

## Ukraine welcomes G7 security pledges

*Associated Press*

VILNIUS, Lithuania — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomed fresh pledges of weapons and ammunition to fight Russia's invasion along with longer-term security commitments from the West on Wednesday even as he expressed disappointment over the lack of a clear path for his country to join NATO as the alliance wrapped up its annual summit.

"The Ukrainian delegation is bringing home a significant security victory for the Ukraine, for our country, for our people, for our children," he said while flanked by President Joe Biden and other leaders from the Group of Seven most powerful democratic nations.

A joint declaration issued by the G7 lays the groundwork for each nation to negotiate agreements to help Ukraine bolster its military over the long term. Zelenskyy described the initiative as a bridge toward eventual NATO membership and a deterrent against Russia. Biden said, "Our support will last long into the future. We're going to help Ukraine build a strong, capable defense."

The Ukrainian and American presidents also met privately along with their advisers, and Biden pledged later that "the United States is doing everything we can to get you what you

need." He acknowledged that Zelenskyy is sometimes "frustrated" by the pace of military assistance.

Zelenskyy thanked Biden, saying that "you spend this money for our lives," and said shipments of controversial cluster munitions would help Ukraine's fight against Russia.

It was a marked shift in tone from Zelenskyy's complaints a day earlier that it was "unprecedented and absurd" to avoid setting a timeline for Ukraine to join NATO.

On the final day of NATO's summit, the alliance launched a new forum for deepening ties with Ukraine: the NATO-Ukraine Council. It's intended to serve as a permanent body where the alliance's 31 members and Ukraine can hold consultations and call for meetings in emergency situations.

The setting is part of NATO's effort to bring Ukraine as close as possible to the military alliance without actually joining it. On Tuesday, the leaders said in their communique summarizing the summit's conclusions that Ukraine can join "when allies agree and conditions are met."

"Today we meet as equals," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said at a news conference with Zelenskyy. "I look forward to the day we meet as allies."

The ambiguous plan for Ukraine's future membership reflects the challenges of reaching consensus among the alliance's current members while the war continues, and has frustrated Zelenskyy even as he expressed appreciation for military hardware being promised by the G7.

"The results of the summit are good, but if there were an invitation, that would be ideal," Zelenskyy said, through a translator. He added that joining NATO would be "a serious motivating factor for Ukrainian society" at it resists Russia.

"NATO needs us just as we need NATO," he said alongside Stoltenberg.

Ukraine's future membership was the most divisive and emotionally charged issue at this year's summit. In essence, Western countries are willing to keep sending weapons to help Ukraine do the job that NATO was designed to do — hold the line against a Russian invasion — but not allow Ukraine to join its ranks and benefit from its security during the war.

"We have to stay outside of this war but be able to support Ukraine. We managed that very delicate balancing act for the last 17 months. It's to the benefit of everyone that we maintain that balancing act," Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said.

## New Navy measure mandates mental health care

**By KELLY AGE**

*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have apparently become the first U.S. service branches to implement the Brandon Act, a set of policies that provide service members with a confidential evaluation and greater access to mental health care.

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro signed the instruction Monday, according to the parents of Brandon Castera and a USNI News report Tuesday. President Joe Biden signed the measure into law in December 2021 as part of the fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act.

The act is named for Petty Officer 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Brandon Castera, an aviation electrician. Castera, 21, died by suicide June 25, 2018, at

Naval Station Norfolk, Va. A command investigation found that a combative and toxic leadership contributed to his death.

Brandon's parents, Teri and Patrick Castera, two months after his death started a push to get the measure passed, an uphill battle of phone calls and trips to the Pentagon, Patrick Castera told Stars and Stripes by phone Wednesday.

"He will forever be saving lives and his death meant something, as tragic as it was," his father said. "I know he's smiling at us. He had a smile and made everyone want to smile."

The Brandon Act allows service members to seek confidential help for any mental health issue, at any time, in any environment, thereby reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health treatment.

The act requires a mental health evaluation as soon as service members self-report, according to thebrandonact.org, a website the Casteras created. The Brandon Act "will also allow Americans serving in uniform to seek help confidentially and, if necessary, outside of the chain of command," according to the website.

The measure also mandates annual training from the Department of Defense on recognizing members who may need a mental health evaluation.

Under the law, commanders and supervisors must ensure that service members understand the procedure for requesting a mental health evaluation, ensure they are referred as soon as possible, maintain privacy protections and not seek the results of evaluations, among other requirements.

# House GOP brings culture wars to budget debate

*The Washington Post*

The Republican-led House is expected to vote as soon as this week on an \$886 billion bill that aims to shape Pentagon policy next year, but its path to passage faces a potentially messy partisan battle over abortion access, LGBTQ+ rights, efforts to promote diversity in the military and other politically charged social issues.

