

Caine lauds midshipmen at graduation

Capital Gazette (Annapolis, Md.)

Nearly 1,100 midshipmen graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy on Friday, marking their commissioning as officers into either the Navy or Marine Corps.

For the graduates, the ceremony represented the culmination of a four- or even five-year journey.

Landon Robinson, a Navy football defensive tackle who was drafted by the Cincinnati Bengals, said: "It's been a whole lot of blood, sweat and tears."

"You form so many deep bonds with people as you make your way through here," Robinson said. "We all grow together."

Though both football standouts, Robinson and graduating quarterback Blake Horvath said

they learned the same skills as their classmates.

"I think this place stands on the shoulders of giants, right, that have gone before us," Horvath said. "I think the shared experience that each midshipman has, whether you were class of 1926 to 2026, the baseline foundational stuff has always stayed the same."

Air Force Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, delivered a 36-minute commencement speech. In a light-hearted tone, Caine lauded the midshipmen's accomplishments and forecast success in their military careers.

"I see the future of American war-fighting dominance, and the future is incredibly bright. But

life and leadership are full-contact sports, and the journey of being a learning leader never ends," said Caine. "You will make mistakes. I often do."

He paid respect to graduates who came before, while reminiscing about nights at McGarvey's and O'Brien's.

Caine poked fun at the academy's friendly rivalry with the Virginia Military Institute, his alma mater. He punctuated his points with the catchphrase "stay frosty."

"You'll be challenged every single day, and on many days, you will be asked to make difficult decisions with lives in your hands," Caine said.

Before becoming chairman of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff in April 2025, Caine served as the associate director for military affairs at the CIA. Caine previously served as a pilot, logging more than 2,800 hours in the F-16 fighter jet, more than 150 of which were in combat.

Citing a rough and informal rotation of the typical graduation speakers, many expected President Donald Trump to deliver the keynote address this year. Trump, however, was unavailable because of a scheduling conflict. He became the first president since at least 2000 to not address the midshipmen in the first two years of his term. Trump spoke at the academy in the second year of his first term.

US Marines conduct exercise at embassy in Venezuela

Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines landed two Osprey aircraft on Saturday at the newly reopened American Embassy in Caracas, Venezuela, as part of a rapid response exercise.

"Ensuring the military's rapid response capability is a key component of mission readiness, both here in Venezuela and around the world," the em-

bassy said in a Facebook post.

Venezuela's government had announced the drill earlier in the week, The Associated Press reported. Foreign Minister Yván Gil said the United States would conduct the exercise to prepare "in the event of medical emergencies or catastrophic emergencies."

Marine Gen. Francis L. Donovan, the commander of U.S.

Southern Command, was in Caracas for his second official visit to Venezuela, SOUTHCOM said in a post on X. He took part in bilateral discussions with senior interim government leaders, met with U.S. Embassy leadership and staff, and observed the exercise. Donovan arrived in one of the Ospreys.

The U.S. formally reopened

the embassy in March, following the restoration of full diplomatic relations after the ouster of then-President Nicolás Maduro in early January.

Squadron markings identified the Ospreys as belonging to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 263, currently deployed aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima in the Caribbean Sea.

'We're sending you to lead,' Hegseth says at West Point

Stars and Stripes

Members of the U.S. Military Academy Class of 2026 tossed their covers high on Saturday to close out 47 months at West Point and begin their Army careers.

During the ceremony at Michie Stadium on the campus in West Point, N.Y., Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, the featured speak-

er, told the 998 newly minted leaders that the stakes could not be higher.

"You've proven that you have what it takes to lead our nation's top 1%, America's most valued treasure, America's sons and daughters," he said. "We're sending you to lead, we're sending you to forge warriors, and we're send-

ing you, perhaps, to war — and you are ready. The world today is at a crossroads, just as it has been for the past 250 years of our great republic."

Hegseth stressed unity, hard work and lethality, telling the new officers that they have his trust and the trust of the president.

The secretary asked the new

officers to ensure that those they lead know the purpose of their mission and that they have each other's backs.

"It greatly improves execution when you share with them the purpose and unlock their combined talent," he said. "Take care of your soldiers, take care of their families and each other."

Marines use modified video game to train

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

The Marine Corps hopes that a modified version of the nearly two-decade-old hit video game Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare can help newly promoted sergeants level up as leaders.

A group of researchers from Virginia Tech and the University of Memphis developed a training adaptation of the genre-defining game to help teach students in the Sergeants School at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Va. The effort, funded by the Office of Naval Research, is known as Research into Competency Acquisition with Novel E-gaming.

The fourth installment of the Call of Duty franchise, a top seller after its release in November 2007, was the first to bring the series out of World War II and into the modern era, though much about modern warfare has changed since, with the advent and growing use of drone technology and artificial intelligence.

In the game's modified version, which was introduced to the first cohort of Marine students in January, players par-

ticipate in over a dozen scenarios tailored to help them hone skills in leadership, critical thinking, decision-making and communication in real time, Virginia Tech said in a statement last week.

