

Migrants face new reality as Title 42 ends

Associated Press

ELPASO, Texas—The U.S. entered a new immigration enforcement era Friday, ending a three-year-old asylum restriction and enacting a set of strict new rules that the Biden administration hopes will stabilize the U.S.-Mexico border and push migrants to apply for protections where they are, skipping the dangerous journey north.

The transition has been far from simple. Even as the old policy known as Title 42 expired, migrants along the border were still wading into the Rio Grande to take their chances getting into the country, defying officials shouting for them to turn back. Others hunched over cellphones trying to access an appointment app, a centerpiece of the new measures, while others with appointments walked across a bridge hoping for a new life. And lawsuits sought to stop some of the measures.

The Biden administration has said the new policies are meant both to crack down on illegal crossings and to offer a new legal pathway for migrants who spend thousands on smuggling operations to get them to the U.S.-Mexico border. Migrants are now essentially barred from seeking asylum in the U.S. if they first didn't seek protection in the

countries they traveled through or applied online. Families allowed in as their immigration cases progress will face curfews and GPS monitoring. Meanwhile, new migration hubs will be stationed in Colombia and Guatemala, with plans to open 100 more in the Western Hemisphere.

If it works, it could fundamentally alter how migrants come to the southern border. But President Joe Biden, who is running for reelection, is facing withering criticism from migrant advocates who say he's abandoning more humanitarian methods and Republicans who claim he's soft on border security.

On Friday morning, small groups of Haitian migrants with appointments to request asylum crossed the Gateway International Bridge connecting Matamoros, Mexico with Brownsville, Texas. They crossed with the assistance of a nongovernmental organization, passing the usual commuter traffic of students and workers lined up on the pedestrian path of the bridge. Car traffic appeared normal.

That is the scenario U.S. officials are hoping for. But many migrants and the advocates who help them say those who have fled their home countries for a myriad of reasons

are at such a risk they cannot wait.

Migrant families — with some parents holding children — hesitated only briefly as the deadline passed before entering the waters of the Rio Grande near Brownsville, clutching cellphones above the water to light the way as U.S. officials shouted to turn back.

"Be careful with the children," an official shouted through a megaphone. "It is especially dangerous for the children."

Separately, at an outdoor encampment of migrants beside a border bridge in Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso, Texas, cellphones were alight as migrants attempted to book an asylum appointment online through an app administered by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"There's no other way to get in," said Venezuelan Carolina Ortiz, accompanied by her husband and children, ages 1 and 4. Others in the camp had the same plan: keep trying the app.

The expired rule, known as Title 42, has been in place since March 2020. It allowed border officials to quickly return asylum seekers back over the border on grounds of preventing the spread of COVID-19. The U.S. has declared the national emergency over, and with it, the restrictions end.

Marine vet who fatally choked subway rider surrenders

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A U.S. Marine veteran who used a fatal chokehold on an agitated fellow passenger on the New York City subway turned himself in Friday as authorities charged him with manslaughter nearly two weeks after the encounter.

Daniel Penny, 24, arrived at a police station and was later taken to a courthouse where he is expected to answer to criminal charges in the May 1 death of Jordan Neely. Neely's death sparked protests, while others embraced Penny as a vigilante hero.

Penny didn't speak to reporters as he arrived at a Manhattan police station with his lawyers Friday morning, nor did he respond to questions shouted by reporters as he was led from the police precinct house in handcuffs several hours later.

Penny's attorneys have said he was acting in self-defense when he pinned Neely to the floor of the subway car with the help of two other passengers and held him in a chokehold for several minutes.

A freelance journalist who recorded Neely struggling to free himself, then lapsing into

unconsciousness, said he had been shouting at passengers and begging for money aboard the train but had not gotten physical with anyone. Penny's lawyers have said he was "threatening" passengers but haven't elaborated.

Neely's death has raised an uproar over many issues, including how those with mental illness are treated by the transit system and the city, as well as crime, race and vigilantism. Penny, who is white, was questioned by police in the aftermath but was released without charges. Neely is Black.

Thomas Kenniff, one of Pen-

ny's attorneys, said the veteran didn't mean to harm Neely and "is dealing with the situation, like I said, with the sort of integrity and honor that is characteristic of who he is and characteristic of his honorable service in the United States Marine Corps."

Friends of Neely said the former subway performer had been dealing with homelessness and mental illness in recent years. He had been arrested multiple times and had recently pleaded guilty for assaulting a 67-year-old woman leaving a subway station in 2021.

Ukraine: We've retaken land near Bakhmut

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian military commanders said Friday that their troops had recaptured more territory from Russian forces at the scene of the war's longest and bloodiest battle, for the eastern city of Bakhmut, but it wasn't clear if this marked the start of Kyiv's long-expected counteroffensive.

Russia's Defense Ministry, meanwhile, said Ukrainian forces had stepped up attacks north of the region while denying speculation by Russian military bloggers that the Kyiv forces had achieved "defense breakthroughs."