The House version of the National Defense Authorization Act includes increased investment in precision missiles, warships and newer technologies like artificial intelligence and hypersonics — core bipartisan priorities as the Pentagon directs greater attention toward China. It also authorizes a 5.2% base pay increase for military personnel and expanded support for their families through housing improvements, and broader access to child care, health care and education benefits.

“The threat posed by China is real, and it represents the most pressing national security challenge we’ve faced in decades,” House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers, R-Ala., told colleagues in remarks Tuesday. The defense bill, he added, was designed “with that underlying goal: to deter China.”

But it is the country’s intensifying culture-war battles, not any specific approach to U.S. national security, likely to attract the most vociferous debate as lawmakers consider amendments to the bill in the coming days. While it is widely considered one of the few must-pass pieces of legislation Congress takes up each year, some members and their staffers have warned that inserting contentious issues like abortion into the bill could derail the process entirely, complicating U.S. defense strategy and funding for the coming year.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., on Tuesday seemed to concede that the rancor surrounding some amendments could lead to delays. “We’re going to get it passed,” he said, adding, “It doesn’t have to be on a specific time.”

“It’s not how you start,” he said. “It’s how you finish.”

The Senate has yet to schedule a vote on its version of the bill. The two chambers will ultimately meet to reconcile any differences before the legislation can move to President Joe Biden for approval. The White House has criticized aspects of the House

measure, which has diverged in some key ways from the proposal that the administration sent to Congress.

The bill, approved last month by the House Armed Services Committee on a 58-1 vote, succeeds in “pushing back against the radical woke ideology being forced on our servicemen and women,” according to a summary of the legislation released last month by committee Republicans.

The House bill would ban drag shows and the teaching of critical race theory in the military while rolling back initiatives, passed by the Democratic-controlled House in previous years, meant to foster diversity and inclusion within the Defense Department. That includes eliminating the department’s chief diversity officer position and a department working group designed to counter extremism in the ranks.

Also built into the House bill is a plan to offer reinstatement to service members who defied the military’s coronavirus vaccine requirement, since repealed, and were discharged for their refusal to do as they were told. That component of the legislation “sets a dangerous precedent that not following lawful orders is an option for service members,” the Biden administration warned.

On Tuesday, the House Rules Committee began evaluating the more than 1,540 amendments lawmakers have sought to insert into the NDAA. Among the record number of proposals are scores that have little to do with defense, including efforts to change laws governing concealed firearms, environmental standards, drug penalties and immigration policy. One seeks to declare the month of July “American Pride Month” — to bolster patriotism.

Not all amendments will be debated on the House floor, but some moderate Republicans worry that the influence of three far-right lawmakers who sit on the committee — Reps. Chip Roy, R-Texas, Thomas Massie, R-Ky., and Ralph Norman, R-S.C. — could prioritize the most polarizing proposals for consideration.

One amendment with more than 60 Republican co-sponsors would prohibit the Pentagon “from paying for or reimbursing expenses relating to abortion services,” the measure says. Conservatives have zeroed in on the policy, adopted in the wake of last year’s Supreme Court decision repealing

the constitutional right to an abortion, that protects service members who must travel out of state to obtain the procedure.

A group of swing-district Republicans has vowed to defeat certain abortion-related amendments if they reach the House floor, said a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to disclose internal discussions. Many House Democrats have said they would not vote to pass the defense bill if it includes an amendment that repeals the policy.

In an interview, the armed services committee’s top Democrat, Rep. Adam Smith, of Washington, charged that “a few Republicans hijacked the bill to push their social agenda and their extreme MAGA agenda” — referring to “Make America Great Again,” a rallying cry among conservatives loyal to former President Donald Trump. Democrats have sought to portray “MAGA Republicans” as espousing the party’s most polarizing and dangerous views, including those concerning abortion, equality and LGBTQ+ rights.

“We’ve taken some steps over the four years that we were in the majority to get the Pentagon to make sure that they did a better job of recruiting and making sure that people in historically marginalized communities — primarily LGBTQ women and people of color ... know that they’re welcome within the military, because historically they have not been,” Smith said, referring to Republican proposals to repeal those measures.

The country’s armed forces are facing a major recruiting challenge, Smith noted, and eliminating diversity and inclusion initiatives hinders the military’s ability to recruit talented individuals from marginalized groups.

Republicans also submitted nearly 20 separate amendments to cut back on or eliminate U.S. security assistance to Ukraine and NATO — proposals that stoked debate Tuesday and are likely to expose intraparty tensions if they go to the House floor.

Vigorous floor debate is important, Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., said in an interview Tuesday. But ultimately, “all of us need to look at getting behind a bill that ensures that our men and women of the military will have the tools they need to be the most lethal and effective fighting force in the world.”

# Microsoft reports breach by Chinese hacking group

*Associated Press*

HONG KONG — China called a Microsoft report that a China-based hacking group breached government-linked email accounts “disinformation,” saying Wednesday that the accusation was meant to divert attention from U.S. cyber activities.

