NBA had more than 100 players sidelined by virus-related issues, along with some head coaches, assistant coaches, referees and team staffers.

The NHL had just paused its season. The NBA commissioner wondered if his league would follow suit.

“I was very concerned,” Silver said. “And we had numerous discussions with our governors about whether we were doing the right thing.”

With a lot of help from dozens of newly signed players, some of whom might already be forgotten, the NBA played on.

It could be argued the untold

MVPs of this season were the more than 100 players signed to short-term hardship contracts to fill in when almost every team was decimated by the Omicron variant and other virus issues in December and January.

Those fill-ins kept the season from veering off the rails. And they’re really why the NBA Finals matchup between the Boston Celtics and Golden State Warriors is being played exactly as planned when the schedule was being put together last summer.

“I think that everyone understood that if we did have to pause the season, it would have a huge potential economic impact on the league as well or force players and the league to have to move into the summer,

which is not ideal,” Silver told The Associated Press. “So, without those players, we wouldn’t be here today.”

Around the league, 605 players — a record — got into at least one game during the regular season, up 12% from last season. There were 633 players who were known to be under contract at some point, up 15% from last season’s figure.

And when the variant was at its worst, the league was at its busiest: over a 10-day span of late December, 93 different 10-day contracts were signed.

To put how many players were needed in some perspective, consider that over a five-season span — 1982-83 through 1986-87 — the Celtics used a total of 27 players.

This season, they used 28.

And that doesn’t count four Boston players who were signed and never got into a game. The Celtics’ total of 32 players who were under contract — some very briefly — at some point this season was the highest in the NBA, one more than Portland and two more than Indiana, Milwaukee, and New Orleans.

The NBA had to postpone a total of 11 games that were originally slated from mid-to-late December, and the rescheduling of those forced eight other games to be shifted in order to keep teams from playing in overly adverse circumstances like having three games in three nights.

Otherwise, games were played like normal. Only it wasn’t normal.

Coach: WCWS doubleheader a safety threat

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Oklahoma bounced back from losing a Women's College World Series semifinal to UCLA on Monday, dominating the Bruins in a game that started 30 minutes after the first one.

Sooners coach Patty Gasso said the turnaround should not have been so quick.

The team handled it fine, but Gasso still called it a player safety issue. She likes that the NCAA's Division I Competition Oversight Committee added a day between the semifinals and finals, one of several popular changes made before the season. But she would give it up for time between the semifinal games.

"The last time we played a doubleheader was in March,

and we are in the final four and we're playing a doubleheader 30 minutes after — I mean, you're playing two games with a 30-minute break to decide who is going to play for a national championship," she said. "I didn't like that."

In a schedule quirk last year, a rain delay pushed back the start times for the first semifinal games, so the NCAA moved the second semifinal games to the next day. Gasso believes that kind of arrangement should be permanent.

Texas made the most of the new format, beating Oklahoma State twice on Monday night to qualify for the best-of-three championship series. But even Longhorns coach Mike White isn't sure that part of it is ideal.

"Winning that first game for

us was huge, but not having the ability to come back and regroup can hurt some teams," White said Tuesday. "You play all year for it. So maybe eliminating doubleheaders altogether would be a good thing."

Coaches lauded the other changes the committee made before this season. In the past, the teams that won on the opening day Thursday had to play again on Friday. This time, the Thursday winners didn't play again until Saturday.

"I know the committee is working their tails off," Cowboys coach Kenny Gajewski said. "We got this format changed. It's awesome. I mean, it's rewarding the winning teams, and that's what we should do."

With the old schedule, the

teams that lost on the opening day Thursday faced elimination games in the early session on Saturday and had to play a second game in the late session on Saturday if they won. This year, no team played twice on the same day until the semifinals.

Last year, Oklahoma State played Florida State in the late game on Saturday, and it didn't end until 2:20 a.m. local time after a rain delay pushed the start time back. Now, the schedule has the flexibility to account for those kinds of issues.

Coaches say the expansion from a maximum of seven days to a maximum of nine days has made for a better tournament.

"I'm grateful we were able to have a voice and do what's best," UCLA coach Kelly Inouye-Perez said.

Walton family buys Broncos for record amount

Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — The Waltons, heirs to the Walmart fortune and America's richest family, have won the bidding to purchase the Denver Broncos in the most expensive deal for a sports franchise anywhere in the world.

