

Biden signs executive order on abortion

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden delivered impassioned remarks Friday condemning the “extreme” Supreme Court majority that ended a constitutional right to abortion and pleading with Americans upset by the decision to “vote, vote, vote vote” in November. He signed an executive order to try to protect access to the procedure under mounting pressure from fellow Democrats to be more forceful in response to the ruling.

The actions Biden outlined are intended to mitigate some potential penalties that women seeking abortion may face after the ruling, but his order cannot restore access to abortion in the more than a dozen states where strict limits or total bans have gone into effect. About a dozen more states are set to impose additional restrictions.

Biden acknowledged the limitations facing his office, saying it would require an act of Congress to restore nationwide access to the way it was before the June 24 decision.

“The fastest way to restore Roe is to pass a national law,” Biden said. “The challenge is go out and vote. For God’s sake there is an election in November.”

Biden’s action formalized instructions to the Departments of Justice and Health and

Human Services to push back on efforts to limit the ability of women to access federally approved abortion medication or to travel across state lines to access clinical abortion services. He was joined by Vice President Kamala Harris, HHS secretary Xavier Becerra and Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco in the Roosevelt Room as he signed the order.

His executive order also directs agencies to work to educate medical providers and insurers about how and when they are required to share privileged patient information with authorities — an effort to protect women who seek or utilize abortion services. He is also asking the Federal Trade Commission to take steps to protect the privacy of those seeking information about reproductive care online and establish an interagency task force to coordinate federal efforts to safeguard access to abortion.

Biden is also directing his staff to convene volunteer lawyers to provide women and providers with pro bono legal assistance to help them navigate new state restrictions after the Supreme Court ruling.

The order, after the high court’s June 24 ruling that ended the nationwide right to abortion and left it to states to determine whether or how to allow the procedure,

comes as Biden has faced criticism from some in his own party for not acting with more urgency to protect women’s access to abortion. The decision in the case known as *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* overturned the court’s landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling.

Since the decision, Biden has stressed that his ability to protect abortion rights by executive action is limited without congressional action, and stressed that Democrats do not have the votes in the current Congress to do so.

“We need two additional pro-choice senators and a pro-choice house to codify Roe,” he said. “Your vote can make that a reality.”

Biden for the first time last week announced his support for changing Senate rules to allow a measure to restore nationwide access to abortion to pass by simple majority, rather than the usual 60-vote threshold required to end a filibuster. However, at least two Democratic lawmakers have made clear they won’t support changing Senate rules.

He predicted that women would turn out in “record numbers” in frustration over the court’s decision, and said he expected “millions and millions of men will be taking up the fight beside them.”

Former Japanese PM Abe assassinated during speech

Associated Press

NARA, Japan— Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was assassinated Friday on a street in western Japan by a gunman who opened fire on him from behind as he delivered a campaign speech — an attack that stunned the nation with some of the strictest gun control laws anywhere.

The 67-year-old Abe, who was Japan’s longest-serving leader when he resigned in 2020, collapsed bleeding and was airlifted to a nearby hospital in Nara, although he was not breathing and his heart had stopped. He was later pronounced dead after receiving massive blood transfusions, officials said.

Nara Medical University emergency department chief Hidetada Fukushima said Abe suffered major damage to his heart, along with two neck wounds that damaged an artery. He never regained his vital signs, Fu-

kushima said.

Police at the shooting scene in Nara arrested Tetsuya Yamagami, 41, a former member of Japan’s navy, on suspicion of murder. Police said he used a gun that was obviously homemade — about 15 inches long — and they confiscated similar weapons and his personal computer when they raided his nearby one-room apartment.

Police said Yamagami was responding calmly to questions and had admitted to attacking Abe, telling investigators he had plotted to kill him because he believed rumors about the former leader’s connection to a certain organization that police did not identify.

Dramatic video from NHK showed Abe standing and giving a speech outside a train station in Nara ahead of Sunday’s parliamentary election. As he raised his fist to make a point, two gunshots rang out, and he collapsed

holding his chest, his shirt smeared with blood as security guards run toward him. Guards then leapt onto the gunman, who was face down on the pavement.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his Cabinet ministers hastily returned to Tokyo from campaign events around the country after the shooting, which he called “dastardly and barbaric.” He pledged that the election, which chooses members for Japan’s less-powerful upper house of parliament, would go on as planned.

“I use the harshest words to condemn (the act),” Kishida said, struggling to control his emotions. He said the government planned to review the security situation, but added that Abe had the highest protection.

Even though he was out of office, Abe was still highly influential in the governing Liberal Democratic Party.

China demands an end to US and Taiwan 'collusion'

Associated Press

BEIJING — China has demanded the U.S. cease military "collusion" with Taiwan during a virtual meeting between the joint chiefs of staff from the two countries whose relationship has grown increasingly fractious.