In a blog post published Tuesday, Microsoft said the group, which it identified as Storm-0558, gained access to email accounts linked to 25 organizations, including Western European government agencies. The breach was detected weeks later when customers complained to Microsoft about abnormal mail activity.

“We assess this adversary is focused on espionage, such as gaining access to email systems for intelligence collection,” Charlie Bell, Microsoft’s executive vice president of security, said in a separate Microsoft post.

A Washington Post report cited a statement from U.S. officials claiming Storm-0558 also breached unclassified

email accounts linked to the U.S. government. A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, Wang Wenbin, said the accusation was “disinformation” aimed at diverting attention from U.S. cyberattacks on China.

“No matter which agency issued this information, it will never change the fact that the United States is the world’s largest hacker empire conducting the most cyber theft,” Wang said in a routine briefing.

“Since last year, the cybersecurity organizations of China and other countries have issued many reports exposing the cyberattacks on China by the U.S. Government over a long period of time, but the U.S. has not made a response so far,” he said.

The Storm-0558 hackers used forged authentication tokens — pieces of information used to verify the identity of a user — required to access the email accounts, Microsoft said.

It said it has dealt with the attack and informed affected customers.

# Vermont looks to recover after being hit by storms, flood

*Associated Press*

ANDOVER, Vt. — Floodwaters receded in Vermont cities and towns pummeled by a storm that delivered two months of rain in two days, enabling people to focus on recovering from a disaster that trapped residents in homes, closed roadways and choked streets and businesses with mud and debris.

The water drained off in the capital city of Montpelier, where streets were flooded Tuesday by the swollen Winooski River, and lingering concerns about a dam just upstream eased as water levels there appeared to stabilize.

“It looks like it won’t breach. That is good. That is one less thing we have to have on our front burner,” Montpelier Town Manager Bill Fraser said.

Fraser said the city of 8,000 has shifted into recovery mode, with public works employees removing mud and debris downtown and building inspections to come as businesses begin cleaning up their properties. Brown water from the Winooski reached the tops of parking meters downtown, inundating basements and ruining the contents of lower floors. Similar scenes played out in neighboring Barre and in Bridgewater, where the Ottauquechee River spilled its banks.

Gov. Phil Scott planned to tour areas hit by the flooding with Deanne Criswell, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, on Wednesday, a day after President Joe Biden declared an emergency for Vermont.

It was too early to estimate the total cost of the flooding damage, but it’s likely to be substantial. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, even before these floods, this year has seen 12 confirmed weather/climate disaster events with losses exceeding \$1 billion in the United States.

This slow-moving storm dumped between 7 and 9 inches of rain on parts of New England, New York and Connecticut. New York’s Hudson River Valley was hit hard, and towns in southwest New Hampshire and western Massachusetts also had heavy flooding and road washouts.

# Senators make call for Supreme Court to follow ethics standards

*Associated Press*

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, responding to Associated Press investigative stories on the Supreme Court, said Tuesday that it was time for the justices to bring their conduct in line with the ethical standards of other branches of government.

“If they just establish the basic standards of every other branch of government, it would give us much more confidence in their integrity,” Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said. He commented in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he was attending the NATO summit as part of the U.S. delegation.

The AP published stories showing that Justice Sonia Sotomayor, aided by her staff, has advanced sales of her books through college visits over the past decade; that universities have used trips by justices as a lure for financial contributions by placing them in event rooms with wealthy donors; and that justices have taken expenses-paid teaching trips to attractive locations that are light on actual classroom instruction.

The series comes after stories over the past six months that have raised ethical concerns about the activities of the justices. Durbin and other lawmakers in Washington have announced a vote next week on legislation that would require the court to adopt an ethics code.

The nation’s highest court operates without an ethics code, instead following what Chief Justice John Roberts has referred to as a set of foundational “ethics principles and practices.”

Asked Tuesday about the AP stories, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., called them “powerful reports” that amount to a “drip-by-drip-by-drip indictment of a Supreme Court that seems answerable to no one for ethical breaches.

“The chief justice really ought to be taking these into account for the sake of the court and the country because the Supreme Court will no longer exist as a truly viable institution if it continues the failure to face the need for a code of ethics,” he said.

# US inflation at 3%, lowest level in 2 years

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — After two years of painfully high prices, inflation in the United States has reached its lowest point in more than two years—3% in June compared with 12 months earlier—a sign that the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes have steadily slowed price increases across the economy.

The inflation figure the government reported Wednesday was down sharply from a 4% annual rate in May, though still above the Fed's 2% target rate. Over the past 12 months, gas prices have dropped, grocery costs have risen

more slowly and used cars have become less expensive.

From May to June, overall prices rose 0.2%, up from just 0.1% in the previous month but still comparatively mild.

At the same time, underlying inflation remains persistently high and a nagging concern for the Fed, which is all but certain to increase its key interest rate again when it meets in two weeks. The Fed has raised its benchmark rate by a substantial 5 percentage points since March 2022, the steepest pace of increases in four decades.

