

Navy told to rename USNS Harvey Milk

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has ordered the Navy to rename the ship that honors Harvey Milk, a former sailor who later became the first openly gay man elected to office in California, defense officials confirmed Tuesday.

The USNS Harvey Milk, a John Lewis-class replenishment oiler, was first named after the gay rights activist in 2016 by then-Navy Secretary Ray Mabus. The John Lewis-class oilers are designated by the Navy to be named for civil rights leaders and activists.

But the ship will be renamed now to “align with President Donald Trump’s and Hegseth’s priorities,” said an official who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The order was handed down from Hegseth to Navy Secretary John Phelan, a second official said. It was unclear Tuesday what the Harvey Milk’s new name will be, when

the change will occur or how much it will cost.

Milk was commissioned in the Navy in 1951 and served as a diving officer on the submarine rescue ship USS Kittiwake during the Korean War. He was forced to resign in 1955 after it was discovered he was gay and was honorably discharged as a lieutenant junior grade.

Milk went on to run for political office in California, winning a seat on the San Francisco board of supervisors in 1977. He was killed in office in 1978 shortly after passing a bill banning housing and employment discrimination based on sexual orientation. Milk’s assassination transformed him into an icon in San Francisco and a martyr in the LGBTQ+ community. He was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009.

“Leaders like Harvey Milk taught us that diversity of backgrounds and experiences help contribute to the strength and

resolve of our nation,” former Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said in 2021 during the ship’s commissioning ceremony. “There is no doubt that the future sailors aboard this ship will be inspired by Milk’s life and legacy.”

The Harvey Milk is undergoing maintenance at a shipyard in Alabama. The maintenance should be completed in late June, according to the Alabama Shipyard.

The Pentagon said reviews of names were in progress and potential renamings would be announced after those reviews are complete.

“Secretary Hegseth is committed to ensuring that the names attached to all [Defense Department] installations and assets are reflective of the commander in chief’s priorities, our nation’s history, and the warrior ethos,” said Sean Parnell, chief Pentagon spokesman.

The Navy declined to comment on the order to rename the

Harvey Milk. The order was meant to become public on June 13, intentionally coinciding with Pride Month — celebrated annually in June to recognize the contributions and achievements of the LGBTQ+ community, according to Military.com, which was first to report the renaming.

News of the ship’s renaming drew criticism Tuesday from lawmakers, scholars and advocacy groups.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., a former House speaker, said the renaming is a spiteful, vindictive erasure of those who fought to break down barriers. Tim Naftali, a senior research scholar for Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs, described the timing of the renaming as “nothing less than the most vicious homophobia.”

Stripping Milk’s name from a Navy ship on the basis of his sexuality is “despicable,” said Lindsay Church, president of Minority Veterans of America.

Army hits recruiting goal for 2025 ahead of schedule

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

The Army has met its active duty recruiting goal for 2025, marking the earliest the service has reached its annual enlistment target in more than a decade, service officials said Tuesday.

The Army surpassed 61,000 future soldier contracts this week, four months before the end of the fiscal year, according to a service news release. It marks the second consecutive year that the service has reached its target for new enlistment after it had failed to meet its goals in 2022 and 2023.

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll credited the service’s 10,000 or so recruiters for their “colossal efforts” to improve the service’s recruiting wing in recent years and sign up some 10% more young Americans to join the Army so far this year than last year when it achieved its 55,000-recruit target just before the fiscal year’s end in September.

“A full four months ahead of schedule, we crushed the U.S. Army’s FY25 recruiting goals,” Driscoll said in a statement. “I want to thank our hard-working recruiting community and everyone who helped support this important milestone.”

The last time that the Army met its recruiting goal in the first week of June was 2014, said Lt. Col. Jeff Tolbert, a spokesman for Driscoll.

The Army secretary said Tuesday that hitting the goal so early showed the service’s recruiting challenges were “behind us.”

Tolbert said those recruited for the rest of the fiscal year will enter the Army’s Delayed Entry Program, which means they will ship to basic training in fiscal 2026, which starts Oct. 1.

Some 14,000 of the recruits who have shipped to basic training in fiscal 2025 did so after en-

tering the Delayed Entry Program last year, according to the service.

The accomplishment comes as the Army prepares to hold events around the world marking its 250th birthday, including a massive celebration and parade planned for Washington, D.C., on June 14. That event is expected to include an enlistment ceremony for new recruits committing to the service.

The Army — and most of the other military services — have struggled in recent years to meet their recruiting goals, at least in part because of a shrinking pool of eligible candidates.

US reducing presence in Syria to 1 base

BY LARA KORTE
Stars and Stripes

The number of U.S. bases in Syria will be pared from eight to one, the American ambassador to Turkey and special envoy to Syria said this week in an interview with a Turkish TV station.

Tom Barrack's comments Monday on the impending consolidation were confirmed to Stars and Stripes by a U.S. official, who was granted anonymity to discuss sensitive matters.

Reduction of the U.S. military's footprint in Syria is a reflection of shifting American policy, Barrack said in the interview, which was published in Turkish.

For more than a decade, the U.S. has been conducting Operation Inherent Resolve, a mis-

sion aimed at defeating Islamic State in Syria and neighboring Iraq.

