

Trump hints at possible Iran nuke deal

Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar — President Donald Trump said Thursday that the United States and Iran have “sort of” agreed to terms on a nuclear deal, offering a measure of confidence that an accord is coming into sharper focus.

Trump, in an exchange with reporters at a business roundtable in Doha, Qatar, described the talks between American envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi as “very serious negotiations” for “long-term peace” and were continuing to progress.

Still, throughout his visit with Arab Gulf leaders this week, the president has underscored that military action against Iran’s nuclear facilities remains a possibility if the talks derail.

“Iran has sort of agreed to the terms: They’re not going to make, I call it, in a friendly way, nuclear dust,” Trump said at the

business event. “We’re not going to be making any nuclear dust in Iran.”

Without offering detail, he signaled growing alignment with the terms that he has been seeking.

But a top political, military and nuclear adviser to Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, told NBC News on Wednesday that Tehran stands ready to get rid of its stockpiles of highly enriched uranium that can be weaponized, agree to enrich uranium only to the lower levels needed for civilian use and allow international inspectors to supervise the process.

Ali Shamkhani added that in return, Iran wants an immediate lifting of all economic sanctions.

Trump said his demands have been straightforward.

“They can’t have a nuclear weapon. That’s the only thing. It’s very simple,” Trump said. “It’s not like I have to give you 30

pages worth of details. It is only one sentence. They can’t have a nuclear weapon.”

But Trump on Wednesday suggested he was looking for Tehran to make other concessions as part of a potential agreement.

Iran “must stop sponsoring terror, halt its bloody proxy wars and permanently and verifiably cease pursuit of nuclear weapons,” Trump said in remarks at a meeting in Saudi Arabia of leaders from the Gulf Cooperation Council. “They cannot have a nuclear weapon.”

Wrapping up his time in Qatar, Trump stopped at a U.S. installation at the center of American involvement in the Middle East and spoke to U.S. troops. The Republican president has used his four-day visit to Gulf states to reject the “interventionism” of America’s past in the region.

Al Udeid Air Base was a major

staging ground during the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The base — home to the forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command — houses some 8,000 U.S. troops, down from about 10,000 at the height of those wars.

Trump told the troops that his “priority is to end conflicts, not start them.”

“But I will never hesitate to wield American power if it’s necessary to defend the United States of America or our partners,” he said.

Trump has held up Gulf nations such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar as models for economic development in a region plagued by conflict. He urged Qatari officials to use their influence to entice Iran to come to terms with his administration on a nuclear deal.

Trump later flew to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates for the final leg of his trip.

Transgender troops to face medical record reviews

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops with a history of gender dysphoria or who show symptoms of the condition will be subject to medical record reviews if they don’t self-report, according to a memo issued Thursday by the Pentagon.

Medical screenings will be the Defense Department’s primary means of involuntarily booting out transgender troops who do not self-identify for a discharge from military service, according to a senior defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity. The medical screenings will be conducted through the department’s individual medical

readiness program, which is executed on a rolling basis to assess whether a service member is able to deploy on a mission.

But unit commanders can also initiate medical screenings of service members suspected of having gender dysphoria if they do not self-identify as the Pentagon works to weed out transgender people. Gender dysphoria is the distress that a person feels because their assigned gender and gender identity don’t match. The medical condition has been linked to depression and suicidal thoughts.

“[This] is also consistent with what we expect and require of commanders generally, to ensure that their service members

are fit and capable for duty — whether it’s under this policy or any other qualification where they may have concern that that service member requires medical intervention or is not able to perform their duties,” the official said.

The Pentagon announced a June 6 deadline last week for active-duty transgender troops and a July 7 deadline for Reserve members to identify themselves voluntarily for an honorable discharge from military service. It followed a Supreme Court ruling on May 2 that allows the Trump administration to enforce a ban on transgender people in the military, while legal challenges to the pol-

icy proceed. President Donald Trump and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth have taken the stance that transgender troops and those with gender dysphoria are not deployable and are ineligible for military service.

“The implementation requires some steps to ensure that those who go forward in service remain eligible to meet the high standards of the department. The department requires high standards to ensure that the force is ready to fight and win the nation’s wars as called upon,” the official said.

Roughly 2,000 transgender people serve in the military, representing less than 1% of active-duty service members.

USAF general on Guam touts US readiness

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force on Guam has never been more ready for a fight — a quality that will prevent one from happening in the first place, the 36th Wing's outgoing commander said this week.

Brig. Gen. Thomas Palenske, interviewed Wednesday on "The Ray Gibson Show," a Guam radioprogram, said a conflict in the Western Pacific is highly unlikely thanks to Air Force deterrence in the region.

"We are as prepared to fight as we have ever been," he said during the interview livestreamed on KUSG's website. "We know exactly what every single airman is going to do, and we're practicing day in and day out."

Palenske, who is slated to relinquish command on May 22,

emphasized that the service's heightened posture at Andersen Air Force Base and across Pacific Air Forces is key to deterring military aggression.

"You know why we're not going to have a war? Because we're so ready for war," he said.

