

US aid mission in Gaza dealt blow, debated

The Washington Post

Repeated mishaps with the Pentagon's Gaza pier have triggered new scrutiny over whether it is safe and sensible to continue using the floating operation to bring humanitarian aid to starving Palestinians, with the Biden administration insisting it can salvage the mission and former military officials split on whether doing so is wise.

Deliveries over the pier were suspended Tuesday after a section broke free in heavy seas and floated away. It marked at least the third significant setback in a week; four U.S. Army vessels ran aground on Saturday, and a U.S. soldier was critically injured in an incident last week that the Pentagon has declined to detail.

Administration officials, who say it will take days to reassemble the pier, have acknowledged the difficulties but maintain the project is worth pursuing as part of a broader effort to help alleviate the

dire food crisis.

"Why wouldn't we try this?" National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said during a White House news briefing on Wednesday. "If we had this capability, and it was available to us, we have the know-how and the expertise to do it? Why would we leave that on the sidelines?"

President Joe Biden announced the pier's deployment in March, characterizing the effort as an emergency mission in which no U.S. service members would set foot in Gaza. A coterie of U.S. vessels and embarked personnel departed from southern Virginia days later, setting out on a weeks-long transit and targeting early May to have a floating structure operational — a timetable that slipped as rough seas roiled the Gaza coastline.

Its installation was completed May 16, and officials have said that about 1,000 tons of supplies made it to land before operations

were halted. Pentagon officials have said that, after a ramping-up period, they expect to be able to deliver up to 2 million meals per day.

The Mediterranean Sea, especially in the east, is "notorious for sudden, vicious wind events," said James Stavridis, a retired Navy admiral and NATO commander. Heavier anchoring could help, as could positioning large vessels to buffer the operation's weak points from powerful waves, he said, "but in any maritime operation, sometimes the weather can defeat the best laid plans."

Jerry Hendrix, a retired Navy captain, said he had been against the pier's deployment because of the security vulnerabilities U.S. troops could face while operating it just outside a war zone. But the repeated problems with weather already have rendered the mission a "failed project," he said, advocating for the administration to

end it.

"Essentially all the winds come down the Med," Hendrix said. "This is fairly all well known by mariners. This is a bad area of the Mediterranean to operate. So the idea of setting up a pier and dock structure? This was going to happen at some point in time."

Joseph Votel, a retired Army general, said commanders need to "respect the sea," but that the operation can still be viable.

"We have to continue to push this," said Votel, who oversaw operations in the region as head of U.S. Central Command before retiring in 2019. "I think the situation requires it."

The mission's struggles, Votel said, present an opportunity for the administration to put greater pressure on Israel to open the land routes into Gaza. U.S. officials, he added, also could consider moving aid ashore using landing craft, a more conventional method.

Navy scraps target number for Mideast drone fleet

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy's much-touted goal of a regional fleet of 100 unmanned surface vessels in the Middle East fell so short of expectations that the service has scrapped the notion of a numerical target for the program, according to a military official.

The focus was switched "from a firm number to an operational capability," the official, who has knowledge of the program, said Wednesday on condition of anonymity in order to speak on sensitive matters.

By the end of last summer, the Navy said it had about 50 such vessels that it considered part of the regional fleet, of which the

U.S. contributed about 20. But since last fall, naval officials have been loath to speak about the issue.

The aim was to have the 100 drone boats patrolling Middle Eastern waters by the end of the summer of 2023, U.S. military officials said last year. The unmanned craft would have been provided primarily by regional allies. They would have collected information to be shared among the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East, following the example of the Navy's tech unit Task Force 59, which since 2021 has tested and operated unmanned surface ships in the region.

But the Navy was overly keen to announce a fleet with an eye-

catching number of unmanned surface vessels and didn't factor in their Persian Gulf allies' concerns, according to analysts.

"The countries are interested in maybe pursuing these as individual efforts, but they're not necessarily looking to do it as part of that cooperative activity that the Task Force 59 guys were leading," said Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Hudson Institute.

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have expressed a willingness to invest in naval surveillance drones and have the resources to do so, experts said.

But these nations are sometimes competitors and have been

hesitant to join an effort involving the sharing of sensitive information, said Clark, an analyst on naval operations and autonomous systems who spoke to Gulf and 5th Fleet officials.

After saying in September that the project was on a "trajectory toward meeting" the goal, U.S. 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Rick Chernitzer responded to an update request in February by saying there was "nothing new to share ... on the regional fleet."

This week, Chernitzer declined to answer questions on the status of the initiative and could not specify a country that had joined, saying only that 5th Fleet is focused on "delivering new capabilities."

Senator seeks \$55B DOD budget boost

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee released a plan on Wednesday calling for a “generational investment” in the military, beginning with a \$55 billion increase to the fiscal 2025 defense budget.

Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi said the U.S. must aggressively build up its military and boost weapons production to counter immediate threats and prepare for long-term competition with China, Russia, Iran and North Korea.