The Broncos announced late Tuesday night they had entered into a sale agreement with the Walton-Penner ownership group led by Rob Walton, his daughter, Carrie Walton Penner, and her husband, Greg Penner.

Terms of the sale weren't disclosed, but KUSA-TV in Denver reported it was for \$4.65 billion.

The price tag far surpasses the \$3.1 billion sale last month of Chelsea, one of European soccer's blue ribbon teams, to an American-led consortium fronted by Los Angeles Dodgers part-owner Todd Boehly.

Boehly reportedly was among the investors with one of the five finalists who were invited to make bids for the Broncos

by Monday's deadline.

The agreement for the Walmart-Penner group to buy the franchise from the Pat Bowlen Trust must be approved by the NFL, but that is considered a formality.

"While this purchase and sale agreement is pending approval from the NFL's finance committee and league ownership, today marks a significant step on the path to an exciting new chapter in Broncos history," team president and CEO Joe Ellis said in a statement.

"I have enjoyed getting to know Rob Walton, Carrie Walton Penner and Greg Penner throughout this process," Ellis said. "Learning more about their background and vision for the Denver Broncos, I am confident that their leadership and support will help this team achieve great things on and off the field."

Walton said Melody Hobson, co-CEO of Ariel Investments and chairwoman of Starbucks, has agreed to join the ownership

group.

Biles, others seek \$1B from FBI over Nassar

DETROIT — Olympic gold medalist Simone Biles and dozens of other women who say they were sexually assaulted by Larry Nassar are seeking more than \$1 billion from the FBI for failing to stop the sports doctor when the agency first received allegations against him, lawyers said Wednesday.

There's no dispute that FBI agents in 2015 knew that Nassar was accused of assaulting gymnasts, but they failed to act, leaving him free to continue to target young women and girls for more than a year. He pleaded guilty in 2017 and is serving decades in prison.

The approximately 90 claimants include Biles, Aly Raisman and McKayla Maroney, all Olympic gold medalists, according to Manly, Stewart & Finaledi, a California law firm. Separately, 13 claims were filed by

others in April.

"If the FBI had simply done its job, Nassar would have been stopped before he ever had the chance to abuse hundreds of girls, including me," said former University of Michigan gymnast Samantha Roy.

Report: DeChambeau, Reed to join rival league

Major champions Bryson DeChambeau and Patrick Reed plan to sign up with the Saudi-funded LIV Golf Invitational series in time for the rival circuit to start playing in U.S. cities, a British newspaper reported Wednesday.

The Daily Telegraph says Greg Norman and his staff that runs LIV Golf Investments plan to announce the latest two defections from the PGA Tour on Friday.

The first U.S. event for the LIV series is the weekend before the Fourth of July at Pumpkin Ridge in Oregon.

Acuña hits 2 HRs, Braves slip past A's

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Ronald Acuña Jr. hit two home runs, Guillermo Heredia gave Atlanta the lead with a solo shot in the seventh inning and the streaking Braves beat the reeling Oakland Athletics 3-2 on Tuesday night.

Kyle Wright (6-3) recovered from a rocky start to allow two runs in eight innings — the longest outing of his career. Atlanta extended its season-best winning streak to six games.

Heredia pulled a pitch from Lou Trivino (1-4) over the left-field wall and into the Oakland bullpen to snap a 2-all tie.

Acuña homered in the first and third off Cole Irvin.

The A's, making their first visit to Truist Park, lost their seventh straight.

Astros 4, Mariners 1: Justin Verlander struck out a season-high 12 in seven sparkling innings, Yordan Alvarez hit a two-run homer and host Houston beat Seattle.

There was no trouble between the teams one night after beanballs led to a bench-clearing scuffle. Astros bench coach Joe Espada filled in for manager Dusty Baker, who served a one-game suspension after he and reliever Héctor Neris were ejected from Monday's game.

Verlander (7-2) yielded one run on six hits. Ryan Pressly pitched the ninth for his 11th save.

Phillies 3, Brewers 2: Alec Bohm and Matt Vierling homered off Josh Hader in the ninth inning, and visiting Philadelphia rallied past Milwaukee for its fifth straight win.

The Brewers led 2-1 in the ninth and handed the game to its All-Star closer, who

hadn't blown a save — or surrendered a run — in 19 previous appearances this year. Bohm belted a leadoff homer off Hader (0-1), whose streak of 40 straight scoreless appearances dating to last season was snapped.