Throughout the hourlong interview, Palenske refrained from mentioning specific adversaries except for a single mention of China and a brief discussion on North Korea.

Regarding China, Palenske said "everyone would make more money if we just get along." He later compared North Korea's economy to the United States' annual expenditure on Halloween candy and said any conflict with the U.S. would be "existential for them."

The Department of Defense views Guam as a strategic hub

vital for protecting U.S. military power in the region. Palenske said the "war footing" mentality seen at Andersen has spread throughout PACAF, calling this the most prepared he's ever seen a major command.

In a moment of candor, Palenske also acknowledged the political and financial forces that help sustain defense spending.

"There are huge political interests that are spring-loaded to make sure that that money keeps getting invested in the military industrial complex across the board," he said. "One, we got to have an enemy. But two, I mean, there are adversaries out there that do pose a threat."

If an adversary is smart, "they won't be anything other than posers of a threat, because if

they take action and make a miscalculation, we're going to club them like baby seals," he said. "Make no mistake."

Palenske—known for signing off his frequent social media posts with "Murica!" — took command of the 36th Wing in 2023. He said he plans to retire and pursue a job in a micro-distillery.

His successor is Col. Charles Cooley, a command pilot and former deputy commander at the 618th Air Operations Center at Scott Air Force Base, Ill., according to a May 12 news release from Joint Region Marianas.

Palenske is one of three top-ranking military leaders on Guam set to step down this month. Joint Task Force Micronesia held a ceremony Thursday, and Joint Region Marianas will change leadership May 29.

Navy SEAL takes command of Joint Task Force-Micronesia

By ALEX WILSON
Stars and Stripes

A Navy SEAL with a distinguished background in special operations has taken command of Joint Task Force-Micronesia, a unit overseeing U.S. military operations across a broad expanse of the southwestern Pacific Ocean.

Rear Adm. Joshua Lasky relieved Rear Adm. Greg Huffman on Thursday during a change-of-command ceremony in the fitness center at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, Guam.

"This region has long been the linchpin of American presence and partnership in the Pacific," Huffman said at the ceremony, livestreamed on Facebook. "Guam, in particular, holds a unique place in our national defense, known as the 'tip of the spear.' It is a symbol of our enduring commitment to the Indo

Pacific security and stability."

Joint Task Force-Micronesia — the Defense Department's first two-star command in the region in over 70 years — was founded last year and is responsible for coordinating defense and humanitarian missions in the region. It answers directly to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

Its primary focus includes the U.S. territories of Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and Wake Island, along with the independent Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Palau.

Lasky described the defense of the region as a "living legacy" built on "trust, shared history and common purpose."

Lasky, a 1994 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, previously served as commander of Joint Interagency Task Force-South in Key West, Fla.

Coast Guard seeks more money for border mission

By CAITLYN BURCHETT
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Coast Guard needs more money and long-term investments in new ships and aircraft to keep up with the Trump administration's crack down on illegal crossings and drug trafficking along the southern border, the acting commandant of the Coast Guard told House lawmakers on Wednesday.

"We are continually hampered by pressure for sustaining and operating our assets—our boats and our ships. We are not able to maintain them at the rate we need to," Adm. Kevin Lunday said as he testified before the homeland security subpanel of the House Appropriations Committee.

Since President Donald Trump's inauguration in January, Homeland Security and mil-

itary forces have been surged to the border to fend off what Trump has described as an "invasion." This has included deploying two Navy destroyers and about 9,600 service members to the federal border security mission.

Lunday, who previously served as the vice commandant, took command of the Coast Guard on Jan. 21 after Trump fired Adm. Linda Fagan from the position reportedly for failing to address border security. After Fagan was replaced by Lunday, Coast Guard ships were immediately surged to southern Florida and other areas to deter maritime migration.

While the service's budget for fiscal 2026 has yet to be released, the Coast Guard typically has an annual budget of about \$13.8 billion. Of that, about \$2 billion historically has been allocated for new ships and aircraft.

Justices weigh birthright citizenship

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court on Thursday weighed whether to allow President Donald Trump's restrictions on birthright citizenship to temporarily take effect in most of the country, even if they might ultimately be found to violate the Constitution.

The justices heard arguments in the Trump administration's emergency appeals over lower court orders that have kept the citizenship restrictions on hold across the country. Nationwide, or universal, injunctions have emerged as an important check on Trump's efforts to remake the government and a mounting frustration to the Republican president and his allies.

Judges have issued 40 nationwide injunctions since Trump began his second term in January,

Solicitor General D. John Sauer told the court at the start of more than two hours of arguments.

Birthright citizenship is among several issues, many related to immigration, that the administration has asked the court to address on an emergency basis, after lower courts acted to slow the president's agenda.

The justices are also considering the Trump administration's pleas to end humanitarian parole for more than 500,000 people from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela and to strip other temporary legal protections from another 350,000 Venezuelans. The administration remains locked in legal battles over its efforts to swiftly deport people accused of being gang members to a prison in El Salvador under an 18th century wartime law called the Alien Enemies Act.