“Defense investment does not guarantee victory. But failing to invest properly denies us a chance to deter war,” Wicker wrote in a report outlining the investment plan. “Right now we are spending too little.”

The White House is requesting \$895 billion in national security spending for the 2025 fiscal year, including \$850 billion specifically for the Pentagon. The figures represent a 1% increase from the previous year and are in keeping with funding limits imposed by a debt limit deal last year.

The House Armed Services Committee stuck to the White House’s topline when it approved its version of an annual defense authorization bill last week. But Wicker on Wednesday said he will push for the Senate

to go higher.

The Senate Armed Services Committee will begin its deliberations next month over the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act, which establishes recommended funding levels for the Pentagon.

Wicker’s plan calls for military spending to grow to 5% of America’s gross domestic product, or total economic output, in the next five to seven years. The annual defense budget is now at about 3% of GDP and nearing historic lows, according to the report.

By contrast, China is planning a 7.2% spending increase on defense and Russia has mobilized its economy for a prolonged confrontation with the West. Together with Iran and North Korea, the emerging “axis of aggressors” is working to undermine U.S. interests around the world, Wicker said.

“The United States is facing the most dangerous threat environment since World War II, and the country needs a generational investment in its military to protect itself,” the report states.

Wicker’s blueprint to put the U.S. on wartime footing includes a heightened presence in Europe, where Russia is waging war in Ukraine, and in the Indo-Pacific region, where China is flexing its military muscle and eyeing an invasion of Taiwan.

He recommends permanently basing an

armored brigade combat team in Poland as well as increasing rotational deployments of U.S. troops in Eastern Europe. The Pentagon established its first permanent garrison in Poland in 2023.

In the Indo-Pacific, Wicker wants the U.S. to consider new nuclear-sharing agreements and the re-deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Korea. He also proposes accelerating the military modernization of Taiwan and the Philippines and buying them asymmetrical weapons.

Wicker’s recommendations also target individual services and the defense industrial base. He is pressing for the production of more ships, fighter jets and missiles.

“We struggle to build and maintain ships, our fighter jet fleet is dangerously small, and our military infrastructure is outdated,” Wicker wrote in an op-ed in *The New York Times* on Wednesday. “Meanwhile, America’s adversaries are growing their militaries and getting more aggressive.”

Under his blueprint, the Navy would grow its fleet to 357 ships by 2035 and the Air Force would buy at least 340 additional aircraft in five years. Wicker’s plan proposes spending \$7 billion to \$10 billion on the munitions industrial base each year for the next decade to rebuild “a lasting 21st-century arsenal of democracy.”

Lava reaches barrier around US Navy site in Iceland

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

Lava from the latest volcanic eruption in Iceland has reached a defensive barrier around a U.S. Navy communications site on the southern coast, according to the country’s national broadcaster.

Live footage by RÚV on Thursday afternoon showed smoke coming from the ground near one of two masts at the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station in Grindavik.

“The expectation, at this point, is that the defenses will hold,” Darren Adam, a presenter and reporter with RÚV’s English service, said, referring to walls of crushed rock that Icelandic authorities started building last year ahead of a series of volcanic eruptions.

Staffers at the telecommunications facility, who include one U.S. Navy civilian

and Icelandic supporting personnel, were evacuated months ago because of the threat posed by the volcanic activity, the Navy said in February.

Normally, the facility operates 24/7 and plays an important role in radio communications with various Navy and NATO vessels in the Atlantic Ocean by helping ensure their safety, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa spokesman Lt. Cody Keim said at the time.

Keim refused to say whether the two communication masts could function without staff on the ground, citing operational security.

On Thursday, activity near the site appeared to be less than it was when the eruption began the previous afternoon.

Much larger plumes of smoke were initially visible and at times nearly hid one of the masts. Around midnight local time,

several prolonged flareups of lava could be seen in the footage.

In an update Thursday, Iceland’s Met Office confirmed that the power of the eruption had decreased significantly, although lava was still bursting at Hagafell and Sylingarfell nearby.

The town of Grindavik is about 30 miles south of the capital, Reykjavik, and about 15 miles from Keflavik International Airport, where U.S. forces operate. There were no initial reports of disruption at the airport because of the volcano.

The eruption is the fifth on the Reykjanes Peninsula, in southwestern Iceland, since December. Until March 2021, the peninsula had not experienced an eruption for 800 years, but scientists believe the area is entering a new volcanic era that could last for decades or even centuries.

Jury rehears instructions in Trump trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The jury in former President Donald Trump's hush money trial resumed deliberations Thursday after revisiting portions of the judge's instructions and rehearing testimony from multiple key witnesses about the alleged scheme at the heart of the history-making case.

The judge responded to a jury request by rereading 30 pages of jury instructions. The 12-person jury, which deliberated for about 4½ hours Wednesday without reaching a verdict, also reheard testimony Thursday morning from a tabloid publisher and Trump's former lawyer and personal fixer.