The 1.2 miles of territory that Ukrainian forces south of Bakhmut retook this week represented a significant gain and will protect an important supply chain, according to commanders of Ukraine's 3rd Separate Assault Brigade, a special forces unit that led the attack.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he met with the top military commanders Friday, noting that Gen. Oleksandr Syrskiy reported his forces "stopped the enemy and even pushed him back in some directions."

In a statement on Telegram on Friday, Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar confirmed that Ukrainian forces gained

ground around Bakhmut, reiterating statements from military commanders earlier this week.

The battle for Bakhmut, once a salt-mining town, has been grinding on for eight months.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the millionaire owner of Russia's private military contractor Wagner who is a frequent critic of the Russian military, slammed it again for losing ground around Bakhmut and exposing his forces battling for the city.

In a video statement Friday, Prigozhin mocked the Russian Defense Ministry's report claiming that its forces regrouped to take more favorable positions, saying they effectively fled and "our flanks are crumbling."

He warned that the Ukrainian forces have reclaimed key heights around the city and effectively unblocked the key supply link to Bakhmut. Prigozhin again accused the military leadership of refusing to provide sufficient ammunition to Wagner.

"You must immediately stop lying," Prigozhin said, addressing Russia's military leaders. "If you fled, you must prepare new defensive lines."

Prigozhin — who seems to use harsh criticism to pressure the Kremlin for more support and improve his stature — alleged

the Defense Ministry's failure to protect Wagner's flanks amounted to high treason and could result in a "great tragedy" for Russia.

Apparently denying Prigozhin's claim of abandonment, Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Russian airborne units are still supporting ground forces to "stop the attempts of the Ukrainian armed forces to counterattack on the flanks."

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, explained the spat as being "reflective of increased panic in the Russian information space over speculations about planned Ukrainian counteroffensives." This indicates increased concern among leaders of Wagner and the Russian Defense Ministry as well as "reflecting Kremlin guidance to avoid downplaying Ukrainian successes," it said.

Ukrainian military officials have dismissed speculation that the fighting and forward movement in Bakhmut signaled that its anticipated counteroffensive was underway. Zelenskyy said in remarks broadcast Thursday that Kyiv was delaying the campaign because it lacks enough Western weapons. Some see the comments as designed to keep Russia guessing about Ukraine's next move.

Greek PM hopes for better Turkey relations if reelected

Associated Press

VOLOS, Greece — Greece's prime minister says he will extend "a hand of friendship" to the winner of upcoming elections in the country's neighbor and longtime regional rival Turkey — but adds that he hopes the next government will "reconsider its approach toward the West."

Kyriakos Mitsotakis, himself facing an election in just over a week, said he is willing to speak to whomever emerges victorious from Sunday's polls in Turkey.

"But I'm not naive," he told The Associated Press in a wide-ranging interview while on the campaign trail in central Greece

on Thursday evening. "I know that foreign policies of countries don't change from one day to the next."

Turkey's increasingly authoritarian President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has led his country as prime minister and president since 2003, faces his most challenging election. Amid a faltering economy, Erdogan has lost some ground to his main rival, the secular, center-left Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

Although not to the same level as with Greece, a fellow NATO member, Turkey's relations with the United States and several European countries have seen strain. Turkey is blocking Sweden's request to join NATO,

pressing the country to crack down on Kurdish militants and other groups that Turkey regards as terrorist threats.

"I would hope that the next Turkish government would overall reconsider its approach towards the West, not just towards Greece, towards Europe, towards NATO, and towards the United States," Mitsotakis said. "But again, I have to be a realist and not be too naive, and that is why we will continue with ... our firm foreign policy. That means we will continue to strengthen our deterrence capabilities and our defense capabilities."

Greece and Turkey have been at odds for decades over issues including their maritime bound-

aries in the Mediterranean. But bilateral relations in recent years plummeted to new lows that saw the two countries' warships shadowing each other and Turkish officials suggesting they could invade Greek islands.

In response, Greece has embarked on an extensive military procurement program to modernize its armed forces, including purchasing advanced French-built fighter jets.

"I wish I did not have to spend much more than 2% of my GDP on defense. But unfortunately, we live in a precarious neighborhood with ... a much larger country than us that's also been behaving aggressively," Mitsotakis said.

US, Spain hold talks amid migration collaboration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez are set to hold talks Friday as their countries are collaborating along with Canada to establish migration hubs in Latin America where asylum seekers fleeing poverty and violence in their home countries can go to apply for protection.

The two leaders are also expected to discuss Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, climate change and other issues. But efforts by the U.S. and Spain to cooperate on asylum processing will loom large over the White House talks as the Biden administration rolls out new immigration measures now that COVID-19 immigration restrictions have ended. The changes could fundamentally alter how migrants arrive at the U.S.-Mexico border.

The new efforts are designed to crack down on illegal crossings while opening up legal pathways meant to incentivize migrants to apply for asylum online where they are, instead of making the dangerous and often deadly journey to the border. Those caught illegally crossing the southern U.S. border cannot return for five years and they face criminal prosecution if they do. And migrants will be barred from seek-

ing asylum at the border if they did not first ask for protection in a country they traveled through, or apply online.