Gen. Li Zuocheng told Gen. Mark Milley on Thursday that China had "no room for compromise" on issues affecting its "core interests," which include self-governing Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

"China demands the U.S. ... cease reversing history, cease U.S.-Taiwan military collusion and avoid impacting China-U.S. ties and stability in the Taiwan Strait," Li said.

The Chinese military would "resolutely safeguard national sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said. "If anyone creates a wanton provocation, they will be met with the firm counterattack from the Chinese people."

Such language is fairly routine and Li was also quoted in a Defense Ministry news release saying China hoped to "further strengthen dialogue, handle risks, and promote cooperation, rather than deliberately creating confrontation, provoking incidents and becoming mutually exclusive."

China routinely flies warplanes near Taiwan to advertise its threat to attack, and the island's Defense Ministry said Chinese air force aircraft crossed the middle line of the Taiwan Strait dividing the two sides on Friday morning. It said measures were taken in response, including the scrambling of Taiwanese jets.

Such "provocative behavior ... has seriously damaged regional peace and stability," the ministry said.

Asked about the incident, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson said, "This exercise by China is directed at external interference and separatist Taiwan independence forces."

Putin to Ukraine: Russia has barely started its action

Associated Press

MOSCOW — With Russia's military action in Ukraine in its fifth month, Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday warned Kyiv that it should quickly accept Moscow's terms or brace for the worst, adding ominously that Russia has barely started its action.

Speaking at a meeting with leaders of the Kremlin-controlled parliament, Putin accused Western allies of fueling the hostilities, charging that "the West wants to fight us until the last Ukrainian."

"It's a tragedy for the Ukrainian people, but it looks like it's heading in that direction," he added.

"Everybody should know that largely speaking, we haven't even yet started anything in earnest," Putin said in a note.

He declared that Russia remains ready to sit down for talks to end the fighting, adding that "those who refuse to do so should know that the longer it lasts the more difficult it will be for them to make a deal with us."

"We are hearing that they want to defeat us on the battlefield," Putin said. "Let them try."

Earlier in the conflict, the Kremlin demanded that Kyiv acknowledge Russian sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula, which it annexed in 2014, and recognize the independence of Moscow-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. Moscow also said it expected Ukraine to bow to the existing situation on the ground, a reference to other land gains it has made since Russian troops rolled into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

After failing to capture Kyiv and other big cities in Ukraine's northeast early in the campaign, the Russian military shifted its focus to the eastern industrial heartland of Donbas.

Putin reaffirmed his long-held claim that the West is using the conflict in Ukraine to try to isolate and weaken Russia.

He charged that Western sanctions against Russia have failed to achieve their goal of "sowing division and strife in our society and demoralizing our people."

"The course of history is unstoppable, and attempts by the collective West to enforce its version of the global order are doomed to fail," Putin said.

Ukrainian official: 'Catastrophe' in city captured by Russian forces

Associated Press

POKROVSK, Ukraine — A Ukrainian regional official warned Friday of deteriorating living conditions in a city captured by Russian forces two weeks ago, saying Sievierodonetsk is without water, power or a working sewage system while the bodies of the dead decompose in hot apartment buildings.

Gov. Serhiy Haidai said the Russians were unleashing indiscriminate artillery barrages as they try to secure their gains in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk province. Moscow this week claimed full control of Luhansk, but the governor and other Ukrainian officials said their troops retained a small part of the province.

"Luhansk hasn't been fully captured even though the Russians have engaged all their arsenal to achieve that goal," Haidai told The Associated Press. "Fierce battles are going on in several villages on the region's

border. The Russians are relying on tanks and artillery to advance, leaving scorched earth."

Russia's forces "strike every building that they think could be a fortified position," he said. "They aren't stopped by the fact that civilians are left there and they die in their homes and courtyards. They keep firing."

Occupied Sievierodonetsk, meanwhile, "is on the verge of a humanitarian catastrophe," the governor wrote on social media. "The Russians have completely destroyed all the critical infrastructure, and they are unable to repair anything."

Haidai reported last week that about 8,000 residents remained in the city. Some Ukrainian officials and soldiers said Russian forces leveled Sievierodonetsk, Luhansk province's administrative center, before Ukraine's troops were ordered out of the city late last month to avoid their encirclement and capture.

Biden to discuss Iran aerial arms on trip

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Thwarting Iranian missiles and drones will be a key part of the conversations between President Joe Biden and regional heads of state on his upcoming trip to the Middle East, officials and analysts said.

Biden will discuss greater collaboration in the Middle East on air defense, National Security Council spokesman John Kirby told reporters Thursday.

The trip, which begins next

week with stops in Israel, the West Bank, and Saudi Arabia, will include talks on how the U.S. can help integrate the air defenses of Middle Eastern countries concerned about Iran's growing aerial arsenal, Kirby said.

These efforts would require Israel, Saudi Arabia and Persian Gulf nations to work together after decades of mistrust, experts said.

