

US sends Ford strike group to aid Israel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Sunday he has ordered the Ford carrier strike group to sail to the Eastern Mediterranean to be ready to assist Israel after the attack by Hamas that has left more than 1,000 dead on both sides. Americans were reported to be among those killed and missing.

The USS Gerald R. Ford, the Navy's newest and most advanced aircraft carrier, and its approximately 5,000 sailors and deck of warplanes will be accompanied by cruisers and destroyers in a show of force that is meant to be ready to respond to anything, from possibly interdicting additional weapons from reaching Hamas and conducting surveillance.

The large deployment reflects a U.S. desire to deter any regional expansion of the conflict. But the Israeli government formally declared war Sunday and gave the green light for "significant military steps" to retaliate against Hamas.

Along with the Ford the U.S. is sending the cruiser USS Normandy and destroyers USS Thomas Hudner, USS Ramage, USS Carney, and USS Roosevelt, and the U.S. is augmenting Air Force F-35, F-15, F-16, and A-10 fighter aircraft squadrons in the region.

"The U.S. maintains ready forces globally to further reinforce this deterrence posture if required," Austin said in a statement.

In addition, the Biden administration "will be rapidly providing the Israel Defense Forces with additional equipment and resources, including munitions. The

first security assistance will begin moving today and arriving in the coming days," Austin said.

The Norfolk, Va.-based carrier strike group already was in the Mediterranean. Last week it was conducting naval exercises with Italy in the Ionian Sea. The carrier is in its first full deployment.

Senior officials from the Pentagon and State Department briefed senators Sunday night, and Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said they were assured that the United States was giving Israel "everything they need."

"I asked the representatives of our Defense Department if they are giving Israel everything they need, and I was heartened that they said yes and that they are surging support," the New York Democrat said in a statement after the unclassified briefing.

"I asked them if they have denied any requests that Israel has made, and they said no. I urged them to ensure Israel has everything it needs to protect itself, and reiterated that the Senate stands ready to deliver on additional needs," he said.

President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a telephone call Sunday, discussed "the taking of hostages by Hamas terrorists, including entire families, the elderly, and young children," according to a White House statement describing their conversation. Biden stressed that all countries "must stand united in the face of such brutal atrocities."

The president updated Netanyahu on U.S. diplomatic efforts and said additional assistance for Israeli forces was on the way, with more to come in the days ahead, the

White House said.

They also discussed ways "to ensure that no enemies of Israel believe they can or should seek advantage from the current situation."

As part of the U.S. effort to deter further escalation, Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates on Sunday. In each call, he encouraged each country's "continued engagement" and "highlighted the United States' unwavering focus on halting the attacks by Hamas and securing the release of all hostages," department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in separate statements on the three calls.

In the U.S. House, leaders of the Foreign Affairs Committee were preparing a bipartisan resolution that says it "stands with Israel" and condemns "Hamas' brutal war." The resolution is expected to be among the first items considered for voting once the House elects a new speaker.

"Now is the time to show the world the United States firmly stands with our friend and ally Israel in our condemnation of this heinous attack by Iran-backed terrorists," said the committee chairman, Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas.

House business is currently at a standstill after the historic ouster of Rep. Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., as speaker.

Majority Republicans plan to kick off the selection process, in private, at a Tuesday evening forum where candidates can address their colleagues. The real contest could come as soon as Wednesday when the House next convenes.

US: 9 Americans killed during Israel-Hamas fighting

New York Daily News

At least nine Americans have died in bloody violence between Hamas and Israel, a U.S. official said Monday, the third day since Palestinian militants launched a surprise attack in Israel.

Matt Miller, a U.S. State De-

partment spokesman, said Monday morning that an unspecified number of Americans remained unaccounted for in Israel, and that America was working to determine the tally.

"We can confirm that there are nine American citizens who have lost their lives as a result of

these horrific attacks," Miller told MSNBC. "Our thoughts are with the victims and their families."

The State Department said it was in contact with the families of the dead Americans. More than 1,200 people have already been reported dead in the con-

flict, which was escalating Monday as Israel ordered a retaliatory assault on the blockaded Gaza Strip.

At least 700 people have died in Israel, according to the Israel Defense Forces. The Palestinian death toll was 560, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

Israel orders 'complete siege' on Gaza

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel's military ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip on Monday, halting deliveries of food, water, fuel and supplies to its 2.3 million people as it pounded the Hamas-ruled territory with waves of airstrikes in retaliation for the militants' bloody weekend incursion.

Around 1,400 Israelis and Palestinians are dead two days after Hamas launched an attack that caught Israel's vaunted military and intelligence apparatus completely off guard and led to fierce battles in its streets for the first time in decades.

The Israeli military said it had largely gained control in its southern towns where it had been battling Hamas gunmen. But Hamas and other militants in Gaza say they are holding more than 130 soldiers and civilians snatched from inside Israel.

Israeli tanks and drones were deployed to guard breaches in the Gaza border fence to prevent new incursions. Thousands of Israelis were evacuated from more than a dozen towns near Gaza, and the military summoned 300,000 reservists — a

massive mobilization in a short time.