It's unclear how long the deliberations will last. A guilty verdict would deliver a stun-

ning legal reckoning for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee. Since verdicts must be unanimous, it's also possible the case ends in a mistrial if the jury can't reach a consensus.

In a memo Wednesday evening, Trump campaign senior advisers Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles blasted the proceedings as a "kangaroo court" and argued the case would not matter in November.

"The bottom line is this case doesn't have an impact on voters," they wrote.

Trump, who on Wednesday appeared to be priming supporters for the possibility of a guilty verdict by saying "Mother Teresa couldn't bear these charges," struck a pessimistic tone again Thursday.

"It's all rigged. The whole thing, the whole system is rigged," he said. It's the same language he used to try to inoculate himself against losses in the 2020 presidential election and Iowa's 2016 GOP primary.

He continued to rail against the case on his social media network from a room in the courthouse, writing in capital letters, "I did nothing wrong! In fact, I did everything right!"

Trump is charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records at his company in connection with an alleged scheme to hide potentially embarrassing stories about him during his 2016 presidential election campaign.

The charge, a felony, arises from reimbursements paid to then-Trump lawyer Michael

Cohen after he made a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to silence her claims that she and Trump had sex in 2006.

Trump is accused of misrepresenting Cohen's reimbursements as legal expenses to hide that they were tied to a hush money payment.

Trump has pleaded not guilty and contends the Cohen payments were for legitimate legal services. He has also denied the alleged extramarital sexual encounter with Daniels.

To convict Trump, the jury would have to find unanimously that he created a fraudulent entry in his company's records or caused someone else to do so and that he acted with the intent of committing or concealing another crime.

Encampment at Detroit university dismantled

Associated Press

DETROIT — Police dismantled a pro-Palestinian encampment Thursday at Wayne State University in Detroit, two days after the school suspended in-person classes and encouraged staff to work remotely to avoid any problems with the protesters' encampment.

Television footage showed campus police and Detroit police officers in riot gear tearing down fencing before they removed the protesters and started breaking down tents erected last week on green space near Wayne State's undergraduate library.

After police began removing the encampment, the protesters chanted, "There's no riot here, why are you in riot gear?" The protesters later began marching on Wayne State's campus, and some people appeared to clash with officers, WXYZ-TV reported.

Protest camps sprang up

across the U.S. and in Europe as students demanded their universities stop doing business with Israel or companies that they say support its war in Gaza. Organizers seek to amplify calls to end Israel's war with Hamas, which they describe as a genocide against the Palestinians.

Wayne State President Kimberly Andrews Espy said in a statement that university police told people in the encampment about 5:30 a.m. Thursday to gather their belongings and leave. The Detroit News reported.

"The encampment at Wayne State University was removed this morning," Espy said. "After ongoing consultation with the Board of Governors, university leadership, and leaders in the community — and after many good-faith efforts to reach a different conclusion — this was the right time to take this necessary step."

Weinstein could face new charges; more come forward

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Manhattan prosecutors told a judge Wednesday they are evaluating more claims of sexual misconduct made against Harvey Weinstein and could potentially seek a new indictment against the fallen movie mogul before his scheduled retrial on rape and sexual assault charges.

Assistant District Attorney Nicole Blumberg said during a court hearing that additional people have come forward with assault claims and prosecutors are currently assessing which fall under the statute of limitations.

She said some potential survivors that were not ready to step forward during Weinstein's first New York trial may now be willing to testify.

When asked by Judge Curtis Farber whether there was a possibility of prosecutors filing a new indictment, Blumberg

replied: "Yes, your honor."

Blumberg said prosecutors would be in a better position to update the court on the direction of the case at the end of June.

Farber set the next hearing date for July 9. The retrial on the rape charge is tentatively scheduled for some time after Labor Day.

Weinstein's lawyer, Arthur Aidala, told reporters outside the courthouse after the hearing that his client was confident no additional accusers would be found to bolster the prosecution's case.

"He knows he's never done anything like this," Aidala said of Weinstein.

Weinstein, appearing in the same New York City courthouse where former President Donald Trump is on trial, entered the court in a wheelchair, as he has during other recent court hearings since his 2020 conviction was tossed out.

US defends Africa strategy amid coups, Russian inroads

Associated Press

AGADIR, Morocco — The head of the U.S. military in Africa vigorously defended the country's counterterrorism strategy on the continent and vowed to press forward with it despite a wave of criticism and a drift among African nations toward seeking security help from Russia instead.

In an interview Wednesday at Africa Lion, an exercise in Morocco, Gen. Michael Langley blamed a tide of Russian disinformation for anti-U.S. sentiment in volatile regions. He said the military needed to reassert how its longstanding strategy can foster stability throughout the Sahel, the semiarid region south of the Sahara Desert.