The year-over-year inflation

figure for June marked the mildest such increase since March 2021, when the current bout of painfully high inflation began as the economy roared out of the pandemic recession.

Yet with most measures of inflation still uncomfortably high, the Fed hardly appears ready to halt its rate hikes. Its expected hike later this month will follow the central bank's decision to pause its rate increases last month after 10 consecutive hikes. The Fed's policymakers have signaled they could hike rates yet again when they next meet in September.

Some economists have suggested, though, that if inflation keeps slowing and the economy shows sufficient signs of cooling, the July increase could be the Fed's last.

Used-car prices, for example, have been falling. Automakers are producing more cars as supply shortages have abated. New-car prices, too, have begun to ease as a result.

A sustained slowdown in inflation could bring meaningful relief to American households that have been squeezed by the price acceleration that began two years ago.

## GOP legislators in Iowa pass more restrictive abortion ban

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Iowa's Republican-led Legislature passed a bill banning most abortions after roughly six weeks of pregnancy during a marathon special session Tuesday that continued late into the night. Gov. Kim Reynolds immediately said in a statement she would sign the bill Friday.

The bill passed with exclusively Republican support in a rare, one-day legislative burst lasting more than 14 hours over the vocal—and sometimes tense—objections from Democratic lawmakers and abortion advocates protesting at the Capitol. Just after 11 p.m., lingering protesters in the gallery booed and yelled “shame” to state senators in the minutes after the bill was approved.

Reynolds ordered the rare session after the state Supreme Court declined in June to reinstate a practically identical law that she signed in 2018.

“The Iowa Supreme Court questioned whether this legislature would pass the same law they did in 2018, and today they have a clear answer,” Reynolds said in a statement. “The voices of Iowans and their democratically elected representatives cannot be ig-

nored any longer, and justice for the unborn should not be delayed.”

Abortion is currently legal in Iowa up to 20 weeks of pregnancy. The legislation will take immediate effect with the governor's signature. It will prohibit almost all abortions once cardiac activity can be detected, which is usually around six weeks of pregnancy.

Preparations were already underway to quickly file legal challenges in court.

“The ACLU of Iowa, Planned Parenthood and the Emma Goldman Clinic remain committed to protecting the reproductive rights of Iowans to control their bodies and their lives, their health and their safety—including filing a lawsuit to block this reckless, cruel law,” ACLU of Iowa Executive Director Mark Stringer said in a statement.

There are limited circumstances under the measure that would allow for abortion after that point in a pregnancy where cardiac activity is detected—such as rape, if reported within 45 days; incest, if reported within 145 days; if the fetus has a fetal abnormality “incompatible with life,” and if the pregnancy is endangering the life of the pregnant woman.

## Pence alone in backing ban on abortions when pregnancies aren't viable

Associated Press

NEW YORK — In a Republican presidential field full of abortion rights opponents, Mike Pence stands out in his embrace of the cause.

The former vice president, who is seeking the White House in 2024, is the only major candidate who supports a federal ban on abortion at six weeks. He has advocated pulling from the market a widely used abortion pill. And he's implored his Republican rivals to back a 15-week federal ban as a minimum national standard.

In a recent interview, Pence went even further, saying abortion should be banned when a pregnancy isn't viable. Such a standard would force women to carry pregnancies to term even when doctors have determined there is no chance a baby will survive outside the womb.

“I'm pro-life. I don't apologize for it,” Pence said in the interview. “I just have heard so many stories over the years of courageous women and families who were told that their unborn child would not go to term or would not

survive. And then they had a healthy pregnancy and a healthy delivery.”

That position places Pence firmly to the right of the rest of the 2024 presidential field and alone among GOP candidates, who have largely declined to take a stance on the issue. And it drew alarms from obstetricians and doctors who specialize in high-risk pregnancies and have said nonviable pregnancies are far more common than people realize.

Spokespeople for former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis declined to say whether they back Pence's position. Trump, the front-runner, has said he backs exceptions in cases of rape, incest and the life of the mother and has blamed hard-line abortion stances for costing the party in last year's midterm elections. DeSantis, polling a distant second, signed a six-week ban in Florida that includes an exception for fatal fetal abnormalities, along with rape, incest and to save the mother's life. He has declined to say whether he supports a federal ban.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Court sides with Amish families on 'gray water'

**MN** MINNEAPOLIS — Members of a deeply conservative Amish community in Minnesota don't need to install septic systems to dispose of their "gray water," the state Court of Appeals ruled Monday in a long-running religious freedom case that went all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court.

A three-judge panel ruled that the government "failed to demonstrate a compelling state interest" to justify overriding the religious freedom of the Amish families that challenged state regulations governing the disposal of gray water, which is water that's been used for dishwashing, laundry and bathing, but not toilet waste.

The Swartzentruber Amish in southeastern Minnesota are among the most traditional Amish groups in the country, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch noted in a 2021 ruling. It sent the case back to Minnesota courts for reconsideration in light of a high court decision a month earlier in a different religious freedom case.