But Middle Eastern countries are starting to find common ground because of their worries

about Iran, said Tom Karako, director of the Missile Defense Project at the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"They're always going to be a little suspicious, but they do seem to be moving in the right direction toward greater cooperation," Karako told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

Tehran's robust drone and missile systems have forced Saudi Arabia and others to bolster their air defense systems, Kara-

ko said.

Iran's drone capabilities have developed to the point where the U.S. is "operating without complete air superiority" for the first time since the Korean War, former U.S. Central Command chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie told Congress this spring.

Iran and the militant groups that it backs in the region have seasoned missile system and drone operators due to their extensive use in Yemen's civil war, Karako said.

US employers add solid 372K jobs in June

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers shrugged off high inflation and weakening growth to add 372,000 jobs in June, a surprisingly strong gain that will likely spur the Federal Reserve to keep sharply raising interest rates to cool the economy and slow price increases.

The unemployment rate in June remained at 3.6% for a fourth straight month, the Labor Department said Friday, matching a near-50-year low that was reached before the pandemic struck in early 2020.

The past year's streak of ro-

bust hiring has been good for job seekers and has led to higher pay for many employees. But it has also helped fuel the highest inflation in four decades and heightened pressure on the Fed to further slow borrowing and spending.

Many employers are still struggling to fill jobs, especially in the economy's vast service sector, with Americans now traveling, eating out and attending public events with much greater frequency. The Fed may regard the June job gain as evidence that the rapid pace of hiring is feeding inflation as compa-

nies raise pay to attract workers and then increase prices to cover their higher labor costs.

The Fed has already embarked on its fastest series of rate hikes since the 1980s, and further large increases would make borrowing much costlier for consumers and businesses and increase the risk of a recession.

The persistent desire of many businesses to hire and grow is providing a bulwark against the likelihood that the economy will tip into recession over the next year. Even if a downturn does occur, the healthy job and pay growth of the past year could

help keep it relatively brief and mild.

For now, there are roughly two posted job openings for every unemployed worker. And the number of people seeking unemployment benefits — a proxy for layoffs and an early indicator of a downturn — remains far below historic averages, although it has ticked up recently.

At the same time, economic growth has been negative for two straight quarters, consumers are slowing their spending with inflation at a four-decade high and home sales have fallen as the Fed has jacked up borrowing costs.

NY gun applicants to share social media accounts

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — As missed warning signs pile up in investigations of mass killings, New York state is rolling out a novel strategy to screen applicants for gun permits. People seeking to carry concealed handguns will be required to hand over their social media accounts for a review of their "character and conduct."

It's an approach applauded by many Democrats and national gun control advocacy groups, but some experts have raised questions about how the law will be enforced and address free speech concerns.

Some of the local officials who will be tasked with reviewing the social media content also are asking whether they'll have the

resources and, in some cases, whether the law is even constitutional.

Sheriffs haven't received additional money or staffing to handle a new application process, said Peter Kehoe, the executive director of the New York Sheriffs' Association. The law, he asserted, infringes on Second Amendment rights, and while applicants must list their social media accounts, he doesn't think local officials will necessarily look at them.

"I don't think we would do that," Kehoe said. "I think it would be a constitutional invasion of privacy."

The new requirement, which takes effect in September, was included in a law passed last week that sought to preserve some limits

on firearms after the Supreme Court ruled that most people have a right to carry a handgun for personal protection. It was signed by Gov. Kathy Hochul, a Democrat, who noted shooters sometimes telegraph their intent to hurt others. Increasingly, young men have gone online to drop hints of what's to come before executing a mass killing, including the gunman at an Uvalde, Texas, school.

Under the law, applicants have to provide local officials with a list of current and former social media accounts from the previous three years. It will be up to local sheriff's staff, judges or county clerks to scroll through those profiles as they check whether applicants have made statements suggesting dangerous behavior.

IG may probe Comey, McCabe tax audits

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The IRS commissioner has asked the Treasury Department's internal watchdog to immediately review the circumstances surrounding intensive tax audits that targeted ex-FBI Director James Comey and former Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, frequent targets of Donald Trump's ire during his presidency.

IRS spokesperson Jodie Reynolds said Thursday the agency has officially referred the matter to the inspector general for tax administration after Commissioner Charles Rettig, who was nominated to the job by Trump and is a close ally of the former president, personally reached out. Reynolds insisted it is "ludicrous and untrue to suggest that senior IRS officials somehow targeted

specific individuals" for such audits.

The New York Times reported Wednesday that the former FBI leaders were subjected to rare IRS audits of their tax returns. The newspaper said Comey was informed of the audit in 2019 and McCabe learned he was under scrutiny in 2021. Rettig, whose term is set to expire in November, faced blistering criticism from Democrats for helping to shield Trump's tax returns from the public.

Trump repeatedly attacked Comey and McCabe over the FBI's Russia investigation that shadowed his presidency for years.

According to the IRS website the audits the two men and their wives underwent are part of a program that randomly selects tax returns to examine tax compliance and im-

prove the system.