The moves, along with Israel's formal declaration of war on Sunday, pointed to Israel increasingly shifting to the offensive against Hamas, threatening greater destruction in the densely populated, impoverished Gaza Strip.

Already, civilians on both sides have suffered a terrible toll. Around 900 people, including 73 soldiers, have been killed in Israel, according to media. More than 100 of those were in Beerli, a small farming community of only 1,000 people that was the scene of a hostage standoff during the Hamas rampage, according to the Israeli rescue service Zaka.

In Gaza, 493 people have been killed, according to authorities there. Thousands have been wounded on both sides.

In response to Israel's bombardment, the spokesman of Hamas' armed wing, Abu Obeida, said in an audio released Monday night that the group will kill one Israeli civilian captive any time Israel targets civilians in their homes in Gaza "without prior warning." Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen warned Ha-

mas against harming any of the hostages, saying, "This war crime will not be forgiven."

A major question remains whether Israel will launch a ground assault into the tiny Mediterranean coastal territory, a move that in the past has brought even greater casualties.

Israel and Hamas have had repeated conflicts in past years, often sparked by tensions around a Jerusalem holy site. This time, the context has become potentially more explosive, and both sides talk of shattering with violence a yearslong Israeli-Palestinian deadlock left by the moribund peace process.

Israel has been stunned by a surprise attack and death toll unseen since the 1973 war with Egypt and Syria. That is fomenting calls to crush Hamas no matter the cost, rather than continuing to try to bottle it up in Gaza. Israel is run by its most hard-right government ever, dominated by ministers who adamantly reject any Palestinian statehood.

Hamas, in turn, says it is ready for a long battle to end an Israeli occupation it says is no longer tolerable. Desperation has grown among Palestinians,

many of whom see nothing to lose under unending Israeli control and increasing settler depredations in the West Bank, the blockade in Gaza and what they see as the world's apathy.

"I ask you to stand firm because we are going to change the Middle East," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told authorities from the south Monday.

In the early evening, the sound of explosions echoed over Jerusalem when a volley of rockets fired from Gaza hit two neighborhoods — a sign of Hamas' reach. Israeli media said seven were wounded.

Monday evening, Israeli warplanes carried out an intense bombardment of Rimal, a residential and commercial district of central Gaza City, after issuing warnings for residents to evacuate. Amid continuous explosions, the building housing the headquarters of the Palestinian Telecommunications Co. was destroyed.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant ordered a "complete siege" on Gaza, saying authorities would cut electricity and block the entry of food and fuel.

Blinken rejects claims Iranian assets helping Hamas

The Washington Post

Secretary of State Antony Blinken pushed back Sunday against unsubstantiated claims that recently freed-up Iranian assets facilitated Hamas' surprise attack on Israel, noting that none of the money has been spent yet and that it can be used only for humanitarian purposes.

"Not a single dollar from that account has actually been spent to date," Blinken said on ABC's "This Week." "And in any event, it's very carefully and closely regulated by the Treasury Depart-

ment to make sure that it's only used for food, for medicine, for medical equipment."

A Hamas spokesman told the BBC that the group received direct support from Iran to conduct its attack. Blinken denounced Iran's long history of backing Hamas but emphasized that Iran had not yet used the funds that were recently made available.

The Biden administration in September notified Congress that banks would be allowed to transfer \$6 billion in frozen Iranian oil assets as part of an agreement to

exchange five American citizens detained in Iran for five Iranian citizens detained in the United States. Under the deal, the funds were transferred from South Korea to Qatar and could only be used for humanitarian purposes.

South Korea held \$6 billion in Iranian funds under a 2018 waiver from the Trump administration that allowed it to continue to purchase oil from Iran.

The assets were frozen in 2019 when the Trump administration increased sanctions on Iran.

Under the recent deal, Blinken

signed a waiver that said foreign banks would not be subject to U.S. sanctions for transferring the Iranian funds.

The funds were transferred to Qatar's central bank and can be used only for humanitarian purchases made by vendors who have been vetted.

The United States monitors how the funds are used to ensure they go toward providing food, medicine and other humanitarian needs to ordinary Iranians, according to the State Department.

GOP lawmakers put Taiwan above Ukraine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — To Rep. Mike Collins, China is a bigger threat to the United States than Russia. So the Georgia Republican has voted against providing military aid to Ukraine as he advocates for doing more to arm Taiwan, the self-governed island that's at risk of military aggression from Beijing.

For Collins and other Republican lawmakers, Taiwan and Ukraine are effectively rivals for a limited pool of U.S. military assistance. But that's not necessarily how Taiwan and many of its supporters see it. They view Taiwan's fate as closely linked to that of Ukraine as it struggles to push back a Russian invasion.

They have said China is watching closely to see if the U.S. has the political stamina to support an ally in a prolonged,

costly war. The U.S. aid to Ukraine also has led to weapons manufacturers stepping up production — something that could benefit Taiwan in a clash with China.