"The actual skills translate directly into making good decisions under high stress," said Brig. Gen. Matthew Tracy, commanding general of Marine Corps Education Command and president of Marine Corps University, according to the statement.

Sergeants School is designed to prepare newly promoted sergeants to take on more significant leadership roles as non-commissioned officers, according to a description on the Marine Corps University's website.

The curriculum emphasizes Marine Corps doctrine, tactical decision-making and maneuver warfare concepts. Course instruction is typically delivered through guided discussions, case studies, practical applications and other exercises.

Traditional modes of instruction provide students with the necessary knowledge, but the

video game lets them develop that knowledge into skills "through practice, reflection and refinement," said Lt. Cmdr. Mike Natali, a program manager with the Office of Naval Research.

The students see "how their thoughts, decisions, and interactions with teammates affect performance and mission success in real-time vice theoretical talking points," Natali said in the Virginia Tech statement.

Having the chance to work with the military on something with a real-world impact "instead of something sequestered away in the ivory tower" was a plus for Louis Hickman, assistant professor of industrial-organizational psychology at Virginia Tech, who leads the research project.

"This is one of the few things in the course that allows for active practice and a more engaging experience," Hickman said.

The similarity of the game's setting to the real world was also part of the reason the researchers chose Call of Duty 4 over something like Halo, which is set on other planets centuries in

the future, Hickman told Stars and Stripes last week.

The team needed to ensure the software could collect data and function perfectly before being deployed because it could not be updated later, which was a unique constraint on their work, said Brandon Booth, a third member of the team and an assistant professor in the University of Memphis Department of Computer Science.

The researchers used existing modification tools to create a custom campaign through 14 levels, some of which have several variants. Fire teams of five Marine players battle together through these levels against much larger numbers of opposing forces than the "drip feed" of enemies they would see in the game's original single-player campaign mode.

"Sometimes they're encountering up to 20 opposing forces at a time," Hickman said, an intensity of combat that "requires coordinating in terms of where you're looking and covering, as well as when you're reloading, just like you might encounter in the real world."

Army reaches its recruiting goal for 2026 early

Stars and Stripes

The Army has reached its recruiting goal for 2026 more than four months before the end of the fiscal year, the service announced Saturday.

The Army has signed contracts with more than 61,500 future soldiers, continuing the recent momentum in recruiting.

It marks the third consecutive year that the service has reached its target for new enlistments after it had failed to meet its goals in 2022 and 2023.

In 2025, the Army hit its recruitment goal in early June,

the first time in more than a decade it had hit the mark that early. The fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

"I'm incredibly proud of our U.S. Army recruiters," said Brig. Gen. Sara Dudley, commanding general of U.S. Army Recruiting Division. "Their dedication to recruiting the best, most qualified talent is the reason we achieved this momentous milestone."

Without providing specifics, the service credited innovative outreach, enhanced career incentives and an increased focus on critical technical skills.

"The men and women who chose to serve our nation are actively showing their commitment to something larger than themselves," said USARDC Command Sgt. Maj. Danny Basham. "The nation depends on their strength, character and commitment."

Some of the recent adjustments include enlistment bonuses and incentives. A program launched four years ago, the Future Soldier Preparatory Course, was aimed at helping young Americans qualify physically and academically for military service.

In March, the Army increased its maximum enlistment age to 42, bringing its accession policy closer in line with most of the United States' other military services.

Recruiting has been strong military-wide.

The Air Force and Space Force surpassed their annual recruiting goals in April, five months ahead of schedule by signing up about 32,000 new recruits.

The Navy surpassed its recruiting last year and has reported strong progress this year.

Comments reveal war's impact on readiness

Bloomberg News

A top Pentagon official's remarks that the U.S. had halted arms sales to Taiwan to ensure sufficient munitions for the Iran war are the latest sign that the conflict has sapped American military readiness, including for a potential confrontation with China.

"We're doing a pause in order to make sure we have the munitions we need for Epic Fury," acting U.S. Navy Secretary Hung Cao told U.S. lawmakers on Thursday, referring to the U.S. campaign in the Middle East.

The comments underscore the toll the war of choice in Iran has taken on U.S. inventories. This month, China's Xi Jinping warned President Donald Trump that misunderstandings over Taiwan could lead to U.S.-China "clashes."

Throughout the nearly three-month war, the U.S. has burned through munitions, lost aircraft and drones, and suffered dam-

age to hard-to-replace radars and regional bases. It's also led to extended deployments for U.S. warships. Keeping ships at sea longer than planned can have cascading effects that limit future deployments for years, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The sheer volume of bombs, missiles and air defense interceptors used in the war — at least 13,629 munitions by mid-May, according to one Pentagon official — has drained the U.S. arsenal, caused a political headache at home and highlighted the cost of taking on even a comparatively weak conventional military. It suggests the U.S. might need to rethink how to approach a near-peer competitor such as China.

"The high tempo of U.S. operations, and high rates of munitions fired, means the U.S. is stretched thin and mortgaging future readiness to deal with the issues of today," said Bloomberg Economics defense lead

Becca Wasser. "That could render the United States to be less prepared to contend with future challenges, including China."