The 6,000 members of the U.S. military stationed in Africa are confronting new setbacks as governments in Chad and Niger — two key regional allies — em-

brace Russian forces and paramilitaries and push for them leave posts previously identified as critical to monitoring security challenges.

"There was negative sentiment across the last couple of years against one of our most valued allies — France — as you looked at all social media and looked all across media writ large," Langley said. "A lot of that negative sentiment was fueled by the misinformation and disinformation of the Russian Federation."

"We need to get our narrative out there," he added.

More than 11,000 deaths last year in the Sahel were linked to militant Islamist violence, continuing a trajectory that has seen them gradually increase since 2021, according to an Africa Center for Strategic Studies analysis of reports collected by the Armed Conflict Location &

Event Data Project.

Since 2020, military officers disillusioned with their government's record of stemming violence have overthrown democratically elected governments throughout the region. In the aftermath, countries including Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger began to distance themselves from western powers and deepen partnerships with Russia.

In northern Mali last November, soldiers accompanied by mercenaries from Russian military contractor Wagner retook territory that rebels had controlled for the past decade. The military junta governing Burkina Faso ousted French forces last year and turned to Russia and Wagner for security support. And similarly in Niger, Russian military trainers arrived weeks after the junta that took power last year ordered U.S. troops to withdraw.

Houthis hit ship holding grain bound for Iran

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A Greek-owned, Marshall Islands-flagged bulk carrier that came under attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels earlier this week had a cargo of grain bound for Iran, the group's main benefactor, authorities said Thursday.

The attack on the Laax comes as the Houthis continue their attacks on shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor, part of a campaign they say aims at pressuring Israel and the West over the war in Gaza. However, as shipping through that artery has dropped during the months of attacks, the rebels have struck vessels associated with Iran, as well as Tehran's economic lifelines of China and Russia.

Initially after the attack, the Laax had listed its destination as Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates. On Thursday, however, its listed destination instead appeared to be Bandar Khomeini, Iran.

A statement released by French naval forces based in the UAE that patrol the Middle East also identified the vessel's grain shipment as being bound for Iran. It said that a team from Djibouti had inspected the damage caused by the attack, which it said involved both drones and missiles, and found no remaining dangerous explosives onboard the ship.

Images released by the French navy showed damage both at the waterline of the vessel, as well as on its deck.

Tuesday's attack saw five missiles hit the Laax during the hourslong assault, the private security firm LSS-SAPU said. LSS-SAPU had three armed security guards onboard the Laax at the time of the attack.

Israel claims to control border area

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel's military said Wednesday it seized control of a strategic corridor along Gaza's border with Egypt to cut off smuggling tunnels as it tries to destroy the militant Hamas group in a war now in its eighth month.

The capture of the Philadelphia Corridor could complicate Israel's relations with Egypt, which has complained about Israel's advance toward its border. Israel says the corridor is awash in tunnels that have funneled weapons and other goods for Hamas — despite a years-long blockade imposed by Israel and Egypt.

Israel also deepened its incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where hundreds

of thousands have been seeking shelter from fighting, and where intensifying violence in recent days has killed dozens of Palestinians. The military said that a fifth brigade — up to several thousand soldiers — joined troops operating in the city on Tuesday.

Egypt says any increase in troops in the strategic border area would violate the countries' 1979 peace accord. It already has complained about Israel taking over the Rafah border crossing, the only crossing between Gaza and Egypt.

"The Philadelphia Corridor served as the oxygen line of Hamas through which Hamas carried out weapons smuggling into Gaza on a regular basis," said Israel's military chief spokes-

person, Rear Adm. Daniel Hargari.

An Israeli military official said Israel had notified Egypt of the takeover.

Some 20 tunnels, including some previously unknown to Israel, were found, as well as 82 access points to the tunnels, said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with military regulations. It was not clear if the tunnels were currently in use.

The corridor is part of a larger demilitarized zone along the entire Israel-Egypt border. Under the peace accord, each side is allowed to deploy only a small number of troops or border guards in the zone, though those numbers can be modified by mutual agreement.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Wineries, vineyards seek \$100M for fire damage

OR PORTLAND — Dozens of Oregon wineries and vineyards have sued PacifiCorp over the deadly 2020 wildfires that ravaged the state, alleging that the utility's decision to not turn off power during the Labor Day windstorm contributed to blazes whose smoke and soot damaged their grapes and reduced their harvest and sales.

In the latest lawsuit to hit the utility over the fires, some 30 wineries and vineyards in the Willamette Valley accused PacifiCorp of negligence and requested over \$100 million in damages.

In their complaint, the wine producers say the fires "produced harmful smoke particles that landed on and infused themselves into the grapes."

Vineyards couldn't sell their grapes to winemakers, and wineries have been unable to sell their wines, resulting in lost revenue and damaged reputations, the complaint says.

Former mayor charged after 3 killed in tiny town

SD CENTERVILLE — Three people were shot to death in a small South Dakota town, and a former law officer who once served as the town's mayor is charged in the killings.