“Ukraine's survival is Taiwan's survival. Ukraine's success is Taiwan's success,” Taiwan's diplomat in the U.S., Hsiao Bi-Khim, said in May at the Sedona Forum hosted by the McCain Institute.

Still, Taiwan has been careful not to weigh in on the U.S. debate about continued funding for Ukraine, which has become a divisive political issue after initially having strong bipartisan support.

Asked about Congress removing Ukraine funding from a temporary spending measure that prevented a U.S. government shutdown on Oct. 1, Taiwan's diplomatic office respon-

ded with discretion.

“Taiwan is grateful to have strong bipartisan support from the U.S. We will continue to work with the U.S. to maintain the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait,” the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office said in a statement emailed to The Associated Press.

But Congress' refusal to include the aid raises “alarm bells” in Taiwan, said Bonnie Glaser, managing director of the Indo-Pacific program at the German Marshall Fund. She noted that the Taiwanese government “has argued that Ukraine's victory is existential for Taiwan.”

“These worries exist even though most Republicans who seek to end U.S. support for Ukraine are still very pro-Taiwan and willing to do more to help

defend Taiwan,” she said.

Taiwan is the thorniest issue in the frayed U.S.-China relationship. Beijing claims sovereignty over the island, which lies roughly 100 miles off the mainland's southeastern coast, and has vowed to seize it, by force if necessary, to achieve national reunification. The U.S. wants a peaceful resolution and has a security pact with the island, supplying it with military hardware and technologies to prevent any forced takeover by Beijing.

China's military actions near the island have fueled concerns over armed attacks. President Joe Biden has said he would send troops to defend Taiwan in case of war, while Chinese President Xi Jinping has demanded the U.S. respect his country's “sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Think tank: N. Korea may supply arms to Russia

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — Recent satellite photos show a sharp increase in rail traffic along the North Korea-Russia border, indicating the North is supplying munitions to Russia, according to a U.S. think tank.

Speculation about a possible North Korean plan to refill Russia's munition stores drained in its protracted war with Ukraine flared last month, when North Korean leader Kim Jong Un traveled to Russia to meet President Vladimir Putin and visit key military sites. Foreign officials suspect Kim is seeking sophisticated Russian weapons technologies in return for the munitions to boost his nuclear program.

“Given that Kim and Putin discussed

some military exchanges and cooperation at their recent summit, the dramatic increase in rail traffic likely indicates North Korea's supply of arms and munitions to Russia,” Beyond Parallel, a website run by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, said in a report Friday.

“However, the extensive use of tarps to cover the shipping crates/containers and equipment makes it impossible to conclusively identify what is seen at the Tuman-gang Rail Facility” on the border, it said.

The report said satellite images as of Oct. 5 captured “a dramatic and unprecedented level of freight railcar traffic” at the Tuman-gang Rail Facility. It said images show ap-

proximately 73 railcars while a review of previous satellite images over the past five years shows about 20 railcars at this facility at most. U.S. and South Korean officials have warned that North Korea and Russia would face consequences if they went ahead with the reported weapons transfer deal in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban all weapons trade involving North Korea.

Since last year, the United States has accused North Korea of providing ammunition, artillery shells and rockets to Russia, likely much of them copies of Soviet-era munitions. South Korean officials said North Korean weapons provided to Russia had already been used in Ukraine.

Pipeline between Finland, Estonia closed over suspected leak

Associated Press

HELSINKI — Finland and Estonia said Sunday that the undersea Balticconnector gas pipeline running between the two countries across the Baltic Sea was temporarily taken out of service due to a suspected leak.

Gasgrid Finland and Elering, the Finnish and Estonian gas system operators, said they noted an unusual drop in pressure in the pipeline shortly before 2 a.m. Sunday, after which they shut down the gas flow.

“Based on observations, it

was suspected that the offshore pipeline between Finland and Estonia was leaking,” Gasgrid Finland said in a statement. “The valves in the offshore pipeline are now closed and the leak is thus stopped.”

The Finnish operator gave no

reason for the suspected leak and said it was investigating the incident together with Elering. If it turns out the detected pressure drop is due to a leak that has caused damage to the pipeline, repair work could take “at least several months.”

Subs' nuke secrets part of alleged leak

Bloomberg News

Former President Donald Trump has repeatedly been accused of leaking U.S. secrets, but the latest allegations against him involve key details about some of the most sensitive weapons in the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

Trump gave key details on the U.S. Navy's elite submarine fleet — including the number of nuclear warheads they can carry and how close they can get to Russian vessels without being detected — to Australian billionaire Anthony Pratt, who passed the information on to dozens of friends and contacts, according to ABC News and The New York Times.

The alleged disclosure is only the latest in a string of cases that raise grave questions about Trump's willingness to keep the nation's secrets — an issue that's only going to remain front and center given his commanding lead in the polls to secure the Republican nomination to chal-

lenge President Joe Biden again next year.

"Very few people in the U.S. government know the exact configuration of the nuclear subs," said Joe Cirincione, a security analyst who held the highest clearance level when he worked in Congress on nuclear weapons issues. If true, Trump's disclosure gets to the heart of U.S. capabilities, he said.