McCabe, in comments on CNN, where he is a law enforcement analyst, described the two audits as a "coincidence that ... really is almost impossible statistically" and said they raised questions that should be answered. He said it was "appropriate for the IRS to do the responsible thing and look into it and determine whether or not something, you know, went awry in this program."

Comey said in a statement that he could not say whether anything improper happened, "but after learning how unusual this audit was and how badly Trump wanted to hurt me during that time, it made sense to try to figure it out."

A Trump spokeswoman did not respond to a request for comment.

17 receive Presidential Medal of Freedom

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Thursday presented the nation's highest civilian honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, to 17 people, including gymnast Simone Biles, the late John McCain, the Arizona Republican whom Biden served with in the Senate, and gun-control advocate Gabby Giffords.

"Today, she adds to her medal count," Biden said as he introduced Biles, a former foster child whose 32 Olympic and World Championship medals make her the most decorated U.S. gymnast in history.

"I don't know how you're going to find room," for another medal, Biden joked. The

25-year-old is an advocate for athletes' mental health, foster care children and sexual assault victims. She's also the youngest person to ever receive the medal, Biden said.

Biden introduced Giffords as "one of the most courageous people I have ever known."

The former Arizona congresswoman founded the organization named Giffords to campaign for an end to gun violence and restrictions on access to guns. The Democrat almost died after she was shot in the head in January 2011 during a constituent event in Tucson.

Biden also recognized former Republican Sens. Alan Simpson of Wyoming and John

McCain of Arizona, recalling a less partisan era of Washington in which members of different parties would argue over issues during the day and then meet over dinner at night.

McCain died of brain cancer in 2018. He spent more than five years in captivity in Vietnam while serving in the U.S. Navy. He later represented Arizona in the House and Senate, and was the 2008 Republican presidential nominee, competing against Democrats Barack Obama and Biden.

Biden said he didn't appreciate the political competition, but I never stopped admiring John ... I knew his honor, his courage and commitment."

Actor Caan of 'Godfather,' 'Brian's Song' dies at 82

Associated Press

James Caan, the curly-haired tough guy known to movie fans as the hotheaded Sonny Corleone of "The Godfather" and to television audiences as both the dying football player in the classic weeper "Brian's Song" and the casino boss in "Las Vegas," has died. He was 82.

His manager Matt DelPiano said he died Wednesday. No cause was given and Caan's family, who requests privacy, said that no further details would be released at this time.

Caan was a grinning, handsome performer with an athlete's swagger and muscular build. He managed a long career despite drug problems, outbursts of temper and mi-

nor brushes with the law.

Caan had been a favorite of Francis Ford Coppola since the 1960s, when Coppola cast him for the lead in "Rain People." He was primed for a featured role in "The Godfather" as Sonny, the No. 1 enforcer and eldest son of Mafia boss Vito Corleone. Caan was already a star on television, breaking through in the 1971 TV movie "Brian's Song."

After "Brian's Song" and "The Godfather," he was one of Hollywood's busiest actors, appearing in "Hide in Plain Sight" (which he also directed), "Funny Lady" (opposite Barbra Streisand), "The Killer Elite" and Neil Simon's "Chapter Two," among others. He also made a brief appearance in a

flashback sequence in "The Godfather, Part II."

But by the early 1980s he began to sour on films, though Michael Mann's 1981 neo-noir heist film "Thief" is among his most admired films. He returned to full-fledged stardom opposite Kathy Bates in "Misery" in 1990. In the film, based on Stephen King's novel, Caan is an author taken captive by an obsessed fan.

Caan didn't take a starring role in a TV series until 2003 but his first effort, "Las Vegas," was an immediate hit. When the series debuted, he was a casino surveillance chief dealing with cheaters and competitors of the fictional Montecito Resort and Casino.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man charged after threatening letters

CT HARTFORD — A Connecticut man was arrested Wednesday, charged with mailing more than 100 threatening letters to journalists, judges, public officials and other individuals in Connecticut and elsewhere.

Federal authorities said the 43-year-old from Hamden has been previously prosecuted, convicted and sentenced for mailing similar threatening letters three prior times. He completed his most recent term of “federal supervision” in August 2021.

Several of the letters, mailed through the postal system, said: “If you don’t obey what this letter says, along with others including people in Washington DC and everywhere and you. You all will be killed!!”

The suspect appeared before a federal magistrate judge and was released on a \$100,000 bond.

Worker dies when head caught in garbage truck

FL BRADENTON — A worker is dead following an accident while performing maintenance on a garbage truck in Florida, officials said.

The accident occurred Tuesday evening at a Waste Pro USA facility near Sarasota Bradenton International Airport, according to a Manatee County Sheriff’s Office news release.

Leroy Firestone, 59, had been standing on a ladder and performing maintenance on the hydraulics of a garbage truck, officials said. At some point, the door on the side of the truck ac-

tivated, causing it to close on the victim’s head.

