

About 650 US troops to stay in Afghanistan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—Roughly 650 U.S. troops are expected to remain in Afghanistan to provide security for diplomats after the main American military force completes its withdrawal, which is set to be largely done in the next two weeks, U.S. officials told The Associated Press.

In addition, several hundred additional American forces will remain at the Kabul airport, potentially until September, to assist Turkish troops providing security, as a temporary move until a more formal Turkey-led security operation is in place, the officials said Thursday. Overall, officials said the U.S. expects to have American and coalition military command, its leadership and most troops out by July Fourth, or shortly after that, meeting an aspirational deadline that commanders developed months ago. The officials were not authorized to discuss details of the withdrawal and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

The departure of the bulk of the more than 4,000 troops that have been in the country in recent months is unfolding well before President Joe Biden's Sept. 11 deadline for withdrawal. And it comes amid accelerating Tali-

ban battlefield gains, fueling fears that the Afghan government and its military could collapse in a matter of months.

Officials have repeatedly stressed that security at the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul is a critical requirement to keeping any U.S. diplomatic staff in Afghanistan. Still, the decision to keep additional troops there for several more months makes it more complicated for the Biden administration to declare a true end to America's longest war until later this fall. And it keeps the embattled country near the forefront of U.S. national security challenges, even as the White House tries to put the 20-year-old war behind it and focus more on threats from China and Russia.

In a statement Thursday night, Pentagon press secretary John Kirby said that as Biden has ordered, the U.S. will complete the withdrawal by early September. "Nothing has changed about that goal," Kirby said. "The situation is dynamic, and we review our progress daily. Speculation by unnamed sources about potential changes to that timeline should not be construed as predictive."

On Friday, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, chair of the High

Council for National Reconciliation, met with Biden at the White House. Earlier, they met at the Pentagon with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin.

"The decision of President Biden has been a strategic decision," Ghani told reporters during a visit to the U.S. Capitol. "We respect that decision in dealing with the new chapter of our friendship."

Getting most troops out by early July had been in doubt because of complications including an outbreak of COVID-19 at the U.S. Embassy and the push to get Afghan interpreters and others who helped the U.S. out of the country. Officials said U.S. commanders and NATO allies in Afghanistan have overcome logistical hurdles that might have prolonged the withdrawal process. But they also warned that plans in place for the final stages of the U.S. military withdrawal could change if airport security agreements fall through or there are other unforeseen developments.

As recently as last week, there was discussion of possibly extending the U.S. troop presence at Bagram Airfield, north of Kabul, but officials said the U.S. presence at the base is expected to end in the next several days.

US intel: Afghan government could fall within 6 months of American pullout

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — A new U.S. intelligence assessment says that the Afghan government could fall within six months of the American military departing, according to U.S. officials familiar with the information.

The assessment, distributed among U.S. officials within the past week, highlights an increasingly stark picture as the U.S. military sends home troops and equipment: The Taliban continue to take control of districts across the country, and Afghan military units are either laying down their arms or are being routed in bloody clashes.

One U.S. official said numerous criteria are trending in the wrong direction, prompting the intelligence community to assess that the fall of the government in Ka-

bul could come more quickly than previously forecast. The official and two other people familiar with the assessment, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue, said the new consensus is that the government could fall within six to 12 months.

The Pentagon's top spokesman, John Kirby, said Thursday that the withdrawal continues "on pace" with the expectation that it will be complete by September, following President Joe Biden's order in April to withdraw. A few hundred troops are expected to be stationed in Kabul to protect the U.S. Embassy.

Kirby declined to comment on the intelligence assessment, which was first reported by The Wall Street Journal, but he acknowl-

edged that security in some parts of Afghanistan "is certainly deteriorating, and that's of concern."

The United States will continue to provide financial support to the Afghan government, but Biden concluded that it is no longer in the interest of the United States to keep its military in Afghanistan after 20 years of war.

"It remains to be seen exactly how this is going to play out," Kirby said. "It's their responsibility to protect their citizens and their sovereignty, and that's what our ongoing, enduring support for them is going to be geared to helping them do."

Kirby's comments came ahead of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's visit to Washington on Friday.