"I never knew the exact payload of our nuclear subs nor the details of our anti-submarine warfare capabilities," Cirincione said. "I did not have a need to know. The Australian billionaire didn't have a need to know either."

Trump is already battling a federal indictment on 40 counts of allegedly holding on to classified documents at his Florida mansion after he left office, disclosing details of war plans to civilians, and obstructing government efforts to get the documents back. Those documents — which

included assessments from the CIA and the National Security Agency — were purportedly left unattended in a bathroom and on a ballroom stage.

And early in his presidency in 2017, reports said Trump revealed sensitive intelligence information from Israel to Russia's foreign minister and ambassador.

In a social media post, Trump called the submarine allegations "false and ridiculous," arguing that he was only telling Pratt that the U.S. makes the best military equipment in the world. He called the claim a bid to interfere with the election.

The reports will also only further underscore the deep and growing unease among allies about the U.S.'s ability to keep intelligence out of the public eye, especially if Trump wins re-election.

Pratt is one of more than 80 people that special counsel Jack Smith's office identified as po-

tential trial witnesses in the classified documents case in Florida, according to a person familiar with the matter who wasn't authorized to discuss it publicly. He was interviewed at least twice this year by U.S. law enforcement agencies, according to ABC.

"Sharing top secret details not only threatens that stealth advantage but puts the lives of Sailors at risk and undermines our national security," Rep. Joe Courtney, a Connecticut Democrat, told Bloomberg News.

Experts on U.S. submarine technology said Trump's disclosures, if true, could expose key details about its submarines' tactical abilities. The U.S. Navy refuses to confirm or deny the presence or number of nuclear weapons on certain vessels. And telling others how close subs can get to adversaries could erode U.S. attack submarines' tactical advantage as they evade and stalk adversaries.

Probe: Vietnam tried to hack US lawmakers, journalists

The Washington Post

Vietnamese government agents tried to plant spyware on the phones of members of Congress, American policy experts and U.S. journalists this year in a brazen campaign that underscores the rapid proliferation of state-of-the-art hacking tools, according to forensic examination of links posted to Twitter and documents uncovered by a consortium of news outlets that includes The Washington Post.

Targeted were two of the most influential foreign policy voices on Capitol Hill: Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Michael McCaul, R-Texas, and Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and chair of its subcommittee on the Middle East. Also targeted were Asia experts at Washington think tanks and jour-

nalists from CNN, including Jim Sciutto, the outlet's chief national security analyst, and two Asia-based reporters.

The targeting came as Vietnamese and American diplomats were negotiating a major cooperation agreement intended to counter growing Chinese influence in the region, when Vietnamese diplomats would have been particularly interested in Washington's views on China and issues in Asia. President Joe Biden signed the agreement in September during a visit to Vietnam.

The State Department said in a statement that the agreement would give the U.S. a forum for a discussion of spyware. A CNN spokeswoman declined to answer questions about the targeting. None of the targeted individuals contacted by The Post said their devices had been infected.

Harvard's Goldin 3rd woman to win Nobel for economics

Associated Press

STOCKHOLM — The Nobel economics prize was awarded Monday to Claudia Goldin, a professor at Harvard University, for advancing understanding of women's labor market outcomes.

Goldin is only the third woman to win the prize, which was announced by Hans Ellegren, secretary-general of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

"Understanding women's role in the labour market is important for society. Thanks to Claudia Goldin's groundbreaking research, we now know much more about the underlying factors and which barriers may need to be addressed in the future," said Jakob Svensson, chair of the Committee for the Prize in Economic Sciences.

Only about half the world's women have paid jobs, in contrast

to 80% of men. Economists regard the gap as a wasted opportunity: Jobs have often failed to go to the most qualified people because women either weren't competing for work or weren't being properly considered. In addition, a persistent pay gap — women in advanced economies earn, on average, about 13% less than men — discourages women from pursuing jobs or continuing their education to qualify for more advanced job opportunities.

Goldin, 77, explored the reasons behind such disparities. Often, she found, they resulted from decisions that women made about their prospects in the job market and about their families' personal circumstances. Some women underestimated their employment opportunities. Others felt overwhelmed by responsibilities at home.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Leases for Saudi access to groundwater canceled

AZ PHOENIX — Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs said recently that her administration is terminating state land leases that for years have given a Saudi-owned farm nearly unfettered access to pump groundwater in the dry southwestern state.

On Oct. 2, Hobbs, a Democrat, said the state had canceled Fondonmonte Arizona's lease in western Arizona's Butler Valley and would not renew three other leases up for renewal there next year.

An investigation by the governor's office found the foreign-owned farm had violated some of its lease terms. Hobbs called it unacceptable that the farm "continued to pump unchecked amounts of groundwater out of our state while in clear default on their lease."

Through a spokesperson, Fondonmonte said it would appeal the governor's decision to terminate its 640-acre lease in Butler Valley. Altogether, Fondonmonte farmed about 3,500 acres in the rugged desert area west of Phoenix.