A major piece of the expanded legal pathway is the creation of processing centers in Colombia and Guatemala and up to 100 others in the Western Hemisphere where migrants can go to apply to come to the U.S., Spain or Canada.

It was a huge boon for the White House to get Spain and Canada to agree to take in asylum seekers from Latin America. And it helps reinforce the Biden administration's argument that the current migration quandary facing the Americas is a global problem that needs a global solution — much like the refugee crises that have impacted Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine in recent years.

The U.S. has increasingly seen migrants arrive at its Southern border who are from China, Ukraine, Haiti, Russia and other nations far from Latin America, and who are increasingly family groups and children traveling alone. Thirty years ago, by contrast, illegal crossings were almost always single adults from Mexico who were easily returned back over the border.

Spain, like many other nations globally, needs workers, and it will be able to choose migrants who have needed skills.

Biden taps Jefferson to be Fed's vice chair, Kugler as 1st Hispanic on board

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden has nominated Philip Jefferson, a member of the Federal Reserve's Board of Governors, to serve as vice chair of the board, the White House announced Friday.

Biden has also chosen Adriana Kugler, a Georgetown University economist, to join the Fed's board. If confirmed by the Senate, she would become the first Hispanic American on the Fed's interest-rate-setting committee.

The two nominations arrive as the Fed is grappling with an increasingly fraught economy marked by rising interest rates, still-high inflation and a shaky banking system. Since March 2022, the Fed has raised its benchmark interest rate 10 times, to the highest level in 16 years, to combat high in-

flation. After a policy meeting last week, Chair Jerome Powell signaled that the Fed may now pause its rate increases.

In the coming months, the Fed will face tough decisions about whether to keep rates unchanged for the rest of this year or resume raising them. The policymakers might even consider cutting rates should a recession occur later this year, as many economists expect.

Jefferson, 61, who first joined the Fed's board barely a year ago, would become the second Black man to serve as the Fed's No. 2 official if confirmed by the Senate.

Kugler, 53, who has a background in international and labor economics, is on leave from Georgetown to serve as the United States' representative on the board of the World Bank.

Department of Commerce to aid tech hubs in US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Commerce Department on Friday is launching the application process for cities to receive a total of \$500 million in grants to become technology hubs.

The \$500 million is part of a \$10 billion authorization from last year's CHIPS and Science Act to stimulate investments in new technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing and biotech. It's an attempt to expand tech investment that is largely concentrated around a few U.S. cities — Austin, Texas; Boston; New York; San Francisco; and Seattle — to the rest of the country.

"This is about taking these places on the edge of glory to being world leaders," Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo told The Associated Press. "My job is to enhance America's competitiveness."

The Biden administration has made it a priority to set an industrial strategy of directing government investment into computer chips, clean energy and a range of other technologies. Officials say that being leaders in those fields will foster economic and national security, reflecting a belief that the best way to compete against China's ascendance will come from building internal strength.

The tech hubs are meant to build up areas that already have major research specialties but lack the access to financing that could fuel stronger growth and business formation in those fields. Pockets of the U.S. already have leading-edge tech such as medical devices in Minnesota, robotics in Pittsburgh and agricultural technology in Fresno, Calif. But the challenge has been finding ways to boost those fields so that government investment leads to more support from private capital.

To qualify for the tech hub money, each applicant will need a partnership that includes one or more companies, a state development agency, worker training programs, a university and state and local government leaders. Roughly 20 cities are expected to be designated as tech hubs with 10 eventually receiving funding.

President Joe Biden hopes to broaden the funding over time, requesting in his budget proposal that Congress appropriate another \$4 billion for it over the next two years. Raimondo said that she expects a large number of applications from across the political spectrum.

NBCUniversal executive to be Twitter CEO

Associated Press

Elon Musk has confirmed that the new CEO for Twitter, or X Corp. as it's now called, will be NBCUniversal's Linda Yaccarino, an executive with deep ties to the advertising industry.

"I am excited to welcome Linda Yaccarino as the new CEO of Twitter!" Musk wrote in a Friday tweet. He added that Yaccarino "will focus primarily on business operations, while I focus on product design & new technology."

Yaccarino has worked at NBCUniversal for nearly 12 years — with her team generating more than \$100 billion in ad sales since

2011, her company bio notes. According to LinkedIn, Yaccarino previously served as NBC's chair for advertising and client partnerships and as president of cable entertainment and digital advertising sales. Prior to her time with NBC, Yaccarino worked at a global entertainment company Turner for almost two decades.

Yaccarino interviewed Musk in Miami last month in front of hundreds of advertisers.

Luring advertisers is critical for Musk and Twitter after many fled in the early months after his takeover of the social media platform, fearing harm to their brands in the ensuing chaos. Musk said in

late April that advertisers had returned, but provided no details.

Yaccarino could help restore advertisers' faith in Twitter, ad agency DiGo founder and creative chief Mark DiMassimo said. He noted that Yaccarino successfully integrated and digitized ad sales at Comcast and NBC — and that her track record of cross-selling ads across different platforms could appeal to Musk as he tries to transform Twitter from a social media company to a bigger media platform.

