

NYC, big firms take hard line on vaccines

Associated Press

New York City, Microsoft, Tyson Foods and the U.S. auto industry joined a cascading number of state and local governments and major employers Tuesday that are taking a hard line against both the surging delta variant and the holdouts who have yet to get vaccinated.

“The goal here is to convince everyone that this is the time. If we’re going to stop the delta variant, the time is now. And that means getting vaccinated right now,” Mayor Bill de Blasio said in announcing that New York will demand people show proof of COVID-19 vaccination at indoor restaurants, shows and gyms.

The hard-line measure — the first such step taken by a big U.S. city — goes into effect in mid-August. Vaccination cards or state and city apps will be accepted as proof of inoculation.

Meanwhile, meat and poultry giant Tyson Foods said it will require all of its approximately 120,000 U.S. employees to get the shot over the next three months. Microsoft will demand that its roughly 100,000 U.S. employees — as well as visitors and others — show proof of vaccination starting in September.

And an estimated 150,000 unionized workers at the big three U.S. automakers will have to go back to wearing masks starting Wednesday, while nonunion Toyota, with a U.S. workforce of about 36,000, said it will do likewise at most of its sites across the country.

In a surge driven by the highly contagious mutant version of the virus, COVID-19 cases across the United States have increased sixfold over the past month to an average of more than 85,000 per day, a level not seen since mid-February. Deaths have

climbed over the past two weeks from an average of 254 per day to 386. Florida has more people now in the hospital with COVID-19 than at any other time during the outbreak — over 11,500. Louisiana reported an all-time high of more than 2,100 hospital patients with the virus, most of them unvaccinated.

Amid the growing alarm over the way the virus is storming back, vaccinations across the country have begun to tick up slightly in recent weeks, reaching more than a half-million per day on average, but are still far below the peak of 3.4 million per day in April.

Seventy percent of the nation’s adults have received at least one shot, and nearly 61% are fully vaccinated — well short of where President Joe Biden wanted the U.S. to be by this point.

Experts say the vaccine is still highly effective at pre-

venting serious illness and death from the delta variant.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, a Republican, doubled down Tuesday as the state again broke its record for COVID-19 hospitalizations, insisting that the spike will ease soon and that he will not impose any business restrictions or mask mandates. He encouraged people to get vaccinated.

“We are not shutting down,” DeSantis said. “We are going to have schools open. We are protecting every Floridian’s job in this state. We are protecting people’s small businesses.”

Biden endorsed New York City’s move while criticizing policies in states like Florida and Texas — both led by Republicans — that block mask or vaccine requirements.

“If you’re not going to help, at least get out of the way of people trying to do the right thing,” Biden said.

Navy: Dropping photos for promotions hurt diversity

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy could include service photos in promotion packages again after data suggested minorities are less likely to be selected blindly in some situations by promotion review boards, the service’s chief of personnel said Tuesday.

Diversity among leadership dropped after photos were removed last year from Navy promotion packages, Vice Adm. John Nowell said during a panel discussion on diversity and inclusion at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space conference.

“I think we should consider reinstating photos in selection boards,” he said. “We look at, for instance, the one-star board over the last five years, and we can show you where, as you look at diversity, it went down

with photos removed.”

Former Defense Secretary Mark Esper directed all services in July 2020 to eliminate photos from promotion and selection boards to support diversity in the ranks. But Nowell said adding them back could do more to build a more diverse leadership force.

“It’s a meritocracy, we’re only going to pick the best of the best, but we’re very clear with our language to boards that we want them to consider diversity across all areas,” he said. “Therefore ... I think having a clear picture just makes it easier.”

The Marine Corps is also “looking at reinstating the photos,” Brig. Gen. A.T. Williamson, director of the service’s manpower plans and policy division, said during the panel discussion.

“There are elements of the photo that are ... very helpful for us. I think that we may find that we may have disadvantaged individuals by removing those photos from the boards.”

Williamson said there was an “assumption that there’s bias in the boardroom,” but a recent review of the Marine Corps’ promotion board process by the Department of the Navy’s office for diversity, equity and inclusion found that’s likely untrue.

The comments come as the Defense Department works to address extremism and promote diversity in the military. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has spoken “very publicly that at the senior leaders’ level, we are not as diverse as the rest of the force,” Chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday.

NY Assembly mulls impeachment of Cuomo

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York's legislative leaders signaled Wednesday that Gov. Andrew Cuomo could swiftly face an impeachment trial if he doesn't resign, while a growing number of prosecutors also eyed investigative findings that he sexually harassed at least 11 women.

Cuomo denied that he made any inappropriate sexual advances and insisted the findings, released Tuesday, didn't reflect the facts. But while political pressure grew, so did the potential for criminal charges against the third-term Democratic governor.

District attorneys in Manhattan, suburban Westchester County and the state capital of Albany said they have asked for investigative materials from the inquiry, led by Democratic state Attorney General Letitia James.

The nearly five-month, non-criminal investigation, overseen by New York's attorney general and led by two outside lawyers, concluded that 11 women from within and outside state government were telling the truth when they said Cuomo had touched them inappropriately, commented on their appearance or made suggestive comments about their sex lives.