Fillmore County in 2013 started requiring homes to have modern septic systems to dispose of gray water. The Swartzentruber Amish sought an exemption, saying their religion prohibits that technology.

## Man charged in scooter shootings that killed 1

**NY** NEW YORK — A man accused of killing an 86-year-old and injuring three other people in a series of apparently random shootings while riding a scooter in New

York City was arraigned Monday on charges including murder and attempted murder, prosecutors said.

Thomas Abreu, 25, was arraigned in a hospital in five shootings that occurred in Queens over about 10 minutes late Saturday morning, a spokesperson for Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz said. An additional person was shot and injured in Brooklyn.

Witnesses identified Abreu as the gunman who shot Hamod Saeidi, 86, just before 11:30 a.m., prosecutors said. Family members said Saeidi had been on his way to a mosque to pray.

## Mayor quits over posts in police Facebook group

**OR** NEWPORT — The mayor of a city on the Oregon coast has apologized and resigned over offensive content he posted in a private Facebook group for current and retired police officers.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reported that Newport Mayor Dean Sawyer apologized and resigned Monday, three days after the media outlet revealed that since 2016, Sawyer had been sharing memes and posts denigrating women, immigrants, non-English speakers and the LGBTQ+ community in the Facebook group with 39,000 members.

Sawyer told OPB on Friday that the Facebook group called LEO Only is a private group and posts are not meant for the public. On Monday, he told The Oregonian/OregonLive that his online persona had become too polarizing for him to continue.

"I now realize that some of my actions and my words have hurt

people I love and care about," Sawyer said.

Sawyer was a Newport police officer for three decades before he was elected mayor in 2018.

## Plea deal reached in abortion clinic burning

**WY** CHEYENNE — A college student who authorities said admitted to setting fire to a building slated to become Wyoming's only full-service abortion clinic has reached a plea agreement with prosecutors, federal court documents showed Monday.

Details of the proposed plea deal for Lorna Roxanne Green weren't available to the public pending a judge's approval of the agreement. Green, 22, pleaded not guilty to an arson charge in U.S. District Court in Cheyenne in June.

Green told investigators she opposed abortion and was experiencing anxiety and having nightmares over the Wellspring Health Access clinic that was to open in Casper last year, so she decided to burn it, according to court documents.

Investigators said Green set the clinic ablaze on May 25, 2022.

## Police chief convicted of taking seized money

**LA** BATON ROUGE — A small-town police chief in Louisiana was convicted after taking money seized in narcotics investigations and stealing a family's COVID-19 stimulus money, leaving them homeless, officials said Monday.

A jury last week found Mitch Bratton guilty of malfeasance in office, felony theft and possession of controlled dangerous sub-

stances, the state Attorney General's office said in a news release. Bratton was recently re-elected as chief of police in Grayson, a village of just more than 500 people in Caldwell Parish.

While serving as chief of police, Bratton was personally responsible for more than \$10,000 in narcotics funds that went missing between 2016 and 2019, the release said.

Additionally, Bratton was convicted on one count of felony theft related to monies taken from a mother and son during the course of an arrest.

## City seeks more time to clear encampment

**AZ** PHOENIX — Phoenix is making progress in complying with a court order to close a large homeless encampment known as "The Zone," but it will take more time to clear, clean and keep people from setting up tents again in the area, a lawyer representing the city said at a trial Monday.

Attorney Justin Pierce said during opening statements that portions of the encampment on the edge of downtown Phoenix have been cleared since a judge declared the area to be a public nuisance, but other blocks still need to be addressed. He said the process takes time, including making sure those who live there have somewhere else to go.

The city is developing a space nearby with tents and temporary restroom facilities as an alternative, has increased the number of police officers working in the area and has nearly tripled its funding on confronting issues of homelessness, Pierce said.

— From wire reports

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# Díaz's homer lifts NL in All-Star Game

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Shining brightly in the Emerald City, the National League snapped a losing streak that lasted more than a decade.

An unheralded catcher from Colorado delivered the big blow.

Elias Díaz hit a two-run homer off Félix Bautista in the eighth inning, and the NL snapped a nine-game losing streak in the All-Star Game with a 3-2 win over the American League on Tuesday night.

The NL won for the first time since an 8-0 victory in 2012 in Kansas City, and Díaz became the first Rockies player to win the All-Star MVP award.

"It feels incredible. When we all got here, we all talked about how we were going to bring home the win," said Díaz, who was non-tendered by the Pirates at the end of 2019. "I just

didn't realize it was going to be me to bring home the win."

Díaz drove a 2-2 pitch from Baltimore's hard-throwing closer deep to left to put the NL in front. Díaz was the lone representative for Colorado in his first All-Star Game.

"It does matter. We wanted to win, the American League we wanted to win," Bautista said through an interpreter. "But overall I think that it's an experience I'll never forget and just wish that would have been a little bit different."

