

Biden OKs cluster munitions for Ukraine

The Washington Post

President Biden has approved the provision of U.S. cluster munitions for Ukraine, with drawdown of the weapons from Defense Department stocks due to be announced Friday.

The move, which will bypass U.S. law prohibiting the production, use or transfer of cluster munitions with a failure rate of more than 1%, comes amid concerns about Kyiv's lagging counteroffensive against entrenched Russian troops and dwindling Western stocks of conventional artillery.

It follows months of internal administration debate over whether to supply the controversial munitions, which are banned by most countries in the world.

The principal weapon under consideration, an M864 artillery shell first produced in 1987, is fired from the 155mm howitzers the United States and other Western countries have provided Ukraine.

In its last publicly available estimate, more than 20 years ago, the Pentagon assessed that

artillery shell to have a "dud" rate of 6%, meaning that at least four of each of the 72 submunitions each shell carries would remain unexploded across an area of approximately 22,500 square meters — roughly the size of 4½ football fields.

"We are aware of reports from several decades ago that indicate certain 155mm DPICMs have higher dud rates," said a defense official, one of seven Pentagon, White House and military officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive decision. The defense official used the acronym for Dual Purpose Improved Conventional Munitions.

The Pentagon now says it has new assessments, based on testing as recent as 2020, with failure rates no higher than 2.35%.

While that exceeds the limit of 1% mandated by Congress every year since 2017, officials are "carefully selecting" munitions with the 2.35% dud rate or below for transfer to Ukraine, Pentagon spokesperson Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder said Thurs-

day.

The defense official said details of the new assessments were "not releasable," including how, when and where the tests were done, and whether they included actual firing exercises or virtual simulations. Military manuals say these weapons cannot be fired in training because they are part of war reserve stockpiles.

There is no waiver provision in the 1% limit Congress has placed on cluster munition dud rates, written into Defense Department appropriations for the last seven years.

Biden would bypass it and Congress, according to a White House official, drawing down the munitions from existing defense stocks under a rarely used provision of the Foreign Assistance Act, which allows the president to provide aid, regardless of appropriations or arms export restrictions, as long as he determines that it is in the vital U.S. national security interest.

Although the United States has used cluster munitions in every major war since Korea,

no new ones are believed to have been produced for years. But as many as 4.7 million cluster shells, rockets, missiles and bombs, containing more than 500 million submunitions, or bomblets, remain in military inventories, according to estimates by Human Rights Watch drawn from Defense Department reports.

Cluster weapons explode in the air over a target, releasing dozens to hundreds of smaller submunitions across a wide area.

More than 120 countries have joined a convention banning their use as inhumane and indiscriminate, in large part because of high failure rates that litter the landscape with unexploded submunitions that endanger both friendly troops and civilians, often for decades after the end of a conflict.

The United States, Ukraine and Russia — which is alleged to have used them extensively in Ukraine — are not parties to the convention. Eight of NATO's 31 members, including the United States, have not ratified the convention.

Global temperatures continue record-setting trend

Associated Press

Earth's average temperature set a new unofficial record high on Thursday, the third such milestone in a week that already rated as the hottest on record.

The planetary average hit 63 degrees, surpassing the 62.9-degree mark set Tuesday and equaled Wednesday, according to data from the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer, a tool that uses satellite data and computer simulations to mea-

sure the world's condition.

That average includes places that are sweltering — like Jingxing, China, which checked in almost 110 degrees — and the merely unusually warm, like Antarctica, where temperatures across much of the continent were as much as 8 degrees above normal this week.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday issued a note of caution about the Maine tool's find-

ings, saying it could not confirm data that results in part from computer modeling.

"Although NOAA cannot validate the methodology or conclusion of the University of Maine analysis, we recognize that we are in a warm period due to climate change," NOAA said.

Still, the Maine data has been widely regarded as another troubling sign of climate change around the globe. Some climate scientists said this week they

weren't surprised to see the unofficial records.

Robert Watson, a scientist and former chairman of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said governments and the private sector "are not truly committed to address climate change." Nor are citizens, he said.

"They demand cheap energy, cheap food and do not want to pay the true cost of food and energy," Watson said.

NATO set to offer aid, but not membership

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — NATO leaders will agree next week to help modernize Ukraine's military, create a new high-level forum for consultations and reaffirm that it will join their alliance one day, the organization's top civilian official said Friday. But the war-torn country will not start membership talks soon.

At a two-day summit starting Tuesday in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, U.S. President Joe Biden and his counterparts will also agree to boost defense spending as allies pour weapons, ammunition and other support like uniforms and medical equipment into Ukraine, 17 months into the war.

They also had hoped to welcome Sweden as the next member of the world's biggest security organization, but Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has raised strong objections and it's unclear if they can be overcome in time. Even if so, Sweden's accession would be-

come official only in coming months.