The investigation's findings, detailed in a 165-page public report, turn up the pressure on

the 63-year-old governor, who just a year ago was widely hailed for his steady leadership during the darkest days of the COVID-19 crisis, even writing a book about it.

Assembly Democrats, who lead the chamber, debated for hours Tuesday about whether to impeach the governor now, wait to see whether he resigns, or give the Assembly Judiciary Committee time to wrap up its investigation into topics from sexual misconduct to the Cuomo administration's obfuscation of the total number of nursing home residents who died from COVID-19.

If the Assembly votes to impeach Cuomo, the state Senate could launch an impeachment trial "in weeks," Deputy Majority Leader Mike Gianaris told The Associated Press.

Gianaris, a Democrat, said the chamber has been preparing for a potential impeachment trial for months.

"We'll be ready to go if and when the impeachment articles are sent over," he said. "It could happen very quickly."

The 150-member Assembly would need 76 votes to impeach Cuomo and send articles of impeachment to the Senate. The Assembly includes 106 Democrats, 43 Republicans and one Independent.

At least two dozen Assembly Democrats

called for impeachment in public statements issued Tuesday, according to a tally compiled by The Associated Press. Some said the Assembly should vote for impeachment now, while others said the chamber should impeach Cuomo if he doesn't resign.

Assembly Republican Leader Will Barclay urged Speaker Carl Heastie, a Democrat, to convene an emergency special session to vote to impeach Cuomo.

James' investigation, conducted by two outside lawyers, painted what she called "a deeply disturbing yet clear picture" of a governor who touched or made sexually inappropriate comments to a series of women, many of whom worked for him. One is state trooper whom Cuomo successfully sought to have assigned to his security detail.

While many of the allegations against Cuomo involve verbal comments, some women have also alleged that he gave them unwanted kisses or touches. One aide said the governor reached under her shirt and groped her breast at the governor's mansion in Albany.

The governor denied Tuesday that he ever inappropriately touched anyone, said that he never intended harm and cast doubt on the political motivations of investigators, accusers and critics.

CDC issues new eviction moratorium through Oct. 3

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued a new eviction moratorium that would last until Oct. 3, as the Biden administration sought to quell intensifying criticism from progressives that it was allowing vulnerable renters to lose their homes during a pandemic.

The ban announced Tuesday could help keep millions in their homes as the coronavirus' delta variant has spread and states have been slow to release federal rental aid. It would temporarily halt evictions in counties with "substantial and high levels" of virus transmissions and would cover areas where 90% of the U.S. population lives.

The announcement was a reversal for the Biden administration, which allowed an earlier moratorium to lapse over the weekend after saying a Supreme Court ruling prevented an extension. That ripped open a dramatic split between the White House and progressive Democrats who insisted the administration do more to prevent some 3.6 million

Americans from losing their homes during the COVID-19 crisis.

Speaking at the White House on Tuesday, Biden said he pushed the CDC to again consider its options. But he still seemed hesitant as to whether the new moratorium could withstand lawsuits about its constitutionality, saying he has sought the opinions of experts as to whether the Supreme Court would approve the measure.

"The bulk of the constitutional scholarship says that it's not likely to pass constitutional muster," Biden said. "But there are several key scholars who think that it may and it's worth the effort."

The president added that the moratorium — even if it gets challenged in court — "will probably give some additional time" for states and city to release billions of dollars in federal relief to renters.

Politically, the extension could help heal a rift with liberal Democratic lawmakers who were calling on the president to take executive action to keep renters in their homes. The administration had spent the past several

days scrambling to reassure Democrats and the country that it could find a way to limit the damage from potential evictions through the use of federal aid.

But pressure mounted as key lawmakers said it was not enough.

Top Democratic leaders joined Rep. Cori Bush, D-Mo., who has been camped outside the U.S. Capitol for several days. The freshman congresswoman once lived in her car as a young mother and pointed to that experience to urge the White House to prevent widespread evictions.

As she wiped her eyes before a crowd at the Capitol after the CDC's announcement, Bush said she was shedding "joyful tears."

"My God, I don't believe we did this," she said. "We just did the work, just by loving folks to keep millions in their homes."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said it was a day of "extraordinary relief."

"The imminent fear of eviction and being put out on the street has been lifted for countless families across America. Help is Here!" Pelosi said in a statement.

Hot, gusty weather could worsen wildfires

Associated Press

GREENVILLE, Calif. — Thousands of firefighters have prepared for a tougher fight against California's largest wildfire as extremely dangerous weather returns, threatening to stoke flames into explosive growth.

Firefighters were able to save homes and hold large stretches of the blaze, but a red flag warning was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon through Thursday because of hot, bone-dry conditions with winds up to 40 mph. That could drive flames through timber, brush and grass, especially along the northern and northeastern sides of the vast wildfire.

"I think we definitely have a few hard days ahead of us," said Shannon Prather with the U.S. Forest Service.

The Dixie Fire jumped perimeter lines in a few spots Tuesday, prompting additional evacuation orders for some 15,000 people, fire officials said.