Gas, diesel taxes rolled back for another month

GA ATLANTA — Georgia's state taxes on gasoline and diesel will be suspended for another month after Gov. Brian Kemp extended the tax rollback in a Friday executive order.

The suspension of the taxes, at 31.2 cents per gallon of gasoline and 35 cents per gallon of diesel, will now run through at least Nov. 11.

The Republican governor last month revived what was a cam-

paigned tactic during his reelection bid in 2022, when he signed a law suspending the gas tax with broad bipartisan support. Kemp signed seven separate extensions after that, with the state forgoing an estimated \$1.7 billion in revenue from March 2022 to January 2023.

Georgia's governor can suspend the collection of taxes during an emergency as long as lawmakers approve it the next time they meet. In September, Kemp issued a novel legal declaration finding that high prices were such an emergency. The 2022 suspensions came under a state of emergency related to COVID-19.

Town sues to overturn toxic waste settlement

NJ TOMSRIVER — A Jersey Shore town where childhood cancer cases rose is trying to overturn a settlement between the state and the corporate successor to the company that dumped toxic waste into the water and ground for decades, turning part of the community into one of America's worst pollution cleanup sites.

Toms River and the environmental group Save Barnegat Bay are suing in state appellate court to overturn a settlement reached in August between the state and German chemical company BASF over decades of environmental damage in and around the former Ciba-Geigy chemical plant.

The town and the group called the settlement "woefully inadequate," saying restoration projects should be undertaken throughout Toms River and nearby communities. Federal authorities can give no estimate

of when the cleanup, which began in the 1990s, will be completed.

Renewed permit at nuke waste repository finalized

NM SANTA FE — New Mexico environmental regulators on Thursday finalized a 10-year permit extension at the nation's only underground nuclear waste repository that they said will increase oversight and safeguards while prioritizing the cleanup of Cold War-era waste at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The state Environment Department said the permit goes into effect Nov. 3, following a nine-month public comment period.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in southeastern New Mexico plays a key role in the nation's multibillion-dollar effort to clean up radioactive waste left behind by decades of nuclear research and bomb-making. It has been licensed previously to take what is known as transuranic waste, or waste generated by the nation's nuclear weapons program that is contaminated with radioactive elements heavier than uranium.

US to help restore ruined Native American site

OR PORTLAND — The U.S. government has agreed to help restore a sacred Native American site on the slopes of Oregon's Mount Hood that was destroyed by highway construction, court documents show, capping more than 15 years of legal battles that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In a settlement filed with the high court Thursday, the U.S. De-

partment of Transportation and other federal agencies agreed to replant trees and aid in efforts to rebuild an altar at a site along U.S. Highway 26 that tribes said had been used for religious purposes since time immemorial. Members of the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde said a 2008 project to add a turn lane on the highway destroyed an area known as the Place of Big Trees, which was home to a burial ground, a historic campground, medicinal plants, old-growth Douglas Firs and a stone altar.

Factory fined; didn't clear area before fatal blast

PA WEST READING — A Pennsylvania chocolate factory was fined more than \$44,000 by the federal workplace safety agency Thursday for failing to evacuate before a natural gas explosion that killed seven people.

R.M. Palmer Co. did not heed warnings from employees about a natural gas leak, according to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which issued multiple citations to the company.

Palmer denied it violated any workplace safety standards and said it would contest the OSHA citations, which the company said are "legally and factually unsupported."

The natural gas explosion leveled one building and heavily damaged another at the factory complex in West Reading. Investigators have previously said they are looking at a pair of gas leaks as a possible cause of or contributor to the blast.

— From wire reports

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NHL players again setting sights on Cup

Associated Press

All Connor McDavid wants to do after establishing himself as the best hockey player in the world is win the Stanley Cup. He knows he can't do that in October, when the NHL playoffs feel like they are a lifetime away.

"There's 82 full games before you can get back to the same position," Edmonton's captain said. "This is a marathon."

This next march to the playoffs that begins Oct. 10 could be much different than last year, when the Boston Bruins broke the record for the best regular season and lost in the first round. The Stanley Cup resides in Sin City for now after the Vegas Golden Knights went through McDavid's Oilers and the Florida

Panthers who vanquished Boston to win it all — and they will have a host of hungry challengers.

Matthew Tkachuk, the heart and soul of the Panthers who played with a broken sternum in the final, doesn't buy what he called the "myth" that the regular season doesn't matter. After all, only 16 of 32 teams get to keep playing beyond mid-April.

"You've got to get in the playoffs," Tkachuk said. "But I think what's more important than that is you've got to be playing your best hockey at the right time."

That was the prevailing lesson after the banged-up Bruins fell "woefully short" of their goal, in the words of their general manager, Don Sweeney, and the Panthers came just

three wins short of the Cup after losing 28 of their first 41 games and being the last team to qualify in the Eastern Conference.

Florida's experience isn't an endorsement of slacking at the start of the year, something the Washington Capitals learned from their playoff streak ending. And coaches and players are still focused on starting strong with an eye on the long, twisting road to the postseason.