Since ISIS' territorial defeat in 2019, the U.S. has consistently maintained at least several hundred troops in northeastern Syria to train and assist Kurdish partners in the Syrian Democratic Forces, as well as a small contingent near the southern border with Jordan and Iraq.

Following an agreement the SDF made in March to merge forces with the interim government in Damascus, the Pentagon said it will reduce the American troop level in the country from 2,000 to less than 1,000 in the coming months.

FoxNews, citing U.S. officials, reported Monday that 500 troops had left bases in north-

eastern Syria, including Mission Support Site Green Village and Mission Support Site Euphrates, which was handed over to the SDF.

The top priority for the U.S. are the 9,000 ISIS fighters currently held in detention centers maintained by the SDF.

During a recent Middle East visit, President Donald Trump urged his new Syrian counterpart, interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, to assume responsibility for the prisons where U.S. forces for years have trained and equipped their Kurdish partners.

But it will likely be months or years before the new government is stable enough to do so, experts say.

Barrack's announcement

came as the United States and other world powers try to navigate shifting dynamics in the Middle East following the collapse of the Assad family's regime in Syria in late 2024 after more than a half-century of rule.

Trump's Syria policy will not be close to those of the past 100 years because none of them worked, Barrack said.

The U.S. is also taking steps to ease decades of economic sanctions on Syria as the interim government works to gain control and stability.

In a congressional hearing last month, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that without U.S. support, the country faces "potential collapse and a full-scale civil war of epic proportions."

Marines train with NMESIS anti-ship system in Pacific

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines are stashing an anti-ship missile system in remote corners of the northern Philippines as part of an ongoing exercise meant to counter threats in the region's contested waters, according to the commander of the Hawaii-based 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment.

Members of the regiment have been in the Philippines since the start of spring and are participating in Kamandag, a 12-day annual exercise with Filipino forces that wraps up Friday.

The training comes amid rising tension between Manila and Beijing over territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

The Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System — NMESIS — made its Philippines debut in April and is operating in the Batanes, a group of islands east of the Luzon Strait between

Taiwan and the Philippines, Col. John Lehane, the regiment's commander, said Wednesday.

Marines are using NMESIS for simulated missions to test the system's ability to target ships at sea. They are not conducting live-fire training, he said.

Lehane declined to say how many Marines are involved or which islands they're using but said each island in the group presents unique challenges. The Batanes cover just 84 square miles, but Marines can still conceal the systems effectively, he said.

"You would be surprised how creative we are," he said.

The regiment acquired NMESIS in November. It includes launchers, a 7-ton vehicle and two Joint Light Tactical Vehicles. Its deployment is part of the Corps' Force Design strategy, which positions small units at maritime chokepoints to deny enemies access to contested waters.

USS Tripoli ships out to Japan to lead ready group

BY ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The amphibious assault ship USS Tripoli is on its way to Japan, where it will replace the USS America as the lead vessel of the Navy's sole amphibious ready group outside the United States.

The Tripoli departed its longtime homeport of San Diego on May 19 and is crossing the Pacific toward Sasebo Naval Base in Nagasaki prefecture, where it will become flagship of Amphibious Squadron 11's amphibious ready group, the Hawaii-based U.S. Pacific Fleet said in a news release Tuesday.

The amphibious ready group regularly conducts regional deployments with the Okinawa-based 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

While under the America's command, the group includes the dock landing ship USS Rushmore and transport dock ships USS San

Diego and USS New Orleans.

"This crew has been diligently preparing to forward deploy since last year," Capt. Eddie Park, the Tripoli's commander, said in the release. "I am fully confident in the crew's abilities to execute any mission assigned to us."

The rotation was first announced on Feb. 14, but no timeline was provided then due to operational security. No other ships are slated to rotate, Lt. Cmdr. Katie Koenig, a Pacific Fleet spokeswoman, told Stars and Stripes at the time.

Meanwhile, the America, which first arrived at Sasebo in December 2019, will return to San Diego, its previous homeport. The America, Tripoli and other ships in their class are small flat-tops typically carrying F-35B Lightning II stealth fighters, MV-22 Osprey tiltrotors and MH-60S Knighthawk helicopters.

Family of Colo. attack suspect detained

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The wife and five children of an Egyptian man accused of firebombing an event in Colorado in support of Israeli hostages were taken into custody Tuesday by U.S. immigration officials and threatened with a swift deportation.

The family of Mohamed Sabry Soliman, 45, could be deported as early as Tuesday night, the White House said in a post on X. It's rare that family members of a person accused of a crime are detained and threatened with deportation in this way.

Soliman, disguised as a gardener, had planned to kill all of the roughly 20 participants in Sunday's demonstration and had 18 Molotov cocktails, but he threw just two while yelling

"Free Palestine," police said. Soliman, who federal authorities say has been living in the U.S. illegally, didn't carry out his full plan "because he got scared and had never hurt anyone before," police wrote in an affidavit.

The two incendiary devices he threw were enough to injure 12 of the participants in the weekly demonstration held at the popular Pearl Street pedestrian mall in downtown Boulder, authorities said, noting that he expressed no remorse about the attack.