Firefighters prevented flames on Monday from reaching homes in the small Northern California community of Greenville near the Plumas National Forest as the 3-week-old fire grew to over 395 square miles across Plumas and Butte counties.

On Tuesday, spot fires jumped some of the perimeters and burned several acres of brush on the western side of the blaze, even though crews had cut back areas of unburned fuel with bulldozers and dumped some 230,000 gallons of fire retardant, said Mike Wink, a state fire operations section chief.

Heat from the flames also created a pyrocumulus cloud, a massive column of smoke that rose 30,000 feet in the air, he said.

The fire has threatened thousands of homes and destroyed 67 houses and other buildings since breaking out July 14. It was 35% contained.

About 150 miles west of Califor-

nia's Dixie Fire, the lightning-sparked McFarland Fire threatened remote homes along the Trinity River in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. The fire was only 5% contained. It was burning fiercely through drought-stricken vegetation and had doubled in size every day, fire officials warned.

Similar risky weather was expected across Southern California, where heat advisories and warnings were issued for interior valleys, mountains and deserts for much of the week.

Heat waves and historic drought tied to climate change have made wildfires harder to fight in the American West. Scientists say climate change has made the region much warmer and drier in the past 30 years and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

More than 20,000 firefighters and support personnel were bat-

ting 97 large, active wildfires covering 2,919 square miles in 13 U.S. states, the National Interagency Fire Center said.

Montana had 25 active large blazes, followed by Idaho with 21 and Oregon with 13. California had 11.

In Hawaii, firefighters gained control over the 62-square-mile Nation Fire that forced thousands of people to evacuate over the weekend and destroyed at least two homes on the Big Island.

In southern Oregon, lightning struck parched forests hundreds of times in a 24-hour period, igniting 50 new wildfires. But firefighters and aircraft attacked the flames before they spread out of control and no homes were immediately threatened.

Meanwhile, Oregon's Bootleg Fire, the nation's largest at 647 square miles, was 84% contained and firefighters were busy mopping up hot spots and strengthening fire lines.

Police officer fatally stabbed at Pentagon was Army vet

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The police officer killed Tuesday at the Pentagon bus platform was an Army veteran who had only been with the force for three years, according to the Pentagon Force Protection Agency.

Officer George Gonzalez was working at 10:37 a.m. when Austin William Lanz, 27, attacked and stabbed him at the Metrobus platform outside the Pentagon, The Associated Press reported. Lanz was shot and killed by other police officers who responded to the scene.

Details of the attack remained unclear Wednesday as the FBI continues to investigate. No motive has been reported. The Pentagon also declined to provide Gonzalez's age or job duty on Wednesday, citing the ongoing

investigation.

Gonzalez, a Brooklyn native, joined the Pentagon's police force in July 2018 after serving at the Federal Bureau of Prisons and Transportation Security Administration. He served in the Army, earning the Army Commendation Medal while serving in Iraq. He was promoted twice during his time with the Pentagon Force Protection Agency and attained the rank of senior officer in 2020, according to an agency statement. He was "gregarious" and "well-liked and respected by his fellow officers," the agency said.

Lanz was facing several criminal charges from April in Cobb County, Ga., including a count of making a terrorist threat, the AP reported Wednesday. He was out of jail on a \$30,000 bond.

It remains unclear why Lanz was at the Pentagon.

Trump-backed Carey, centrist Democrat win Ohio primaries

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Mike Carey, a coal lobbyist backed by former President Donald Trump, beat a bevy of Republicans in central Ohio, while Cuyahoga County Council member Shontel Brown pulled out a victory for the Democratic establishment in Cleveland, in a pair of primary elections for open House seats Tuesday.

The special elections were both viewed as a measure of voters' influences, though low turnout and huge candidate fields complicated interpreting the results too broadly. In both races, party leaders showed they still held sway.

Carey's race reinforced Trump's status as GOP kingmaker, particularly after the former president's preferred candidate lost a special election in Texas last week. Brown's primary win over progressive Nina Turner handed another blow to a liberal wing that

has been challenging the Democratic old guard with a more confrontational style.

Turner, a leading national voice for Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns, was for many months the best known and most visible among 13 Democrats running in the primary and the choice of Sanders, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others. But Brown, a centrist backed by Hillary Clinton, the Congressional Black Caucus and leading unions, prevailed after a surge in national attention to her campaign in the weeks leading up to the election.

Carey defeated a crowd of candidates in his Columbus-area race. Trump celebrated Carey's win Tuesday in a statement.

"Thank you to Ohio and all of our wonderful American patriots," he said. "Congratulations to Mike and his family. He will never let you down!"

Turkey won't shoulder new Afghan refugees

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Turkey's foreign ministry has called the United States "irresponsible" after the Biden administration announced it would expand efforts to assist at-risk Afghan citizens with the major caveat that the adjudication process would take months in a third country.

Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tanju Bilgic said Wednesday that the U.S. statement had suggested Turkey as an application spot "without

consultation." He said Turkey does not have the capacity to shoulder another migration crisis.

"The U.S. may directly transport these people by plane. Turkey will not take over the international responsibilities of third countries," Bilgic said and added Turkey would not allow its laws to be abused by other countries. He said the U.S. announcement would trigger a major refugee crisis.