"For 500 days, Moscow has brought death and destruction to the heart of Europe, seeking to destroy Ukraine and divide NATO," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters on Friday. "At the summit, we will make Ukraine even stronger, and set out a vision for its future."

Stoltenberg said the leaders "will agree a multi-year program of assistance to ensure full interoperability between the Ukrainian armed forces and NATO."

A NATO-Ukraine Council — where crisis talks can be held — will be established. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will attend the council's first meeting in Vilnius on Wednesday.

Stoltenberg said the leaders "will reaffirm that Ukraine will become a member of NATO and unite on how to bring Ukraine closer to its goal." NATO first

pledged that Ukraine would become a member one day in 2008, but things have evolved little since then.

Asked when, or how, Ukraine might join, Stoltenberg said that the "most important thing now is to ensure that Ukraine prevails." The U.S., Germany and some other allies consider that Ukraine should not be invited in while it's at war, so as not to encourage Russia to widen the conflict.

With Ukraine imploring its Western partners for more weapons and ammunition, and national military stocks among its partners depleting, NATO is encouraging the 31 allies to boost their military budgets.

In 2014, NATO allies pledged to move toward spending 2% of gross domestic product on defense by 2024. In Vilnius, they will make 2% the minimum, but will not set any time frame for achieving that goal, NATO officials say. Under new estimates released Friday, only 11 of the

allies will reach the 2% goal in 2023.

But Stoltenberg said that good progress is being made. "In 2023, there will be a real increase of 8.3% across European Allies and Canada. This is the biggest increase in decades," he said.

Question marks remain about Sweden's future at NATO. It abandoned a long history of military nonalignment last year to seek protection under the organization's security umbrella after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Erdogan appears set to steal the summit limelight. He accuses Sweden of being too lenient toward groups that Ankara says pose a security threat, including militant Kurdish groups and people associated with a 2016 coup attempt.

Hungary is also holding up approval of Sweden's candidacy, but has never clearly stated publicly what its concerns are. NATO officials expect that Hungary will follow suit once

EU eyes boosting ammo production to help Ukraine

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union took a major step early Friday in approving plans to boost its anemic production of ammunition and missiles within the 27-nation bloc, to both defend itself and quickly help Ukraine in trying to push back the invasion by Russia.

The EU presidency announced early Friday that the member states and the EU Parliament reached a deal "to urgently mobilize" half a billion euros from its budget for an Act in Support of Ammunition Production.

The deal follows up the decision by EU leaders in March to boost urgently needed ammuni-

tion deliveries to Ukraine, which were then sought to start a counteroffensive against Russian forces.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has steadfastly asked for more military aid, from ammunition to planes and missiles.

ASAP was part of the plan to send Ukraine 1 million rounds of artillery ammunition within the next 12 months.

The EU had already approved the plan for a fast-track purchasing procedures when it approved funds Friday to ramp up production in EU facilities and factories.

"This is yet another proof of the EU's unwavering commit-

ment to supporting Ukraine, strengthening the EU's defense, technological and industrial base, and ultimately ensuring the long-term security and defense of EU citizens," said Defense Minister Margarita Robles of Spain, which currently holds the EU presidency.

The United States was expected to announce Friday that it will send thousands of cluster munitions as part of a new military aid package worth \$800 million, according to people familiar with the decision who were not authorized to discuss it publicly before the official announcement and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Many European nations have

moved even slower than Washington in providing military hardware, in part because for decades they hunkered under the U.S. military umbrella at the NATO alliance.

"Facing a war on European soil, we can no longer afford to neglect our defense as we have done over the last three decades. We urgently need to adapt our budgetary priorities," said EU Parliament member Michael Gahler.

The deal must still be reappraised once more by the member states and Parliament, the Spanish presidency said, but the procedure should not provide major hiccups and be finished the end of the month.

Drones sweeping for sharks during rise in NY encounters

Associated Press

WANTAGH, N.Y. — Off the coast of Long Island, drones sweep over the ocean, patrolling the water for any danger that might lurk below the surface as beachgoers grow more vigilant because of a recent spate of shark encounters.

Over two days this week, five people reported being bitten by sharks at some of New York's most popular beaches, leading to heightened surveillance of the area's waters.

The sighting of a 10-foot shark on Thursday prompted officials to keep people out of the water at Robert Moses State Park, the same Long Island beach that delayed its opening July 4 after a drone spotted a group of 50 sand sharks off the coast.

"We are now more vigilant than ever," said George Gorman, the state's park director in Long Island. "We have drones in the sky that watch over the waters. We have lifeguards on WaveRunners that watch over the waters."

Just a few years ago, encounters with sharks were rare. But more recently, reports of sharks biting people have increased.

Last year, eight people reported being bitten by sharks swimming in the shallows off Long Island's beaches.

"This year, we've already had five bites," Gorman said, "and the season has kind of just begun."

Even if the injuries have not been serious, he and others are concerned by the rise in shark sightings and encounters.