"You've got to build your game," Oilers star Leon Draisaitl said. "You got to get off to a good start and build your game from there on in segments or in months — however you shape it ... and continue to get better throughout the year."

Look no further than Vegas for that blueprint. Despite

needing five different goaltenders and 30 skaters during the season, the Golden Knights finished atop the Western Conference to shore up home-ice advantage when it mattered most.

They went 9-3 on The Strip in the first title run in franchise history and again look like top contenders, armed with experience and with the vast majority of their roster back to try to repeat.

"That would be my goal every year, to go into the year with the expectation to be competing for the Stanley Cup," Vegas coach Bruce Cassidy said. "That's our first goal: to keep building games to give ourselves a chance to get there. Once you're there, I don't want to say wide open, but to a certain extent, it is wide open."

Mahomes steps up as Chiefs hold on to beat Vikings

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Though Patrick Mahomes and the defending Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs have had plenty of scares already, they've lost just one game, by one point.

The frightening part for the rest of the NFL is what they might look like once they hit their stride.

Mahomes threw two touchdown passes in the third quarter, one to Travis Kelce after the All-Pro tight end had left the game with an ankle injury, and the Chiefs beat the Minnesota Vikings 27-20 on Sunday.

Mahomes went 31-for-41 for 281 yards and no turnovers in his most efficient performance of the season for the Chiefs (4-1), who once again won while not at their best.

Kirk Cousins threw for scores to Jordan Addison and Alexander Mattison for the Vikings (1-4). They had two chances at the tying touchdown in the final five minutes, but a late hamstring injury to star wide receiver Justin Jefferson and a lack of timeouts from earlier mismanagement of the game were ultimately too much to overcome.

49ers 42, Cowboys 10: Brock Purdy threw three of his four touchdown passes to George Kittle and host San Francisco ex-

tended its dominance over Dallas.

The Niners led 14-0 before the Cowboys (3-2) got their initial first down and were never really threatened on the way to matching a franchise record with their 15th straight regular-season win and earning their fifth 5-0 start.

Saints 34, Patriots 0: Alvin Kamara rushed for a touchdown, Derek Carr had two scoring passes and visiting New Orleans routed New England.

Tyrann Mathieu added a 27-yard interception return for a touchdown to help New Orleans (3-2) chase Patriots quarterback Mac Jones from the game — the second straight week coach Bill Belichick benched Jones in the second half.

Lions 42, Panthers 24: Jared Goff threw three touchdown passes in the first half and ran for a score in the fourth quarter, and host Detroit kept Carolina winless.

The NFC North-leading Lions (4-1) are alone atop the division in October or later for the first time since 2016.

Steelers 17, Ravens 10: Kenny Pickett hit George Pickens for a 41-yard touchdown with 1:17 remaining, and host Pittsburgh rallied past Baltimore.

Eagles 23, Rams 14: Jalen Hurts passed for 303 yards and a touchdown and rushed

for 72 yards and another score, and visiting Philadelphia outlasted Los Angeles to remain unbeaten.

Bengals 34, Cardinals 20: Joe Burrow threw three touchdown passes to Ja'Marr Chase, who finished with a season-high 192 yards receiving, and visiting Cincinnati beat Arizona.

Dolphins 31, Giants 16: Rookie DeVon Achane ran for a 76-yard touchdown, Tyreek Hill surpassed 150 yards receiving for the third time this season, and host Miami beat New York 0.

Jets 31, Broncos 21: Breece Hall ran for a 72-yard touchdown, Bryce Hall had a 39-yard, game-sealing scoop-and-score and visiting New York beat Denver.

Falcons 21, Texans 19: Desmond Ridder passed and ran for touchdowns, providing an answer to those who had called for him to be benched, Younghoe Koo kicked a go-ahead 37-yard field goal as time expired and host Atlanta beat Houston to snap a two-game skid.

Colts 23, Titans 16: Zack Moss upstaged the return of Jonathan Taylor by running for a career-high 165 yards and two scores, and Gardner Minshew was sharp in relief of the injured Anthony Richardson to lead host Indianapolis past Tennessee.

Rangers beat O's, move to brink of advancing

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — Bruce Bochy is rolling through another postseason where everything he tries seems to work.

Mitch Garver hit a third-inning grand slam in his first appearance of these playoffs, and the Texas Rangers won their fourth consecutive game to start the postseason, pushing the Baltimore Orioles to the brink of elimination with an 11-8 victory in Game 2 of the AL Division Series on Sunday.

The wild-card Rangers have outscored the Orioles and Tampa Bay—the top two teams in the American League in the regular season—by 25-11. Bochy moved within one win of his first AL Championship Series as a manager. He reached that round four times in the National League, winning three World Series titles with San Francisco.

“It’s kind of hard to read the emotion on him because sometimes he looks like he’s folded up in a lawn chair sitting there

watching the game,” Garver said. “But, yes, we trust his decisions and the way he manages the game.”

Gunnar Henderson and Aaron Hicks homered for the AL East champion Orioles, who haven’t been swept in a series of at least two games since May 2022. They’re now in danger of doing that at a most inopportune time.