Marine infantry training to intensify

BY SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Training for new Marines will become more rigorous as troops start to conduct more complex operations in smaller units, the commandant told senators Thursday.

“Through [a Marine’s] entry-level training to [his or her] first unit, we have to raise the bar because we’re going to expect noncommissioned officers and junior officers to make decisions that two levels up, they make today,” Gen. David Berger said during a Senate Ap-

ropriations Committee hearing on the Navy and Marine Corps budget for 2022.

Berger said junior leaders are going to have to make calls, especially in a high-threat environment, independent from their higher headquarters as the service is now more than a year into reshaping its force to better prepare for modern operations.

In March 2020, the Marine Corps announced its “Force Design 2030” plan that laid out sweeping changes, including cutting overall end-strength numbers from 186,000 in 2020 to 174,000 by 2030, divesting in tanks, as

well as investing in rockets instead of conventional artillery.

Berger said the service is lengthening infantry training by 50% this year.

“It has to get them to another level ... We have got to make sure one person has three skill sets,” such as an individual who is a corpsman, a machine gunner and a sniper, he said.

“We will raise the bar in training to make sure that we can empower and train them to a level where they can make the decisions on the spot,” Berger said.

Navy ships may soon get ICBM interceptors

Bloomberg

The Pentagon’s No. 2 official has ordered 11 missile interceptors transferred from research and development for possible deployment on Navy ships in the Pacific or European regions after a test in November indicated they could stop an intercontinental ballistic missile.

In the test, the USS John Finn intercepted a mock ICBM intended to simulate one that could be launched at Hawaii by North Korea. The destroyer, operating near Hawaii, fired off one of the Standard Missile-3 model Block IIA interceptors built by Raytheon Technologies Corp. at the target launched from Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks informed Congress May 27 of her rationale for transferring the interceptors, although she didn’t disclose it publicly.

“The missiles have conducted successful intercept tests and their deployment is in the important interest of our national security,” Hicks spokesman Jamal Brown said in an email this month. The transfer to the Navy marks the first major missile defense initiative of the Biden administration.

Although the Navy’s Aegis combat system, which launched the missile, and the interceptor “were not designed to defeat an ICBM-class target, this test demonstrated some potential limited capability,” Vice

Adm. Jon Hill, director of the Missile Defense Agency, said in testimony to Congress last week.

The Block IIA is the latest model in the Standard Missile family of weapons. Earlier versions are now the Navy’s primary surface-to-air defensive system against short-, medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles threats. The IIA has increased range, more sensitive seeker technology and an advanced “kill vehicle” or warhead, to intercept medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles. Congressional missile defense supporters mandated the November test to determine the missile’s capabilities to intercept an ICBM.

Russia begins Mediterranean drills amid rift

Associated Press

MOSCOW — The Russian military on Friday launched sweeping maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea featuring warplanes capable of carrying hypersonic missiles, a show of force amid a surge in tensions following an incident with a British destroyer in the Black Sea.

Moscow said one of its warships fired warning shots and a warplane dropped bombs in the path of British destroyer Defender on Wednesday to force her out of an area near Crimea that Russia claims as its territorial waters. Britain denied that account, insisted its ship wasn’t fired upon and said she was sailing in Ukrainian waters.

The Russian drills that began Friday in the eastern Mediterranean come as a British carrier strike group is in the area. Earlier this week, British and U.S. F-35 fighters from HMS Queen Elizabeth flew combat sorties against Islamic State.

Russia has waged a military campaign in Syria since September 2015, allowing Syrian President Bashar Assad’s government to reclaim control over most of the country after a devastating civil war.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that a pair of MiG-31 fighter jets capable of carrying Kinzhal hypersonic missiles arrived at the Russian airbase in Syria and flew missions practicing strikes on targets in the Mediterra-

nean. The Hemeimeem airbase, in the coastal province of Latakia, serves as the main hub for Moscow’s operations in the country.

It’s the first time the warplanes capable of carrying Kinzhal have been deployed outside Russia’s borders. The military says the Kinzhal flies at 10 times the speed of sound and has a range of up to about 1,250 miles.