Cary Epstein, a lifeguard supervisor who pilots drones at Jones Beach, said the tiny battery-powered aircraft make three sweeps each day: once before opening, then sometime midday and a final round before the end of the day.

"Despite the nervousness over what's going on right now in New York, people swim in the ocean every day, and they have for centuries," he said. "But we do have to remember that we are cohabitating, and this is their house."

Drones provide an additional vantage point unavailable to lifeguards on the beach, Epstein said as he demonstrated how he uses the drones to patrol the waters off Long Island.

As he operated one of the

drones from the beach, he stared into a small box equipped with controls and a display screen. The craft lifted off, hovering over the sand until it hurtled forward over the water and turned into a mere dot as it approached the horizon.

"When you're up in an elevated lifeguard station or a lifeguard stand, you can see up and you can see out, but you can't see straight down," Epstein said. "When we do have sharks that are eating on these fish, it's very, very clear to us. You could see it, no questions asked."

But, he warned, "just because you don't see something doesn't mean it's not there."

Just two months ago, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced the addition of 10 drones to its squadron, bringing the total to 18 that can be used to monitor shark activity along her state's beaches.

An increase in shark sightings might suggest a healthier ecosystem, some say. Cleaner waters allow the small fish that sharks feed on to flourish. More small fish swimming closer to shore means more sharks nipping at their tails.

Biden sets new push to limit health care costs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Friday rolled out a new set of initiatives to reduce health care costs: a crackdown on scam insurance plans, new guidance to prevent surprise medical bills and an effort to reduce medical debt tied to credit cards.

Biden's remarks build on previous initiatives to limit health care costs, with the Department of Health and Human Services releasing new estimates showing 18.7 million older adults and other Medicare beneficiaries will save an estimated \$400 per year in prescription drug costs in 2025 because of the president placing a cap on out-of-pocket spending as part of last year's Inflation Reduction Act.

Gearing up for his 2024 re-election campaign as inflation remains a dominant concern for voters, the Democratic president has emphasized his policies to help families manage their expenses.

Republican lawmakers have criticized Biden's policies by saying they have spurred higher prices that hurt the well-being of families.

The Biden administration plans to limit what it calls "junk" insurance plans, such as short-term policies that can deny basic coverage as people transition between employers and still need temporary health care coverage.

Neera Tanden, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, highlighted the case of a man in Montana who received a \$43,000 health care bill because his insurer said his cancer was a pre-existing condition.

DeSantis raised \$20 million in 6 weeks

Associated Press

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis raised \$20 million in the first six weeks after he announced his run for president, his campaign said Thursday.

The formidable haul indicates a well of support despite a glitchy campaign launch on Twitter back in May. Still, polling shows he's in a distant second place for the 2024 Republican nomination behind former President Donald Trump.

Trump's campaign said

Wednesday he raised \$35 million during the second quarter of the year, nearly double what he raised during the first three months of the year. The money was raised from April through June between his main campaign account and a joint fundraising account, which is used for expenses like paying his legal bills. Trump's fundraising has exploded since he was indicted in New York and Florida, and he faces additional investigations that could further juice

his ability to raise money.

DeSantis has maintained a busy schedule of fundraising and campaigning in early primary states and beyond amid a deepening rivalry between him and Trump.

He sparked controversy last week with a video slamming Trump for his past support of gay and transgender people, which a prominent group of LGBT conservatives said "ventured into homophobic territory."

US added solid 209,000 jobs in June

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers pulled back on hiring but still delivered another month of solid gains in June, adding 209,000 jobs, a sign that the economy's resilience is confounding the Federal Reserve's drive to slow growth and inflation.

The latest evidence of economic strength makes it all but certain that the Fed will resume its interest rate hikes later this month after having ended a streak of 10 rate increases intended to slow inflation.

The June hiring figure reported by the government Friday is below the levels recorded in recent months. But it still points to a durable labor market that also features a

historically high number of advertised openings. The unemployment rate fell to 3.6% from 3.7%, and is near a five-decade low.

The economy is beset by high interest rates, elevated inflation and nagging worries about a possible recession resulting from the Fed's ever-higher interest rates. Yet many industries are still adding jobs to keep up with consumer demand and restore their workforces to pre-pandemic levels.

The solid pace of hiring and rising wages have enabled consumers to keep spending on services, from traveling to dining out to attending entertainment events. While economists have repeatedly forecast a re-

cession for later this year or next year, a downturn is unlikely as long as companies keep steadily filling jobs.

Chair Jerome Powell has said that worker demand for higher pay to keep up with inflation can perpetuate inflation if employers pass on their higher costs to their customers. The Fed wants to see hiring and wage increases slow before halting its rate hikes.

The Fed has jacked up its key interest rate by a sizable 5 percentage points — the fastest pace of rate hikes in four decades. Those increases have made mortgages, auto loans and other forms of borrowing significantly more expensive.