Rescue workers pronounced Firestone dead at the scene.

Investigators said the death appears to be accidental, resulting from a miscommunication with another worker.

3 plead guilty to scam targeting grandparents

RI PROVIDENCE — Three men have pleaded guilty to defrauding 14 Rhode Island seniors out of more than \$350,000 by pretending to be their grandchildren.

U.S. Attorney Zachary Cunha said Tuesday that the victims ranged in age from 79 to 94 and were all contacted by phone by someone claiming to be family members or attorneys.

The callers typically claimed a grandchild needed money for bail after being arrested during a motor vehicle accident. The victim was then instructed to hand off the cash to a courier sent to their home.

Bryan Valdez-Espinosa and Diego Alarcon, both 22 and from Union City, N.J., and Jason Hatcher, 40, of New York, admitted to participating in the scheme last June during a hearing in Providence federal court.

Prosecutors say the men defrauded the victims out of between \$9,500 and \$85,000 and were caught only after a family member intervened in one of the scams.

Study: Salmon decrease threatens killer whales

WA BELLINGHAM — Southern Resident killer whales have not had enough food for several years,

which could affect their already small numbers, according to a study by the University of British Columbia.

Researchers looked at requirements and availability of prey for Northeastern Pacific Southern Resident killer whales.

The study found a fluctuating level of salmon from spawning areas on rivers had a detrimental effect on killer whale health, threatening a small and fragile group of whales, the Bellingham Herald reported.

“It really appears like they cannot take (many) more rough years,” said Fanny Couture, lead researcher for the study.

About 75 of the Southern Resident killer whales span from the California coast to Haida Gwaii in British Columbia’s Queen Charlotte Islands.

They feed on Chinook salmon, but the number of Chinook has decreased even as fishing regulations attempted to bolster their numbers. That leaves animals high on the food chain, like killer whales, without adequate prey.

Lifeguards set to make \$19.46 an hour to start

NY NEW YORK — Starting wages for lifeguards in New York City will be \$19.46 an hour this summer under an agreement reached with the lifeguard union, Mayor Eric Adams announced Wednesday.

Under the deal, a retention bonus will be awarded in September for those lifeguards who work every week through the summer season.

Also, a new training program will be developed to fully staff 17 mini pools throughout the

city.

Adams said in a statement that with an influx of lifeguards, the city will be able to “very quickly open all of our mini pools, an essential cooling center for young New Yorkers.” But he warned the agreement reached with the union won’t entirely solve the city’s challenge of fully guarding public swim areas.

The mayor last month said he didn’t believe a pay raise would help the city attract more lifeguards, noting how lifeguards do the job for the “love of swimming” and “love of protecting people.”

Governor proposes 10% personal income tax cut

WV CHARLESTON — West Virginia Gov. Jim Justice on Wednesday proposed a permanent 10% reduction in the personal income tax after the state ended the fiscal year with a record \$1.3 billion surplus.

The Republican governor said he plans to call a special session of the Legislature during its interim meetings from July 24 to 26 to address the tax cut. It’s the third time a personal income tax cut has been proposed in the past year. The other two attempts failed.

Justice said it’s a way for residents to deal with inflation, including the high cost of gasoline, while hoping to lure more businesses into the state.

The governor said the 10% reduction is the maximum cut allowed while remaining in compliance with funding stipulations in the American Rescue Plan Act.

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No. 1 Djokovic reaches his 8th Wimbledon final

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Novak Djokovic fashioned a second consecutive comeback victory at Wimbledon on Friday, this one with a deficit far less daunting, the drama far less palpable.

The top-seeded Djokovic beat No. 9 seed Cam Norrie of Britain 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 in the semifinals to run his winning streak at the All England Club to 27 matches in a row as he pursues a fourth straight championship there.

On the steamiest afternoon of the fortnight so far, with the temperature reaching 85 degrees and the air still, Djokovic got off to a slow start and often looked displeased, shaking his head or gesticulating toward his guest box. But unlike in the quarterfinals, when he dropped the opening two sets against No. 10 seed Jannik Sinner before winning in five, it took little time for Djokovic to assert his dominance.

When it ended, Djokovic curled his lips as if sending a kiss to someone in the stands who had been backing Norrie during the match.

"The job," Djokovic said, "is not finished."

He will face first-time major finalist Nick Kyrgios for the trophy on Sunday. The unseeded Kyrgios, a combustible 27-year-old from Australia who drew jeers for the mere mention of his name during Djokovic's on-court interview, did not need to play on Friday because 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal withdrew from their semifinal with a torn abdominal muscle.

"Well, one thing is for sure," said Djokovic, who has lost both past matches against Kyrgios. "There's going to be a lot of fireworks, emotionally, from both."

It will be the 32nd Grand Slam title match for Djokovic, breaking a tie for the men's record he shared with Roger Federer, and gives the 35-year-old from Serbia a shot at a 21st major title and seventh at Wimbledon. Only Federer, with eight, owns more at the grass-court tournament among men.