"If anyone can translate the Musk vision into advantages for marketers she'll be able to do it," DiMassimo said.

Idaho jury weighs fate of mom in triple murder trial

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — An Idaho jury is weighing two theories in the strange triple murder trial of Lori Vallow Daybell: Is she a power-hungry manipulator who would kill her two youngest children for money, as prosecutors allege, or a normally protective mother who fell under the romantic sway of a wannabe cult leader, as the defense team claims?

Jurors heard both stories Thursday during final arguments in the seven-week-long trial, and deliberated for about four hours before breaking for the evening. They would continue the work of deciding Vallow Daybell's fate on Friday morning, a court bailiff said.

Vallow Daybell and her fifth husband Chad Daybell are both charged with murder, conspiracy and grand theft in the deaths of 7-year-old Joshua "JJ" Vallow, 16-year-old Tylee Ryan, and Daybell's previous wife Tammy Daybell. Prosecutors say the two worked with Vallow Daybell's brother, Alex Cox, to carry out the crimes. Cox died in December 2019 and was never charged.

Both defendants have pleaded not guilty. Vallow Daybell

faces up to life in prison if she is convicted. Chad Daybell's trial is still months away.

Vallow Daybell wanted the victims' money, so she used sex and power to manipulate her brother and her lover into carrying out the crimes, Madison County Prosecutor Rob Wood told jurors during closing arguments.

"Money, power and sex," Wood said, reprising the arguments his team made at the start of the trial. He claimed Vallow Daybell considered the three victims nothing more than obstacles to her goals.

"What does justice for these victims require? It requires a conviction on each and every count," Wood said.

Defense attorney Jim Archibald countered that there was no evidence tying his client to the killings but plenty showing she was a loving, protective mother whose life took a sharp turn when she met her fifth husband, Chad Daybell, and fell for the "weird" apocalyptic religious claims of a cult leader. He suggested that Daybell and Cox were the ones responsible for the deaths, and that Vallow Daybell's only crime was lying to police about where her children were.

McDonald's found liable for hot nugget that burned girl

Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — McDonald's and a franchise holder are at fault after a hot Chicken McNugget from a Happy Meal fell on a little girl's leg and caused second-degree burns, a jury in South Florida found in a case reminiscent of the famous hot coffee lawsuit of the 1990s.

A second jury will determine how much McDonald's USA and its franchise owner, Upchurch Foods, will pay the child and her mother, the South Florida SunSentinel reported.

Thursday's decision was split, with jurors finding the franchise holder liable for negligence and failure to warn customers about the risk of hot food, and McDonald's USA liable for failing to provide instructions for safe handling of the food. McDonald's USA was not found to be negligent, and the jury dismissed the argument that the product was defective.

"Our sympathies go out to this family for what occurred in this unfortunate incident, as we hold customer safety as one of our highest priorities," McDonald's owner-operator Brent Upchurch said in a statement. "We are deeply disappointed with to-

day's verdict because the facts show that our restaurant in Tamarac, Florida did indeed follow those protocols when cooking and serving this Happy Meal."

Jurors heard two days of testimony and arguments about the 2019 episode that left the 4-year-old girl with a burned upper thigh.

Philana Holmes testified that she bought Happy Meals for her son and then-4-year-old daughter at a drive-thru window at a McDonald's in Tamarac, near Fort Lauderdale, the SunSentinel reported. She handed the food to her children, who were in the back seat.

After she drove away, her daughter started screaming. The mother testified she didn't know what was wrong until she pulled over to help the girl, Olivia Caraballo, who is now 7, the newspaper reported. She saw the burn on the girl's leg and took photos on her iPhone, which included audio clips of the child's screams.

Lawyers for McDonald's noted that the food had to be hot to avoid salmonella poisoning, and that the nuggets were not meant to be pressed between a seat belt and human flesh for more than two minutes.

Pakistani court grants ex-PM Imran Khan bail

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — A high court in Islamabad on Friday granted former Prime Minister Imran Khan protection from arrest in a graft case and ordered him freed on bail.

The ruling came as the government and legions of Khan's supporters were on edge after days of violent confrontations sparked by the arrest of the former prime minister earlier this week. The government has vowed it will find a way to take Khan back into custody, a move that would likely cause a resurgence of riots and mob attacks.

Friday's ruling by the Islamabad High Court gave Khan protection from arrest on one of several corruption cases against him for a period of two weeks, a form of interim bail that usually is renewed in the Pakistan judicial system.

Khan, however, remained in the court after the decision as his lawyers petitioned the judges for similar protection in a number of other corruption charges, trying to close off a legal avenue for the government to arrest him again.

Khan's chief lawyer, Babar Awan, praised the ruling, and said Khan was now "a free man."

A short while later, the court said Khan could not be arrested for the time being in other pending corruption cases against him.

The former premier was expected to walk out of the court shortly.