Trump signed an executive order on the first day of his second term that would deny citizenship to children who are born to people who are in the country illegally or temporarily.

The order conflicts with a Supreme Court decision from 1898 that held that the Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment made citizens of all children born on U.S. soil with narrow exceptions that are not at issue in this case.

States, immigrants and rights group sued almost immediately, and lower courts quickly barred enforcement of the order while the lawsuits proceed. The current fight is over the rules that apply while the lawsuits go forward.

The court's liberal justices seemed firmly in support of the lower court rulings that found the changes to citizenship that

Trump wants to make would upset the settled understanding of birthright citizenship that has existed for more than 125 years.

Birthright citizenship is an odd case to use to scale back nationwide injunctions, Justice Elena Kagan said. "Every court has ruled against you," she told Sauer.

But if the government wins on today's arguments, it could still enforce the order against people who haven't sued, Kagan said. "All of those individuals are going to win. And the ones who can't afford to go to court, they're the ones who are going to lose," she said.

Several conservative justices who might be open to limiting nationwide injunctions also wanted to know the practical effects of such a decision as well as how quickly the court could reach a final decision on the Trump executive order.

Mo. lawmakers' referendum repeals abortion measure

Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Six months after Missouri voters approved an abortion-rights amendment, Republican state lawmakers on Wednesday approved a new referendum that would seek the amendment's repeal and instead ban most abortions with exceptions for rape and incest.

The newly proposed constitutional amendment would go back to voters in November 2026, or sooner, if Republican Gov. Mike Kehoe calls a special election.

Republican senators used a series of rare procedural moves to cut off discussion by opposing Democrats before passing the proposed abortion-rights revision by a 21-11 vote. The measure passed the Republican-led House last month.

The Senate then blocked further Democratic debate and gave final approval to a separate mea-

sure repealing provisions of a voter-approved law guaranteeing paid sick leave for workers and cost-of-living increases to the minimum wage. That measure does not go back to the ballot. It will instead become law when signed by Kehoe.

After taking the sweeping votes, the Senate effectively ended its annual legislative session — two days ahead of a constitutional deadline to wrap up work.

Republicans contend they are simply giving voters a second chance on abortion — and are confident they will change their minds because of the new rape and incest exceptions.

Missouri lawmakers have a history of altering voter-approved policies. They previously tried to block funding for a voter-approved Medicaid expansion and authored changes to voter-approved measures regulating dog breeders and redistricting.

DC airport-DOD hotline had been inoperable for 3 years

The Washington Post

A hotline connecting air traffic controllers at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and their counterparts at the Pentagon has been "inoperable" since March 2022, a Federal Aviation Administration official confirmed Wednesday, further evidence of poor safety coordination between agencies responsible for the airspace where a midair collision in January killed 67 people.

The line is maintained by the Defense Department, and the aviation agency was not aware of the outage during the three years it was down, Franklin McIntosh, the FAA's deputy head of air traffic control, testified at a Senate hearing. Aviation officials discovered the hotline wasn't working after May 1, when controllers at Reagan ordered two passenger jets to abandon landings because an Army helicopter was circling nearby at the Pentagon.

"We're insisting on that line to be fixed before we resume any operations out of the Pentagon," McIntosh said.

Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy has accused the military of violating safety protocols, while military officials have insisted they have followed the FAA's restrictions.

Maj. Montrell Russell, a spokesman for the Army, said it was working with the FAA to determine what repairs were needed. McIntosh said that he did not know how long it would take to restore the line but that he expected the military to "expedite that timeline."

This month's incident came just a week after a Virginia-based Army unit resumed flights in the capital region following the Jan. 29 crash, when an Army Black Hawk collided with an American Airlines regional jet arriving from Wichita, Kan.

Rubio to NATO: Boost defense spending

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NATO allies on Thursday that much more defense spending is needed to reinforce the security pact.

Rubio, who is in Turkey for a foreign ministers meeting and high-level peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, said progress on a plan for more robust military investments is needed ahead of a NATO leaders summit in June.

"The alliance is only as strong as its weakest link, and we endeavor to have no weak links in this alliance," Rubio said as NATO discussions began.

The gathering of foreign ministers comes one month before President Donald Trump and other heads of state meet in The Hague, Netherlands, to discuss

the future course of the alliance.

Defense spending is expected to be at the top of the agenda. Trump has demanded that allies increase their military investment levels from the current NATO minimum of 2% of gross domestic product to 5%.

Rubio said that Trump's budget, which calls for \$1 trillion in defense spending, is headed in that direction.

He called that level of American defense expenditure "unheard-of" and "unparalleled."

"And it's not just spending money," Rubio said. "It's spending money on the capabilities that are needed for the threats of the 21st century."

The White House's focus on major increases means many allies that are already struggling to hit the 2% mark will be under significant pressure to do

more.

Germany, which reached 2% in 2024 after years of criticism from Washington for not investing enough in defense, now said it's prepared to move toward Trump's 5% demand.

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said Thursday that eight of the alliance's 32 members still fall short of the 2% benchmark.