Soliman told authorities that no one, including his family, knew about his plans for the attack, according to court documents that, at times, spelled his name as "Mohammed."

According to an FBI affidavit, Soliman told police he was

driven by a desire "to kill all Zionist people" — a reference to the movement to establish and protect a Jewish state in Israel.

Soliman left an iPhone hidden in a desk drawer at his Colorado Springs home that contained messages to his family, according to an FBI affidavit. After his arrest, his wife gave his phone to police, saying it was his but was also used by other family members.

Soliman was born in el-Motamedia, an Egyptian farming village in the Nile Delta province of Gharbia that's located about 75 miles north of Cairo, according to an Egyptian security official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to talk to the media.

Before moving to Colorado Springs three years ago, he

spent 17 years in Kuwait, according to court documents.

He has been living in the U.S. illegally, having arrived in August 2022 on a tourist visa that expired in February 2023, Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said in a post on X.

She said Soliman filed for asylum in September 2022 and was granted a work authorization in March 2023 but that it also expired.

The immigration status of his wife and children is not clear, and DHS did not respond to requests for additional information.

Soliman told authorities that he had been planning the attack for a year and was waiting for his daughter to graduate before carrying it out, the affidavit said.

Iran rebukes US proposal but doesn't reject nuke offer

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran's supreme leader on Wednesday criticized an initial proposal from the United States in negotiations over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear program, though he stopped short of entirely rejecting the idea of agreement with Washington.

The remarks by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei colored in the red line expressed over recent days

— one that says Tehran refuses to give up enriching uranium in any possible deal with the U.S.

That demand has been repeatedly made by American officials, including President Donald Trump, though it remains unclear just how much U.S. Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff brought it up in his initial proposal to Iran.

But what Khamenei, 86, did not say in his speech matters as

well.

He didn't reject the talks, which Iran views as crucial for its economy to lift some the crushing economic sanctions it faces. Khamenei also did not insist on any specific level of nuclear enrichment. Iran now enriches uranium up to 60% — a short, technical step from weapons-grade levels.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who has led the

talks with Witkoff, said Tehran soon will offer its response to the U.S. Khamenei's speech at the mausoleum of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini may be a preview.

"If we had 100 nuclear power plants while not having enrichment, they are not usable for us," Khamenei said. "If we do not have enrichment, then we should extend our hand (begging) to the U.S."

CBO says Trump tax bill will add \$2.4 trillion to deficit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's big bill making its way through Congress will cut taxes by \$3.75 trillion but also increase deficits by \$2.4 trillion over the next decade, according to an analysis released Wednesday by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

The CBO also estimates an increase of 10.9 million people

without health insurance under the bill by 2034, including 1.4 million who are in the United States without legal status in state-funded programs.

The package would reduce federal outlays, or spending, by nearly \$1.3 trillion over that period, the budget office said.

"Republicans cry crocodile tears over the debt when Democrats are in charge — but ex-

plode it when they're in power," said Rep. Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania, the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee.

"In the words of Elon Musk," Boyle said, reviving the billionaire former Trump aide's criticism of the package, "this bill is a 'disgusting abomination.'"

The analysis comes at a crucial moment in the legislative

process as Trump is pushing Congress to have the final product on his desk to sign into law by the Fourth of July. The work of the CBO, which for decades has served as the official scorekeeper of legislation in Congress, will be weighed by lawmakers and others seeking to understand the budgetary impacts of the sprawling 1,000-page-plus package.

S. Korea's new president outlines policy goals

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — South Korea's new President Lee Jae-myung vowed Wednesday to restart dormant talks with North Korea and bolster a trilateral partnership with the U.S. and Japan, as he laid out key policy goals for his single, five-year term.

Lee, who rose from childhood poverty to become South Korea's leading liberal politician vowing to fight inequality and corruption, began his term earlier Wednesday, hours after winning a snap election that was triggered in April by the removal of then-President Yoon Suk Yeol over his ill-fated imposition of martial law late last year.

In his inaugural address at the National Assembly, Lee said that his government will deal with North Korean nuclear threats and its potential military aggressions with "strong deterrence" based on the South Korea-U.S. military alliance. But he said he would "open a communication channel with North Korea and establish peace on

the Korean Peninsula through talks and cooperation."

He said he'll pursue pragmatic diplomacy and boost Seoul-Washington-Tokyo cooperation.

"Through pragmatic diplomacy based on national interests, we will turn the crisis posed by the major shift in global economic and security landscapes into an opportunity to maximize our national interests," Lee said.

It was unclear whether Lee's election would cause any major, immediate shift in South Korea's foreign policy.

Lee, previously accused by critics of tilting toward China and North Korea and away from the U.S. and Japan, has recently repeatedly stressed South Korea's alliance with the U.S. as the foundation of its foreign policy and avoided making any contentious remarks that would raise questions on his views on the U.S. and Japan.