The government contends that Khan's release rewards and encourages mob violence. After he was arrested Tuesday, his supporters attacked military installations, burned vehicles and ambulances and looted general stores in various parts of the country. The government responded with a crackdown, arresting nearly 3,000 people. The violence left at least 10 Khan supporters dead. Dozens of protesters and more than 200 police officers were injured.

The arrest Tuesday was a startling and controversial move: Agents from the National Accountability Bureau burst into the Islamabad High Court where Khan was attending a session on other charges — the same court where he appeared Friday — and dragged him away, putting him into an armored vehicle.

On Thursday, Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled that arrest unlawful, but asked the Islamabad High Court, a lower court, to reconsider its initial decision to uphold the arrest.

The controversy surrounding Khan — a figure who inspires both vehement loyalty and furious opposition — threatens to open a deeper vein of turmoil in a country that has seen multiple military takeovers and bouts of violence.

Bangladesh and Myanmar brace for severe cyclone

Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh — Authorities in Bangladesh and Myanmar prepared to evacuate hundreds of thousands of people Friday, warning them to stay away from coastal areas as a severe cyclone churned in the Bay of Bengal.

Cyclone Mocha is expected to hit land on Sunday with wind speeds of up to 100 miles per hour and gusts up to 110 mph between Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh and Kyaukpadaung in Myanmar, India's Meteorological Department said.

Bangladesh, a delta nation with more than 160 million people, is prone to natural disasters such as floods and cyclones. The evacuation of nearly 500,000 people is expected to start Saturday with 576 cyclone shelters ready to provide refuge to those who are moved from their homes along the coast, said Bangladesh government administrator Muhammad Shaheen Imran.

The International Rescue Committee said in a statement the cyclone posed a threat to Rohingya refugees who fled from neighboring Myanmar and are living in camps in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh.

The committee said it was scaling up its emergency response by deploying mobile medical teams to offer services to vulnerable groups such as women, girls, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Zelenskyy barred from addressing 'nonpolitical' Eurovision

Associated Press

LIVERPOOL, England — This weekend's Eurovision Song Contest will have Ukrainian flags, Ukrainian musicians and Ukrainian fans — but not the country's wartime leader.

Organizers say they rejected a request from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to make a video address to the final of the pan-continental music competition on Saturday. He was expected to urge the world to continue its support for Uk-

raine's fight to repel Russian invasion.

The European Broadcasting Union, a grouping of national public broadcasters that runs Eurovision, said that letting Zelenskyy participate would breach "the nonpolitical nature of the event."

Zelenskyy's request "to address the audience at the Eurovision Song Contest, whilst made with laudable intentions, regrettably cannot be granted by the European Broadcasting Union management as it would be against the rules of

the event," the organization said.

Zelenskyy spokesman Sergii Nykyforov denied that the president had asked to speak to the event, which will be watched by an estimated 160 million people.

"The Office of the President of Ukraine did not address the organizers of the Eurovision Song Contest to offer (Zelenskyy's) online performance during the finals or at any other stage of the contest," he said on Facebook.

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Nuggets blow past Suns to win series

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Two years ago, the Denver Nuggets were embarrassed by the Phoenix Suns in a postseason sweep.

This time, it was the Nuggets who dished out the embarrassment.

Nikola Jokic scored 32 points in another triple-double, Jamal Murray added 26 and the Nuggets advanced to the Western Conference finals for the first time since 2020 by beating the short-handed Suns 125-100 in Game 6 on Thursday night.

“When we defend, when we rebound, when we run, when we share the ball, we believe we’re the best team in the NBA,” Denver coach Michael Malone said. “And tonight, we showed it.”

The Nuggets will play in the conference finals for the first time since they lost to the Lakers in five games in the Florida bubble during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have never reached the NBA Finals.

The top-seeded Nuggets used a 23-2 run during the latter part of the first quarter to take a 44-26 lead and never looked back. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope — averaging 9.5 points in the playoffs — scored 17 in the first quarter while Jokic added 14.

“We were the aggressors the whole game,” Jokic said. “Especially the first half. We were just really good.”

Caldwell-Pope finished with 21 points. Jokic shot 13 of 18 from the field and added 12 assists and 10 rebounds. It was his fourth triple-double of the postseason in 11 games.

“He shows (his greatness) every night,” Murray said.

Denver’s offensive onslaught continued in the second as the lead grew to 81-51 by halftime, leading to boos from Suns fans as players made their way to the locker room. The second half was essentially an afterthought.

“It was deflating to see them score like that and running down the floor getting easy buckets,” Suns coach Monty Williams said. “That falls on my shoulders not having us ready to play at the highest level in the biggest game of the year.”

Cameron Payne scored 31 points for Phoenix, hitting 7 of 9 3-pointers. Kevin Durant added 23.

The Suns were playing without injured starters Deandre Ayton and Chris Paul. Ayton sustained a rib contusion in Tuesday’s Game 5 while Paul has been out the

past four games with a strained left groin.

Phoenix was eliminated in the Western Conference semifinals in a blowout at home for a second straight season despite a blockbuster trade deadline deal for Durant, a 13-time All-Star and one of the game’s most prolific scorers. The 34-year-old had some good moments in the playoffs, but made just 1 of his first 10 shots on Thursday as the Suns fell into a huge hole.