Padres 7, Mets 0: Yu Darvish held New York hitless until the sixth inning and Jurickson Profar launched a leadoff home run for host San Diego in a matchup between two of the NL's best teams.

Darvish (5-3) allowed only two hits in seven innings while striking out six and walking none on 100 pitches. He hit three of the Mets' first five batters with pitches, including Brandon Nimmo, to open the game.

Yankees 10, Twins 4: Anthony Rizzo hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning to crack open a close game as New York won at Minnesota for its seventh straight win.

Aaron Judge and Giancarlo Stanton got the visitors going with first-inning homers, the 23rd time they've gone deep in the same game in five seasons together.

White Sox 4, Dodgers 0: Michael Kopec pitched six innings of one-hit ball, pinch-hitter AJ Pollock delivered a two-run double against his former team and host Chicago beat Los Angeles.

Pollock's clutch swing off the bench sparked a four-run sixth that sent the White Sox to their third consecutive victory.

Rays 4, Cardinals 2 (10): Taylor Walls hit a three-run homer with two outs in the 10th inning and host Tampa Bay beat St. Louis.

Walls sent a 2-2 pitch from Drew VerHagen (3-1) into the right field seats.

Rockies 5, Giants 3: Connor Joe homered leading off the game, pinch-hitter

Charlie Blackmon connected for a three-run shot and Colorado won at San Francisco to stop a four-game skid.

Germán Márquez (2-5) shook off a shaky start and struck out seven in six innings for his first road win this season. Daniel Bard earned his 12th save.

Marlins 12, Nationals 2: Jazz Chisholm Jr. homered twice, including a grand slam, and had a career-high six RBIs as host Miami beat Washington.

Nick Fortes and Jorge Soler also went deep while Avisail García had three hits for the Marlins.

Orioles 9, Cubs 3: Cedric Mullins and Trey Mancini hit successive homers, sparking a power surge that carried host Baltimore past Chicago.

Jorge Mateo, Austin Hays and Ramón Urías also connected for the Orioles, who beat the Cubs for the first time in seven tries since 2008.

Blue Jays 7, Royals 0: Alek Manoah scattered six hits in six scoreless innings and Toronto won at Kansas City.

Guardians 6-3 Rangers 3-6: Cal Quantrill stayed unbeaten at home, Owen Miller drove in two runs and host Cleveland beat Texas in the first game of a doubleheader.

Diamondbacks 14, Reds 8: Graham Ashcraft pitched six shutout innings to extend his impressive debut run, Joey Votto led an early homer barrage and host Cincinnati beat slumping Arizona.

Pirates 5, Tigers 3: Tarik Skubal pitched seven steady innings to win his fourth straight decision and Harold Castro hit a two-run single to lead Detroit to a rain-delayed win at Pittsburgh.

Angels fire Maddon; skid runs to 13, tying club mark

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — The Los Angeles Angels' free fall from having one of the best records in the American League to a disastrous losing streak cost Joe Maddon his job Tuesday.

General manager Perry Minasian recommended making the move to owner Arte Moreno, then drove to Maddon's house to give him the news.

Third base coach Phil Nevin will be the interim manager for the rest of the season. The Angels

tied a club record with their 13th straight loss Tuesday night, falling 6-5 to the Boston Red Sox in 10 innings. Los Angeles star Mike Trout exited with groin tightness.

"I'm not worried about morale at all," Nevin said. "You saw the effort from everyone. We had good at-bats. I thought there was a lot of great things. It was just a game where we ended up on the wrong side."

The Red Sox won their sixth straight with a 15-hit effort, including two from Christian Váz-

quez. Bobby Dalbec had two RBIs.

Trout homered in the first inning and gingerly ran out a double in the third before leaving with the groin issue. He said he felt a little sore but isn't overly alarmed. There was no scan or MRI done after Trout left the game.

The 68-year-old Maddon went 130-148 with the Angels, who hired him before the coronavirus-shortened 2020 season for his self-described dream job. Mad-

don spent three decades of his career as a player and coach for the Angels before going on to an impressive managerial career that has included three Manager of the Year awards.

The Angels were beaten 1-0 in Maddon's final game by the Red Sox and journeyman starter Michael Wacha, who threw a three-hitter against the Halos' star-studded lineup Monday night. Los Angeles closed a seven-game road trip Sunday with a loss in Philadelphia.