"We'll have to now see if the pressures of office will cause Lee Jae-myung to govern from

the center — at least when it comes to matters of national security and the alliance with the United States," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"It's hard to predict with absolute certainty how he will deal with the U.S., North Korea, Japan and China because he's changed his position so much," said Duyeon Kim, a senior analyst at the Washington-based Center for a New American Security. "We can expect tensions if his government doesn't align with Washington's approach to China and Japan."

The toughest external challenges awaiting Lee are U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff policy and North Korea's expanding military partnerships with Russia.

Lee called for unity to address the country's stark political divide deepened after Yoon's martial law debacle, saying that he will "answer the people's solemn call to let hope bloom over deep and painful wounds." Lee

still promised a thorough investigation into the circumstances surrounding Yoon's martial law imposition, describing it as a "rebellion that seized people's sovereignty with arms."

Lee said revitalizing a slowing domestic economy would be his top priority and that his government would immediately launch an emergency task force to wage a "head-on battle" against the threats of recession. He also promised more aggressive government spending to help spur economic activity.

Lee's term began immediately without the usual two-month transition period after the National Election Commission formally confirmed his election victory. Before his inauguration, Lee visited the national cemetery in Seoul to pay his respects to late Korean leaders, patriots and war dead who are buried there, and he had a telephone call with Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman Kim Myung-soo to call for military readiness against possible North Korean aggression.

UN: Bodies discovered in section of Libyan capital

Associated Press

GENEVA — The United Nations human rights office expressed concerns on Wednesday about the recent discovery of dozens of bodies, some charred and buried and others in hospital refrigerators, in an area of Libya's capital that is currently controlled by an armed militia whose leader was killed last month.

U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said he was shocked by revelations that gross rights violations were uncovered at detention facilities in Tripoli that are being run by the Stabilization Support Authority, or SSA, an armed group whose commander Abdel-Gha-

ni al-Kikli, was killed in militia fighting in mid-May.

The rights office said it later received information on the excavation of 10 charred bodies at the SSA headquarters in the Abu Salim neighborhood and another 67 bodies that were discovered inside of refrigerators in the nearby Abu Salim and Al Khadra hospitals. It also cited reports of a burial site at the Tripoli Zoo that was run by the SSA.

The office said the identities of the bodies were not immediately clear.

Turk called on authorities to seal the area to preserve any evidence and said that there needed to be accountability for the killings.

Several killed in stampede outside stadium in India

Associated Press

BENGALURU, India — Several people were feared dead and many more injured in a stampede on Wednesday as crowds tried to make their way inside a cricket stadium in southern India's Karnataka state.

The crush happened as thousands of cricket fans gathered outside the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru city as part of a victory celebration for the winners of the Indian Premier League, which is the world's most popular T20 cricket tournament.

Indian authorities didn't immediately confirm the number of deaths.

But India's NDTV broadcaster reported at least 11 people had died in the crush, while The Times of India newspaper reported seven dead.

Local TV news channels showed some people stretched out on the ground and emergency personnel carrying people away on stretchers and into ambulances.

Cricket fans across the city had come out to celebrate Royal Challengers Bengaluru's first Indian Premier League title win on Tuesday.

D.K. Shivakumar, the deputy chief minister of Karnataka state, told reporters that "the crowd was very uncontrollable."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman taken to hospital after moose attack

CO DENVER — A woman attacked Sunday by a moose in Steamboat Springs was airlifted to a Front Range hospital with serious injuries, according to Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

She was walking her two dogs at River Creek Park when she was attacked, agency officials said in a news release. Both dogs were leashed.

A man passing by on a paddleboard found her on the ground near the river after the attack and was helping her to the parking lot when the moose returned and kicked him, according to the release.

Paramedics evaluated the man's minor injuries on scene and released him while the woman was taken to the hospital, agency officials said.

State wildlife officers saw a moose with two calves in the area after the attack and believe the moose was protecting her young, the release stated.

Ex-CEO charged in effort to vandalize homes

NH CONCORD — The founder and former CEO of New Hampshire's largest network of addiction treatment centers has been charged with orchestrating threats and vandalism targeting New Hampshire Public Radio journalists who published sexual misconduct allegations about him.

Eric Spofford, 40, who lives in both Salem, N.H., and Miami, was arrested Friday after being indicted by a federal grand jury on three counts of stalking and one count of conspiracy to com-

mit stalking. The man he is accused of paying to carry out the 2022 attacks and three others who were involved have already been convicted.

According to prosecutors, the homes of an NHPR editor, reporter and the reporter's parents were hit with bricks, rocks and red spray paint in six incidents in April and May 2022. In one incident, a brick was thrown through reporter Lauren Chooljian's window in Massachusetts, and the phrase "JUST THE BEGINNING!" was spray-painted on the front of her home.

The attacks came after Chooljian published a story describing sexual assault and harassment allegations against Spofford, who founded Granite Recovery Centers in 2008 and sold the business in 2021. He denied the allegations and sued the journalists, alleging defamation, but the case was dismissed.

Study: Odds of a collision of galaxies now at 50-50

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — It turns out that looming collision between our Milky Way and Andromeda galaxies might not happen after all.

Astronomers reported Monday that the probability of the two spiral galaxies colliding is less than previously thought, with a 50-50 chance within the next 10 billion years. That's essentially a coin flip, but still better odds than previous estimates and farther out in time.