"We need to do much, much more, and that's exactly what we will focus on today," Rutte said. "There's also a clear demand from our biggest ally to make sure that we equalize in terms of spending with what the U.S. is doing and what Europeans and Canada are doing."

In NATO, there has been significant progress toward the 2% mark over the past decade. The increased threat posed by Rus-

sia and pressure from Washington have been driving factors in those increases, NATO officials have said.

However, it's not clear how many members are prepared to meet Trump's new spending demand. Also uncertain is what the consequences will be for NATO if members push back on Trump's spending benchmark.

Over the years, Trump has said the U.S. commitment to NATO and the defense of allies are linked to member states' fulfillment of their spending obligations.

While some countries, such as Poland, already have plans to get to the 5% level, others are barely at 2%. One plan being circulated calls for 3.5% of GDP spent on defense and an additional 1.5% related to military infrastructure.

Putin spurns Zelenskyy meeting but talks still on

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — Russia and Ukraine are set to hold their first direct peace talks in three years, both countries said Thursday, but hopes for a breakthrough remained dim after Russian President Vladimir Putin spurned an offer by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to meet face-to-face in Turkey.

Zelenskyy said he is sending a team headed by his defense minister from the Turkish capital Ankara to Istanbul to meet a Russian delegation, even though Moscow's side doesn't include "anyone who actually makes decisions."

Few had expected Putin to show up in Turkey, and his absence punctured any hope of significant progress in efforts to end the 3-year-old war that was given a push in recent months by the Trump administration

and Western European leaders.

Zelenskyy, speaking to reporters in Ankara where he flew Thursday after challenging Putin to sit down with him, accused Moscow of not taking efforts to end the war seriously by sending a low-level negotiating team that he described as "a theater prop."

His proposal to Putin came after a flurry of maneuvering last weekend as each side sought to gain a diplomatic advantage.

The head of the Russian delegation, presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky, said in Istanbul the representatives were ready to meet Ukrainian officials.

Zelenskyy, who is heading Friday to a gathering of European officials in Albania, said that he had decided to send the delegation to Istanbul to demonstrate to U.S. President Donald Trump that Ukraine wants to end the fighting.

GAO: DODEA schools see mental health needs surge

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERLAUTERN, Germany — Counselors and psychologists at Defense Department schools say they are overwhelmed by a surge in student mental health concerns — especially suicidal behavior — due to staffing shortages, administrative burdens and unclear guidance, a federal watchdog agency report says.

The Government Accountability Office found that 1 in 50 students at Department of Defense Education Activity schools was assessed for suicide risk in each of the past two school years, according to a report released Wednesday.

Staff at all 27 DODEA schools visited by the GAO said students have "unprecedented and increasing levels of mental health concerns," including rising rates of self-harm, depres-

sion and anxiety.

GAO auditors conducted the review between January 2024 and May 2025, visiting 11 military installations. The review was mandated by the 2024 National Defense Authorization Act in response to reports of worsening mental health among K-12 students nationwide since the pandemic.

DODEA recently launched a program to help schools identify student needs and build resilience, but school leaders haven't evaluated whether they have enough staff to carry out those goals, the GAO found.

The GAO recommended that the Defense Department direct DODEA to assess its workforce capacity and develop guidance discouraging the assignment of school counselors to standardized testing duties. It also called on DOD to evaluate its school-based mental health services.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Rapper's alleged attacker assaulted inmate in 2008

CA LOS ANGELES — Authorities said Tuesday that a man who attacked rapper Tory Lanez in a California prison is an inmate serving a life sentence for second-degree murder who was previously convicted for an in-prison assault with a deadly weapon.

Lanez, 32, was in fair condition a day after the attack in a housing unit at the California Correctional Institution in Tehachapi, where he's serving a 10-year sentence for shooting hip-hop star Megan Thee Stallion in the feet in 2020, Pedro Calderon Michel, spokesman for the state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, said in an email.

Prison officials identified the alleged attacker as Santino Casio, 42. He has been put in restricted housing pending an investigation by the prison and the Kern County District Attorney's Office.

Casio has been in the facility since 2004, after he was sentenced to life, with parole possible, for convictions of second-degree murder and first-degree attempted murder. In 2008, he was sentenced to six more years for assault by a prisoner with a deadly weapon.

First female mayor of Omaha concedes in race

NE OMAHA — Omaha's first female mayor has conceded the mayoral race to a man who will likely become the community's first Black mayor.

Voters in Omaha were making history Tuesday by either

reelecting the city's first female mayor to a rare fourth term or electing the community's first Black mayor.

The race between Mayor Jean Stothert and challenger John Ewing primarily revolved around local issues, but in the final stretch the campaign touched on more national, hot-button issues such as President Donald Trump's administration and transgender rights.

Stothert was trailing by nearly 5,000 votes in early returns. At her election night event, Stothert said she called Ewing and conceded in the race, KETV reported.

The winner will lead Nebraska's largest city, which makes up nearly a quarter of the state's population.

Ewing, the county treasurer, said the mayor hasn't focused enough attention on core issues like filling potholes, hiring more police officers and building more affordable housing.