The Defense Ministry said the maneuvers also involve several warships, two submarines and long-range Tu-22M3 bombers along with other combat aircraft. The supersonic, nuclear-capable Tu-22M3s were first deployed to Syria last month in a demonstration of an increased Russian military foothold in the Mediterranean.

Many still missing, death toll rises in Fla. collapse

Associated Press

SURFSIDE, Fla. — About 160 people were still unaccounted for Friday after an oceanside condominium building collapsed into a pile of rubble, and searchers combing through a twisted, shifting heap of concrete and metal feared the death toll of at least four could go much higher.

With scores of firefighters working overnight to reach any possible survivors both from under and atop the remains of the building, hopes rested on how quickly crews using dogs and microphones to sift through the wreckage could complete their grim, yet delicate task.

“Every time we hear a sound, we concentrate on those areas,” said Assistant Miami-Dade Fire Chief Raide Jadallah.

Two heavy cranes began removing debris from the pile using large claws Friday morning, creating a din of crashing glass and metal as they picked up material and dumped it to the side.

Three more bodies were removed overnight, and Miami-Dade Police Director Freddy Ramirez said authorities were working with the medical examiner’s office to identify the victims. Eleven injuries were

reported, with four people treated at hospitals.

Miami-Dade Mayor Daniella Levine Cava said rescuers were at “extreme risk” going through the rubble.

“Debris is falling on them as they do their work. We have structural engineers on site to ensure that they will not be injured, but they are proceeding because they are so motivated and they are taking extraordinary risk on the site every day,” she said.

With searchers using saws and jackhammers to look for pockets large enough to hold a person, Levine Cava said there was still hope of finding people alive.

State Sen. Jason Pizzo of Miami Beach told the Miami Herald he watched as tactical teams of six worked early Friday to sift through the debris. He said he saw one body taken in a yellow body bag and another that was marked. They were taken to a homicide unit tent that was set up along the beach.

Many people remained at the reunification center set up near the collapse site early Friday morning, awaiting results of DNA swabs that could help identify victims.

Officials said no cause for the collapse has been determined.

Poll: Majority OK limiting abortion after 1st trimester

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A solid majority of Americans believe most abortions should be legal in the first three months of a woman’s pregnancy, but most say the procedure should usually be illegal in the second and third trimesters, according to a new poll.

The poll comes just weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear a case involving a currently blocked Mississippi law that would ban abortions after 15 weeks of pregnancy. If the high court upholds the law, it would be the first time since *Roe v. Wade* that a state would be allowed to ban abortions before a fetus can survive outside the womb.

The new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 61% of Americans say abortion should be legal in most or all circumstances in the first trimester of a pregnancy. However, 65% said abortion should usually be illegal in the second trimester, and 80% said that about the third trimester.

Still, the poll finds many Americans believe that the procedure should be allowable under at least some circumstances even during the second or third trimesters. For abortions during the second trimester, 34% say they should usually or always be legal, and another 30% say they should be illegal in most but not all cases. In the third trimester, 19% think most or all abortions should be legal, and another 26% say they should be illegal only in most cases.

Michael New, an abortion opponent who teaches social research at Catholic University of America, predicted the findings regarding second- and third-trimester abortions will be useful to the anti-abortion movement.

“This helps counter the narrative that the abortion policy outcome established by the *Roe v. Wade* decision enjoys substantial public support,” he said.

But Dr. Daniel Grossman, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of California, San Francisco, who supports abortion rights, cited research showing that Americans viewed second-trimester abortions more empathetically when told about some of the reasons why women seek them.

These include time-consuming difficulties making arrangements with an abortion clinic and learning during the second trimester that the fetus would die or have severe disabilities due to abnormalities, Grossman said.

Giuliani’s NY law license suspended

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An appeals court suspended Rudy Giuliani from practicing law in New York on Thursday because he made false statements while trying to get courts to overturn Donald Trump’s loss in the presidential race.

An attorney disciplinary committee had asked the court to suspend Giuliani’s license on the grounds that he’d violated professional conduct rules as he promoted theories that the election was stolen through fraud.

The court agreed and said suspension should be immediate, even though disciplinary proceedings aren’t yet complete, because there was an “immediate threat” to the public.