"As it stands, proclamations of the impending demise of our galaxy seem greatly exaggerated," the Finnish-led team wrote in a study appearing in *Nature Astronomy*.

While good news for the

Milky Way, the latest forecast may be moot for humanity.

"We likely won't live to see the benefit," lead author Till Sawala of the University of Helsinki said in an email.

Sawala's international team relied on the latest observations by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope and the European Space Agency's Gaia star-surveying spacecraft to simulate the possible scenarios facing the Milky Way and next-door neighbor Andromeda. Both already collided with other galaxies in their ancient past and, according to many, seemed destined for a head-on crash.

Schools sued for failing to halt teacher's actions

MD BALTIMORE — Three women are suing Baltimore's public school system, alleging they were sexually abused by a special education teacher decades ago while administrators failed to protect students from his behavior.

One plaintiff was 14 when she alleges the teacher, whom the lawsuit names as Alvin Hunt, raped and impregnated her, according to the complaint.

At a news conference Monday morning, attorneys for the women said school officials knew about the abuse and allowed it to continue. They said Hunt would lure students to his house under the pretense of after-school tutoring. The allegations contained in the lawsuits occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Attempts to reach Hunt were unsuccessful. A message seeking comment was left for a spokesperson for Baltimore City Public Schools.

The lawsuits add to a growing

pile of child sexual abuse claims filed in Maryland since the state eliminated its statute of limitations for such cases.

Attorneys said Hunt, who was also a sports coach, never faced prosecution or accountability for his actions. Instead, he retired. He is not named as a defendant in the lawsuits.

To prevent blackouts, US keeps power plant online

PA HARRISBURG — The U.S. Department of Energy has ordered another power plant, this time an oil and gas plant in Pennsylvania, to keep its turbines running through the hottest summer months as a precaution against electricity shortfalls in the 13-state mid-Atlantic grid.

The department's order to the grid operator, PJM Interconnection, regarding the Eddystone power plant just south of Philadelphia on the Delaware River, is the department's second use of federal power under President Donald Trump to require a power plant to keep operating on the mainland U.S.

Constellation Energy had planned to shut down Eddystone's units 3 and 4 on Saturday, but Trump's Department of Energy ordered the company to continue operating the units until at least Aug. 28.

The department, in its order, cited PJM's growing concerns about power shortfalls amid the shutdown of aging power plants and rising electricity demand.

The department took a similar step last week, ordering Consumers Energy to keep the J.H. Campbell coal-fired power plant open in Michigan past its Saturday retirement.

— From wire reports

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Thunder-Pacers matchup is years in making

Associated Press

The seeds for the 2025 NBA Finals began getting planted unknowingly in 2017, back when Shai Gilgeous-Alexander was about to enroll at Kentucky and Tyrese Haliburton was getting ready for his senior year of high school in Wisconsin.

That was the year the Indiana Pacers traded Paul George to the Oklahoma City Thunder. The Pacers landed Domantas Sabonis out of that deal. Oklahoma City would trade George in 2019 to the Los Angeles Clippers for a package that included Gilgeous-Alexander.

Indiana would trade Sabonis in 2022 to Sacramento for a package that included Haliburton.

And here we are.

Gilgeous-Alexander is the NBA's MVP and the Thunder's best player. Haliburton is an Olympic gold medalist and the Pacers' best player. They'll lead their teams into Game 1 of the NBA Finals on Thursday night — Indiana at Oklahoma City, the start of a series that will de-

cide who hoists the Larry O'Brien Trophy.

"Man, I'm just so proud of this group," Haliburton said in the on-court televised interview with TNT after the Pacers' 125-108 victory over the New York Knicks on Saturday in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference finals. "I don't even have words right now. It's really exciting. We'll enjoy this one for now. There's four more, there's a lot more work to do, against a really tough team."

The Thunder — depending on how you count — are in the finals for either the second time or the fifth time. The franchise, when it was in Seattle, lost what was then called the NBA World Championship Series to Washington in 1978, then won the title in a rematch against the then-Bullets in 1979 and lost in the NBA Finals to Chicago in 1996. OKC got to the finals in 2012, losing to Miami.

The Thunder are 80-18 this season, after going 68-14 in the regular season and then 12-4 in

the playoffs — sweeping Memphis in Round 1, surviving seven games against Denver in Round 2 and then ousting Minnesota in five games for the Western Conference title.

"When you win, that's a special thing," Oklahoma City forward Chet Holmgren said. "It's not guaranteed in this league. If everybody was guaranteed to win, it'd be a participation trophy instead of a Larry O'Brien. So you have to kind of take it in and understand what you've accomplished to that point, but then the next day you have to start turning the page, get rid of the emotions and start focusing on preparation and what you have to do to conquer the next step. And that's where we're at."

Indiana is in the NBA title round for the second time, having lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in 2000. The Pacers franchise won ABA titles in 1970, 1972 and 1973. They got out of the Eastern Conference as the No. 4 seed, beating Milwaukee in five games in Round 1, beat-

ing top-seeded Cleveland in five games in Round 2 and then beating New York in the conference finals.