The women's final is Saturday, with No. 3 Ons Jabeur of Tunisia facing No. 17 Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan. That will be the first Wimbledon final since 1962 between two women both making their debuts in a major final.

Djokovic vs. Norrie began auspiciously enough for locals hoping to see one of their own get to a men's final, something only two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray has accomplished for Britain since the professional era began in 1968.

Roars came when the left-handed Norrie arose first from his seat — Djokovic was pouring some

water on his hand and rubbing it in his hair to cool off — and headed to the baseline to receive serve in the first game.

More arrived when Djokovic missed a backhand to cede the opening point, when he pushed a forehand long on the second and when Norrie's volley winner completed the break to grab that game. Norrie hopped and skipped and threw an uppercut. Some Union Jack flags waved in the stands.

Was the championship won? No, of course not. A berth in the final earned? Not that, either. All in all, it was quite a celebration after merely one of what would become 35 games, after five of 202 points, four of 154 minutes.

When Djokovic broke right back a few minutes later, he swiftly turned to walk to the courtside stand holding his white towel and dabbed at his perspiration. To him, this was not a monumental achievement.

The contrasting reactions underscored the differences in their careers to date.

For Norrie, this was his first Grand Slam semifinal, 42 fewer than his opponent. Until this fortnight, Norrie never had been past the third round at a major, going 0-5 at that stage previously.

By the conclusion, the disparity in skills was obvious, too. Just one tiny example of how versatile and superb Djokovic is came on one particularly marvelous point. He hit a spinning half-volley on the move, but Norrie replied with a lob. So Djokovic ran back toward the baseline, the net behind him, and conjured up a between-the-legs, facing-the-wrong-way, high-arching lob of his own that somehow landed in. Norrie ran to that, twisted his body to reply with a forehand and Djokovic ended the 14-stroke exchange with a drop volley winner.

Even the partisans on hand cheered with approval. Djokovic raised his right index finger to the sky.

Still, it took him a full set to get going. Only two of Norrie's first 20 points in the match came via winners he produced. Djokovic was off enough to commit 12 unforced errors by set's end, and there were plenty of other strokes mediocre enough to let Norrie take the early lead.

"A bit tighter at the beginning of the match," said Djokovic, who took a bathroom break and put on a white hat before the second set. "You're not swinging through the ball so smoothly as you would like to."

But here is one measure of how he restored order: Djokovic made 16 unforced errors over the last three sets combined.

Raiders hire NFL's first Black, female team president

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — The Las Vegas Raiders introduced a former Nevada gambling regulator Thursday as the franchise's new president, the first Black woman to hold the title with an NFL team.

Team owner Mark Davis said Sandra Douglass Morgan topped his list every time after he spoke to candidates.

"Her experience, integrity and passion for this community will be invaluable to our organization," Davis said. "From the moment I met Sandra, I knew she was a force to be reckoned with. We are extremely lucky to have her at the helm."

Morgan, the former chairwoman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board, is the third woman and third African American to become president of an NFL team. She is also the latest Raiders hire to break barriers. Former Raiders coach Tom Flores was the first Hispanic head coach to win a Super Bowl title and former coach Art Shell was the first Black head coach of the NFL's Super Bowl era.

Morgan, who spent eight years with the city of North Las Vegas, was also the first Black city attorney in the state of Nevada when she served in that role from 2013 to 2016.

Morgan emphasized leadership and full transparency during her introductory press conference at Allegiant Stadium.

"We have so much more to do, and I'm excited to be at the helm of that growth and look forward to ushering in the new chapter for the Raiders," said Morgan. "The fact is I have accepted this role because I believe in the promise of the Raiders, I believe in the future of the Raiders, and I believe in this organization's tenets of community, integrity, and most of all, commitment to excellence."

Verlander wins 11th as Astros rebound

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Justin Verlander got his 11th win, Yordan Alvarez hit his 26th homer and the Houston Astros beat the Kansas City Royals 5-2 on Thursday.

Jose Altuve added a homer and three RBIs for the Astros, who bounced back after a 7-4 loss Wednesday night that snapped an eight-game winning streak. Houston took three of four from Kansas City.

Verlander (11-3) grinded through six innings, allowing seven hits and two runs — one earned — with eight strikeouts to lower his ERA to 2.00 in his remarkable return from Tommy John surgery. He and the Dodgers' Tony Gonsolin (11-0) lead the majors in victories.

Kris Bubic (1-6) yielded four hits and three runs while tying a career high with six walks in 5½ innings for his second straight loss.

Padres 2, Giants 1 (10): San Diego left fielder Jurickson Profar collapsed as he was trying to walk off the field after a scary collision with rookie

shortstop C.J. Abrams in a victory over visiting San Francisco.