Jay Ostrem, 64, was jailed on \$1 million bond on three counts of first-degree murder, South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley said Tuesday in a news release.

A probable cause affidavit identified the victims as two brothers, ages 26 and 21, and a

35-year-old man.

Ostrem served as mayor of Centerville about a decade-and-a-half ago, but the exact dates weren't immediately available.

The probable cause document said a man in Centerville called police at 9:44 p.m. Monday to report that his brother had been shot by "a guy from across the street" and that the shooter had gone back home. The caller was still on the phone with a dispatcher when he said that he had been shot, too. He then stopped talking, the document said.

Ostrem was arrested a short time later.

US opens up banking to Cuban businesses

DC WASHINGTON — The U.S. lifted some financial restrictions against Cuba on Tuesday, in a move designed to boost private businesses on the island.

"These regulatory amendments update and clarify authorizations in support of internet-based services to promote internet freedom in Cuba, support independent Cuban private sector entrepreneurs, and expand access to certain financial services for the Cuban people," the Treasury Department said in a news release.

One of the key changes will allow Cuban private business owners to open bank accounts in the United States and then access them online once back in Cuba. The U.S. also is again allowing something called U-turn transactions, where money is transferred from one country to another but is routed through the United States.

The changes come as Cuba struggles with one of the worst

economic and energy crises in its history. Hundreds of thousands of people have migrated, many of them headed to the United States.

Expanded exception to abortion ban is sought

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Abortion providers are asking an Indiana trial judge this week to broaden access to abortions under the state's near-total ban.

Indiana law allows for abortion in rare circumstances, including when the health or life of the woman is at risk, but only at a hospital.

Planned Parenthood and other abortion providers are asking a Monroe County judge for a preliminary injunction expanding the medical exemptions and blocking the hospital-only requirement.

The bench trial before special Judge Kelsey Blake Hanlon is scheduled for Wednesday through Friday.

The Indiana Supreme Court upheld the ban in June, ending a broader legal challenge brought by the same plaintiffs, but said the state's constitution protects a women's right to an abortion when her life or health is at risk.

New housing laws aimed at helping residents stay

HI HONOLULU — Hawaii Gov. Josh Green on Tuesday signed legislation meant to jumpstart the construction of more dwellings to address an acute housing shortage that is pushing local-born residents to move to states where the cost of living is less.

The measures include requirements for the counties to allow at least two additional

units on residential lots and allow business district buildings to be reconfigured for people to live in. Another would allow state bonds to fund housing infrastructure.

Green, a Democrat, said Hawaii has a shortage of teachers, nurses, firefighters and other workers because they can't afford housing.

State: 5 million live or work in flood-prone areas

TX AUSTIN — More than 5 million Texans, or one in six people in the state, live or work in an area susceptible to flooding, according to a draft of the state's first-ever flood plan.

The plan by the Texas Water Development Board is an effort to reduce the risk for those people by recommending solutions to harden Texas against floods and rising sea levels. The board was required to create the plan in a 2019 state law passed in response to Hurricane Harvey.

The plan, released in early May, estimates that close to 1.3 million Texas homes are in flood-prone areas.

Sarah Kirkle, the director of policy and legislative affairs for the Texas Water Conservation Association, said the plan is significant because it gives the most complete picture yet of which areas of the state are most at risk for flooding.

Texas has a long history of flooding, and Harvey, a Category 4 hurricane that dumped more than 50 inches of rain in the Houston area over four days, was the wettest tropical cyclone in U.S. history and caused nearly \$125 billion in damages.

— From wire reports

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Oilers rally past Stars to even series

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Kris Knoblauch thought he might be in for a long night.

The Edmonton coach was watching a confounding, uninspired, flat start unfold in front of him on the Rogers Place ice.

Down 2-1 heading into Game 4 of the NHL's Western Conference finals to Dallas, his team trailed 2-0, had yet to register a shot, and seemed like it might fade into the night midway through the first period Wednesday.

"Didn't look very good," Knoblauch said.

But in a series with wild momentum swings — Edmonton blew a 2-0 lead before falling 5-3 in Game 3 — the home side was far from out of it.

One good shift finally bled into another. The Oilers pushed back, tied it before the period

was out, and didn't break when the Stars applied pressure. Now the teams are in a best-of-three for a Stanley Cup Final berth.

Mattias Janmark and Leon Draisaitl scored in a 51-second span in the second period and the Oilers beat the Stars 5-2 to even the series.

"We were a little sleepy," Draisaitl said about the slow start. "Found our legs, got going a little bit, started to play our game."

Janmark tied it on a short-handed, 2-on-1 break with Connor Brown with 5:29 left in the period, and Draisaitl followed with his 10th of the postseason with 4:38 to go.

Game 5 is Friday night in Dallas.

"Got home ice back," Stars coach Pete DeBoer said. "This isn't supposed to be easy."