Indiana was 10-15 through the first 25 games of the season — then went 40-17 to finish the regular season. It is the fourth team to start 10-15 or worse and go on to win a conference title, joining Seattle in 1977-78 (8-17), the 1956-57 St. Louis Hawks (10-15) and the 1958-59 Minneapolis Lakers (10-15). None of those teams went on to win the NBA title.

"In 49 states, it's just basketball," Pacers coach Rick Carlisle said. "But this is Indiana. ... Our guys earned this. Congratulations to our guys."

The Thunder swept the season series with the Pacers 2-0, part of a regular season where OKC — which finished with the NBA's best record — went 29-1 against the Eastern Conference. That doesn't include a loss to the Bucks in the NBA Cup final, a game that didn't count in any standings.

Knicks fire Thibodeau after 1st East finals berth in 25 years

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Tom Thibodeau just took the New York Knicks to the Eastern Conference finals, the deepest playoff march in 25 years for a franchise that reemerged as a contender after he became their coach.

For that, he was fired.

New York made what it called a "difficult decision" to move on from Thibodeau on Tuesday, believing it was a necessary step in their chase for a championship.

"We can't thank Tom enough for pouring his heart and soul into each and every day of being the New York Knicks head coach. He led us not only with class and professionalism for the past five seasons, but also to tremendous success on the court with four playoff berths and four playoff series victories," team president Leon Rose said in a statement.

"Ultimately we made the decision we feel is best for our organization moving forward. Tom will always be a part of our Knicks family and we truly wish him nothing but the best in the future."

New York was eliminated by the Indiana Pacers with a loss in Game 6 on Saturday night, falling two games short of its first NBA Finals appearance since 1999. Thibodeau was then asked what the Knicks needed to do this summer to go further.

"Like you would do after every season, you take a step back, I think decompress," Thibodeau said. "You do a deep dive on the team and then you analyze what you think you need to improve upon."

New York decided it was the coach.

The move was made by Rose with approval from owner Jim Dolan, according to a person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because that detail was not included in the announcement. The firing was first reported by ESPN.

It's a strange decision by the Knicks, who had been one of the league's worst franchises for most of the 2000s until Thibodeau was hired in 2020. He promptly led New York to the playoffs in his first season, winning his second NBA Coach of the Year award, and the Knicks have been a solid contender in

the East in recent seasons. They gave Thibodeau a three-year contract extension last summer.

Their big breakthrough came this season, when they knocked off defending champion Boston in the second round to reach the conference finals for the first time since 2000 — when Thibodeau was an assistant under Jeff Van Gundy.

After they were eliminated Saturday, captain Jalen Brunson expressed his support for Thibodeau, bristling at a question about whether he believed the coach was right for the team.

"Is that a real question right now?" Brunson said. "You just asked me if I believe that he's the right guy? Yes. Come on."

Three days later, Thibodeau was gone despite a 226-174 record in New York. He has the fourth-most wins by a Knicks coach.

But the source said the organization felt there was a need for a new voice when New York tries again to end its lengthy championship drought. It won its second and last title in 1973.

Gauff digs deep, tops Keys in quarters

Associated Press

PARIS — Coco Gauff kept double-faulting. She kept missing plenty of other strokes. She kept losing games in bunches. And all the while, she would let out a sigh or bow her head or look generally uncomfortable.

What the 21-year-old Gauff never did Wednesday during a tense and topsy-turvy French Open quarterfinal against another American woman with a Grand Slam title, Madison Keys, was give up hope or go away. And, in a contest filled with plenty of mistakes, it was Gauff who emerged to grab eight of the last nine games for a 6-7 (6), 6-4, 6-1 victory over Keys and a third trip to the semifinals at Roland-Garros.

"I have had that in me from a young age," said the No. 2-seeded Gauff, who won the 2023 U.S. Open as a teenager and was the French Open runner-up the year before. "When times become more difficult, knowing that I can dig deep in those tough moments."

Where did that come from? "Just a love to win, the will to win. It's not something that's taught or anything. It's just I have always had that in me, and not just in tennis but in everything. I'm a very competitive person," she said. "My philosophy is if I can just leave it all out there, then the loss will hurt a lot less than regrets of maybe not giving it your all."

Gauff needed to overcome 10 double-faults — three in the opening tiebreaker alone — and the first set she's dropped in the tournament, as well as deal with the big-hitting Keys, the No. 7 seed, who entered with an 11-match Grand Slam winning streak after her title at the Australian Open in January.

They combined for 101 unforced errors and just 40 winners across more than two hours under a closed roof at Court Philippe-Chatrier.

Nearly half of the games — 14 of 29 — featured breaks of serve. But from 4-all in the second set, Gauff held four times in a row

while pulling away. She made two unforced errors in the last set, including just one double-fault.

After falling behind 4-1 at the start, and twice being a single point from trailing 5-1, Gauff switched to a racket with a different tension in the strings to see if that would help.

"Maybe it did, and maybe it didn't. I'd like to think that it helped a little bit," she said. "Sometimes that stuff could just be mental. Maybe you're thinking, 'Oh, I changed my racket, I'm going to play better,' and you start doing it. I don't know."