At least two dozen U.S. warships have been involved in the conflict so far, with the Navy now orchestrating a full blockade of Iranian ports.

Navy ships operate on the Optimized Fleet Response Plan, a three-year schedule of deployment, training and maintenance that limits deployments to seven months and allows for periods of readiness when they can "surge" into action.

Yet the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford was dispatched to the Middle East after being sent to the Caribbean to help pressure Venezuela. And during its 326-day deployment, the \$13.2 billion vessel suffered a fire in its laundry area and had to leave the fight for repairs at a Greek port.

"Between this and the operations in South America, you've got a certain ratio of operational

time to maintenance time that has to be maintained," said Tom Shugart, a former U.S. Navy submarine captain now at the Center for a New American Security. "I would never say to not fight a war because of your maintenance schedule. But that bill is going to get paid at some point."

The lack of shipyard space and trained workers means there is also limited flexibility to navigate extended deployments or other setbacks, according to the person familiar with the matter, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the issue.

The Pentagon didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The effect on stockpiles of long-distance strike weapons is even more stark. The U.S. used about 1,100 of Lockheed Martin's JASSM-ER cruise missiles and about 900 RTX Tomahawks, said a person familiar with the arms stockpiles.

US reaches limit of sanctions power on Iran

Bloomberg News

The Trump administration launched its "Economic Fury" campaign to hobble Iran's economy with sanctions more than a month ago. So far, the country is unbowed.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent exhorted allies last week to join the U.S. in its economic pressure campaign, which the administration rolled out shortly after it entered into a ceasefire that halted its military campaign against Iran, dubbed "Epic Fury."

The new campaign appeared to be an update of "Maximum Pressure," the tag line dating from Trump's first term that described his approach of suffocating the Iranian economy. The new campaign that started April 16 promised to leverage

"the full range of available tools and authorities" to choke off Iran.

So far, though, the actions largely resembled the previous strategy, and with the same effect: Iran has broadly held out against U.S. demands despite facing a steadily growing arsenal of sanctions dating back to 2018, when President Donald Trump backed out of a nuclear deal forged during the Obama era.

That's brought the total number of sanctions against Iran imposed in the last eight years to nearly 2,000, according to Jeremy Paner, a partner at Hughes Hubbard & Reed, who tracks designations on Iran's oil and petrochemical sectors.

"There really hasn't been any significant shift in the targeting

priorities," Paner said. "The authorities are the same. The geographies being targeted are the same."

The U.S. effort has targeted everything from oil companies and shipping firms to currency exchanges and intermediaries across China and the Middle East.

But all of those measures — even with an extensive bombing campaign alongside Israel and an ongoing U.S. Navy blockade — have only underscored Iran's ability to weather U.S. pressure, especially given continued oil sales to China.

The administration's challenge with Iran is one that's befallen successive administrations: squeezing Iran's economy enough to force change while avoiding excessive harm to the

global economy and American consumers' pocketbooks.

"We've just reached the limit of what we can achieve with sanctions and economic pressure," said Richard Nephew, a former State Department official who served as the deputy envoy for Iran and a coordinator for sanctions policy. "We need to either overwhelm them with something new — and this Economic Fury stuff isn't it — or we need to start limiting our ambitions."

Trump wants a quick end to a war that has closed the vital Strait of Hormuz and caused global energy prices to soar. On Saturday, Iran said talks on a peace deal were progressing with Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio also signaling a resolution was in sight.

Chemical tank no longer poses threat of catastrophic blast

The Orange County Register

Crews have confirmed that a crack inside a malfunctioning chemical tank at a Garden Grove, Calif., aerospace plant is indeed reducing pressure inside the container, leading fire officials to say they have potentially turned a corner in heading off the most catastrophic threat — a massive explosion.

Data collected from an “all-night mission” by fire crews determined that the threat of a highly destructive blast known as a “boiling liquid expanding vapor explosion,” or “BLEVE,” has been eliminated, interim Orange County Fire Authority Chief TJ McGovern announced in a Monday morning video update.

“The crack is there,” Division Chief Craig Covey added. “We had identified it is there, and the tank has released its pressure.”

The discovery more than a day earlier of the crack in the

compromised tank at GKN Aerospace on Western Avenue buoyed officials, who hoped it would relieve enough pressure to prevent a massive explosion that could damage buildings and release a toxic vapor cloud or a spill that could unleash 7,000 gallons of volatile chemicals.

The compromised tank is filled with methyl methacrylate, a highly flammable chemical and in a worst-case scenario, a blast could damage hundreds of homes and buildings and create a toxic plume.

Air quality experts, who have been tracking the atmosphere near the tank, have not reported detecting any contaminants so far. The current evacuation zone — which was crafted in consultation with the EPA and OC Health Care Agency — is meant to be large enough to prevent residents from being at risk in the most catastrophic po-

tential outcomes.

The roughly 50,000 resident of six cities impacted by the evacuation — Garden Grove, Stanton, Westminster, Cypress, Buena Park and Anaheim — were urged to remain out of the area Monday.

Emergency crews — aided by experts from around the state and country — have been working since Thursday to come up with a way to prevent a massive explosion or chemical spill.