Profar was strapped onto a stretcher, his neck in a brace, and driven off the field on a cart as his teammates watched from a few feet away. Profar pumped his right fist to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd and appeared to be smiling. He was taken to a hospital and no update was immediately available.

The Padres won it in the 10th on pinch hitter Jorge Alfaro's bases-loaded single.

Dodgers 5, Cubs 3: Tony Gonsolin pitched seven strong innings for his 11th win, and Mookie Betts hit two leadoff homers as host Los Angeles beat Chicago and extended its winning streak to four games.

Gonsolin is the first Dodgers pitcher to start a season 11-0 since Alex Wood in 2017.

Mets 10, Marlins 0: J.D. Davis hit his first major league grand slam, James McCann had a three-run homer and host New York routed Miami behind a strong start from Trevor

Williams.

Davis set a career high with five RBIs and Williams (2-5) pitched seven innings of two-hit ball as the NL East leaders won easily in the opener of a four-game series.

Mariners 8, Blue Jays 3: Dylan Moore homered — with an assist from left fielder Lourdes Gurriel Jr. — and Marco Gonzales gave up two earned runs and pitched into the seventh inning, leading host Seattle to a victory over Toronto.

Moore hit a deep fly to the warning track in the second inning. Gurriel tracked it down, but as he made a running leap on the track, the ball went into his glove and immediately popped out and over the wall.

Yankees 6, Red Sox 5: Josh Donaldson hit a grand slam, Aaron Hicks homered on the next pitch and visiting New York held on to win despite two home runs from Boston All-Star candidate Rafael Devers.

Cardinals 3, Braves 2 (11): Dylan Carlson hit a tiebreaking single in the top of the 11th inning, and St. Louis snapped a

four-game skid with a victory at Atlanta.

Phillies 5, Nationals 3: Darick Hall homered, doubled and drove in two runs, and visiting Philadelphia took two of three from last-place Washington.

Tigers 2, White Sox 1: Rookie Beau Brieske (2-6) tossed two-hit ball into the seventh inning while outpitching Dylan Cease, Javier Báez homered and Detroit hung on beat host Chicago, running its winning streak to five games.

Reds 5-2, Pirates 1-4: Jonathan India hit a go-ahead single, Brandon Drury added a two-run triple in the nightcap and Cincinnati split a double-header at home.

Orioles 4, Angels 1: Rookie Adley Rutschman hit his first home run at Camden Yards as Baltimore extended its winning streak to a season-best five games.

Rockies 4, Diamondbacks 3: Randal Grichuk doubled to score Jose Iglesias with the go-ahead run in the ninth inning, and visiting Colorado defeated Arizona.

US women blank Jamaica, clinch World Cup berth

Associated Press

MONTERREY, Mexico — The U.S. women's national team qualified for the 2023 World Cup on Thursday night at the CONCACAF W Championship.

The United States defeated Jamaica 5-0 at Estadio BBVA but had to wait until Haiti downed Mexico 3-0 in the late game to secure a spot in next summer's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

With two victories at the W Championship, the United States was atop its group and became the first team to win one of the region's four World Cup berths up for grabs. The U.S. women have qualified for every World Cup, winning the last two tournaments and four overall.

Sophia Smith had two goals for the United States in the opening eight minutes against the Reggae Girlz.

Rose Lavelle scored in the 59th minute

and Kristie Mewis added a goal in the 83rd. Some three minutes later Trinity Rodman, the daughter of former NBA player Dennis Rodman, scored her second international goal.

"Obviously, being a young player on this team, it can be a little bit intimidating, but I think I've found my confidence and I've just felt I can be myself on the field," said Smith, who has eight international goals. "That's just what I've been doing and my team has been super supportive of that."

Megan Rapinoe was not available for the match because she was at the White House on Thursday to receive the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

"We didn't play well," Jamaica coach Lorne Donaldson said. "You're not going to play the world's champ and play that

bad and expect anything to come out of the game. We weren't good."

Roselord Borgella and Nerilia Mondesir converted penalty kicks and Sherly Jeudy added a goal for Haiti in the victory over Mexico, stunning the tournament hosts.

The Americans will face Mexico and the Reggae Girlz will play Haiti in their final group matches on Monday. Haiti could clinch its first World Cup berth with a tie or win over Jamaica.

Eight teams were playing in the W Championship, divided into two groups. The top two teams in each group qualify for the World Cup. The two third-place teams will advance to an intercontinental playoff in New Zealand in February.

The winner of the W Championship will also qualify for the 2024 Olympics.

Canada, Costa Rica, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago are in the other group.

3 Russians go in first round of NHL Draft

Associated Press

Ducks general manager Pat Verbeek provided a simple answer regarding his decision to select defenseman Pavel Mintyukov 10th in the NHL Draft amid increasing concerns over Russian-born prospects' availability to play in North America because of issues stemming from the war in Ukraine.

"The talent is undeniable," Verbeek said shortly after making the selection on Thursday night. "We're looking to get our franchise going in the right direction, towards winning the Stanley Cup, and we think this player is really going to help us get there."