Gauff will play Thursday for a berth in another major final, facing 361st-ranked French wildcard entry Loïs Boisson, who is on one of the most stunning runs in tennis history. Boisson beat No. 6 Mirra Andrejeva 7-6 (6), 6-3 in the quarterfinals to follow up her upset of No. 3 Jessica Pegula in the fourth round.

Boisson, 22, is the first woman to reach the semifinals in her Grand Slam debut since 1989,

when Monica Seles and Jennifer Capriati both did it at the French Open. A crowd that offered support to Gauff against Keys via shouts of "Allez, Coco!" was raucous as can be behind Boisson, rattling the 18-year-old Andrejeva.

"I have a lot more work left to do," said Gauff, who raised her arms overhead after the last point against Keys, "but I'm going to savor this one today."

Repeatedly, Gauff scrambled this way or that to get her racket on a shot from Keys and send it back, often leading to a miss.

"The court being a little bit slower, coupled with the fact that she covers the court so well, just put a little bit of pressure on me to go a little bit more for my shots and maybe press a little bit too much, too soon," said Keys, who occasionally admonished herself with a slap on her right leg.

"There were a lot of points where I felt like, playing someone else," Keys said, "I would have won the point."

Goalies Skinner, Bobrovsky matching wits once again

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — The only times that Sergei Bobrovsky spent any time really reflecting on winning the Stanley Cup were the obvious moments. The on-ice celebration that night. The day of the parade. Things like that.

Otherwise, Bobrovsky did what he always does. He looked at what was next.

It is a simple approach and it works best for the Florida goaltender, who is about to play in the Stanley Cup Final for a third consecutive season. At 36 and showing absolutely no sign of slowing down, Bobrovsky's save percentage in these playoffs is higher than what he posted a year ago on the way to the title, while his goals-against average is lower.

And in this title series, he'll likely be matching goalie wits with Stuart Skinner again — the Edmonton netminder who was in goal for last year's Stanley Cup Final, when the Panthers topped the Oilers in a

seven-game classic. Game 1 was in Edmonton on Wednesday night.

"You enjoy the moment and savor the moment," Bobrovsky said. "You're not trying to cut yourself off thinking about what's ahead or what's happened in the past. So you're just trying to take advantage of the opportunity again. It's a great opportunity. There's only two teams left, and we're one of them and we have an opportunity to win it all. It's an exciting time, and I want to enjoy every bit of it."

Bobrovsky has been the only goalie for Florida in these playoffs. It's a different story for the Oilers. Skinner had the starter job going into the postseason, then lost it to Calvin Pickard, then got it back. Each has six of the 12 wins needed to get to the Final.

But Skinner, before getting replaced in the playoffs, just didn't have the numbers he has now. He had a 3.39 GAA and an .872 save percentage in his first six playoff appearances; he had a 1.25 GAA and a .952

save percentage in the last four appearances, all of them wins over Dallas in the West final. He seemed more confident; Skinner said that wasn't really the case.

"I felt confident before," Skinner said. "That's the life of being a goaltender."

That said, Skinner did acknowledge that there was a different feel to those games against the Stars.

"It's ebbs and flows," Skinner said. "You can feel it right away. Sometimes you don't feel it right away. I mean, I wish I felt it all the time."

Bobrovsky has almost made a career out of trying to avoid the ebbs and flows. The Panthers have put complete trust in him and what he needs to do to be ready. Florida coach Paul Maurice has often said — and he isn't kidding — that he doesn't coach Bobrovsky. Robb Tallas is the Panthers' goaltender coach, he works with Bobrovsky, and Maurice's job is to say hello and little else.

Muncy hits 2 HRs, LA wins in 10th

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Max Muncy homered twice, including a tying shot in the ninth inning, and Freddie Freeman doubled home the winning run in the 10th to lift the Los Angeles Dodgers over the New York Mets 6-5 on Tuesday night.

Freeman's slicing fly to deep left field was misplayed by Brandon Nimmo, who got twisted around and appeared to lose sight of the ball as it dropped on the warning track beside him.

That allowed automatic runner Tommy Edman to score from second base with one out, ending New York's four-game winning streak.

The Dodgers earned their 20th comeback win of the season after blowing a 4-1 lead they established in the first. They also tied the series opener in the ninth on Monday, but lost 4-3 in 10 innings when reliever Tanner Scott got knocked around.

This time, Scott (1-2) retired the side in order in the 10th, striking out Juan Soto and Pete Alonso before Nimmo grounded out.

José Buttó (2-1) intentionally walked Shohei Ohtani in the bottom half before Mookie Betts lined out to left field, bringing up Freeman.

Los Angeles improved to 2-3 against the Mets this season after eliminating them in Game 6 of last year's NLCS. Three of the five meetings this year have gone to extra innings.

Soto, booed by the sellout crowd of 53,424, launched a two-run homer that cut the Mets' deficit to 4-3 in the third.

New York tied it on Alonso's RBI double in the fifth that scored Francisco Lindor, who walked and was safe at second on Muncy's error at third base.