They have been aided by nearly 800 state and local emergency workers who are helping with evacuations, traffic, sheltering the displaced residents, monitoring the environment and protecting the empty homes and businesses.

A state of emergency in Orange County was declared by Gov. Gavin Newsom on Saturday afternoon, opening the way for those extra resources.

Alligator Alcatraz transfers declining

Tampa Bay Times

Immigration lawyers and advocates have said detainees at Alligator Alcatraz are being moved unusually fast to other locations amid reports the detention center in the Everglades could shut down as soon as next month.

Immigration attorney Laura Quintero, who has clients in Central Florida and Tampa, said she heard of detainee relocations happening in less than a week.

“At this time, we have not been given any official explanation as to whether these movements are related to the facility’s closure or are part of an internal operational transfer,” Quintero said. “But this is a pattern we are actively seeing and monitoring.”

Over the past week, eight flights, each with a capacity of 50 passengers, traveled between Dade-Collier Training and Transition Airport — the site of Alligator Alcatraz — and Alexandria, La., home to another prominent immigration detention center, according to flight tracking service Flightradar24.

In April, Alligator Alcatraz held 1,383 detainees, according to the latest available federal immigration statistics reported by Syracuse University’s TRAC database.

Thomas Kennedy, a policy analyst and consultant at the Florida Immigrant Coalition, a nonprofit that supports immigrant communities, said he heard from families of detainees at Alligator Alcatraz about unusual activity by workers inside.

“They said certain sections of the detention center are being dismantled,” he said.

Waymo suspends rides on freeways

Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Waymo said it’s pausing its robotaxi services on freeways in the United States as it updates software to improve performance around construction zones and flooded roads.

Before the suspension, freeway operations were available in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Phoenix and Miami. The company said street and other off-highway operations of Waymos will continue.

The company first confirmed the temporary pause to Reuters, and said that it was working to integrate technical learnings into software and expects to resume these routes soon.

“We are committed to being good neighbors for our riders

and our communities. As part of that commitment, we make proactive decisions including temporarily pausing aspects of our service. We know riders count on us to get around, and we appreciate their patience as we work to get them where they’re going safely and reliably,” a Waymo spokesperson said in an email statement.

The company also paused operations in Atlanta after a Waymo stopped in flood water. In early May, about 3,800 of Waymo’s autonomous taxis were recalled after a software defect caused some vehicles to drive into flooded roadways.

The suspension comes at a time when the Alphabet-backed company, which is based in Mountain View, Calif., has in-

creased its pace of expansion into a number of new cities in the U.S. and across the globe, and getting them on freeways and local airports is important for expansion.

Competitors Tesla and Zoox are playing catchup, but don’t match the scale of Waymo yet.

The company said it has collected 170 million autonomous miles, with 13 times fewer injury-causing collisions compared with human drivers in the routes they operate in.

Waymo did not cite a specific instance that prompted the most recent recall, but the company has been forced to pause operations to improve software in several Southern states that have been hit by flash floods, including Texas, Tennessee and Georgia.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Governor vetoes ad bill benefiting news outlets

MD ANNAPOLIS — Gov. Wes Moore vetoed a bill that was backed by Maryland media organizations that sought to steer more state advertising dollars to local news outlets.

The Local News for Maryland Communities Act of 2026, also known as Senate Bill 459, would have established a goal for state agencies to spend at least 50% of their advertising budgets with Maryland news organizations. The measure exempted campaigns aimed at out-of-state audiences, including tourism and recruitment advertising.

Supporters said the bill would provide financial support to local journalism without requiring additional state spending.

Moore wrote Friday that the bill would “impair the state’s ability to communicate effectively with Maryland residents,” questioning the effectiveness of traditional media in reaching Marylanders.

Salmonella outbreak tied to moringa leaf capsules

MN MINNEAPOLIS — State health officials are warning the public that a nationwide salmonella outbreak, which also sickened two Minnesotans, has been linked to a supplement purchased online from Amazon.

The Minnesota Department of Health said two Minnesotans became ill with salmonella in April after taking moringa capsules from the brand TNVItamins that was purchased from Amazon, specifically the powder capsule supplements from Lot 2793, with an expiration

date of February 2028.

Both Minnesotans have recovered and did not need to be hospitalized, health officials report.

The two new cases indicate that a previously published salmonella outbreak linked to dietary supplements is still ongoing, health officials warn. The Minnesota cases are associated with a newly identified product containing moringa leaf powder — the same ingredient in the products that caused the earlier cases, health officials say.

County mulls restrictions at famous coast spot

CA LOS ANGELES — Parking at one of California’s most iconic stops on Highway 1 could be closed after a vote by the board of supervisors in Monterey County.

The board last week voted to move forward with a plan to restrict parking around Bixby Bridge in Big Sur, which has seen an uptick in traffic following the long-awaited reopening of an uninterrupted drive along California’s coast.

While the parking moratorium is not yet in effect — and still needs to go through several more reviews — officials hope it will eventually help ease congestion and safety concerns in the area.