Díaz has nine homers this season, but hadn't hit a long ball since June 23 against the Los Angeles Angels. "As soon as he walked in the clubhouse and I met him, he said, 'I'll do anything you want. If I play, I play. If I don't, I don't. I'm just so happy to be here,'" NL manager Rob Thomson said. "So for him to do that, it's fantastic."

For most of the night, the All-Star Game was a pitchers' duel highlighted by a couple of big hits and some excellent defense.

It got nervous for the NL with Philadelphia closer Craig Kimbrel on the mound in the ninth.

"I threw way more pitches than I wanted to on an off day," Kimbrel joked.

Wander Franco led off with a fly ball to the warning track, and Kimbrel issued two-out walks to Kyle Tucker and Seattle star Julio Rodríguez.

The 22-year-old Rodríguez was in position to close it out in front of his home crowd.

"I was definitely trying to win it. But it was a situation where I had to pass the baton," he said.

Kimbrel recovered to strike out José Ramírez to end it. Kimbrel also pitched in the previous NL win, recording two outs in 2012.

"The ninth inning in the dugout was just a lot of fun to experience," said San Diego's Josh Hader, who pitched the eighth for the NL.

Yandy Díaz hit a solo homer in the second and Bo Bichette's sacrifice fly in the sixth gave the AL a 2-1 lead.

J.D. Martinez doubled and scored on Luis Arraez's single in the fourth against Seattle's George Kirby, tying it at 1. Lourdes Gurriel Jr. appeared to tie the game again in the seventh when his shot down the left-field line was originally ruled a homer but was overturned as a foul ball on replay.

The All-Star Game returned to Seattle for the first time since 2001 when the Mariners were in the middle of their magical 116-win regular season, Cal Ripken Jr. said goodbye to the All-Star stage and Tommy Lasorda took a tumble.

## New pearly white baseballs could rid sticky stuff issue

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Pristine white baseballs that would not require rubbing are under consideration by Major League Baseball as a way to solve the issue of pitchers using sticky substances for better grip.

"We continue to work with the people at Dow Chemical on developing a tacky ball," Commissioner Ron Manfred told the Baseball Writers' Association of America on Tuesday. "It would literally eliminate all — well, not all — but many of the variables in the current process. It would come out of a sealed foil pouch at the ballpark. No individual mudding."

MLB executive vice president Morgan Sword said the balls were tested in the first half of this season in the Double-A Southern League. The balls would retain colored stitches.

"Like everything in baseball, when you inch toward a solution, you figure out another problem," Manfred said. "The baseball, if we get there with the Dow people, would be a pearl, right? A pure white baseball. I think if you take hitters and pitchers out front here and ask 'em what they think of a pure white baseball, you're going to find out that it's a pretty controversial topic. So not only do we have the science that we're continuing to work on but we're going to have to get over that sort of policy issue of: Is a pure white baseball a good thing?"

A minimum 13 dozen baseballs are prepared for each game. Humidors have been used for storage by all teams since 2022.

"The only issue guys are having now is that whatever park you go to, every stadium is dif-

ferent," Minnesota All-Star pitcher Sonny Gray said. "The elements are different everywhere. Like when you're pitching in Minnesota when it's 30 degrees outside for the first month of the season, the balls are going to be hard, cold and dry, rather than when you're pitching in Cincinnati in the middle of the summer it's sticky and humid."

Tampa Bay pitcher Shane Bieber prefers a pre-tacked ball, such as Nippon Professional Baseball uses.

"We've seen that it's had success in Japan with consistent balls," he said. "Once we agree upon it as players and whatnot, I'm excited to see what happens."

Five pitchers have been suspended for 10 games each since MLB began its crackdown on banned grip substances in June 2021 by instituting regular in-

spections by umpires.

Seattle's Hector Santiago and Arizona's Caleb Smith served suspensions in 2021 and three were disciplined this season: the Mets' Max Scherzer, the Yankees' Domingo Germán on May 17 and the Mets' Drew Smith on June 14.

"The suspensions that we have had would fall into the category of clear-to-egregious violations," Manfred said. "I understand that feeling someone's hand is inherently subjective. I think this is an area where umpires, again, with a difficult topic, have shown great judgment and discretion. I think gray areas, players have definitely been given the benefit of the doubt."

Baseballs are currently rubbed with mud to make them less slick. MLB standardized rubbing procedures among the 30 teams last year.

# Sabalenka, Medvedev reach Wimbledon semis

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Aryna Sabalenka reached the semifinals at Wimbledon for the second straight time, with a one-year break in between because she was banned from the tournament in 2022.

Sabalenka, a Belarusian who is seeded second at the All England Club, had to sit out last year's competition along with other players from her country and from Russia because of the war in Ukraine. She advanced Wednesday by beating Madison Keys 6-2, 6-4 on No. 1 Court.

"It really feels amazing to be back in the semifinals. I can't wait to play in my second semifinal at Wimbledon," said Sabalenka, who lost to runner-up Karolina Pliskova in 2021. "Hopefully I can

do better than I did last time."