Nimmo hit a grounder to first and outraced Clayton Kershaw to the bag for a run-scoring infield single. The Mets successfully challenged the initial out call, giving them a 5-4 lead and chasing Kershaw.

Muncy's two-run homer highlighted a four-run first for the Dodgers against Tylor Megill, who recovered nicely after that to last six innings.

Betts returned after missing four games with a slight fracture to his left toe and went 2 for 5.

Rockies 3, Marlins 2: Colorado ended a streak of 22 consecutive series losses dating to last year, beating host Miami as Hunter Goodman homered for the third time in two games.

Colorado, a major league-worst 11-50, won consecutive games for just the second time this year. They go for a series sweep against the Marlins on Wednesday.

Goodman hit his 10th homer of the season in the eighth inning as the Rockies ended a run of 19 series losses this season.

Astros 3, Pirates 0: Lance McCullers Jr. pitched six sparkling innings for his first win since 2022, and Christian Walker and Isaac Paredes hit late home runs as visiting Houston beat Pittsburgh.

McCullers (1-1) won a tight duel with Pirates ace Paul Skenes, allowing just two hits and one walk while striking out seven. It was his first win since Sept. 21, 2022, at Tampa Bay.

Cubs 8, Nationals 3: Michael Busch hit his ninth homer of the season, drove in three runs and finished a double shy of the cycle to help visiting Chicago to a victory over Washington.

Nico Hoerner singled in two runs to complete a four-run fifth inning that put Chicago up 7-3. Dansby Swanson added a pair of sacrifice flies as the Cubs won their third straight and 15th out of 19.

Yankees 3, Guardians 2: Jazz Chisholm Jr. hit a tiebreaking home run in his return from a month on the injured list, Carlos Rodón won his seventh straight decision and host New York beat Cleveland for their 11th win in 14 games.

Chisholm pulled a fastball into

the first row of the right-center seats against Tanner Bibee (4-6) for a 2-1 lead in the seventh inning.

Phillies 8, Blue Jays 3: Bryce Harper homered in his first at-bat following a five-game absence, Trea Turner went deep twice and Philadelphia scored six runs in the first inning on the way to an away victory over Toronto that ended a four-game skid.

Harper was back in action after being sidelined with a bruised right elbow after being hit by a pitch. The Phillies went 1-4 without the slugger and fell out of first place in the NL East.

Angels 4, Red Sox 3 (10): Automatic runner Zach Neto scored on Taylor Ward's bases-loaded double play groundout to lift Los Angeles to an away victory over Boston in 10 innings.

Nolan Schanuel had two RBIs and Neto added two hits and an RBI to give the Angels consecutive wins for the first time since capping an eight-game win streak on May 23.

Reds 4, Brewers 2: TJ Friedl made a leaping catch in center field for the final out to rob pinch-hitter Jake Bauers of a tying home run, and Cincinnati rallied for a home victory that snapped Milwaukee's eight-game winning streak.

Tyler Stephenson homered for Cincinnati, and pinch-hitter Gavin Lux drove in the go-ahead run with a sacrifice fly in the seventh inning. Will Benson also went deep as the Reds stopped a three-game skid.

Diamondbacks 8, Braves 3: Ketel Marte and Corbin Carroll each homered twice and visiting Arizona snapped a five-game road losing streak with a win over Atlanta.

Zac Gallen (4-7), who had struggled with an 8.02 ERA in his last four starts, surrendered just one earned run in seven innings.

Rays 5, Rangers 1: Drew Rasmussen extended his MLB-lead-

ing scoreless streak to 23 innings with five innings of one-hit ball and host Tampa Bay beat Texas.

Rasmussen (5-4) allowed only a single to Jake Burger in the third inning and struck out eight in a game that was delayed for less than 20 minutes due to rain in the third in front of an announced crowd of 9,131 at George M. Steinbrenner Field.

White Sox 8, Tigers 1: Shane Smith pitched three-hit ball into the sixth inning, and host Chicago beat Detroit to stop a four-game slide.

Michael A. Taylor homered and drove in four runs for Chicago, which had dropped seven of eight overall. Smith (2-3) struck out six in 5½ scoreless innings for his first win since April 24.

Royals 10, Cardinals 7: Nick Loftin homered to start a six-run fifth inning, Bobby Witt Jr. also homered and visiting Kansas City erased a five-run deficit to beat St. Louis in the major league debut of top Royals' prospect Jac Caglianone.

Caglianone, recalled from Triple-A Omaha on Monday, went hitless in five at-bats.

Orioles 5, Mariners 1: Colton Cowser homered in his first game since being activated from the 60-day injured list as visiting Baltimore beat Seattle.

Cowser, who hadn't played in a major league game since March 30 due to a broken left thumb, cranked a solo shot to left field in the sixth inning for his second home run.

Padres 3, Giants 2 (10): Manny Machado had four hits, including a two-run single that tied the score with two outs in the ninth inning, and Jake Cronenworth drove in the go-ahead run in the 10th as visiting San Diego rallied past San Francisco.

Twins 10, Athletics 3: Willi Castro hit a pair of solo homers and visiting Minnesota scored four runs in both the sixth and seventh innings to hand the Athletics their eighth straight loss and 19th in their last 20 games.