The motion that passed directs Monterey County staff to draft an ordinance that would ban parking in the “immediate vicinity” of Bixby Bridge for a year, while also pursuing the permits required for such a decision, including from the California Coastal Commission and the Department of Transportation. The county is still considering how to enforce such a

moratorium, and what that would cost.

Airport sinkhole forces delays on holiday weekend

NY NEW YORK — Repairs and additional inspections sparked by a sinkhole discovered on a LaGuardia Airport runway will cause delays that will hamper travel on Memorial Day weekend, officials said Friday.

LaGuardia Airport said it expects runway 4/22 — one of the airport’s two main runways — to be out of service until early Saturday morning as they continue inspections.

A crew found the sinkhole around 11 a.m. Wednesday during a daily morning inspection of the airfield, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey said. But, as a repair team worked on the problem, more issues were discovered, airport officials said.

“During investigatory inspections of LaGuardia’s airfield pavement Thursday using ground-penetrating radar, possible areas of concern were identified and proactively repaired,” the airport said on X. “Out of an abundance of caution, engineering crews are conducting additional inspections.”

The runway was expected to reopen 6 a.m. Saturday.

FAA closes Blue Origin probe that held rocket

DC WASHINGTON — It took just over one month for the Federal Aviation Administration to close the book on an investigation that had grounded Blue Origin’s New Glenn rocket.

The company announced Friday on X that the FAA had ap-

proved its report about what went wrong with an April 19 launch when the rocket’s upper stage had an engine issue and ultimately lost its customer’s payload.

“Prior to our second (upper stage) burn, we experienced an off-nominal thermal condition, and, as a result, one of the BE-3U engines didn’t achieve full thrust to reach our target orbit,” the company stated.

Blue Origin said “corrective measures have been implemented,” meaning it can get back to the business of launching rockets from the Space Coast.

Full lots, gridlock traffic after reservations waived

CA FRESNO — Even before Memorial Day Weekend marked the beginning of Yosemite National Park’s high season, many visitors experienced hours-long wait times at entrance gates that led to jam-packed parking lots before mid-morning.

Known for its soaring views and rushing waterfalls nestled in the Sierra Nevada, California’s most visited national park has seen the highest number of visitors in a decade this spring, according to National Park visitation data.

Some park advocates say this is due to elimination of Yosemite’s reservation system by the Trump administration for 2026. Instead of reservations, NPS said Yosemite will rely on “real-time traffic management measures,” including diverting traffic when parking areas reach capacity and deploying additional seasonal staff to manage high-use areas.

— From wire reports



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Suarez honors Busch after 600 victory

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — When Daniel Suarez was struggling to make his name in auto racing, he would often get phone calls from Kyle Busch offering words of encouragement and urging him to keep working.

That made his crown jewel Cup Series victory Sunday night all the more special.

Suarez benefited from a crucial pit call, then caught a break from Mother Nature to win the rain-shortened Coca-Cola 600, capping an emotional day in which the racing world remembered the late Busch.

Suarez became the first Mexican-born driver to win the 600. It was his third Cup Series win and first since 2024.

The victory was especially emotional for Suarez, who previously raced for Kyle Busch Motorsports.

“Kyle, he was special,” Suarez said as he teared up. “I was doing this for Kyle, for (his wife) Samatha, for (his children) Brexton and Lennix and for all of his family.”

A non-factor for most of the race, Suarez gambled and took two tires during a late pit stop, then held off Christopher Bell and Denny Hamlin on restarts before the race was called when the sky opened up and rain drenched the track shortly before midnight Eastern time.

NASCAR quickly made the decision to call the race with 27 laps remaining.

Bell finished second; Hamlin was third.

The two Joe Gibbs Racing teammates had a chance to catch Suarez on the two restarts, but couldn't clear his No. 7 Chevrolet.

“It's a bummer,” said Bell, who won the rain-shortened 2024 Coca-Cola 600. “It wasn't meant to be today. That's 2026 for us.”

“The 20 car (Bell) and us were just really battling because we knew whoever could clear him (would win the race),” Hamlin said.

The race came just three days after Busch's death sent shockwaves throughout the motorsports world and beyond. The 41-year-old Busch died after severe

pneumonia progressed into sepsis, resulting in rapid and overwhelming complications, according to a statement released by his family.

The two-time Cup Series champion and winner of a record 234 races across NASCAR's three national series had become unresponsive while practicing in a Chevrolet simulator Wednesday, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because no details were released by the family.

Busch's family attended the race and NASCAR CEO Steve O'Donnell told them in an emotional speech before the race that they are part of the NASCAR community and “we got you.”

NASCAR and CMS honored Busch with his No. 8 and signature on the frontstretch grass and a highway billboard near the main entrance of the track.

The U.S. Army Golden Knights carried a Busch flag prior to the race and each of the 39 cars in field carried a small, black No. 8 decal.

Kyle Larson won the first stage race. Hamlin won the second stage and Bell the third.

Crashing out

Defending champion Ross Chastain crashed out when Ricky Stenhouse Jr. clipped his car in Turn 2 with 81 laps remaining in the race.

Connor Zilisch and Austin Cindric only made it 52 laps before getting caught up in a crash. Cindric got turned around and Zilisch came crashing in to the side of his No. 2 Ford, ending both drivers' day.