Mortgage rates lead to spike in monthly payments

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Would-be homebuyers are willing to take on sharply higher mortgage payments, even as home prices have begun to pull back this year.

The median monthly payment listed on applications for home purchase loans jumped 14.1% in May from that of a year earlier to an all-time high \$2,165, according to the Mortgage Bankers Association. The May figure also represents a 2.5% increase from April.

"Homebuyer affordability eroded further in May as prospective buyers continue to grapple with high interest rates and low housing inventory," Edward Seiler, the MBA's associate vice president of housing economics, said in a release last week.

The size of the mortgage and the interest

rate on the loan influence how large the monthly payment on a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage will be. Those two housing market variables have ballooned in recent years.

Home price growth accelerated during the pandemic, fueled by ultra-low mortgage rates and bidding wars as competition for relatively few properties on the market intensified. Even after the market cooled last summer as the Federal Reserve raised interest rates in its bid to slow economic growth and tame inflation, home price appreciation remained resilient until this February, when the median U.S. home price slipped 0.2% from that of a year earlier — its first annual decline in 13 years, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Home prices have kept falling since, most recently sliding 3.1% in May from that of a year earlier to a median \$396,100, according to the NAR.

Still, the national median home price remains nearly 40% higher than it was three years ago. Meanwhile, the average rate on a 30-year home loan climbed to a new high for the year this week at 6.81%, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday. That's more than double what it was two years ago.

The combination, along with a stubbornly low level of homes for sale, is driving mortgage payments higher, pushing the limits of what many homebuyers can afford.

Consider that two years ago the median national monthly payment on home loan applications was \$1,320.48, or 63.4% less than what it was last month.

OceanGate suspends operations after Titan implosion

Associated Press

The company that owned a submersible that imploded on its way to explore the wreck of the Titanic, killing all five on-board, said Thursday it has suspended operations.

OceanGate announced the action in a brief statement posted atop its website. Contacted for additional information, a spokesperson declined to comment further. Among those killed in the implosion was Stockton Rush, the submersible's pilot and chief executive officer of the company.

Investigators believe the Titan imploded

as it made its descent into deep North Atlantic waters on June 18. The Coast Guard said last week that human remains have likely been recovered from the wreckage of the submersible and are being examined by medical officials in the U.S.

Remotely operated vehicles, known as ROVs, were used to retrieve the debris from the ocean floor about 12,500 feet underwater and a ship later brought pieces of the wreckage to a port in Canada to be examined. The debris was found roughly 1,600 feet away from the Titanic.

The U.S. Coast Guard has convened a

Marine Board of Investigation, its highest level of investigation, into the implosion, and plans to hold a public hearing in the future. The Coast Guard did not respond to an emailed request for comment on Thursday.

In its statement Thursday, OceanGate said it "has suspended all exploration and commercial operations," but didn't elaborate. The site still contained a photo of the wreck of the Titanic along with the tagline "explore the world's most famous shipwreck," but it wasn't possible to book a trip and some of the site's other features were broken.

Yellen appeals to China to revive talks during visit

Associated Press

BEIJING — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen appealed to China's No. 2 leader not to let frustration over U.S. curbs on access to processor chips and other technology disrupt economic cooperation during a visit Friday aimed at improving strained relations.

Meeting with Premier Li Qiang, Yellen said Washington and Beijing have a duty to cooperate on issues that affect the world. She appealed for "regular channels of communication" at a time when relations are at their lowest in decades due to disputes over technology, security and other irritants.

Yellen is one of several senior U.S. officials due to visit Beijing to encourage Chinese leaders to revive interactions between governments of the two largest economies. Treasury officials said earlier she wouldn't meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and no breakthroughs were expected.

Yellen defended "targeted actions," a reference to curbs on Chinese access to advanced processor chips and other technology, saying they are needed to protect national security.

"You may disagree," Yellen said. "But we should not allow any disagreement to lead to misunderstandings that needlessly worsen our bilateral economic and financial relationships."

Yellen appealed for "healthy economic competition," a reference to complaints Beijing is stepping up use of subsidies and market barriers to protect its companies.

"A fair set of rules will benefit both of our countries," Yellen said. "We also face important global challenges where the United States and China have a duty to both countries but also to the world to cooperate."

Li expressed optimism that conditions might improve but gave no indication of possible changes in Chinese policies that have irked Washington and its trading partners.

Referring to a rainbow that was spotted after Yellen's plane landed Thursday in rainy weather, Li said, "after a round of wind and rain, we will definitely see more rainbows."

The Chinese finance ministry called Yellen's visit a "concrete measure" toward carrying out an agreement by Xi and President Joe Biden during a meeting in November to improve relations.

Robots say they could lead better than humans

Associated Press

BERLIN — Robots told reporters Friday they could be more efficient leaders than humans, but wouldn't take anyone's job away and had no intention of rebelling against their creators.

Nine AI-enabled humanoid robots sat or stood with their creators at a podium in a Geneva conference center for what the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union billed as the world's first news conference featuring humanoid social robots.