Another player who was banned last year, Daniil Medvedev, reached the semifinals in the men's tournament. The second-seeded Russian beat American player Chris Eubanks 6-4, 1-6, 4-6, 7-6 (4) 6-1 on the same court.

Sabalenka's victory improved her record to 17-1 at major tournaments this year. She won the Australian Open and reached the semifinals at the French Open before her five wins so far on the grass at Wimbledon.

Sabalenka, the only former major champion remaining in the women's tournament, also improved her record to 6-0 in Grand Slam quarterfinal matches, and she did so despite much of the cheering going toward Keys on Wednesday.

"Thank you so much for the atmosphere, even though you supported her more," Sabalenka said on court. "I still enjoyed playing in front of you guys."

Sabalenka will next face Ons Jabeur, a sixth-seeded Tunisian who beat defending champion Elena Rybakina 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-1 on Centre Court in a rematch of last year's final.

"I wish we can exchange this match from finals last year," said Jabeur, who lost to Rybakina in three sets in 2022.

Jabeur won eight of the last nine games to reach the semifinals at a major tournament for the third time. She is 2-0 in the previous two, also reaching the final at last year's U.S. Open.

"I'm going to keep the spirit on the court and hopefully the crowd

will be with me," Jabeur said of the match against Sabalenka.

Jabeur will play Sabalenka in the second match on Centre Court on Thursday for a spot in Saturday's final. Elina Svitolina will face Marketa Vondrousova in the early match.

Medvedev won the U.S. Open in 2021 and will be playing in the semifinals of a Grand Slam tournament for the sixth time — and first time at Wimbledon.

Later Wednesday in the other men's quarterfinal match, top-seeded Carlos Alcaraz was playing Holger Rune on Centre Court.

Queen Camilla was in attendance on Day 10 of the tournament, about a week after Kate, the Princess of Wales, sat in the Royal Box.

# Saudi investment in PGA Tour set to top \$1B

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund has agreed to invest more than \$1 billion in a new commercial entity controlled by the PGA Tour, and Greg Norman will be ousted as the CEO of LIV Golf if the business deal between the Saudis and the tour is finalized, a tour executive told Congress on Tuesday.

The agreement between the Saudi Public Investment Fund, the primary funder of LIV Golf, and the PGA Tour shocked the golf world when it was announced last month and led to probes by the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which summoned tour officials to the Capitol to testify under oath, and the Justice Department, which is looking into potential antitrust violations.

Among the subcommittee's findings were that representatives of the tour and the Saudis discussed giving Tiger Woods and Rory McIlroy their own LIV Golf teams, a proposal that apparently never reached either player. There was no indication during Tuesday's hearing that Congress would block the tour from going into business with the Saudis.

The subcommittee chairman, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said he was troubled by the geopolitical implications of Saudi investment in American sports and efforts by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi leader, to whitewash the kingdom's human

rights abuses. Republicans on the committee, however, were more sympathetic to the PGA Tour and the existential threat it faced from the PIF, which controls \$600 billion in assets — roughly 500 times what the tour is worth.

"We're here because we're concerned about what it means for an authoritarian government to use its wealth to capture an American institution," Blumenthal said.

The PGA Tour and the Saudis announced on June 6 that they agreed to drop all lawsuits against each other and combine their commercial interests into a new for-profit company while maintaining the tour's nonprofit status. Asked by Blumenthal how much money the Saudis have committed to the new venture, Ron Price, the PGA Tour's chief operating officer, testified the amount was "north of \$1 billion."

Blumenthal repeatedly pressed Price and Jimmy Dunne, a PGA Tour board member and a key negotiator of the Saudi deal, on why the tour did not seek alternative sources of funding to compete with the PIF. Price and Dunne said going into business with outside investors would not prevent LIV Golf and the PIF from continuing to compete with the tour and use its vast resources to sign top players.

"My entire concern here is to put this divisive period behind us, and for the sake of players, fans, sponsors and charities, unite the game of golf again," said Dunne, a New York

investment banker who is well connected with the sport's leaders.

Critics of the Saudi investment in golf have pointed to the kingdom's poor human rights record and the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, which U.S. intelligence concluded was likely approved by the crown prince, an allegation he has denied. The PIF has bought its way into other sports including soccer — it owns Newcastle United of the English Premier League — and Formula One racing.

"There is something that stinks about this path that you're on right now because it is a surrender, and it is all about the money, and that is the reason for the backlash that you're seeing, Mr. Price," Blumenthal said. "The equity ownership interest that the Saudis will have ... gives them financial dominance. They control the purse strings."

But Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., a harsh critic of the Saudi regime, said Congress should not interfere with a private enterprise doing business with the Saudis. He proposed instead that the United States reduce arms sales to Saudi Arabia. And the committee's ranking member, Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., suggested that Saudi involvement in sports could ultimately improve human rights in the kingdom.

"If the kingdom's involvement in golf and other sports helps it to modernize or offer rights to women, wouldn't that be a good thing?" Johnson said.