"People just feel like she's had her time, and it's time for somebody new," Ewing said.

Although the mayor's office is nonpartisan, the candidates have made it clear to voters that Stothert is a Republican and Ewing is a Democrat.

Judge orders health effort for miners be restored

WV CHARLESTON — A judge on Tuesday ordered the restoration of a health monitoring program for coal miners in West Virginia and rescinded layoffs the federal government implemented in a unit of a small U.S. health agency.

U.S. District Judge Irene Berger issued a preliminary injunction in a lawsuit filed

against Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services by a coal miner who was diagnosed with a respiratory ailment commonly known as black lung disease.

Nearly 200 workers at a National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health facility in Morgantown were told last month that their jobs were being terminated as part of restructuring within Health and Human Services. Berger ordered that jobs be restored within NIOSH's respiratory health division in Morgantown. The division is responsible for screening and reviewing medical exams to determine whether there is evidence that miners have developed black lung.

Federal law mandates that regular health screenings be made available to coal miners.

Berger said the defendants "lack the authority to unilaterally cancel" the Coal Workers Health Surveillance Program within NIOSH.

The judge gave Kennedy 20 days to show the federal government is complying with her order.

Town baffled by mystery of exploding birds

CA RICHMOND — The residents of a California town are raising the alarm after dozens of birds appear to have exploded without explanation.

The phenomena appears to be limited to a single neighborhood in Richmond, about 10 miles north of Oakland. Neighbors claim that more than 50 birds have suddenly fallen dead to the ground after sitting on a stretch

of power lines over the last few months.

"When they land and it happens, they just quickly explode and it's really violent," resident Maximillian Bolling told local ABC affiliate KGO.

The Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office said it was aware of the incidents and asked local energy supplier Pacific Gas & Electric Co. to inspect the power lines.

The company said its equipment was safe and was not causing the birds to be electrocuted. California Department of Fish & Wildlife is investigating.

Police: Burrito road rage incident ends in charge

TX SPRING — A Texas man's retaliation over a thrown burrito put several people in danger and ended in his arrest on a felony charge, according to police.

The burrito road rage incident happened on May 9, near a Dollar Tree in Spring, the Harris County Precinct 4 Constable's Office said in a Monday news release.

A man threw a burrito at the vehicle of a 59-year-old grandfather who had two of his grandchildren with him, ages 1 and 17, investigators say.

This came after the thrower allegedly "exchanged words" with the grandfather and followed him around the parking lot, the Constable's Office said.

But pelting the grandpa's ride with a burrito was apparently a step too far. He rammed into the other man's vehicle, "causing major damages," officials said, and was arrested on a charge of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, which is a felony.

— From wire reports

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Wolves back in West Finals with new look

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The staff had a simple question for the players who helped the Minnesota Timberwolves make their deep run last year.

“Were you a Western Conference finals team, or were you a team that just happened to make the Western Conference finals?” coach Chris Finch said, recalling the preseason conversation. “And there’s only one way to prove that: Go out and do it again. And that was our mission all year.”

The Timberwolves filled in that blank by beating the Los Angeles Lakers and the Golden State Warriors in five games in each of their first two series in these NBA playoffs, finalizing their return to the penultimate round where they lost last season to the Dallas Mavericks.

The roster from that five-game defeat underwent a surprisingly significant change, layering the challenge of new-

player adjustment on top of an already difficult task of matching or bettering such a strong postseason run.

Right before training camp began, Minnesota traded franchise cornerstone Karl-Anthony Towns to the New York Knicks for Julius Randle to take his place at power forward and in the sidekick role to Anthony Edwards. It got Donte DiVincenzo in the deal for defense and shooting off the bench, too.

Randle looked out of sorts at times during the first couple of months, and coinciding midseason injuries for him, DiVincenzo and Rudy Gobert further hampered progress on the court and in the standings. Losing 117-116 on Feb. 28 to a Utah team that finished last in the league left the T-wolves at 32-29, staring the play-in games straight in the face with the West stacked again with more competitive teams than there

were spots in the playoffs.

But the three of them got healthy again, and Minnesota took off in March.

“Having the mental toughness and determination to say we’re going to figure this thing out, because all of us, as a whole, believed how good we could be as a team,” said Randle, who had 29 points in the Game 5 win over Golden State on Wednesday night. “I’m extremely proud of everybody.”

The Wolves will play the Denver-Oklahoma City winner. They could get five days off if the Nuggets beat the Thunder on Thursday to force a Game 7 in the other West semifinal series. If OKC wins, it’ll host Game 1 on Sunday, still a three-day break for Minnesota.

“It’ll be good to get a chance to take a breath and regroup and figure out where we’re going,” said Finch, whose team is 10-3 on the road over the 2024 and 2025 playoffs.

Finch is by far the most successful coach in the history of these star-crossed Timberwolves, who’ve had only three of their 14 coaches even make the playoffs. They’ve made it in each of his four full seasons and now reached back-to-back conference finals for the first time in franchise history.