Turkey is already hosting

some 3.7 million Syrians who fled the civil war there. Afghans have also fled to Turkey to escape their country's war and instability. Media reports from border towns with Iran show the number of Afghans crossing into Turkey are on the rise.

The State Department on Monday said it is widening the scope of Afghans eligible for refugee status in the U.S. to include current and former employees of U.S.-based news organizations, U.S.-based aid

and development agencies and other relief groups that receive U.S. funding. Current and former employees of the U.S. government and the NATO military operation who don't meet the criteria for a dedicated program for such workers are also covered.

But applicants must leave Afghanistan to begin the adjudication process that may take 12-14 months in a third country, and the U.S. does not intend to support their departures or stays there.

Hijackers leave British vessel off of UAE coast

Associated Press

FUJAIRAH, United Arab Emirates — The hijackers who captured a vessel off the coast of the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf of Oman departed the targeted ship on Wednesday, the British navy reported, as recorded radio traffic appeared to reveal a crew member onboard saying Iranian gunmen had stormed the asphalt tanker.

The incident — described by the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations the night before as a "potential hijack" — revived fears of an escalation in Mideast waters and ended with as much mystery as it began.

Hints of what unfolded on the Panama-flagged asphalt tanker, called Asphalt Princess, began to emerge with the mar-

itime radio recording, obtained by commodities pricing firm Argus Media and shared with The Associated Press. In the audio, a crew member can be heard telling the Emirati coast guard that five or six armed Iranians had boarded the tanker.

"Iranian people are onboard with ammunition," the crew member says. "We are ... now, drifting. We cannot tell you exact our ETA to (get to) Sohar," the port in Oman listed on the vessel's tracker as its destination. It was not clear whether the crew members, whom he identified as Indian and Indonesian, were in immediate danger.

No one took responsibility for the brief seizure, which underscored mounting tensions as Iran and the United States

seek a resolution to their standoff over Tehran's tattered 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Apparently responding to the incident, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Tuesday denied that Iran played any role. He described the recent maritime attacks in the Persian Gulf as "completely suspicious."

Rising tensions have played out in the waters of the Persian Gulf in recent years, where just last week a drone attack on an oil tanker linked to an Israeli billionaire off the coast of Oman killed two crew members. The West blamed Iran for the raid, which marked the first known fatal assault in the yearslong shadow war targeting vessels in Mideast waters. Iran also denied involvement.

China seals city, punishes leaders amid COVID-19 outbreak

Associated Press

BEIJING — China's worst coronavirus outbreak since the start of the pandemic a year and a half ago escalated Wednesday with dozens more cases around the country, the sealing-off of one city and the punishment of its local leaders.

Since that initial outbreak was tamed last year, China's people had lived virtually free of the virus, with extremely strict border controls and local distancing and quarantine measures stamping out scat-

tered, small flareups when they occurred.

Now, the country is on high alert as an outbreak of cases connected to the international airport in the eastern city of Nanjing touched at least 17 provinces. China reported 71 new cases of COVID-19 from local transmission Wednesday, more than half of them in coastal Jiangsu province, of which Nanjing is the capital.

In Wuhan, the central city where the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in late

2019, mass testing has shown some of its newly reported cases have a high degree of similarity to cases discovered in Jiangsu province. Those cases have been identified as being caused by the highly transmissible delta variant that first was identified in India.

Meanwhile, another COVID-19 hot spot was emerging in the city of Zhangjiajie, near a scenic area famous for sandstone cliffs, caves, forests and waterfalls that inspired the on-

screen landscape in the "Avatar" films. The city ordered residential communities sealed Sunday, preventing people from leaving their homes. In a subsequent order on Tuesday, officials said no one, whether tourist or resident, could leave the city.

The city government's Communist Party disciplinary committee on Wednesday issued a list of local officials who "had a negative impact" on pandemic prevention and control work who would be punished.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Iceberg wall collapse at Titanic Museum hurts 3

TN PIGEON FORGE — The iceberg wall at the Titanic Museum Attraction in Tennessee collapsed and injured three guests, the museum's owners said.

Those harmed were taken to the hospital with unspecified injuries, Mary Kellogg Joslyn and John Joslyn wrote on the attraction's Facebook page.

The ship-shaped museum closed after the collapse but reopened for those with tickets the next day, according to a post. The owners said the affected area has been blocked off, and they estimate it will take at least four weeks for the iceberg wall to be rebuilt.

Visitors can see more than 400 Titanic artifacts, shovel "coal" in the boiler room and feel 28-degree water through self-guided tours, according to the attraction's website.

Utilities blame 'flushable wipes' for clogged pipes

AL MOBILE — Alabama utility operators are trying to discourage the state's residents from believing the claims of "flushable wipes," asking people not to throw them away in the toilet.

The utilities are blaming the wipes for clogging pipes and causing backups of raw sewage overflow.

"There is no such thing as a flushable wipe. There never has been such thing as a flushable wipe," Jessica Walker, spokesperson for the city of Fairhope, which operates its own municipal sewer system, told AL.com.