# Rodman poised for breakout in US debut

*Associated Press*

Trinity Rodman collected the ball just outside the penalty area and needed just one more touch to send it into the lower left corner of the net.

About a month shy of her 20th birthday, she'd scored her first goal for the U.S. women's national team.

That was April 2022, in a blowout victory over Uzbekistan. Now, a far greater stage awaits at the Women's World Cup beginning this month. On a U.S. team that will soon have to embrace a new generation of standouts, Rodman belongs on any list of possible breakout stars in Australia and New Zealand.

But with those expectations comes a new kind of pressure. She's dealt with that in various forms throughout her short career, and now she's ready for this next challenge.

"I'm so honored, proud and just excited for this opportunity," she said. "At this age, there's so much time to accomplish things, but to experi-

ence it this early has been so amazing, and I'm just so excited."

The daughter of basketball Hall of Famer Dennis Rodman, Trinity has become a force for the Washington Spirit of the NWSL. Her confidence and deft footwork make her a highlight waiting to happen, and it feels like only a matter of time before Rodman follows in the footsteps of great American attacking players like Abby Wambach, Carli Lloyd and Alex Morgan.

The question is whether she's ready for that kind of responsibility now, at age 21. On a team that may need her to play a major role, no less.

"Ever since she came in the league, we could see the energy and the creativity and the intensity that she brings," said Vlatko Andonovski, the coach of the national team. "I feel like every time when she gets the ball, it's almost like there is a little expectation of, something will happen, something will transpire off of it."

Born in 2002 — three years after Mia Hamm led the United States to a World Cup title at home — Rodman was 13 when the Americans next won. Lloyd had a hat trick in the final that year. One goal in particular stood out.

"The final against Japan, when she scored from half-field," Rodman said. "Obviously, that was one of the biggest moments in soccer, but obviously that will always be in my head. I mean, that was just inhuman."

You can imagine Rodman pulling off something similar, given her fearlessness on the field, and her talent has been obvious from the moment she entered the NWSL as the No. 2 pick in the 2021 draft. She scored in her pro debut that April and went on to win Rookie of the Year honors — and the Spirit won a championship. In 2022, Rodman signed a contract making her the league's highest-paid player.

After accomplishing all that while still a teenager — and

with a famous last name to boot — it's fair to say she's no stranger to a certain level of hype.

"I think for me, trying to block the outside noise has been difficult, but also doable," she said. "Obviously, coming off of the rookie year that I had, it was more than I ever expected it to be, but that obviously opened up the doors for a lot of attention and a lot of expectations moving into the second season and so on."

Mark Parsons, Rodman's coach with the Spirit, has tried to keep the pressure from becoming too burdensome.

"Trin has had a lot of expectation. I also disagree with that, and I think that's unfair," Parsons said. "I think that this is a 21-year-old that things are coming thick and fast. She's taken everything in her stride. I think she's doing a wonderful job at trying to stay focused on what is most important, which is being a good person, being a good teammate and developing as a soccer player."

## Women's World Cup shows inequity within game

*Associated Press*

As the Women's World Cup approached, Jamaican players started to panic.

They were uncertain about training camps, accommodations and even pay heading into what for many would be the biggest tournament of their careers.

So they took to social media.

A number of the Reggae Girlz, as they are affectionately known, went public with their concerns, pleading with the Jamaican Football Federation to address "subpar" conditions.

The mother of one player took it a step further: She started a GoFundMe page to raise money to make sure the team and the support staff are provided what they need to be successful — such as adequate hotels and compensation.

"These girls deserve better. They have proven themselves on an international platform that they belong. And they need support, whether it's from parents, friends or

fans, to let them know that we see what they've accomplished, and we're proud of them," said organizer Sandra Phillips-Brower, the mother of midfielder Havana Solau.

The World Cup always draws attention to the inequities between men's and women's soccer. But it also highlights the inequity within the women's game itself.

Teams like the United States and England, with greater support from their federations, enjoy the best that money can buy: Things like sports psychologists, massage therapists and team chefs.

Other teams, like Jamaica and South Africa, are uncertain they'll even get paid. So they're using social media and collective action to draw attention to their plight.

"All the teams are using their voices a lot more. We know these things because players are talking about it," U.S. forward Megan Rapinoe said. "Even when they're subjected to the discrimination and unequal

treatment, they're still speaking out. They're still using their voice. That's really important."

The Reggae Girlz felt compelled to speak out at a time when their attention should be solely focused on competing in the World Cup.

"On multiple occasions, we have sat down with the federation to respectfully express concerns resulting from subpar planning, transportation, accommodations, training conditions, compensation communication, nutrition and accessibility to proper resources," players said in a post on social media. "We have also showed up repeatedly without receiving contractually agreed upon compensation. We were told that all [our] requests and concerns would be resolved in a timely manner."

The GoFundMe site has raised more than \$45,000, and Phillips-Brower was figuring out how to distribute the funds to best serve the players and staff.