Hicks drove in five runs, including a three-run shot with one out in the ninth. But it was too little, too late.

Texas fell behind for the first time this postseason when the Orioles scored two runs in the first, but the Rangers answered with five in the second to knock out rookie Grayson Rodriguez. Garver, a backup catcher who hadn’t played yet in the 2023 playoffs, hit his grand slam for a 9-2 lead.

“He can hit, and he’s done a great job this year for us,” Bochy said. “So gave him the start today. Got a pitch he could handle.

He’s got big power, and that’s big at that point in the game. Really was the difference in the game.”

Garver came up again with the bases loaded in the fifth but hit into a double play. Even that brought home another run.

Garver was in the lineup as the designated hitter because it was “just time to get him out there” — to quote Bochy pregame. He hit .270 with 19 home runs in 87 games this year.

The 68-year-old manager was rewarded for that move, and there were plenty of other contributors for the Rangers.

Corey Seager became the first player to walk five times in a postseason game and scored twice. Baltimore pitchers walked 11, their most in a game since 2019, and six of those runners scored.

Texas became the first team in postseason history with seven hits and seven walks through three innings, according to Sportradar.

“It’s a good offense, and it’s

been a really good offense all year, but we also walked 11 of them,” Baltimore manager Brandon Hyde said. “You’re not doing yourself any favors by putting that much traffic out there.”

Neither starting pitcher made it through the fifth. Cody Bradford got the win in relief of Jordan Montgomery, tossing 3⅓ scoreless innings.

Rodriguez took the loss. He was one of baseball’s top prospects at the beginning of the season and posted a 2.58 ERA after the All-Star break, but he allowed five runs, six hits and four walks Sunday.

Down 9-2, the Orioles scored twice in the fourth on Jorge Mateo’s RBI single and Ryan Mountcastle’s sacrifice fly. Henderson’s solo homer in the fifth made it 10-5.

Baltimore has lost seven straight postseason games. The Orioles were swept by Kansas City in the 2014 ALCS, then dropped a winner-take-all game at Toronto as a wild card in 2016.

Correa stars against ex-team, Twins top Astros to even series

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Carlos Correa was back at Minute Maid Park, starring in the playoffs like he had so many times before.

Only this time he was wearing a different uniform.

Correa had three hits and three RBIs and Pablo López pitched seven shutout innings, helping the Minnesota Twins beat the Houston Astros 6-2 on Sunday night in Game 2 of their AL Division Series.

Kyle Farmer hit a two-run homer for the Twins, who bounced back nicely after losing 6-4 in the series opener on Saturday night.

Game 3 of the best-of-five series is Tuesday at Minnesota.

Correa, an October star for so many years in Houston, is back in the playoffs after Minnesota stumbled last year in his first season with the Twins. And he is relishing his return to his favorite time of the year.

“It worked as motivation for me to, one, never miss it again and, two, be in the spotlight once again and be able to deliver for my team and feel that passion and love that I

feel for this game and for winning,” Correa said.

Correa hit an RBI double in the first inning in Game 2. He added a two-run single to center in the fifth, lifting the Twins to a 5-0 lead. He also robbed Jeremy Peña of a hit with a terrific diving stop for the final out.

Correa has eight hits and four RBIs in four games this postseason, helping the Twins to three playoff wins.

He admitted that his big game Sunday was even more special because it came against the Astros.

“I would be lying if I said no,” he said. “It’s cool when you do it against your former team. But at the same time, the ultimate goal is for us to win the series. I’m focused on bringing a championship to Minnesota.”

Manager Rocco Baldelli raved about Correa’s performance.

“We’ve always heard all of the sayings and things, when the lights come on and the bright lights, there are some guys, they’re giants in the light, and he’s one of them,” he said. “That’s what he is. He’s always an excellent player, but when it matters most, it’s

like he can really take his attention and channel it and focus it and just play even better over and over again.”

López pitched a gem after leading the Twins to the victory in Game 1 of the Wild Card Series. He yielded six hits and struck out seven while lowering his ERA to 0.71 this postseason.

He kept the Astros off balance with a fastball that averaged 95.9 MPH, slightly up from his season average.

“We knew that today’s game was extremely, extremely important after losing the first one,” he said. “We came up with a good plan. We still wanted to be aggressive.”

Yordan Alvarez, who homered twice in Houston’s win in Game 1, cut the lead to 6-2 with a two-run shot in the eighth inning. But Jhoan Duran pitched a perfect ninth for Minnesota.

The victory gave the Twins a jolt of confidence before they head back home.

“We’re in the driver’s seat right now,” center fielder Michael A. Taylor said. “Honestly, we just believe in ourselves.”

'Dinger plays spoiler with Roval win

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — AJ Allmendinger isn't racing for a NASCAR championship and knew very well that Kyle Busch's entire season rested on the outcome of Sunday's playoff elimination race.

Busch could only stave off elimination by winning on The Roval at Charlotte Motor Speedway.

Allmendinger figured he knows Busch well enough that Busch would understand if Allmendinger raced for the win.