Ryan McLeod, Evan Bouchard and Mattias Ekholm, into an empty net with 1:53 remaining, also scored for Edmonton. Connor McDavid added two assists, and Stuart Skinner made 20 saves.

Wyatt Johnston and Esa Lindell scored as Dallas raced to a 2-0 lead in the first 5½ minutes. McLeod and Bouchard countered for Edmonton late in the period.

Skinner made a big stop on Evgenii Dadonov with the rink still buzzing after the tying burst.

The Stars got their second power play with eight minutes left in regulation, but the Oilers killed their 23rd straight penalty before Ekholm put it away with the empty-netter.

Jake Oettinger stopped 24 shots for Dallas.

Johnston scored his ninth of

the playoffs just 58 seconds in when he snapped the puck past Skinner on the game's first shot.

The crowd gave the Oilers a sarcastic cheer when Edmonton finally got its first shot more than eight minutes into the game.

"It's funny in the playoffs how the psychology works," Janmark said about blown leads. "We were in the opposite position two days ago. It's hard to explain."

Edmonton made three lineup changes, inserting defenseman Philip Broberg along with McLeod and fellow forward Corey Perry for Vincent Deshaenais, Warren Foegele and Sam Carrick.

Stars defenseman Chris Tanev left in the second period because of a lower-body injury. He didn't return.

Prosecutor drops all charges against golfer Scheffler

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Criminal charges against Scottie Scheffler have been dismissed, ending a legal saga that began with images of the world's top golfer being arrested and handcuffed in Louisville during the PGA Championship.

Jefferson County Attorney Mike O'Connell asked a judge Wednesday afternoon to drop the four charges against Scheffler, who was not required to be in the courtroom. The prosecutor said Scheffler's explanation that he had a misunderstanding with police directing traffic was "corroborated by the evidence."

"Based upon the totality of the evidence, my office cannot move forward in the prosecution of the charges filed against Mr. Scheffler," O'Connell said during the short hearing.

Scheffler said in an Instagram post Wednesday that his

May 17 arrest and jailing was an "unfortunate misunderstanding" during a "chaotic situation."

"I wish to put this incident behind me, and I hope (the officer) will do the same. Police officers have a difficult job and I hold them in high regard," Scheffler said.

Scheffler had been charged with a felony for assaulting a police officer with his vehicle, along with three misdemeanors. The arresting officer, Detective Bryan Gillis, was outside the gate of Valhalla Golf Course directing traffic after a pedestrian death when he encountered Scheffler.

Video of Scheffler in handcuffs being escorted by officers quickly spread on the internet, followed by a mug shot of Scheffler in an orange jumpsuit from Louisville's jail.

O'Connell said Wednesday that his office thoroughly re-

viewed evidence in the case before deciding to dismiss charges.

"The evidence we reviewed supports the conclusion that Detective Gillis was concerned for public safety at the scene when he initiated contact with Mr. Scheffler," O'Connell said. "However, Mr. Scheffler's actions and the evidence surrounding their exchange during this misunderstanding do not satisfy the elements of any criminal offenses."

Scheffler was not aware there had been a pedestrian death, and several PGA-marked vehicles like Scheffler's were able to enter the course without a problem, O'Connell said. But a passenger bus attempting to enter was halted and told to turn around. Gillis was on the scene stopping vehicles so the bus would have room to pivot, and Scheffler's car was among the first to

reach the point where Gillis was stopping traffic, O'Connell said.

Gillis said in a police report that Scheffler then "refused to comply and accelerated forward, dragging" Gillis to the ground. Gillis said his uniform pants were damaged in the fall and he was taken to the hospital for his injuries.

A surveillance video released by Louisville police last week showed Gillis pursuing Scheffler's vehicle on foot and stopping him from entering the course. Scheffler is later pulled from the car and cuffed. But the video did not show Gillis' first contact with Scheffler, authorities said.

Gillis has been disciplined for not activating his body-worn camera during the arrest. In a report on that failure, Gillis wrote that Scheffler had "demanded to be let in" the golf course.

Swiatek fends off Osaka's challenge

Associated Press

PARIS — Iga Swiatek played like the current No. 1 and the two-time defending champion at the French Open. No surprise there. That Naomi Osaka looked like the former No. 1 that she is — and on clay, no less — amounted to an announcement that she is still quite capable of elite tennis.

Surging down the stretch as Osaka faded, Swiatek saved a match point and grabbed the last five games to sneak her way to a 7-6 (1), 1-6, 7-5 victory in the second round of the French Open on Wednesday night in a thrill-a-minute contest befitting two women who both own four Grand Slam titles.

“For sure, this match was really intense. Much more intense for the second round than I ever expected. For sure, I’ll be more ready next time,” Swiatek

said. “Naomi played amazing tennis. ... I’m happy that she’s back and she’s playing well.”