“The seriousness of respondent’s uncontroverted misconduct cannot be overstated,” the court wrote. “This country is being torn apart by continued attacks on

the legitimacy of the 2020 election and of our current president, Joseph R. Biden.”

Trump called the suspension a politically motivated “witch hunt,” while Giuliani said it was a “disgrace” on his afternoon radio show. The court’s opinion, Giuliani said, was based on hearsay and “could have been written by the Democratic National Committee.”

“The bar association should give me an award,” the Republican told listeners on WABC-AM. “I defended an unpopular client. I’ve been threatened with death. I’ve had a good deal of my income taken away. I’ve lost friends over it.”

“This is happening to shut me up,” he added. “They want Giuliani quiet.”

The court held that Giuliani, as a lawyer for Trump, “communicated demonstrably false and misleading statements to courts, lawmakers and the public at large.”

Nearly all virus deaths in US now in unvaccinated

Associated Press

Nearly all COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. now are in people who weren't vaccinated, a staggering demonstration of how effective the shots have been and an indication that deaths per day — now down to under 300 — could be practically zero if everyone eligible got the vaccine.

An Associated Press analysis of available government data from May shows that “breakthrough” infections in fully vaccinated people accounted for fewer than 1,200 of more than 853,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations. That's about 0.1%.

And only about 150 of the more than 18,000 COVID-19 deaths in May were in fully vaccinated people. That translates to about 0.8%, or five deaths per day on average.

The AP analyzed figures pro-

vided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC itself has not estimated what percentage of hospitalizations and deaths are in fully vaccinated people, citing limitations in the data.

Among them: Only about 45 states report breakthrough infections, and some are more aggressive than others in looking for such cases. So the data probably understates such infections, CDC officials said.

Still, the overall trend that emerges from the data echoes what many health care authorities are seeing around the country and what top experts are saying.

Earlier this month, Andy Slavitt, a former adviser to the Biden administration on COVID-19, suggested that 98% to 99% of the Americans dying of the coronavi-

rus are unvaccinated.

And CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said on Tuesday that the vaccine is so effective that “nearly every death, especially among adults, due to COVID-19, is, at this point, entirely preventable.” She called such deaths “particularly tragic.”

Deaths in the U.S. have plummeted from a peak of more than 3,400 a day on average in mid-January, one month into the vaccination drive.

About 63% of all vaccine-eligible Americans — those 12 and older — have received at least one dose, and 53% are fully vaccinated, according to the CDC. While the vaccine remains scarce in much of the world, the U.S. supply is so abundant and demand has slumped so dramatically that shots sit unused.

Ross Bagne, a 68-year-old

small-business owner in Cheyenne, Wyo., was eligible for the vaccine in early February but didn't get it. He died June 4, infected and unvaccinated, after spending more than three weeks in the hospital, his lungs filling with fluid. He was unable to swallow because of a stroke.

“He never went out, so he didn't think he would catch it,” said his grieving sister, Karen McKnight. She wondered: “Why take the risk of not getting vaccinated?”

The preventable deaths will continue, experts predict, with unvaccinated pockets of the nation experiencing outbreaks in the fall and winter. Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle, said modeling suggests the nation will hit 1,000 deaths per day again next year.

Required vaccinations for some is Russia's new plan

Associated Press

MOSCOW — They tried grocery giveaways and lotteries for new cars and apartments. But an ambitious plan of vaccinating 30 million Russians by mid-June still has fallen short by a third.

So now, many regional governments across the vast country are obligating some workers to get vaccinated and requiring the shots to enter certain businesses.

As many Western countries lift coronavirus restrictions and plan a return to normal life after mass vaccinations, Russia is battling a surge of infections — even though it was first to authorize a vaccine and among the first to start administering it in December.

Daily new cases have grown from about 9,000 in early June to about 17,000 on June 18 and over 20,000 on Thursday, with Moscow, its outlying region and St. Petersburg combining for about half of all new infections.

Officials have blamed Rus-

sians' lax attitude toward taking necessary precautions and the growing prevalence of more infectious variants. But perhaps the biggest factor is the lack of vaccinations. Only 20.7 million people, or 14% of its population of 146 million, have received at least one shot as of Wednesday, and only 16.7 million, or about 11%, have been fully vaccinated.