Utilities say the wipes congeal with grease and other cooking fats that are also sent improperly through sewer systems, creating a

waste combination that blocks pumps and pipes and become a major cause of sewer backups and overflows into waterways.

Iconic cable cars are running again

CA SAN FRANCISCO — San Francisco's iconic cable cars were rolling and ringing their bells on the city's hills again after being sidelined for 16 months by the pandemic.

At Powell and Market, one of the cable car's stops, a line of people snaked around waiting to ride a car to Ghirardelli Square or Fisherman's Wharf.

"Our cable cars are part of what makes San Francisco a world-class destination, and their return is just the latest sign that our city is bouncing back," said San Francisco Mayor London Breed.

Breed said it will be free to ride the cable cars in August and asked people to be patient because the service won't follow a regular schedule until September when the historic trolleys will resume full service on all three lines and start charging a riding fee.

Officer gets man to leave tracks just ahead of train

IN PORTER — A northwest Indiana man narrowly avoided being hit by an Amtrak train after a police officer yelled at him to get off some railroad tracks as the train hurtled toward him.

Brandon Seay, 25, of Porter, was arrested on public intoxication, unlawful use of a railroad right of way and other charges, police said.

A Porter police officer was responding to a report about an intoxicated man walking along railroad tracks when he spotted Seay lying on his back on a set of tracks as an Amtrak train quickly approached. The (Northwest Indi-

ana) Times reported.

The officer said he knew he wouldn't be able to reach Seay before the train hit him, but Seay jumped off the tracks at the last possible moment while clutching a six-pack container of wine coolers with only one bottle remaining.

Agency lists Sierra Nevada red fox as endangered

NV RENO — The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced it will list the Sierra Nevada red fox as an endangered species, estimating its population now totals fewer than 40 individuals in an area of California stretching from just south of Lake Tahoe to south of Yosemite National Park.

The agency said it decided against listing a distinct population segment of the foxes in the southern Cascade Range of Oregon. That includes a segment in Northern California near Lassen Peak.

It said the Sierra Nevada segment south of Tahoe "is in danger of extinction throughout all of its range."

Unruly air passenger facing multiple charges

SD RAPID CITY — A Florida woman faces multiple charges after police said they took her off a plane at the Rapid City Regional Airport for exposing herself and becoming unruly.

According to police, an officer at the airport was notified of a disruptive passenger who was exposing herself to others on the plane. The officer said he could smell that she had been drinking. The officer told the 41-year-old Daytona Beach Shores woman he would escort her off the plane.

Police said when she pulled

away and kicked the officer, additional officers arrived to take her out of the airport. She is facing charges of disorderly conduct, indecent exposure, assaulting a law enforcement officer and unlawful occupancy, the Rapid City Journal reported.

Teen gets stitches after likely shark bite

NC WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH — A 15-year-old visiting Wrightsville Beach needed more than a dozen stitches after he was bitten by what officials think was a shark, news outlets reported.

Town Manager Tim Owens said lifeguards and emergency personnel tended to the boy's injury after he walked out of the water.

No one got a good look at what bit the boy, but Wrightsville Beach Fire Department Chief Glen Rogers said they believe it was a shark. The doctor who tended to the teen believes the wound was likely caused by a small shark about three or four feet long, the teen's father, Ivan Nekrasov, said.

Some lake areas closed due to plague in animals

CA SOUTH LAKE TAHOE — Officials were closing some areas on the south shore of Lake Tahoe after some chipmunks tested positive for plague.

The Tahoe Daily Tribune reported that the Taylor Creek Visitor Center, Kiva Beach and their parking areas were off limits. While the areas are closed, the U.S. Forest Service will be conducting vector control treatments to those areas.

El Dorado County spokeswoman Carla Hass said the chipmunks that were tested had no contact with any people.

— From wire reports

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McLaughlin wins showdown in 400 hurdles

Associated Press

TOKYO — Sydney McLaughlin broke the world record. Dalilah Muhammad broke it, too.

Only one of the world's best hurdlers could win the Olympic gold medal — and McLaughlin came out ahead in the latest installment of the best rivalry in track.

The 21-year-old from New Jersey won the 400-meter hurdles title Wednesday, finishing in 51.46 seconds in yet another history-making day on the speedy Olympic oval.

"Iron sharpening iron," McLaughlin called the latest in her series of showdowns with Muhammad, each one faster than the last. "Every time we step on the track, it's always something fast."

McLaughlin came from behind after the last hurdle to top

the defending Olympic champion. Muhammad's time of 51.58 also beat McLaughlin's old record of 51.9, set at the Olympic trials in June. But in this race, it was only good enough for the silver.

For McLaughlin, it was a muted celebration — in part, because traversing 400 meters while clearing 10 hurdles at 17 miles-per-hour is more exhausting than she makes it look.

"There was some lactic" acid building up, she said.

She sat on the ground, gave a serious look toward the scoreboard — yep, it's a record ... again — then got up and moved toward the hand-sanitizing station. Muhammad came over and gave her a congratulatory hug. They'll meet again. World championships are next July.