“It was a bad feeling,” Durant said. “It was embarrassing. They came out and got us in the mouth and we couldn’t recover.”

Suns guard Devin Booker was brilliant in most of the postseason, averaging 36 points per game on 60% before Game 6. But the three-time All-Star finished with just 12 points on Thursday.

The home team won the first five games of the series until the Nuggets broke through in Game 6.

Denver’s Murray was listed as questionable before the game with a non-COVID illness, but played well. Murray got a big hug from Malone as he checked out of the game for the final time. The point guard said he slept most of the day until the game.

Tatum, Celtics defeat 76ers 95-86 to force Game 7

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Jayson Tatum humbly believes he is one of the best basketball players in the NBA and not even a lengthy streak of missed shots in a win-or-else Game 6 could shake his faith.

Sometimes, though, a pep talk in the heat of the moment lifts even the most confident stars. Boston rookie coach Joe Mazzulla pulled the forward aside in a late timeout and didn’t draw a play or tell Tatum to keep shooting and soon the buckets would fall.

His message was more simple.

“I love you,” Mazzulla told Tatum. “That’s a pretty powerful statement.”

Tatum rewarded his coach’s love with decisive 3-pointers straight through the heart of a Philadelphia comeback that pushed the Celtics past the 76ers 95-86 on Thursday night to send the Eastern Conference semifinals back to Boston for Game 7.

“I kept looking at the time,” Tatum said. “I’ve got time, I’ve got time to make a difference. I believed that the whole time.”

Tatum buried one 3 for the 84-83 lead and a second that made it 87-83 and put the Celtics in firm control in front of a boisterous

Philly crowd. Tatum stuck it to the 76ers with one final 3-pointer for a 95-84 lead.

The defending conference champs are in familiar territory. Boston trailed 3-2 last season in the second round against Milwaukee before it won Game 6 on the road and the clincher at home.

Game 7 is Sunday. The winner of the Miami-New York semifinal awaits the Celtics or 76ers.

Tatum, who averaged 30.1 points in the regular season, kept his confidence high. He missed 14 of his first 15 shots overall from the floor — and his first six 3s — and his 3 1/2-quarter ineffectiveness was a key reason the Celtics squandered a 16-point lead.

He was grateful Mazzulla stuck by him.

“I told him a lot of times, ‘I got your back. We’re in this together,’” Tatum said. “I love the relationship that me and Joe have.”

With a shot at their first conference final since 2001 at stake, the Sixers slogged through the first half before Joel Embiid flashed his MVP form and rallied the Sixers to a fourth-quarter lead.

Tyrese Maxey hit two free throws with 5:25 left for an 83-81 edge.

And that was it for Philly in yet another postseason home crusher.

“If I have to go to war, Game 7 in Boston, I would want to go with this group,” Maxey said. “I know we’ve got some fighters, I know we’ve got some resilient guys. I’m ready to get it on.”

Embiid and Maxey each scored 26 points for the 76ers.

76ers coach Doc Rivers has blown three 3-1 series leads over his playoff career. While the 76ers only led 3-2, this is their second loss at home in the series.

And confronting more ominous history looms for Rivers. The 2008 NBA championship coach with Boston, Rivers has lost nine times in a Game 7, four more than any other head coach.

The Sixers unraveled in the fourth after a rally in the third — keyed by two pivotal 3s by Georges Niang — and after Embiid’s pull-up jumper tied it 81-all, the 76ers didn’t make a bucket over the final 6:13 of the game.

The Sixers could not close in the close-out quarter and missed 15 of 20 shots and all eight 3s in the decisive fourth.

Fast, Canes eliminate Devils in Game 5

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Jesper Fast could only shake his head in disbelief after missing an early open-net putaway, a play that took on growing weight as the Carolina Hurricanes found themselves in an overtime.

“Yeah, it was hard to get over that one,” Fast said.

He certainly made amends, pushing the Hurricanes through to the Eastern Conference final and eliminating the New Jersey Devils.

Fast deflected in a shot by Jesperi Kotkaniemi on a power play at 7:09 of overtime, lifting the Hurricanes to a series-ending 3-2 victory Thursday night.

Fast’s deflection while shielding Akira Schmid set off a celebration for the Hurricanes, who never led until the final play and twice trailed by a goal before winning the best-of-seven series 4-1.

In the first tight game of the second-round matchup, Fast’s winner came after New Jersey’s Jonas Siegenthaler was sent to the box for a delay-of-game penalty for sending a puck out of play from his own zone. It also came with Fast in his second game back on the power-play unit.

“I know that he was shaking his head in the first period,” Carolina defenseman Jacob Slavin said, “but to get it in the end is awesome for him.”

Slavin and Brent Burns also scored for Carolina, and Frederik Andersen made 27 saves.

Carolina earned its first trip to the Eastern Conference final since 2019, which came during Rod Brind’Amour’s first season as coach. The Hurricanes are now in their fifth straight playoff season, a veteran group that has pushed through two series despite losing multiple scoring forwards.