In light of the surge, at least 14 Russian regions made vaccinations mandatory this month for employees in certain sectors, such as government offices, retail, health care, education, restaurants, fitness centers, beauty parlors and other service industries. Moscow authorities said companies should suspend without pay employees unwilling to get vaccinated, and they threatened to temporarily halt operations of businesses that don't meet the goal of having 60% of staff get at least one shot by July 15 and both shots by Aug. 15.

Pacific Northwest set to get record-breaking heat wave

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Record heat is forecast in the normally mild-weathered Pacific Northwest this weekend, raising concerns about wildfires and health in a region where many people don't have air conditioning.

City officials in Seattle were opening libraries as cooling centers and crews were being sent to places in Oregon where the risk of wildfires was high.

The National Weather Service issued an excessive heat watch and predicted “dangerously hot” conditions Friday through at least Tuesday. The heat wave will cover portions of Washington, Oregon and Idaho, with temperatures rising to 114 degrees Fahrenheit in places, the agency said.

“This will likely be an historic heat wave,” the agency said. “Chances are good that many long standing records will be broken.”

Among those might be the re-

cord high temperature for Spokane, Wash., of 108 degrees Fahrenheit, set in 1921 and matched in 1968, the Weather Service said.

AccuWeather meteorologist Bernie Rayno warned that the heat wave is arriving in an area where many people do not have air conditioning. That's especially true west of the Cascade Range, where cities such as Seattle and Portland, Ore., typically enjoy more moderate weather.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Housing Survey of 2015, only one-third of households in Seattle had air conditioning, as the average high temperature in June is 71 degrees Fahrenheit. Nationally, 89% of households have air conditioning.

The Bonneville Power Administration, the federal agency responsible for electrical supply in the Northwest, did not expect the heat to produce rolling blackouts like those that have happened in other parts of the country.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Herd of cows escapes into Los Angeles suburb

CA PICO RIVERA — Forty cows escaped a slaughterhouse and ended up in a Los Angeles suburb where one was killed after charging at a family, authorities said.

Cows were reported running loose on the streets of Pico Rivera after a gate at a meat packing facility was accidentally left open, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said in a statement.

The herd made its way to a neighborhood about a mile away and one cow charged at four members of a family, knocking them to the ground.

A deputy shot and killed the animal to protect the family from further injury, the department said.

Man sentenced for buying endangered animal parts

FL TAMPA — A Florida man has been sentenced to a year and a day in federal prison for buying parts of dead endangered animals.

Steven Phillip Griffin II, 36, was sentenced in Tampa federal court, according to court records. He pleaded guilty to receiving and transporting endangered species in violation of the Endangered Species Act and for possessing firearms and ammunition as a convicted felon.

According to the plea agreement, Griffin communicated with an undercover wildlife agent for more than two years to negotiate the sale and purchase of endangered and threatened wildlife. Griffin repeatedly stated that he collects

skulls, full skeletons and other parts of animals such as lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, rhinos and elephants. Griffin also sent photographs of his personal collection, as well as items on his wish list, to the undercover agent.

In May 2019, Griffin drove to Texas, met with undercover agents and purchased two Southern White rhino horns, four elephant ivory tusks, one African lion skull and three leopard skulls for \$9,750, investigators said.

Couple's wedding album stolen on anniversary

LA NEW ORLEANS — A Houston couple celebrating their 50th anniversary in New Orleans is now missing their wedding album after their car was stolen.

They'd brought the irreplaceable pictures to New Orleans, WGNO-TV reported.

Gary and Sandra Fidelman met on a blind date while they were in college, and they've been together every since.

The Fidemans said their car was stolen while they were parking near a bar on Magazine Street.

"We are people that have been flooded twice. So we understand, let the good times roll. It's still going to be good," Sandra Fidelman told WVUE.

Firefighter impersonator arrested for arson

NV RENO — A Lyon County man has been charged with nearly two dozen criminal counts accusing him of arson, impersonating a firefighter and possessing more

than \$50,000 in uniforms, equipment and other items stolen from area fire agencies.

Kevin Critor, 29, Dayton, was in possession of a firefighter badge and a firearm when he was arrested in Dayton while attempting to set an arson fire near Mound House, the state fire marshal said.