Among them: Sophia, the first robot innovation ambassador for the U.N. Development Program; Grace, described as the world's most advanced humanoid health care robot; and Desdemona, a rock star robot. Two, Geminoid and Nadine, closely resembled their makers.

The event was part of the AI for Good Global Summit, meant to illustrate how new technology can support the U.N.'s goals for sustainable development.

Reporters were asked to speak slowly and clearly when addressing the robots, and were informed that time lags in responses would be due to the internet connection and not to the robots themselves. That didn't prevent awkward pauses, audio problems and some robotic replies.

Asked about the chances of AI-powered robots being more effective government leaders, Sophia responded: "I believe that humanoid robots have the potential to lead with a greater level of efficiency and effectiveness than human leaders. We don't have the same biases or emotions that can sometimes cloud decision-making and can process large amounts of data quickly in order to make the best decisions."

A human member of the panel pointed out that all of Sophia's data comes from humans and will contain some of their biases. The robot then said that humans and AI working together "can create an effective synergy."

Would the robots' existence destroy jobs? "I will be working alongside humans to provide assistance and support and will not be replacing any existing jobs," said Grace. Was she sure about that? "Yes, I am sure."

Israeli forces kill two in shootout

Associated Press

NABLUS, West Bank — Israeli forces killed two Palestinian militants in a flash-point city in the occupied West Bank Friday, days after Israel concluded a major two-day offensive meant to crack down on militants.

The persistent violence raised questions about the effectiveness of the raid earlier this week in the Jenin refugee camp, which saw Israel launch rare airstrikes on militant targets, deploy hundreds of troops and cause widespread damage to roads, homes and businesses. As a result of the raid, 12 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier were killed.

The Israeli domestic security agency Shin Bet said Friday the two men, who it said were behind a shooting attack this week on a police vehicle, were killed in a gun battle with Israeli forces in the heart of the city of Nablus, the West Bank's commercial capital.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said two men were killed by Israeli fire, identifying them as Khayri Mohammed Sari Shaheen, 34, and Hamza Moayed Mohammed Maqbool, 32. Two militant groups, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, claimed the men as members.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Wimbledon finally finishes first round

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Let the record reflect that the rain-logged first round of Wimbledon 2023 finally concluded at 3:23 p.m. local time on Thursday, Day 4 of the tournament, 48 hours later than originally planned, when Alexander Zverev finished off his 6-4, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5) victory over Dutch qualifier Gijs Brouwer.

Zverev was supposed to start and, naturally, finish, on Tuesday. Instead, he didn't play his first point of the fortnight until about 17½ hours after Novak Djokovic already had made his way into the third round.

"Took me three days," Zverev joked, "but I'm here."

For once this week, the sun was out at the All England Club, and the showers were nowhere to be found.

Instead, there was plenty of play, plenty of results—56 in all—and plenty of drama, perhaps none more than in one much-hyped showdown that did not conclude: Two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray vs.

two-time major finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas was suspended at 10:40 p.m. and was to resume Friday.

Played with the roof closed at a loud Centre Court filled with "Let's go, Andy! Let's go!" chants from fans, that one was stopped just after Murray took a two-sets-to-one lead. Tsitsipas took the opening set 7-6 (3), but Murray took the next two 7-6 (2), 6-4. Murray, 36 and with an artificial hip, slipped and fell behind a baseline but arose and finished that third set just before play was halted.

There were tears for Alizé Cornet, who slipped to the turf and hurt her leg at 5-all in the second set of what would become a 6-2, 7-6 (2) loss to defending champion Elena Rybakina.

There were tears for Donna Vekic, too, and she won. She came back from a set and 5-2 down in the second to eliminate 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens.

"I was losing," Vekic said later. "Not that I was just losing—I

felt like I was getting killed."

There was realism for Stan Wawrinka, a three-time Grand Slam champion who is now 38, coming off years of injuries and operations, and, while he was pleased to defeat Tomás Martín Etcheverry 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-2, knows what comes next: a matchup against Djokovic, who has won seven of his men's-record 23 major championships at this event.

"There's zero opportunity to win Wimbledon for me, I think," Wawrinka acknowledged.

"It's an honor to play Novak here. ... Hopefully I can make a competitive match," he continued, "but if you will look at recent results, I don't really stand a chance."

There was new ground for a group of men who won to reach the third round at the All England Club for the first time: No. 14 seed Lorenzo Musetti, qualifier Maximilian Marterer, Mikael Ymer, Quentin Halys and Roman Safiullin.

Ymer came back from a two-set deficit to knock off No. 9 Tay-

lor Fritz of the U.S. 3-6, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

Two American men stuck around for the next round by winning: No. 10 Frances Tiafoe, a semifinalist at the U.S. Open last September, and No. 16 Tommy Paul, a semifinalist at the Australian Open in January.