"No mixed emotions," Mu-

hammad said. "Sure, there are always things you want to do better. But you use this as a springboard to the next. This is not my last race."

Impressive as McLaughlin's race was, this record didn't really surprise anyone.

McLaughlin and Muhammad, a New York City native who went to Southern Cal, have been trading the record, and the wins, for two years. Muhammad first broke the mark at U.S. Nationals in Des Moines, Iowa, in 2019, then lowered it to 52.16, at the world championships in Qatar.

McLaughlin broke that record earlier this summer at the Olympic trials, running 51.9 to become the first woman to crack 52 seconds.

It felt inevitable that the mark would go down again on a

fast track in perfect, hot-and-humid running conditions in Tokyo.

Only a day earlier, Norway's Karsten Warholm crushed his old world record in the men's 400 hurdles, finishing in 45.94. Runner-up Rai Benjamin's 46.17 also beat the old mark. Six runners in that race set national, continental or world records.

It was a lot to live up to for the M&M duo, whose race was even more eagerly anticipated. They exceeded expectations, and left everyone else in the race behind.

"I just went out like crazy for the first 300 to be with them," said bronze medalist Femke Bol of the Netherlands, who set a European record and whose time of 52.03 would've been a world record six weeks ago. "And I died a bit."

Passive Maroulis loses in wrestling semifinals

Associated Press

CHIBA, Japan — Helen Maroulis wishes she had a do-over.

Being too careful cost her a chance to become the first American woman to win two Olympic gold medals in freestyle wrestling. She lost to Risako Kawai of Japan 2-1 in the 57-kilogram semifinals on Wednesday.

Maroulis said she realized too late that she overestimated Kawai's attacking skills.

"I felt like I needed to be stronger in the position so that I could kind of impose my will, and I felt a little bit more like I was reacting to her," Maroulis said.

All three points in the match were scored for passivity — the first two against Maroulis and the last against Kawai.

More action was expected, given the resumes. Kawai was the 2016 Olympic gold medalist at 63kg and a three-time world

champion. Maroulis won Olympic gold at 53kg in 2016 when she stunned Saori Yoshida of Japan, a three-time Olympic gold medalist, in the final.

Kawai advanced to face Iryna Kurachkina of Belarus in the final.

Maroulis will wrestle Khongorzul Boldsaikhan of Mongolia or Fatoumata Yarie Camara of Guinea for bronze on Thursday. She could become the first U.S. woman to earn more than one Olympic medal in the sport.

David Taylor of the United States advanced to the final in the men's freestyle 86kg class. He won all three of his matches by technical superiority: 11-0 over Ali Shabanau of Belarus, 12-2 over American-born Myles Amine of San Marino and 10-0 over Deepak Punia of India.

American Thomas Gilman has a shot at a bronze in the freestyle men's 57kg class.

Canadian sprinter edges pair of Americans in 200

Associated Press

TOKYO — Perhaps the world's next sprint star wasn't so hard to find after all.

He's Andre De Grasse, the Canadian who ran his first sprint as a teen in baggy basketball shorts and borrowed spikes, and now has an Olympic gold medal in the 200 meters.

De Grasse powered past a pair of Americans — Kenny Bednarek and the favorite, Noah Lyles — to finish in 19.62 seconds Wednesday and take one of the titles that Usain Bolt had owned for the previous three Olympics.

It ends a string of close calls for the 26-year-old and fills out a medal collection that was only missing gold. De Grasse won bronze four nights earlier in the 100 to go with the third-place medal he took in that event in Rio de Janeiro. He also earned a silver medal in Rio in the 200, finishing behind Bolt.

Given all he's been through, it was no surprise when he revealed that he'd been crying behind the bronze — or were they gold — colored shades he wore for the race.

"It's my first time being so emotional on the track," De Grasse said. "I always thought I came up short winning bronze and silver, so it's just good to have that gold medal. No one can take that away from me."

Other gold medals on Day 6 of Olympic track went to:

■ Wojciech Nowicki in the hammer throw, which gave Poland a men's-women's sweep of those titles.

■ Emmanuel Korir in the 800, who was followed by Kenyan teammate Ferguson Rotich.

■ Peruth Chemutai of Uganda in the women's steeplechase.

Allyson Felix advanced into the final of the 400 meters.

US, 3 unbeatens set for men's hoops semis

Associated Press

SAITAMA, Japan — They believe they are the best basketball team at the Olympics, too good to consider anything but gold.

"If we do what we do well, we bring the intensity on defense, we play our roles but we're ourselves in our roles, we're free, we're the best players in the world," U.S. guard Zach LaVine said. "I don't think anybody's going to be able to beat us."

Australia and France already have this summer.

And Slovenia has beaten everyone it's ever played with Luka Doncic in the lineup.

So the semifinals might be as wide open as any time during the Americans' run of three straight titles. The U.S. is the only team left that has won Olympic gold, but the other three teams think this is their time.

"We're well experienced," Australia guard Patty Mills said. "We've been to this stage many a time and haven't crossed the line. But we've bottled those experiences up, and I think we're well prepared for this moment and for this stage to make the next step."