For Swiatek, this extended her Roland Garros winning streak to 16 matches as she pursues a third consecutive trophy at the clay-court major. For Osaka, who cried when she left the court after letting a 5-2 lead in the concluding set slip away, this amounted to a return to her big-hitting best.

They went back and forth for nearly three hours as rain loudly pelted the outside of the closed roof at Court Philippe Chatrier — showers forced the postponements of 23 singles matches until Thursday — and a riveted, if hardly full, crowd alternated its support between the two players. Sometimes, spectators called out before a point was done, prompting admonishment from chair umpire

Aurélié Tourte during the match. And from Swiatek afterward.

“Sometimes, under a lot of pressure, when you scream something during the rally or right before the return, it’s really, really hard to be focused,” Swiatek said. “The stakes are big and there is a lot of money here to win. So losing a few points may change a lot. So please, guys, if you can support us between the rallies but not during, that would be really, really amazing.”

Osaka served for the victory at 5-3 in the final set, and was a point away from winning, but she put a backhand into the net. Soon, when Osaka missed another backhand, this one long, Swiatek finally converted a break point on her 10th chance of that set, and they played on.

Maybe the lack of high-level

matches caught up to Osaka, because her mistakes continued to mount, including a double-fault that put Swiatek in control 6-5. Swiatek, who has led the WTA rankings for nearly every week since April 2022, then held serve one last time.

“I don’t necessarily feel like I regret anything,” Osaka said.

Still, this was, without a doubt, Osaka’s top performance since she returned to the tour in January after 15 months away while becoming a mother. (Her daughter, who is 10 months old now, accompanied Osaka to Paris and recently started walking.)

“I was watching Iga win this tournament last year, and I was pregnant. It was just my dream to be able to play her,” Osaka said. “When I kind of think of it like that, I think I’m doing pretty well.”

Mets cutting López after he throws glove in stands

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jorge López will be cut by the struggling New York Mets after the reliever threw his glove into the stands following his ejection Wednesday at Citi Field.

Mets manager Carlos Mendoza called the outburst “not acceptable” and said it would be handled internally. López expressed no remorse over his display.

“I don’t regret it. I think I’ve been looking (like) the worst teammate probably in the whole MLB,” he said, using a profanity during a bizarre and confusing postgame interview in the Mets’ clubhouse.

López told reporters he had not spoken to Mendoza or president of baseball operations David Stearns about the outburst, but a person with direct knowledge of the situation said that was not true. The person, who also confirmed López was being designated for assignment, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose that detail publicly.

López, an All-Star in 2022, gave up a two-run homer to Shohei Ohtani late in New York’s 10-3 loss to the Los Angeles Dodgers. Moments later, the right-hander was

ejected for shouting at third base umpire Ramon De Jesus over an appeal ruling on Freddie Freeman’s checked swing.

“It’s just emotions. The game, it just takes you there,” López said.

López pointed at De Jesus and yelled some more, then dropped the ball and walked off the mound with his jersey untucked.

As he approached the Mets’ dugout, he tossed his glove high over the protective netting and it landed a couple of rows deep in the stands, where it was snagged by a fan.

“It definitely doesn’t look good,” said Mets shortstop Francisco Lindor, who initiated a players-only meeting in the clubhouse following New York’s 15th loss in 19 games.

“If our manager says it’s unacceptable, it’s unacceptable. I hope tomorrow, (López) feels completely different.”

After his cap fell off his head as well, López left it laying in the dirt in front of the dugout and headed for the bench.

“I’m the way I am,” he said. “I’m not afraid to be me.”

López, however, said he thought his

teammates were embarrassed.

“Jorge’s a good guy inside. Deep down, he knows he shouldn’t have done that, obviously,” veteran reliever Adam Ottavino said. “Everybody’s going through stuff.”

After the game, the Mets began the process of designating López for assignment. They will have seven days to trade or release him, or send him outright to the minors if no other team claims him on waivers.

In his first season with the Mets, the 31-year-old López is 1-2 with a 3.76 ERA and two saves in 28 appearances — among the most in the majors. He signed a \$2 million, one-year contract with New York in December.

López pitched for three playoff teams last season, going 6-2 with a 5.95 ERA and three saves in 61 relief appearances for Minnesota, Miami and Baltimore.

He moved exclusively to the bullpen in 2022 and was a dominant closer for the Orioles during four breakout months that earned him an All-Star selection. Baltimore traded him to the Twins in early August that year and he finished 4-7 with a 2.54 ERA and 23 saves in 67 games.

Basketball leagues looking for revenue

Associated Press

Bernadette McGlade leads an Atlantic 10 Conference built around basketball and focused on getting multiple bids to the NCAA men's tournament much more than anything tied to big-time football.

Yet her league is among dozens of conferences and scores of schools that will feel the impact from the NCAA and major college conferences approving a \$2.8 billion settlement of federal antitrust claims that calls for paying athletes with a plan framed in a football-driven college sports landscape.

"We've got to move forward, we want to continue to preserve our rich history in basketball," McGlade told The Associated Press. "So we have to get to the strategy table and start doing analysis."