They’ll next face the winner of the Florida-Toronto series, with the Panthers leading that one 3-1.

“We’re stacking memories here, and they’re giving them to me, too,” said Brind’Amour, the captain on Carolina’s Stanley Cup winner in 2006. “So it’s pretty special.”

Dawson Mercer and Timo Meier scored for New Jersey. Schmid stopped 36 shots after being chased early in the second in Game 1 and after the second in Game 2.

“I said this morning they’d give me everything they had,” Devils coach Lindy Ruff

said. “They gave me everything they had.”

The first four games of the series had been filled by lopsided results, with each decided by at least four goals and a starting goaltender chased early.

The Hurricanes had been in this position in Round 1, with a chance to close out the New York Islanders on home ice in Game 5. They lost that one and instead had to clinch the series with an overtime road victory in Game 6.

This time, they needed a dramatic finish to avoid a repeat.

The Devils’ exit comes in a season where a young group arrived to playoff contention earlier than expected.

New Jersey finished one point behind the Hurricanes in the Metropolitan Division for the league’s third-best point total (112) and the franchise’s first playoff appearance in five years, then pushed past the rival New York Rangers in seven games despite falling behind 0-2 for its first playoff series win since 2012.

“We knew we had to play better, and I think the whole team bought in,” Devils captain Nico Hischier said. “The effort was there and we had our chances.”

Hintz, Pavelski lift Stars to 3-2 lead over Kraken

Associated Press

DALLAS — The Dallas Stars have their top line back together — and are a victory away from advancing to the Western Conference finals.

Roope Hintz had two goals and an assist, Joe Pavelski scored his seventh goal of the second-round series and Jason Robertson assisted on all the goals by his primary linemates in a 5-2 victory over the Seattle Kraken in Game 5 on Thursday night.

“Our best players have to be your best players if you’re going to move through the playoffs,” coach Pete DeBoer said. “And you know, that line (and) Otter was great.”

Goalie Jake Oettinger had 29 saves for the Stars, who take a 3-2 lead into Game 6 on Saturday in Seattle.

It was Pavelski’s second game back with on the No. 1 line with Hintz and Robertson.

“On the same line a couple of years now, so whenever we get back together, everything comes natural,” Robertson said. “And in the playoffs we need that.”

Pavelski also had an assist on Hintz’s second goal, which ricocheted hard out of the net with 8:37 left for a two-goal lead, though

play continued for nearly a half-minute before a replay review that confirmed the score. Radek Faksa added an empty-netter with 3:17 to go.

Hintz has eight goals and 10 assists in the Stars’ 11 games this postseason. Pavelski missed the last five games in their first-round series against Minnesota while in concussion protocol after a hit in Game 1.

When Pavelski returned in the opener against the Kraken, he scored all four of Dallas’ goals in a 5-4 overtime loss. He started on a different line, like he also did in Games 2 and 3.

Rookie center Wyatt Johnston also scored for the Stars, who hope to repeat the pattern from their opening-round series against Minnesota. They also lost that opener in overtime at home and were down 2-1 in the series before winning three in a row and wrapping up with a road win.

Down 2-0 only 5½ minutes into the game, and 3-0 when Pavelski scored on an odd-man rush in the opening minute of the second period, the second-year Kraken cut the gap to 3-2 when Adam Larsson and Jared McCann scored in the second period.

“We spot them two right off the bat. You know, I thought for the most part, we were skating and we’re moving the puck ... but you look at the scoreboard,” Kraken forward Jordan Eberle said. “I like the way that we fought back.”

McCann, their leading goal scorer with 40 in the regular season, got his first of the playoffs and became the 18th Kraken player to score this postseason. It was only his second game back after missing six in a row due to an injury after getting hurt on a late hit from Colorado’s Cale Makar early in Game 4 of the first round.

When Pavelski scored on a backhand in the opening minute of the second period, he extended his record for U.S.-born players to 71 career postseason goals.

That matched Sidney Crosby for the second-most career playoff goals by an active player, one behind Alex Ovechkin. Pavelski and Crosby are tied with Hall of Famer Bryan Trottier for 17th on the overall list.

Hintz got his first goal with a top-shelf shot from the top of the left circle over the shoulder of Phillip Grubauer, who stopped 16 shots.

Rays rout Yankees, improve to 30-9

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Josh Lowe drove in a career-high five runs, Drew Rasmussen extended his scoreless streak against the Yankees to 21 innings and the Tampa Bay Rays kept up their domination of New York with an 8-2 rout on Thursday night.

Lowe hit a three-run double off Ron Marinnaccio to open a 4-0 lead in the sixth, then hit a two-run homer in a three-run eighth against Ryan Weber.

Tampa Bay improved to 3-1 against New York this season. The Rays are a major league-best 30-9 and dropped the last-place Yankees nine games back in the AL East.

Rasmussen (4-2) allowed two hits in seven scoreless innings with no walks and seven strikeouts, including Aaron Judge three times.