Verbeek wasn't alone in his thinking on a night three Russians were selected among the 32 picks, with the final six rounds of the draft in Montreal being held on Friday.

Following Mintyukov's se-

lection, the Washington Capitals choose forward Ivan Miroschnichenko 20th, followed by the Minnesota Wild taking right wing Danila Yurov four picks later.

All three attended the draft and were projected to go in the first round, though questions were raised as to whether their draft stock might fall because of travel restrictions in and out of Russia and Belarus and the lack of a transfer agreement between the NHL and Russian-based Kontinental Hockey League.

NHL Central Scouting director Dan Marr went so far as to say a mock draft conducted by his staff finished with Russians being shut out of the first round for the first time since 2005.

Fears were heightened further last week, when Philadelphia Flyers goalie prospect

Ivan Fedotov was suddenly assigned to a remote military base in northern Russia, according to the player's agent, J.P. Barry. Selected in the seventh round of the 2015 draft, Fedotov signed with the Flyers in May after completing his contract with CSKA Moscow in the KHL.

Miroschnichenko's situation is more complicated because his junior season in Russia was cut short after being diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma in March. He has since been cleared to resume playing.

"Just a tremendous feeling. Such a great organization," he said through an interpreter.

Capitals general manager Brian MacLellan said he and his staff were "somewhat comfortable" in selecting Miroschnichenko based on having team doctors review the

player's medical report.

"Our guys thought the upside was worth taking the risk involved. He's a really good player," MacLellan said. "Hopefully, it works out and we've got a really good player on our hands."

While there has always been a risk of Russian players electing to stay home, Mintyukov's desire to play in North America was more clear after he spent last season with Saginaw of the Ontario Hockey League.

Though Miroschnichenko and Yurov have only played in Russia, they were selected by teams with a history of drafting and developing Russians.

The war in Ukraine and status of Russian players in North America have become sensitive subjects around the league. Several agents who represent Russian players have declined comment.

Slafkovsky taken first; two compatriots also selected

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Juraj Slafkovsky waited and wondered if the Montreal Canadiens would take him with the first pick in the NHL Draft.

When the moment came, he didn't even hear general manager Kent Hughes call his name. Shock overwhelmed the big, charismatic winger as soon as he heard Hughes say, "From the Slovakian national team."

"I didn't even listen anymore," he said. "I was like shaking and I had goosebumps."

Months after leading Slovakia to its first Olympic gold medal and being named tournament MVP, Slafkovsky made more history by becoming the first player from the country to be taken No. 1. Minutes later, countryman and Beijing Games teammate Simon Nemec went second to the New Jersey Devils.

Slafkovsky and Nemec became the highest-drafted

players from Slovakia, 22 years after Marian Gaborik went third to Minnesota in 2000.

"I lost the words," Nemec said. "We were kids when we dream about NHL Draft."

Nemec was all smiles later when he and Slafkovsky embraced Filip Meszar, the third Slovak taken in the first round, also by Montreal at No. 27. It's the first time Slovakia has had three players taken in the first round, which also matched a record with 16 prospects born outside of North America being selected.

The crowd at Bell Centre was fired up for the league's first in-person draft since 2019, booing Commissioner Gary Bettman each time he stepped up to the microphone — until he said he had a trade to announce. There were some oohs and ahhs when Shane Wright, long projected to be the top pick in this draft even before the Canadiens won the

draft lottery, was not taken in the top three.

The Arizona Coyotes made forward Logan Cooley the highest-drafted player from Pittsburgh when they took him third. Wright's fall, reminiscent of Seth Jones in 2013 — the last draft with this level of uncertainty about the top pick — ended when the Seattle Kraken took him fourth.

Wright said he'd have a chip on his shoulder and play with "a little more fire" after getting passed over by three teams at the top of the draft.

The Canadiens kept everyone guessing in saying they were considering Slafkovsky, Wright and Cooley before the draft. And after answering that question by choosing the 6-foot-4 winger, Montreal made another splash by completing a trade.

The Canadiens traded defenseman Alexander Romanov to the New York Islanders for the

13th pick and moved that selection and the 66th to the Chicago Blackhawks for young forward Kirby Dach.

It was the second dismantling move made Thursday by the Blackhawks, who also traded high-scoring winger Alex DeBrincat to the Ottawa Senators for three picks.

Chuck Fletcher, whose Philadelphia Flyers picked forward Cutter Gauthier fifth, said Wednesday he expected a lot of trades at the draft. Other GMs around the league didn't wait for the draft to begin to start dealing.

The Stanley Cup champion Colorado Avalanche got things started by acquiring goaltender Alexandar Georgiev from the New York Rangers for a third- and a fifth-round pick in this draft and a third-rounder next year. Then Chicago sent DeBrincat to Ottawa for the seventh and 39th picks and a third-rounder in 2024.