Schools that lean on basketball in leagues like the A-10, Big East — home to UConn, the two-time reigning men's national champion — and the West Coast Conference face the prospect of directing millions to their athletes every year. But they have

to figure out the best way to do that without streams of football money flowing in.

"With the opportunity that football brings, there's a lot of (financial) obligation that football brings, too," said Gonzaga athletic director Chris Standiford. "So it cuts both ways. We don't have the obligation of the operations and new expenses associated with the compensation of football players. But we don't have the benefit of the revenues that come with it, particularly the TV revenues."

The settlement includes the NCAA and conferences paying \$2.77 billion over 10 years. Under the plan, each school would be allowed to set aside up to around \$21 million to pay athletes, a cap that could change. It could start as soon as the 2025 fall semester.

The lawsuit targeted the so-called Power Five conferences — Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Big Ten, Pac-12 and Southeastern — as well as Notre Dame. But coming up with money to pay for the settlement will hit hundreds of other Division I member schools

in the form of smaller annual payouts from the organization. That revenue flows largely from the NCAA's lucrative TV contract for the men's basketball tournament and its other championship events.

The NCAA has no role in the College Football Playoff or bowl games and TV deals for football are struck at the conference level. Yet schools with smaller or even no football program will be shouldering a piece of the settlement before even getting into paying future athletes.

"I think the real interesting angle here is: Why does men's basketball pay for the entire overhead of college athletics and college football doesn't contribute?" Standiford asked.

McGlade went a step further, noting that the projected CFP per-school payouts alone to the Big Ten and SEC (around \$22 million) largely covers the estimated annual amount a school can pay to athletes. McGlade estimated the focus for the basketball-focused schools in her league could be generating around \$3 million to \$5 million in

annual payments by comparison.

"We knew the settlement was being discussed and I think everyone across D-I was supportive of that for this whole year," McGlade said. "We didn't know the gory details of what the payment model would be. The disproportionality is a real concern, and it wouldn't have taken that much for that proportionality to get balanced a little bit more and everyone be a little bit more respectful of each other."

Jay Bilas, a former Duke player and attorney who is also an ESPN basketball broadcaster, said NCAA member schools put themselves in this position by voting "in lockstep to restrict athletes from making money all these years."

"So there's no difference in culpability from the University of Georgia to Marquette," Bilas said. "They're all equally culpable in violating federal antitrust law. So that to me should not be lost in all this, that all of them were of like mind in saying the athletes get nothing but scholarship or stipend or whatever it is."

UConn's Karaban, Tide's Sears withdraw from draft

Associated Press

Two of last year's Final Four teams are returning key pieces for next season.

UConn forward Alex Karaban is heading back to campus for a try at a third straight national title and Alabama guard Mark Sears also will be back after withdrawing from the NBA Draft Wednesday.

The 6-foot-8 third-year sophomore has started in 77 of his 78 games since joining the Huskies. He averaged 13.3 points and 5.1 rebounds last season as UConn went 37-3 and became the first team with consecutive NCAA Tournament titles since Florida in 2006 and 2007.

No program has won three in a row since UCLA won seven

straight from 1967-73.

"While I've enjoyed the draft process, Storrs is home," Karaban, from Southborough, Mass., posted on social media. "Let's run it back!"

Sears was a second-team AP All-American last season after becoming the first Division I player in the last 31 seasons to have 795 points, 150 rebounds, 145 assists and 95 three-pointers in a season. The 6-1 guard was a finalist for the Bob Cousy Award as the nation's top point guard following a 2023-24 season in which he averaged 21.5 points, 4.2 rebounds, 4.0 assists and 1.6 steals per game.

Sears averaged 24.2 points, 5.2 rebounds and 3.6 assists per game during the NCAA Tourna-

ment while helping lead the Crimson Tide to the Final Four for the first time.

Sears announced his decision on social media with a post saying: "last dance #rolltide."

Arizona also got a big boost with shooting guard Caleb Love's decision to withdraw from the NBA Draft to rejoin the Wildcats.

An explosive 6-4 guard, Love was the Pac-12 player of the year and a Naismith Award semifinalist after leading Arizona with 18 points per game and 92 made 3-pointers.

Love arrived at Arizona prior to last season after spending the previous three at North Carolina, where he built a reputation as a big shot maker during the

Tar Heels' run to the 2022 national title game.

The Wildcats announced Love's return with a social media post declaring: "He's back. #OneLove."

Also withdrawing was Clemson guard Chase Hunter, who helped the Tigers reach the Elite Eight last season.

Hunter, a 6-foot-4 senior from Atlanta, averaged 12.9 points a game and led the Tigers with 116 assists. He had declared for the NBA Draft last month, but was not invited to the draft combine.

Hunter played a big role in Clemson's run to the Elite Eight, where he averaged 17.8 points in four games and was named to the All-West Region team.