The U.S. plays Australia in the first semifinal Thursday at Saitama Super Arena, with a

victory assuring the Australians their first medal in men's basketball.

But they'd have to win again Saturday to get the one they believe is in reach.

"Our goal is the gold medal," guard Matthew Dellavedova said.

France faces Slovenia in the nightcap. The winners meet Saturday for gold.

The U.S. was beaten 91-83 by Australia in an exhibition game and fell to France 83-76 in the teams' Olympic opener. But the Americans, who didn't have their full roster for the game in Las Vegas, may have rounded

into top form.

They pulled away from Spain in the quarterfinals for a 95-81 victory, getting 29 points from Kevin Durant and improving to 3-0 since Jrue Holiday and Devin Booker joined the starting lineup after arriving on the eve of the tournament after the NBA Finals.

"I think the potential of this team is endless," forward Draymond Green said. "Unfortunately, we got two games left and so we need to make sure that we're continuing to get better each and every time we step on the floor, and I think that's what we've done."

Stewart leads US women into basketball semifinals

Associated Press

SAITAMA, Japan — Breanna Stewart and the U.S. women played their best basketball of the Tokyo Games, putting on a dominant performance that the team has been known for over the years en route to winning six consecutive Olympic gold medals.

The Seattle Storm star was a big reason why the Americans were so impressive, scoring 20 of her 23 points in the first half as the U.S. routed Australia 79-55 Wednesday in the quarterfinals.

"We wanted to come out and set the tone on both ends of the floor," Stewart said. "We haven't had great starts to the games so far. This is the quarterfinals, and it's win or go home."

The Americans will face Serbia on Friday in the semifinals looking to advance to their seventh consecutive gold medal game. The Serbians, who won the bronze medal in the 2016 Rio Games, rallied to beat China 77-70 in the quarterfinals.

For the first time since getting together about three weeks ago the U.S. looked like the team

that's won 53 consecutive games in the Olympics dating back to the 1992 Barcelona Games.

"Knockout rounds brings out a certain intensity about a team and that played a huge role in it," said Sue Bird, who had nine points and five assists. "It's do or die at this point. I do think we subtly have been taking steps in the right direction and getting better. We're trending in the right direction."

During the pool games the U.S. got off to slow starts, trailing after the first quarter in each contest. Stewart made sure that wouldn't happen against Australia. Trailing 5-2, she scored seven consecutive points to start a 19-1 run. The Americans led 26-12 after the opening quarter as Australia had 10 turnovers in the period.

"The way she did it inside-outside, she was unconscious," U.S. coach Dawn Staley said. "She took great shots and was efficient. We knew Stewie can score, but it was her defensive effort. She chased those guards around, something she doesn't do a whole lot."

Women's canoe 200 debuts with questions

Associated Press

TOKYO — The women's canoe sprint 200 made its Olympic debut on Wednesday with optimism about gender equity in the sport, and a nagging sense of skepticism about how one gold medal favorite got to Tokyo.

Laurence Vincent LaPointe of Canada, who dominated the event at the international level for nearly a decade, needed an embarrassing 2019 doping suspension overturned, and some maneuvering through the entry rules by Canadian Olympic officials to get to the Olympics.

But she's here now, and eyeing a likely showdown with American teenager Nevin Harrison, who was only 17 when she won the 2019 world championship when the Canadian was suspended.

Both cruised through their opening heats Wednesday to advance to Thursday's semifinals. The women's 200 is being raced at the Olympics for the first time in a push for gender equity.

"There are some people who are frustrated or so focused on themselves. ... Most of them seem

to be fine," Vincent Lapointe said of her presence at the Sea Forest Waterway. "But you know what? I proved that I could be here. I did everything in the last two years to make it here, and I think I deserve to be here. If someone is still mad, there's nothing I can do."

The Canadian has been the standard-bearer in the women's canoe since 2010, when it became a world championship event. She won six world titles and seemed a lock for the first Olympic gold medal until a 2019 doping test found traces of the banned steroid ligandrol, which is used to repair and build muscle.

That sidelined her for the 2019 world championships, opening the door for the debutante Harrison to become the first American world champion.

Vincent Lapointe and her lawyers went to work appealing the doping suspension that could have been as long as four years. A hair sample taken from an ex-boyfriend and a supplement product sample showed he had ingested ligandrol at about the time it could have affected her doping test.

Casas, Kazmir help US top Dominican Republic

Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan — For Triston Casas, the Olympics feel as comfortable as spring training.

That's because when he stepped to the plate in the United States' elimination game against the Dominican Republic on Wednesday, he was facing Boston Red Sox Double-A teammate Denyi Reyes.

"I have one career at-bat off of him in spring training, and I hit a home run over the batter's eye, as well," Casas said after he crushed a two-run, first-inning drive that started the Americans to a 3-1 win. "So 2-for-2 with a walk."

Tyler Austin, a former major leaguer in his home ballpark of the Central League's Yokohama Bay Stars, added a solo home run in the fifth against Gabriel Arias, his second long ball of the tournament to go with a .412 average and five RBIs.

The U.S. (3-1) plays next on Thursday night, meeting South Korea, a 5-2 loser Wednesday to Japan, for a berth in this weekend's gold medal game.