Who knows where this run will finish? But with No. 1 seed Cleveland out and No. 2 seed Boston on the brink of elimination in the East with star Jayson Tatum sidelined by injury, plus the No. 2 and No. 3 seeds long gone from the West bracket, Minnesota has given itself as good of a chance as anyone to win its first title.

“Every team goes through a lot. Everyone wants to rush the process. Everybody wants everything to be great, compared to what you’ve done in the past. All that’s kind of irrelevant really when you have a new team coming in to the season,” Finch said.

White scores 34, Celtics stave off elimination vs. Knicks

Associated Press

BOSTON — Before the Boston Celtics took the floor without their biggest star on a night they had to win, Joe Mazzulla implored his players to just pour everything they had into winning one game.

They did, and the defending NBA champions earned another chance to extend their season.

Derrick White had 34 points, including seven 3-pointers, to lead the Celtics to a 127-102 Game 5 win over the New York Knicks on Wednesday night that kept them alive in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

“We did what was necessary to do what we needed to do to get it back to New York,” Mazzulla said. “You don’t get to pick the test that you have, you pick how you respond to them.”

Boston connected on 22 3-pointers to post its first home victory of the series and first without Jayson Tatum following his season-ending Achilles tendon injury.

“Losing JT is tough,” White said. “But

we’ve got a lot of guys that are highly competitive, and we didn’t want the season to end tonight.”

The Knicks will try again to win the series Friday in New York. If the Celtics win, Game 7 would be in Boston on Monday.

Jaylen Brown added 26 points and 12 assists. Payton Pritchard had 17 points and five 3-pointers. Luke Kornet finished with 10 points, nine rebounds and seven blocks. He started the second half for Kristaps Porzingis, who played just 12 minutes. Mazzulla said Porzingis was having trouble breathing as he continues to deal with a lingering viral illness.

The Celtics are looking to become just the 14th team in NBA history to come back from a 3-1 deficit in 294 attempts.

Josh Hart led the Knicks with 24 points despite briefly leaving the game late in the first quarter to close a bloody gash over his eye after he took an inadvertent elbow.

Jalen Brunson added 22 points before fouling out with 7:19 to play in the game.

Boston closed the third quarter on a 23-9

run and took a 91-76 lead to the fourth. Brunson spent the final 2:45 of the third on the bench after picking up his fifth foul.

“They came out with a sense of urgency that we need,” Brunson said.

The Celtics kept it going in the final period, pushing their lead as high as 28 points.

The game was highly physical throughout and included a brief face-to-face skirmish between Hart and Brown.

That energy carried over offensively. Boston came out hot, getting five 3s from White and 12 total in the opening 24 minutes.

“We’ve got to play desperate. I don’t think we did that,” New York guard Mikal Bridges said.

But the Knicks held as much as a nine-point lead, connecting on eight 3s of their own and getting 10 second-chance points. Mitchell Robinson also converted on all four of his free throw attempts in the first half, nullifying the series-long intentional foul strategy the Celtics employed on him.

Oilers beat Knights in OT to advance

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Oilers are about a lot more than Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, something the Golden Knights learned the hard way.

For Edmonton to get through to the Western Conference final for the second year in a row, it took a goalie who was benched earlier in these NHL playoffs and a forward who wasn't in the lineup until Monday.

Kasper Kapanen scored on a scramble in front of the net at 7:14 of overtime, and the Oilers beat Vegas 1-0 in Game 5 on Wednesday night to advance out of the second round.

"Obviously, we win games with Leon and Connor leading the way," Edmonton coach Kris Knoblauch said. "That's an absolute given. We won some games where our goalie outperformed their goalie. Then there's games where our depth guys came through and scored big goals. Hopefully we're only halfway through this, but we're going to need contributions

from everybody."

The Oilers, who last season made it all the way to the Stanley Cup Final before losing in seven games to Florida, will play Dallas or Winnipeg in the next round. The Stars led 3-1 going into Game 5 on Thursday night.

Kapanen's goal backed up another shutout performance from goalie Stuart Skinner, who made 24 saves and drew several chants of "Stu! Stu!" from Edmonton fans in the crowd. Skinner, who was benched two games into the playoffs, also blanked the Golden Knights in Game 4. This was his third start in a row in replacing the injured Calvin Pickard.

And Kapanen was a spectator the first nine games of the playoffs before finally getting his chance in Game 4. Given the other players on the roster, Kapanen said he understood why he was initially left out.

"The team was playing really well, so we weren't changing with the lineup, which is under-

standable," Kapanen said. "The most important thing is the team winning and now us advancing. I knew eventually I'd probably get a chance. Just being patient and being ready."

Adin Hill made 29 saves for Vegas, which is out of the playoffs by the midway point for the second year in a row. The Golden Knights, who won the Stanley Cup two seasons ago, came into the playoffs as the Pacific Division champion and with the second-best record in the Western Conference.

"Any time you have a good team, you feel like you didn't finish what you set out to do," Vegas defenseman Alex Pietrangolo said. "We've got a hell of a team. It's disappointing. It's a hard league to win. We knew that going in."

Both teams were also involved in the two most recent scoreless playoff games to reach overtime. The Oilers lost to Winnipeg on May 21, 2021, five days after Vegas was defeated by Minnesota.