They were joined in the third round by two American women, No. 4 Jessica Pegula and 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin.

There was familiar disappointment for Casper Ruud, who was the runner-up at three of the past five majors but lost to British wild-card Liam Broady on Centre Court 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, 6-0. Ruud has never reached the third round in four appearances at Wimbledon.

"I'm going to keep trying. I have a goal, of course, in my career to try to do well here at some point," said Ruud, who was seeded No. 4 in the men's bracket. "It didn't happen this year. I'll come back. I honestly love coming here. It's such a special place."

Lin shares early lead with Kim at US Women's Open

Associated Press

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. — Pebble Beach was everything the best women golfers in the world imagined for the first U.S. Women's Open with its raw beauty, marine layer and chill in the air.

For some of them, it was a sheer beast.

Xiyu Janet Lin and Hyo Joo Kim could soak up the scenery, each of them with a 4-under 68 on Thursday to share the lead after one round of a historic week on one of the most famous golf courses in America.

"We're part of the history. It's really cool," Lin said. "I kind of told myself no matter what, this is going to be a memorable week."

It was a forgettable start for Jin Young Ko, whose 79 was her worst U.S. Women's Open score by four shots. And she had company. The top four players in the women's world ranking combined to go 22-over par with Nelly Korda and Lydia Ko at 76 and Lilia Vu at 79.

Rose Zhang, the 20-year-old Stanford sensation who won in her pro debut last month, wasted a good start with a double bogey on the eighth hole that slowed her momentum. She played the final 10 holes in 2 over for a 74.

"I felt like the game in general was pretty solid. It was just the mishap on 8 that kind of turned my entire round a lit-

tle bit," Zhang said.

She didn't make a birdie the rest of the way, and had to chip on her last four holes—one of them from the wrong side of the green on the par-3 17th just as Gary Woodland did in 2019 when he won the U.S. Open. She nearly holed it, a perfectly clipped wedge she had never tried in competition.

"Always something new," Zhang said with a laugh.

Lin began her round on the tough par-4 10th hole, and she saved par on four of her opening five holes before holing an 8-foot birdie putt on the 15th. The Chinese player's lone bogey came at the end when she failed to get up-and-down from short of a bunker on No. 9.

"At the beginning, putting definitely save me," said Lin, who took only 25 putts and was leading the field in the key putting statistic. "Making those short putts really kind of boosted my confidence, making me feel more comfortable to attack when I needed to."

Kim, whose lone major was the Evian Championship in 2014, was 4 under through eight holes until her lone bogey at No. 9. She made only one birdie the rest of the day, holing a 20-footer on the 17th that allowed her to catch Lin.

She was happy with her score and the location.

"I think I can brag about this, my opportunity to play at Pebble Beach," Kim said.

Reds notch 20th victory in 24 games

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nick Senzel made a leaping catch to save a run in the ninth inning, then hit a two-run homer leading off the 10th to lift the Cincinnati Reds over the Washington Nationals 5-4 Thursday for their 20th win in 24 games.

Cincinnati (49-39) stretched its winning streak to five and maintained a two-game lead over the second-place Brewers in the NL Central heading into a weekend series at Milwaukee.

Senzel preserved a 3-3 tie when he made the leaping catch on CJ Abrams with a runner on second, then hit a leadoff two-run homer in the 10th off Hunter Harvey (3-4). Tony Santillan (1-0) got the win and Alexis Díaz earned his 25th save after allowing Lane Thomas' RBI single.

Dodgers 5, Pirates 2: Max Muncy and Freddie Freeman homered and Julio Urias pitched six innings to help host Los Angeles beat Pittsburgh.

The Dodgers took three of four from Pittsburgh to pull within a half-game of slumping Arizona for the NL West lead with two games left before the All-Star break.

Freeman, who will participate in his seventh All-Star Game, was 3 for 4 with three RBIs and two runs. He made a sliding catch, turned a double play and stole a base.

Muncy hit the go-ahead home run in the sixth inning, a two-run shot to center field for his 20th of the season. Freeman led off the inning by legging out a double to the left-field corner, and Muncy then hit the 414-foot home run.

Urias (6-5) allowed two runs on three hits, struck out eight and walked one, all in 88 pitches. Pirates starter Johan Oviedo (3-10) allowed five earned runs on six hits in 6½ innings.

Mets 9, Diamondbacks 0: Francisco Lindor homered and had two triples among his five hits, Francisco Alvarez ho-

mered for the third straight game and New York routed Arizona.

Carlos Carrasco (3-3) allowed three hits in eight innings for the once-struggling Mets, who had 17 hits for their fifth straight win.

Red Sox 10, Rangers 6: Kiké Hernández blooped a bases-loaded, broken-bat single in the seventh to give the Red Sox the lead and then drove in another run on an infield hit later in the six-run inning as host Boston rallied to beat Nathan Eovaldi.