Allmendinger spoiled NASCAR's playoffs by refusing to cede track position even though he's not part of the championship field. Back in the Cup Series full time for the first time since 2018, Allmendinger led 46 laps for Kaulig Racing to win for the first time in NASCAR's top series since Indianapolis in 2021.

"I knew Kyle had to win. I kept looking up at the board to see where he was points-wise," Allmendinger said. "Kyle has been fantastic to me my whole career. I knew he was going to race hard.

I knew what he was racing for."

Busch, the two-time series champion who had to win Sunday to advance to the round of eight, gave it a few tries but couldn't get into second place — William Byron finished second — and Busch settled for third.

Busch was uncharacteristically optimistic after elimination and said he'll try to win each of the final four races.

"I would love to be the spoiler. That would be fun," Busch said. "We've got our work cut out for us, but we'll keep building."

Also eliminated was Ross Chastain, last year's title runner-up, 2012 champion Brad Keselowski and Bubba Wallace, whose first playoff appearance ended in the round of 12 on his 30th birthday with 23XI Racing co-owner Michael Jordan watching from Wallace's pit stand.

"We weren't supposed to be here, according to a lot of people, but we proved them wrong and then proved a lot of people in the garage wrong that you can't really count on the 23 at a road

course race," said Wallace, who finished 16th. "Got to continue to work. I don't think we're a winning car yet, but we're light years from where we were a few races ago."

It was a brutal day for Chevrolet, which lost both popular Chastain of Trackhouse Racing and a resurgent Busch, who won three times in his first season driving for Richard Childress Racing. He's been a boost to the organization, which won its last championship in 1994 with the late Dale Earnhardt.

"First year at RCR, means a lot to me for Richard having me and for the Chevy guys having me, everybody, to get this far," Busch said. "Rides on me to get to the next round, so I've just got to do a better job."

Keselowski knocked a Ford team out, while Toyota lost a championship chance with Wallace.

Moving on

The remaining eight drivers in the championship race are led by Byron and Ryan Blaney, who

both won in the three-race round of 12 to earn automatic berths into the next three races.

Denny Hamlin advanced in a Toyota for Joe Gibbs Racing, as did Tyler Reddick, who drives for Hamlin and Jordan at 23XI Racing. Christopher Bell and Martin Truex Jr., the regular-season champion, advanced with Hamlin for Gibbs to get three cars through.

Kyle Larson drove a backup car to a 13th-place finish to join Byron, who has a series-best six wins this season, representing Hendrick Motorsports and Chevrolet in the next round.

Ford has Blaney of Team Penske and Chris Buescher of RFK Racing, which didn't advance Keselowski through but still has one driver racing for the championship.

Hamlin had already locked himself into the round of eight earlier in the race via stage points, so his last-place finish Sunday was irrelevant.

"We've already shifted our focus to Vegas and we'll see what we can do there," Hamlin said.

Young, Plum help Aces whip Liberty in Finals opener

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Whether it was Chelsea Gray on her 31st birthday orchestrating the offense, Jackie Young knocking down three-pointers or Kelsey Plum driving to the basket, Las Vegas' guards helped deliver an emphatic Game 1 victory Sunday in the WNBA Finals.

They combined to score 72 points to hand the New York Liberty a 99-82 defeat before a boisterous sellout crowd.

Young — who made five three-pointers — and Plum each scored 26 points, and Gray had 20 points and nine assists.

"It's kind of like Jackie and (Plum) are doing this really hard work, and then the ball goes in to Chelsea and it's just

dicing everything," Aces coach Becky Hammon said. "It was a really nice combination. Our trio of guards were pretty ridiculous."

Add in A'ja Wilson's 19 points, and the Aces got all but eight points from four players, but the Liberty were always going to have the superior depth over a Las Vegas team that is using a six-player rotation.

Five New York players scored in double figures. This season's league MVP, Breanna Stewart, led the Liberty with 21 points, Jonquel Jones totaled 16 points and 10 rebounds and Marine Johannes came off the bench to score 14.

Johannes, however, was shut out in the second half when the

Aces began sending double teams her way. Las Vegas also held Sabrina Ionescu, who entered averaging 16.3 points in the playoffs, to seven points for the game.

"Their defense was as good as I've ever seen it," New York coach Sandy Brondello said. "We've got to play with better poise and we can exploit it the next time."

Game 2 of the best-of-five series is Wednesday in Las Vegas, and the Liberty were in a similar situation after losing Game 1 of their semifinal series to the Connecticut Sun by 15 points. New York then won the next three games to advance to the championship round.

"We can obviously learn a lot

from this and we can play better," Brondello said. "That's what we have to remember. We haven't lost two in a row all season long, and we're going to know that we responded the right way. I trust these players."

In one of the most anticipated Finals in recent memory with three WNBA MVPs, this game instead played out like the regular-season meetings between the teams in which the closest outcome was nine points.

The Aces made sure to turn it into another one-sided game by going on an 11-2 run that turned a 67-63 advantage late in the third quarter into a 78-65 lead early in the fourth. Las Vegas led by as much as 94-72 with 3:32 remaining.