Domingo Germán (2-3) fell behind in the fifth when first baseman Anthony Rizzo allowed Lowe's grounder to bounce off his glove for an error and Yandy Díaz hit a two-out RBI double.

Giants 6, Diamondbacks 2: Rookie infielder Casey Schmitt had four more hits, including a two-run homer, and San Francisco's Alex Cobb blanked host Arizona into the eighth inning.

Schmitt connected for a 443-foot home run into the second deck above the Diamondbacks' bullpen in the second inning off Tommy Henry (1-1). Schmitt, recalled Tuesday from Triple-A Sacramento, finished 4 for 4 with a run-scoring double and is 8 for 12 with two homers and four RBIs through three games.

Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio is the only other player since 1920 with at least eight

hits, four RBIs and four runs scored through his first three games, according to OptaSTATS.

Schmitt, 24, drove in the Giants' first three runs, with his double in the ninth off reliever José Ruiz starting a four-run outburst.

Cobb (3-1) lowered his ERA to 1.70 with 7½ shutout innings.

Rangers 4, Athletics 0: Nathan Eovaldi set a career high with 12 strikeouts and extended his scoreless streak to 28⅓ innings as visiting Texas beat Oakland.

Eovaldi (5-2) allowed three hits and one walk over 8⅓ innings, becoming the third pitcher in franchise history to post three consecutive starts of at least eight scoreless innings. He was lifted after allowing two baserunners with two out in the ninth, and Will Smith got the final out for his seventh save.

Marcus Semien homered against his former team in front of a crowd of 2,949 that was the second-smallest of the season at the Oakland Coliseum.

Luis Medina (0-2) allowed three runs and five hits in six innings for the A's (8-31).

Reds 5, Mets 0: Kevin Newman hit a two-run single in a four-run first inning, and host Cincinnati took two of three from New York.

The Mets lost for the fourth time in five games. They have dropped five series in a row for the first time since 2012.

Mets right-hander Kodai Senga (4-2) allowed five runs and eight hits in five innings.

Ben Lively (1-0) pitched three innings of four-hit ball for his first win since his rookie season in 2017. Kevin Herget worked three

innings for his first career save.

Twins 5, Padres 3: Carlos Correa hit a two-run double in the seventh inning, lifting host Minnesota to the victory.

Kyle Farmer homered as Minnesota won its second straight after a stretch of five losses in seven games. Emilio Pagán (3-0) got three outs for the win, and Jorge López pitched a perfect ninth for his third save.

Correa, who returned to Minnesota when he finalized a \$200 million, six-year contract in January, was booed again by the home crowd after two strikeouts earlier in the game. But he capped the Twins' three-run seventh when he pulled a ground ball down the left-field line against Brent Honeywell (2-2).

San Diego's Fernando Tatis Jr. homered on the first pitch of the game. Rougned Odor hit his first homer of the season.

Royals 4, White Sox 3: Freddy Fermin lifted host Kansas City to the victory, following a leadoff walk by Nick Pratto and a single by Matt Duffy with a perfectly executed sacrifice bunt in the ninth inning.

The Royals nursed a 3-1 lead into the eighth, but the White Sox tied it with a two-out rally against Aroldis Chapman. Andrew Vaughn and pinch-hitter Carlos Pérez singled, and Luis Robert Jr. bounced a tying double off the chalk of the left-field line.

In the ninth, Pratto worked a walk off Reynaldo López (0-3) before Maikel Garcia struck out. Duffy followed with a single to right, and Fermin laid down a bunt just in front of the plate that allowed Pratto to slide home without a tag at the plate.

Scott Barlow (1-2) pitched a perfect ninth for the win.

Firm launches integrity hotline for gambling issues

Associated Press

SECAUCUS, N.J. — A sports integrity monitor launched a tool Thursday to help athletes, coaches and staff to anonymously report suspicions about gambling activity to regulators and law enforcement.

The tip hotline "Athlete Alert Powered by RealResponse" was announced by U.S. Integrity, a sports data integrity company that played a role in an ongoing investigation into possible wrongdoing involving the University of Alabama baseball team.

This month, Matthew Holt, the president of U.S. Integrity, said the operators of a sportsbook located in the Cincinnati Reds

stadium alerted his company to "abnormal activity." U.S. Integrity alerted state gambling regulators, and Ohio officials opened an investigation.

Alabama fired its baseball coach last week amid an investigation into suspicious bets involving a Crimson Tide game at LSU.

The tip hotline unveiled by the two companies allows athletes, coaches and others to anonymously report integrity-related concerns such as the misuse of insider information, match-fixing, game manipulation or illegal wagering.

The tips would go to regulators who could then verify them and bring the matter to law

enforcement, the companies said in a statement.

"Nothing is more important than the health and well-being of the professional and student athletes who have committed their lives to compete at the highest levels, and it is our job to help protect that paradigm," Holt said. The hotline enables concerned athletes and others "to stay one step ahead of any bad actors."

Texting 843-USI-TIPS "protects and enhances the integrity and purity of competition, while ensuring their anonymity and safety," said David Chadwick, founder and CEO of RealResponse.