Edmonton's only 1-0 overtime playoff victory occurred in 1997 over Dallas. The Golden Knights have yet to win a post-season game by that score in OT.

Vegas played without captain Mark Stone because of an upper-body injury that caused him to miss most of Game 3 on Saturday. Stone played in Game 4 on Monday, but was far from at full health.

Neither team scored through the first two periods, and prime scoring chances were at a premium. There were only five high-danger chances, according to Natural Stat Trick, and the Golden Knights had four of them.

But each team had a grade-A chance early in the third period. Vegas' Brett Howden whiffed on a tap-in after taking a fantastic pass from Jack Eichel, and shortly after Draisaitl failed to convert on a breakaway. McDavid had a chance on a 2-on-1 to end the game in regulation but was denied by Hill with 1:06 left.

Panthers rout Maple Leafs to take 3-2 series lead

Associated Press

TORONTO — Sergei Bobrovsky made 31 saves, three Panthers defensemen scored and Florida routed the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-1 on Wednesday night to take a 3-2 lead in the Eastern Conference semifinal series.

The defending champion Panthers scored three times in a 7:53 span of the second period to pull away for their third straight victory.

"I wasn't thinking about it too much," Bobrovsky said when asked about opening the series with two losses. "I was just focusing on the next game."

Game 6 is Friday night in Sunrise, Fla.

"I'm not a big believer in momentum," Panthers coach Paul

Maurice said. "The series is closer than you think."

Jesper Boqvist returned to score his first career playoff goal and also had an assist, and defensemen Aaron Ekblad, Dmitry Kulikov and Niko Mikkola also scored in the first two periods. In the third, A.J. Greer had his first career playoff goal and Sam Bennett added his sixth of the playoffs.

Bobrovsky missed a chance for his second straight shutout when Nicholas Robertson swept the puck in with 1:06 left for Toronto's first goal in 143 minutes 25 seconds. After a 5-4 overtime victory in Game 3, Bobrovsky made 23 saves Sunday night in a 2-0 win.

"We have trust in Bob that you wouldn't believe," Ekblad

said. "It is unwavering."

Joseph Woll stopped 20 of 25 shots for the Maple Leafs before giving way to Matt Murray after Greer's goal at 6:23 of the third.

"I don't think there's really any excuse or explanation," Toronto captain Auston Matthews said. "We've got to win a game to keep our season alive."

Ekblad opened the scoring with 5:22 left in the first period, firing a wrist shot past Woll.

Kulikov began the second-period spree at 6:08 with a slap shot from the right point that the Leafs' Scott Laughton inadvertently deflected past Woll.

Boqvist, back in the lineup in place of the injured Evan Rodrigues after being a healthy scratch for two games, scored with 9:55 remaining. Boqvist

finished at the left post off San Reinhart's cross-ice feed. Mikkola made it 4-0 with 5:59 left with a slapper from the left side.

Rodrigues was hurt on a hit from Oliver Ekman-Larsson in Game 4. With Rodrigues out, Boqvist slotted into a spot alongside Reinhart and Aleksander Barkov.

"It was a good opportunity for me," Boqvist said. "I enjoyed it, and it probably helped I was playing with two of the best players in the world."

Toronto added forwards Nick Robertson and David Kampf and sat Calle Jarnkrok and Pontus Holmberg. Robertson last played in Game 2 of the first round. Kampf dressed for the first time since April 2 when he was injured against Florida.

Marte, Suárez power D-backs past Giants

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Ketel Marte hit two home runs, Eugenio Suárez added a three-run shot and the Arizona Diamondbacks used 13 hits to hold on and outlast the San Francisco Giants 8-7 on Wednesday.

Marte took Jordan Hicks (1-5) deep to right with a solo shot in the first inning and launched a two-run homer off Hayden Birdsong in the fourth.

Suárez's homer came off Birdsong with two men on in the third. It was Suárez's 13th HR of the season — the third baseman had a four-homer game against Atlanta on April 26.

Every member of Arizona's starting lineup had a hit except No. 9 batter Jose Herrera, who walked twice.

Ryan Thompson (1-0) got the win in relief as the Diamondbacks had 12 strikeouts and took two of the three games in the series.

San Francisco's Heliot Ramos had three RBIs, including a sacrifice fly in the second and a two-run double in the fourth. Jung Hoo Lee hit a two-run homer in the seventh, his second in two games.

Twins 6-8, Orioles 3-6: Kody Clemens hit a three-run homer in the eighth inning to lead visiting Minnesota to its 10th straight with a victory over Baltimore in the second game of a doubleheader sweep Wednesday.

The Twins rallied from a 3-0 deficit to win the opener 6-3, then fell behind 6-4 before coming back in the second game. Minnesota trailed by a run when Willi Castro led off the eighth with a single, stole second and advanced to third on a balk by Yennier Cano (0-3). After a walk to Royce Lewis, Clemens hit a drive to right to give the Twins the lead.

Kody Funderburk (1-0) won in relief. Cole Sands pitched a perfect ninth for his first save.