Replacing Busch

Austin Hill, a regular driver in the O'Reilly Auto Parts Series for Richard Childress Racing, took Busch's spot in the race and finished 26th. He drove the No. 33 car after RCR temporarily retired the No. 8 until Busch's 11-year-old son Brexton is ready to drive.

Austin Dillon, went behind the wall with damage to the front of his car with 56 laps to go, ending any hope of an emotional win for RCR. He finished 32nd.

Legge finishes 31st, falls short of 'Double' with crash at Indy

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — Katherine Legge had one thing on her mind as Sunday night turned to Monday morning at Charlotte Motor Speedway: Getting some much-needed sleep.

“The highlight will be when I can finally lay down because I'm so tired,” Legge said.

Legge's quest to become the first woman to complete “The Double” — racing 1,100 miles spread out over two tracks on one day — ended quickly Sunday when she crashed out in the Indianapolis 500.

She flew to North Carolina and finished in 31st at the Coca-Cola 600 and 12 laps back after losing a tire mid-race.

Legge said now it is time to regroup after what she called “a calamity of errors.”

The English driver completed just 17 of the scheduled 200 laps at Indianapolis Motor Speedway's iconic 2.5-mile oval before she ran into the car of Ryan Hunter-Reay, knocking both cars out of the race. Hunter-Reay started spinning in the second turn and braked hard to keep his car off the wall, and the trailing Legge steered inside to try to avoid the 2013 Indy 500 winner. But as smoke emerge from both braking cars, Legge's car hit the inside wall.

“I'm fine, just gutted more than anything,” she said after being checked and released at the track's infield medical center. “Ryan spun in front of me, I think he was battling his car for a minute, I was just chilling, trying to save fuel and he spun

down the track and started coming up the track, so I tried to go low and just didn't make it.”

Legge was the sixth driver ever to attempt “The Double.” The only driver to complete it is three-time NASCAR champion Tony Stewart in 2001.

It's been a week full of bad luck for Legge.

Her flight from New York to Indianapolis was delayed, causing her to miss Indy's annual media day. Then she had communications trouble in Friday's final 500 practice, and after flying to Charlotte on Saturday, Coca-Cola 600 qualifying was rained out.

“Hopefully, we get all of the travel woes out of the way now before the weekend, and this weekend goes smoothly,”

Legge told The Associated Press on Thursday. “My management has been speaking with Kyle's management about how to get the logistics sorted out, how they did it and we're trying our best to copy and paste what they had and they're just keeping me in the loop.”

Then came the tangle with Hunter-Reay, who was also was checked and released by IndyCar's medical team.

At the 500, crashes and bad weather have been a theme in each of the last three “Double” attempts. But Legge was hoping to avoid all of it.

The English driver started from the No. 26 spot, the middle of the ninth row, at Indy, where she drove for HMD Motorsports with A.J. Foyt Racing team.

Spurs tighten defense, even series with Thunder

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Victor Wembanyama had 33 points, eight rebounds, five assists and three blocks and the San Antonio Spurs held Oklahoma City to its second-lowest postseason total, beating the Thunder 103-82 in Game 4 on Sunday night to tie the Western Conference finals.

De'Aaron Fox had 12 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for San Antonio, which has not lost three consecutive games all season. Stephon Castle and Devin Vassell added 13 points each.

"You definitely don't want to go down 3-1 going into their house," Vassell said. "We knew we had to respond and that's how you respond. You get stops. You don't try and focus on the offensive end, you get stops, you get out of transition. You guard your yard and that's what we did."

Game 5 is Tuesday in OKC, followed by the Spurs hosting Game 6 on Thursday.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 19 points on 6-for-15 shooting for the Thunder.

Wembanyama took Oklahoma City's 123-108 victory Friday in Game 3 personally. The 7-foot-4 star from France said he needed to be better to make his teammates better. He was monumentally better Sunday night — and so was San Antonio.

"We all have high standards and I know I have a lot of responsibilities, but I'm here for it," Wembanyama said. "Yeah, it was better today. It wasn't perfect. But, you know, all of us, I'm talking about the whole organization, so we're going to have to do things that we didn't sign up for."

The Spurs limited the Thunder to 33% shooting from the field, including 6 for 33 on 3-pointers (18%).

"I think we made a great defensive adjustment," Vassell said. "I don't want to say what it was. We were just able to rotate

the shooters and not give them so many wide-open 3s. I feel like they had so many wide-open 3s over the past couple games and you've got to respect them, especially if they're making them. So, we were trying to cut them out with that and just stay playing fast."

After being outscored 76-23 in bench points in Game 3, San Antonio's reserves scored 30 points while limiting OKC to 34.

The Spurs had another hot start in Game 4 after opening the previous game on a 15-0 run. Unlike Friday's lopsided loss, they never relinquished that lead.

"They just punched us in our face early," Gilgeous-Alexander said. "It's two games in a row they've come out the aggressor. The last game we were able to course correct. Tonight, we just didn't do so."