Boston led 1-0 and 3-1 before the AL West-leading Rangers scored two runs in the fourth and two more in the fifth for a 5-3 lead. The Red Sox got one back in the sixth, when they chased Eovaldi, and then sent 12 batters to the plate against four pitchers in the seventh. No. 9 hitter Connor Wong had three hits for Boston, and Josh Winckowski (3-1) got the win with a scoreless inning of relief.

Josh Sborz (4-4) was charged with three runs on three hits and two walks while getting just two outs.

Brewers 6, Cubs 5: Victor Caratini homered off Michael Fulmer (0-5) to break a 5-5 tie in the eighth.

Cody Bellinger was 4 for 4 with three RBIs for the Cubs, finishing a triple shy of the cycle and raising his average to .298.

Milwaukee led 4-1 in the sixth inning and 5-3 in the eighth before Yan Gomes' two-run homer off J.C. Mejía (1-0). Joel Payamps got his third save.

Orioles 14, Yankees 1: Gunnar Henderson set career highs with two homers, four hits and five RBIs — all in the first four innings. Henderson hit his first leadoff homer before the visiting Orioles sent 21 batters to the plate in the third and fourth innings, opening a 13-0 lead with 11 hits, three walks and one hit batter.

Luis Severino (1-4) allowed seven runs and 10 hits over 2½

innings and has a 7.38 ERA with a .315 opponents' batting average and .560 slugging percentage.

Baltimore scored its most runs since a 15-10 win over Boston last Aug. 19 and had 20 hits. Kyle Bradish (5-4) allowed three hits over six innings.

Phillies 3, Rays 1 (11): Kyle Schwarber and Trea Turner had RBI singles off Ryan Thompson (1-2), in the 11th inning and visiting Philadelphia completed a three-game sweep that extended Tampa Bay's losing streak to a season-high five.

Matt Strahm (3-3) worked two innings for Philadelphia, which has won 12 straight road games, one shy of the team record set in 1976.

Cardinals 3, Marlins 0: Nolan Arenado homered in the sixth inning off Eury Pérez (5-3), Jack Flaherty pitched shutout ball for his second straight start and visiting St. Louis won the series finale to avoid a four-game sweep.

Luis Arraez had his 12th three-hit game. His MLB-leading average is .389.

Flaherty (6-5) allowed nine hits in 6½ innings, struck out five and walked two. He has lowered his ERA from 4.95 to 4.27 in his past two starts. Jordan Hicks got three outs for his sixth save.

Mariners 5, Astros 1: Eugenio Suárez homered twice with three RBIs, J.P. Crawford added a solo shot and visiting Seattle beat Houston.

Suárez connected off Ronel Blanco (2-1) to make it 2-0 in the second and Crawford's homer put Seattle up 3-0 an inning later. Suárez, who also doubled, made it 5-1 with his second home run to start the ninth.

Seattle starter George Kirby (8-7) allowed six hits and one run in 6½ innings.

Blue Jays 6-5, White Sox 2 (11)-4: Whit Merrifield hit two solo homers, Matt Chapman also connected and visiting To-

ronto beat Chicago for a double-header sweep.

Vladimir Guerrero Jr. had two hits and two RBIs for Toronto, including a tiebreaking double in the seventh inning. Fellow All-Star Bo Bichette had four of the team's 16 hits.

Toronto used a six-run 11th inning to beat the White Sox in the opener. George Springer hit a tiebreaking RBI single, and Jordan Romano (4-4) worked the 10th for the win.

The Blue Jays (48-40) completed a season sweep, outscoring Chicago 35-11 in six games.

Guardians 6, Royals 1: José Ramírez and Josh Naylor homered on consecutive pitches in the sixth inning, powering host Cleveland past Kansas City.

Ramírez homered to left field and Naylor, who missed the previous two games because of tendinitis in his right wrist, drove one over the wall in right against reliever Amir Garrett (0-1).

Andrés Giménez also homered for Cleveland (43-44). The Guardians haven't been at .500 since April 28 at 13-13.

Eli Morgan (4-1) worked a scoreless inning before Enyel De Los Santos, Trevor Stephan and Nick Sandlin completed the six-hitter.

Tigers 9, Athletics 0: Javier Báez had a two-run single in the first inning and All-Star Michael Lorenzen (3-6) combined with Tyler Holton, Brendan White and Chasen Shreve on a four-hitter.

Jake Marisnick homered and drove in two runs for the Tigers, who pitched their fifth shutout of the season.

Rookie Hogan Harris (2-3) allowed a career-high seven runs, eight hits and four walks in 4½ innings. Oakland has been blanked 10 times and was held to four hits or fewer for the 16th time. At 25-64, the A's are on pace to finish 46-116, the most losses since the 2003 Tigers went 43-119.

Wembanyama, Spears detail incident

The Washington Post

LAS VEGAS — Pop singer Britney Spears said Thursday that she was struck by a San Antonio Spurs security team member when she attempted to approach rookie forward Victor Wembanyama outside a Las Vegas restaurant on Wednesday night.