The Orioles scored six runs in the third — thanks largely to a

grand slam by Cedric Mullins and a solo shot by Heston Kjerstad — but managed no further scoring.

Phillies 2-7, Cardinals 1-14: Bryce Harper had two hits and drove in the game-winning run, Jesus Luzardo pitched seven strong innings and host Philadelphia defeated St. Louis in the first game of a doubleheader.

Harper reached base three times in the game, but it was his bloop, two-out single that capped off a seventh inning rally for the Phillies that broke the Cardinals' nine-game winning streak.

St. Louis rebounded in the second game, as Alec Burleson had a homer among his three hits and drove in four runs in a slugfest.

Burleson was one of three Cardinals to homer off Philadelphia starter Aaron Nola (1-7), who gave up the most hits, 12, in any start in his 11-year career to go with nine runs.

Yankees 3, Mariners 2: Aaron Judge hit a go-ahead home run in the eighth inning as visiting New York beat Seattle.

The Yankees trailed for most of the contest thanks to a couple strong plays from the Mariners' Julio Rodríguez. Seattle's center fielder robbed Trent Grisham of a leadoff home run and then drove in a pair of runs in the third inning.

Mariners starting pitcher Luis Castillo allowed one run on six hits over six innings. But the Yankees evened the score at two apiece in the seventh inning when Paul Goldschmidt delivered a pinch-hit, game-tying home run.

Blue Jays 3, Rays 1: Alejandro Kirk hit a three-run home run in the sixth inning and host Toronto beat Tampa Bay.

Kirk had two hits, and Vladimir Guerrero Jr. reached base three times and scored a run as the Blue Jays bounced back from Tuesday's 11-9 defeat and won for the fifth time in six games.

Rays right-hander Ryan Pepiot (2-5) allowed three runs and six hits in six innings, extending his winless streak to three starts. He walked one and struck out seven.

Marlins 3, Cubs 1: Kyle Stowers hit a pair of solo home runs and tripled, Ryan Weathers tossed five strong innings in his return to Miami's rotation and the visiting Marlins topped Chicago to end a three-game slide.

Agustín Ramírez also homered and doubled to help Miami avoid being swept at Wrigley Field and win for just the fourth time in 17. Stowers homered for the second straight game to increase his season total to 10.

Weathers (1-0) struck out five and walked one before exiting after 76 pitches. He strained his left flexor muscle during spring training, then rehabilitated it in the minors.

Brewers 9, Guardians 5: Rhys Hoskins homered and drove in five runs, Jake Bauers had two RBIs and visiting Milwaukee beat Cleveland to avoid a series sweep.

Hoskins' single in the three-run sixth plated William Contreras with the go-ahead score and his two-run homer in the seventh made it 7-2. He drove in two more in the ninth with a single for his fourth hit of the afternoon.

Tigers 6, Red Sox 5: Justyn-Henry Malloy hit a pinch-hit single in the ninth to end the game and give host Detroit a win over Boston.

Aroldis Chapman (2-2) walked Andy Ibáñez to start the inning. Connor Wong threw the ball into center field as Ibáñez stole second, putting a runner on third. Malloy hit for Akil Baddoo and lined a single to center.

White Sox 4, Reds 2: Davis Martin pitched one-run ball into the seventh inning, and visiting Chicago beat slumping Cincinnati for its season-high third consecutive win.

Lenyn Sosa and Michael A. Taylor homered and Martin

(2-4) allowed seven hits in a career-high 6⅓ innings in his first win since April 11.

Pirates 4, Mets 0: Matt Gorksi and Jared Triolo each connected for a two-run homer off New York starter Clay Holmes, and visiting Pittsburgh finally mustered some offense in a victory at rainy Citi Field.

Five pitchers combined on a six-hitter as the last-place Pirates (15-29) won for the fourth time in 17 games to prevent a series sweep. They're 3-3 under Don Kelly, promoted from bench coach to manager when Derek Shelton was fired last week.

Astros 4, Royals 3: Jeremy Peña had a season-high four hits, capped by a tiebreaking RBI single in the eighth inning, to give host Houston a win over Kansas City.

Rangers 8, Rockies 3: Colorado lost to host Texas to become the first team in baseball's modern era to lose 36 of its first 43 games.

Wyatt Langford and Adolis García hit opposite-field, two-run home runs and Patrick Corbin (3-2) struck out six consecutive batters among a season-high nine for the Rangers.

Padres 5, Angels 1: Xander Bogaerts hit a three-run homer in the first inning and Randy Vásquez (3-3) pitched six innings of four-hit ball in host San Diego's victory over Los Angeles.

Manny Machado extended his hitting streak to 13 games with two hits and two walks as the Padres took two of three from the Angels.

Nationals 5, Braves 4: James Wood's eighth-inning double drove in the go-ahead run and visiting Washington rallied to beat Atlanta and end its seven-game losing streak.

Dodgers 9, Athletics 3: Pinch-hitter Miguel Rojas doubled in the go-ahead run in the sixth inning and host Los Angeles hit four home runs while rallying past the Athletics.