After blocking Jared McCain's layup under the rim, Vassell tossed an alley-oop pass

to Wembanyama for a dunk as part of 16-0 run that gave the Spurs a 23-8 lead with 4:19 remaining.

"I feel like with who we are, we need to start games like this," Wembanyama said, "but it really doesn't mean anything for the way it holds. I mean, it helps for sure, but it's a whole 'nother type of effort to be consistent rather than just hitting first."

San Antonio had an assist on all 10 field goals in the first quarter.

The Spurs held the Thunder to 38 points in the first half, tied for their second-lowest half in the past four regular and postseasons. Oklahoma City is 2-9 when it scores less than 40 points in any half over the last five seasons.

The Thunder's franchise low is 65 points in a playoff loss to Memphis on May 3, 2014, and their second-fewest points had been 85 against San Antonio on May 21, 2014.

Hertl caps Knights' wild rally, giving them 3-0 lead on Avs

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — There are a number of adjectives that could be applied to how Vegas has found various ways to win in the regular season and playoffs.

Golden Knights coach John Tortorella had his own description.

"This is a game where we showed some balls," the man known as Torts said after Vegas' latest Houdini act.

Tomas Hertl weaved his way toward the slot and broke a tie at 8:21 of the third period as the Golden Knights overcame a three-goal deficit Sunday night to beat the Colorado Avalanche 5-3 and move within a victory of their third Stanley Cup Final appearance in nine years.

"It obviously feels really good right now, but we're playing a hell of a hockey team," Vegas forward Mitch Marner said. "We know that the next game is going to be even tougher now. Enjoy this for the next 10 minutes, 30 minutes, go home and then try to take care of yourself, and do what you got to do to be ready tomorrow."

The Golden Knights will go for what

would be a stunning sweep over the Presidents' Trophy winners Tuesday night. Chicago in 2013 was the last team to win the Presidents' Trophy and the Stanley Cup in the same season.

Colorado will try to become just the fifth team to win a series after falling behind 3-0. Los Angeles in 2014 was the most recent team to accomplish that in eliminating San Jose in their first-round series.

Vegas, which trailed 3-0 after the first period, was 0-19 in the playoffs when behind that many goals. The Avalanche were 74-1 when holding such a lead.

"As low as it can get," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said of the team's emotions. "It's a big hill to climb. The next 24-to-36 hours is for ... you've got to find a way to get over it, regroup and go again."

The Avs have other concerns because front-line center Nathan MacKinnon might not be fully healthy going forward. MacKinnon, who has 15 points this postseason and led the league in the regular season with 53 goals, took a puck to his

right knee in the second period and played through the injury.

That comes just as Colorado got back star defenseman Cale Makar, who missed the first two games this series because of an upper-body injury.

The Golden Knights keep finding ways, going this deep into the postseason despite being outshot in 11 of 15 games, including now nine in a row. They erased deficits the past two games against the Avalanche, though Game 2 was just 1-0.

"We've been all season long many times down," Hertl said. "We've come back so many times. Even after the first when we were down 3-0 we knew we could do it."

Hertl, Mark Stone and William Karlsson each had a goal and assist. Keegan Kolesar and Brett Howden scored the other Vegas goals, and Mitch Marner and Kaedan Korczak each tallied two assists. Carter Hart made 32 saves.

Gabriel Landeskog, Nazem Kadri and Jack Drury scored for Colorado, and Devon Toews had two assists. Scott Wedgewood stopped 18 shots.

Marlins sweep Mets on walk-off grand slam

Associated Press

MIAMI—Heriberto Hernández hit a grand slam off Devin Williams in the ninth inning for his first big league walk-off hit, giving the Miami Marlins a 4-0 win Sunday and a three-game sweep of the New York Mets.

New York had just two runs and 11 hits in the series and has scored two runs or fewer in four straight games. The Mets (22-31), who have dropped into last place in the NL East, were shut out for the sixth time this season as they completed a 2-5 trip. They have scored one run or none in 15 games.

Miami (25-29) swept a series for the first time since its opening three games against Colorado.

Juan Soto was scratched before the game because of a fever. Marcus Semien went 0 for 10 in the series, dropping his average to .214.

Orioles 5-1, Tigers 3-4: Dillon Dingler hit a two-run homer in the first inning, Troy Melton and two relievers combined on a three-hitter and visiting Detroit stopped an eight-game losing streak by beating Baltimore in a doubleheader nightcap.

Melton (1-0), making his season debut after recovering from right elbow inflammation, allowed two hits and Samuel Basallo's sacrifice fly in 5⅓ innings.

In the opener, Colton Cowser hit a three-run homer off Kenley Jansen with two outs in the ninth inning that lifted the Orioles to a victory.

The Tigers led 3-1 before Taylor Ward's RBI single in the eighth off Kyle Finnegan. Jansen entered with two on and two outs and retired Pete Alonso on a popout.

Pirates 4, Blue Jays 1: Esmerlyn Valdez homered for his first career hit, Spencer Horwitz and Oneil Cruz also connected and visiting Pittsburgh beat Toronto to avoid a three-game sweep.