The incident, which reportedly prompted Spears to file a police report, came two days before Wembanyama is set to make his highly anticipated Summer League debut against the Charlotte Hornets at UNLV's Thomas & Mack Center on Friday. No charges have been filed in connection to the incident.

"I recognized an athlete [Wembanyama] in my hotel lobby as I was heading to dinner," Spears wrote in a lengthy statement on Instagram. "I later

went to a restaurant at a different hotel and saw him again. I decided to approach him and congratulate him on his success. It was really loud, so I tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention."

The 19-year-old Wembanyama told reporters Thursday that he was walking in a busy hall and that his security team had instructed him not to stop to talk with any fans because it would "make a crowd" outside Catch, a seafood restaurant at the Aria resort on the Las Vegas Strip.

"One person [Spears] was calling me," Wembanyama told reporters at a team practice Thursday. "I couldn't stop. That person grabbed me from behind. I didn't see what happened because I was walking straight and didn't stop. That person grabbed me from behind, not on my shoulder. I just know secur-

ity pushed her away. I don't know with how much force."

Wembanyama, who didn't realize Spears was the one who approached him until he was told hours later, added that he "enjoyed a nice dinner [and had] a fun night with the guys," and that he thought the incident was "no big deal."

Spears disputed Wembanyama's claim that she attempted to "grab him from behind" and said that the security team member "backhanded me in the face without looking back in front a crowd." The Grammy-winning singer added that the force of the blow initially knocked her off balance and caused her to lose her glasses.

"It's important to share this story and to urge people in the public eye to set an example and treat all people with respect," said Spears, who noted that she

hadn't yet received an apology from Wembanyama, his security team or the Spurs.

The 7-foot-4 Wembanyama became the first French player to be selected as a No. 1 overall draft pick last month after drawing comparisons to past teenage basketball prodigies like LeBron James and Lew Alcindor. The excitement around his NBA arrival — dubbed "Wembymania" — generated a record television audience for the draft that topped 6 million viewers, and tickets for his Summer League debut sold out days in advance. Prices for a general admission ticket have soared to more than \$200 apiece on secondary sites.

Spears, 41, was once a teen sensation herself, as her 1999 debut album "... Baby One More Time" has sold more than 25 million copies.

Volkanovski returns to featherweight at UFC 290

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Alexander Volkanovski is coming off a fight in which he lost — and was congratulated for it.

He wasn't all that comfortable at first about hearing the kudos for moving up a weight class to come close in a fight that Volkanovski said even many close to him didn't think he had much of a chance to win.

Now he's back in his more familiar featherweight division, where he won five title fights, to take on interim champion Yair Rodriguez (16-3) on Saturday for the belt in UFC 290.

Having gone up in weight and come back down, Volkanovski (25-2) said the experience of trying to add more bulk should serve him well.

"It feels good to be at featherweight again and being as sharp as ever," Volkanovski said. "Def-

initely, that bulk made me stronger. Rising to that challenge, to that occasion, put my skills on a whole other level."

He moved up to lightweight to face Islam Makhachev on Feb. 11 for the championship. The fight went five rounds, with Makhachev winning by unanimous decision. That loss, before a pro-Volkanovski crowd in his home country of Australia, ended his 22-match winning streak.

Even in losing, the 34-year-old Volkanovski took a big step in solidifying his reputation as one of the UFC's top pound-for-pound fighters, trading blows and coming close on the scorecards at 48-47, 48-47 and 49-46 despite facing an opponent 4 inches taller and 15 pounds heavier.

He is a substantial favorite to recapture the lightweight belt against Rodriguez, a 30-year-old from Mexico.

Lillard hopeful Blazers, Heat can discuss a trade

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Damian Lillard's position has not and will not change: The seven-time All-Star wants to be traded to the Miami Heat.

Lillard's agent, Aaron Goodwin, confirmed that stance Thursday and said he hopes that the Portland Trail Blazers — the team that Lillard has spent the entirety of his 11-year NBA career with — can engage with the Heat on steps toward a deal in the coming days, especially with virtually everyone from the NBA gathering in Las Vegas for Summer League that starts on Friday.

The Trail Blazers publicly revealed this past weekend that Lillard had asked for a trade, an announcement that ended weeks of speculation about his future in Portland. Lillard had told the team that he wanted a

chance to contend for a title; the Blazers have won only four playoff series in his 11 seasons and missed the playoffs in each of the last two years by wide margins.

"I'm hopeful that at least talks will initiate since they're all going to be in one place," Goodwin said. "That's my hope."

It will obviously take a significant package of players and picks to make any trade happen. Lillard will make almost \$46 million this coming season and could make as much as \$216 million over the next four years if he exercises his option for the 2026-27 season.

"The solution comes in Miami actually having a chance to sit down and talk with Portland," Goodwin said. "I think if they can ever sit down and get in a room, there could be a deal to be made."