Scott Kazmir (1-0) escaped a bases-loaded,

one-out jam in the first. The 37-year-old left-hander pitched two-hit ball over five scoreless innings, retiring 14 of his final 15 batters around José Bautista's leadoff double in the third.

"I felt like I still had a lot in me," Kazmir said.

A 21-year-old first baseman at Portland, Maine, Casas homered following a one-out walk to Austin. Casas, batting .313 with eight RBIs, was the 26th overall pick in the 2018 amateur draft and is hitting .271 with six homers and 30 RBIs for the Sea Dogs this season.

"I wouldn't necessarily say it's better, but the atmosphere makes it better," he said of the Olympics. "I feel like it puts pressure on both sides of the ball, on defense and on offense, really stay engaged in every pitch, really just trying to focus on winning. In affiliated ball, sometimes you can get out of that mindset."

"At the end of the tournament," he added, "nobody's going to remember really how many home runs I hit or how many runs I drive in. It's just whether we came home with that gold."

USA Boxing has revival in Tokyo

Associated Press

TOKYO — Richard Torrez Jr. went into the Olympic boxing ring Wednesday with a game plan jointly concocted over the phone by his father back home in central California and by Billy Walsh, his national team's head coach in Tokyo.

The 22-year-old super heavyweight from Tulare then executed the plan perfectly and repeatedly until his Kazakh opponent's face was split too far open to continue the third round, thanks to a brutal barrage of Torrez's confounding overhand lefts.

Torrez advanced to the Olympic final on Sunday, when he'll have a chance to be the first U.S. super heavyweight to win gold since Riddick Bowe in 1988.

He could even be the first American man to win boxing gold in 17 years — but only if featherweight Duke Ragan and lightweight Keyshawn Davis don't beat him to it in the ensuing three days.

Afterward, Torrez lavished praise on his coaches and the revitalized national team pro-

gram that has put this genial hulk of a fighter in position to join the American greats of his sport — a generation after the U.S. boxing team's Olympic prime seemed to have passed.

The Americans are heading home from Tokyo with four medals, the most boxing hardware they've claimed since 2000 — and three could still be gold.

"Everyone here has believed in me," Torrez said. "This isn't a shock to them. This isn't a shock to my dad. This isn't a shock to Coach Billy. I think they all believed in it even more than I did. ... I'm just a vessel. This is for everybody that's worked so hard with our team."

Torrez's success is emblematic of the work done in the past half-decade by Walsh, who has led the revitalization of the team that still leads the overall Olympic boxing table in gold medals and total medals despite winning rarely in the 21st century.

Dominant middleweight Claressa Shields is the Americans' only gold medalist in 17 years, and the men won only three medals in the previous three Olympics combined.

Astros weather crowd, Dodgers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Lance McCullers Jr. threw 6⅓ shutout innings and the Houston Astros withstood the raucous, heckling fans at Dodger Stadium to blank Los Angeles 3-0 Tuesday night.

Mariners 4, Rays 2: Yusei Kikuchi went six effective innings, Abraham Toro and Jarred Kelenic homered, and Seattle won at Tampa Bay.

Yankees 13, Orioles 1: Luis Gil pitched six scoreless innings in his major league debut, Giancarlo Stanton homered and drove in four runs, and New York routed visiting Baltimore.

Marlins 5, Mets 4: Newly acquired Alex Jackson hit his first career home run, Nick Neidert earned his first big league win and host Miami beat NL East-leading New York.

Blue Jays 7, Indians 2: Hyun Jin Ryu pitched seven solid innings in his first start for Toronto on Canadian soil, George Springer and Teoscar Hernandez homered in a win over visiting Cleveland.

Angels 11, Rangers 3: Top prospect Jo Adell drove in three runs while reaching base four times in his season debut, Phil Gosselin had three RBI singles and visiting Los Angeles ended Texas' three-game winning streak.

Diamondbacks 3, Giants 1: Madison Bumgarner threw seven stellar innings to beat his former team for the first time and host Arizona knocked off first-place San Francisco.

Padres 8, Athletics 1: Tommy Pham hit a leadoff homer, Austin Nola had four hits and two RBIs, and San Diego rolled at Oakland.

Tigers 4, Red Sox 2: Miguel Cabrera hit his 498th home run and host Detroit dealt Boston its fifth straight loss, a season high.

Phillies 5, Nationals 4: Bryce Harper's solo home run in the eighth inning against his former team was the difference in his team's victory at Washington, Philadelphia's third straight win.

Braves 6, Cardinals 1: Freddie Freeman and visiting Atlanta hammered Jon Lester in his first start for St. Louis.

Twins 7, Reds 5: Jorge Polanco delivered a go-ahead, three-run homer in the ninth inning.

White Sox 7, Royals 1: Dylan Cease allowed one hit in six scoreless innings.

Rockies 13, Cubs 6: Elías Díaz hit a grand slam and Kyle Freeland got his first win in more than a month.

Pirates 8, Brewers 5 (10): Milwaukee starter Adrian Houser was pulled with a no-hitter intact in the seventh inning, and visiting Pittsburgh rallied.