Valdez was promoted from Triple-A Indianapolis on Friday and had gone 0 for 7 before hit-

ting a two-run homer off Chase Lee in the sixth inning.

Twins 6, Red Sox 5: Brooks Lee hit a tiebreaking, two-run single in a three-run sixth inning, and visiting Minnesota held off Boston at soggy Fenway Park to complete a three-game sweep for its 10th victory in 14 games.

Pinch runner Connor Wong, the potential tying run, was cut down at the plate by shortstop Ryan Kreidler's relay on Isiah Kiner-Falefa's double for the second out in ninth.

Guardians 3, Phillies 1: Rhys Hoskins hit an RBI double in the sixth inning and Travis Bazzana homered in the eighth to lead visiting Cleveland over Philadelphia.

Parker Messick (6-1) earned the win. Messick threw 5⅓ shutout innings, allowing five hits and striking out six. Cade Smith pitched a perfect ninth for his MLB-leading 18th save.

Yankees 2, Rays 0: Aaron Judge ended a career-worst 11-game streak with no RBIs by hitting a game-ending, two-run homer off Kevin Kelly in the ninth inning that lifted host New York over Tampa Bay for its first win in five games this year against its AL East rival.

After the Yankees' Ryan Weathers and the Rays' Drew Rasmussen each pitched seven shutout innings, New York left fielder Cody Bellinger made a key defensive play with two outs in the eighth. With Oliver Dunn at second and Junior Caminero at first, Ryan Vilade singled to left and Bellinger threw out Caminero at third as Ryan McMahon applied the tag before Dunn crossed the plate.

Royals 8, Mariners 6: Salvador Perez made Seattle pitcher Bryan Woo pay for intentionally walking the bases loaded ahead of him, delivering the go-ahead, two-out single that ignited the Kansas City offense and propelled the host Royals to a win over Seattle.

Seth Lugo (2-4) allowed a first-

inning homer by Julio Rodriguez before pitching into the seventh for Kansas City. The former Cy Young runner-up allowed three runs and six hits and two walks in winning for the first time since his March 29 season debut.

Dodgers 5, Brewers 1: Andy Pages hit a two-run homer immediately after Kyle Tucker delivered a tiebreaking two-run triple in the fifth inning to back up Yoshinobu Yamamoto's (4-4) one-run, seven-inning outing as visiting Los Angeles defeated Milwaukee.

Will Klein worked the eighth and Tanner Scott pitched the ninth as the Dodgers' bullpen extended its modern-day franchise record streak of scoreless innings to 38. According to Sportradar, the last time any major league bullpen had this long a streak was in September 2017, when Cleveland relievers threw 39 straight scoreless innings.

Astros 8, Cubs 5: Christian Walker hit a three-run homer to cap a five-run fifth inning and visiting Houston completed a three-game sweep of Chicago.

Michael Busch homered for the Cubs as their skid reached eight games, their longest since a nine-game slide during the 2022 season. Chicago has lost 12 of 14, including six straight at Wrigley Field after winning 15 in a row there.

Giants 8, White Sox 5: Rafael Devers hit San Francisco's third grand slam in a seven-day span, a tiebreaking, fifth-inning drive that led the host Giants over Chicago.

Casey Schmitt homered for the second time in two days and had three RBIs as San Francisco won its second straight after a 2-7 slide. The Giants scored 18 runs in the final two games of the series, their best two-game stretch this season.

Diamondbacks 9, Rockies 1: Corbin Carroll hit a pair of run-scoring triples to increase his big-league lead, Ryne Nelson pitched eight effective innings

and host Arizona routed hapless Colorado.

Carroll extended his hitting streak to 12 games with a run-scoring triple in the first inning and added another in the sixth to finish 4 for 4. He has eight triples this season and 51 in his career, one shy of Stephen Drew's team record.

Athletics 5, Padres 2: Carlos Cortes hit a leadoff home run and Nick Kurtz extended his on-base streak to 47 games as the AL West-leading Athletics beat host San Diego to avoid a three-game sweep.

Kurtz singled to right with one out in the third to tie Jimmie Foxx (1932) for the second-longest streak in A's history. He's one shy of matching Mark McGwire's club-record streak of 48 games to open the 1996 season. Kurtz's streak is the longest in the majors this year.

Nationals 2, Braves 1: Foster Griffin (6-2) allowed only three hits in six scoreless innings, Nasim Nuñez singled in a run in the fifth and visiting Washington survived Atlanta's ninth-inning comeback attempt for a win to hand the Braves their first home series loss of the season.

Nuñez made an error that allowed a run to score in the ninth before Atlanta loaded the bases. Orlando Ribalta then came in and struck out Chadwick Tromp and got Ronald Acuña Jr. on a weak grounder for his second save.

Angels 2, Rangers 1: Reid Detmers was nearly perfect for eight innings while striking out a career-high 14, and host Los Angeles beat Texas on Justin Foscue's ninth-inning throwing error for its first series sweep this season.

Foscue fielded a potential double-play, one-hopper over the mound but juggled it as he pulled it out of his glove for a throw while stepping on the base. His throw to first bounced away from Jake Burger, and Donovan Walton scored standing up.