The marshal and the Central Lyon Fire Protection District launched an investigation and conducted surveillance operations following a vehicle arson fire in the same area, the marshal's office said.

Critor also was in possession of a retired fire engine with operating emergency lights and siren, they said.

Driver rammed into horse-drawn carriage

SC CHARLESTON — Police are searching for a suspect in the hit-and-run crash into a horse-drawn carriage in Charleston that left two people injured.

The crime happened near Broad and Meeting streets, The Post and Courier reported.

A semitrailer truck struck the carriage, spooking the horse and caused it to gallop toward City Hall, police said.

The driver of the carriage was taken to a hospital and a passenger suffered a broken ankle, police said. The horse wasn't hurt.

Theodore Roosevelt statue to be relocated

NY NEW YORK — A prominent statue of Theodore Roosevelt at the entrance of The American Museum of Natural History will be

removed after years of criticism that it symbolizes colonial subjugation and racial discrimination.

The New York City Public Design Commission voted unanimously to relocate the statue, which depicts the former president on horseback with a Native American man and an African man flanking the horse, according to The New York Times.

The newspaper said the statue will go to a yet-to-be-designated cultural institution dedicated to Roosevelt's life and legacy.

The bronze statue has stood at the museum's Central Park West entrance since 1940.

Roosevelt, a pioneering conservationist, was a founding member of the institution.

Bear bites camper staying in national forest

MT BOZEMAN — A bear bit a person who was camping near Mystic Lake in the Custer Gallatin National Forest, the U.S. Forest Service said.

Improperly stored food likely attracted bears to the area southeast of Bozeman before the attack, the agency said.

The victim was too injured to walk out, but was able to find a runner who called 911, the Gallatin County Sheriff's Office said.

The person was flown to the hospital in Bozeman with injuries that were not considered life-threatening.

Several trails in the area were closed but were reopened the next day.

— From wire reports

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Canadiens return to Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

MONTREAL — Phillip Danault was patting rookie Cole Caufield on the back for playing a big role in helping the Canadiens' remarkable playoff run, while familiar chants of "Ole, Ole" and sounds of horn-honking could be heard from a large celebrating crowd outside the Bell Centre walls.

Suddenly, Montreal is partying like it's 1993: the last time the Canadiens reached the Stanley Cup Final.

Danault's no-look pass set up Artturi Lehkonen's goal scored 1:39 into overtime to clinch a 3-2 win over Vegas on Thursday night and eliminate the Golden Knights in Game 6 of their semifinal series.

Carey Price stopped 37 shots, Caufield and captain Shea Weber also scored and the Canadiens advanced to the championship round for the first time since winning their 24th title 28 years ago.

Considered mere afterthoughts after entering the playoffs with the worst record, Montreal has won 11 of 13 since falling behind 3-1 to Toronto in its first-round series.

"I feel blessed, very blessed to be here with Montreal and to be in the Stanley Cup Final is something amazing," said Danault, who grew up in Victoriaville, Quebec, and is in his sixth season with the Canadiens. "Obviously, Cole has been scoring goals, too. We all participate and it's a team effort all series. I'm so proud of us."

Caufield, who scored his fourth playoff goal on a breakaway in the second period, paid tribute to the veteran players such as Weber and Price, making their first trip to the Final.

"I'm just trying to take it all in and enjoy the moment," said the 20-year-old Caufield, who has played more NHL playoff games (15) than regular-season games (10). "It's for the older guys."

That's when Danault put his arm around Caufield and said: "You're sure a big part of it, though."

Montreal will make its NHL-leading 35th Stanley Cup Final appearance. The Canadiens will face the winner of the semifinal series between the defending champion Lightning and New York Islanders, which headed to a Game 7 at Tampa Bay on Friday.

Montreal also becomes just the sixth Canadian-based team to reach the final since 1994, and first since the Vancouver Canucks lost to Boston in seven games in 2011.

"We wouldn't be here right now if we didn't believe," Price said. "We've believed this whole time and obviously we're ecstatic and we have a lot of work left to do."

The Golden Knights, making their third semifinal appearance in four seasons of existence, fell short of returning to the championship round for the first time since their inaugural campaign in 2018, when they lost

to Washington in five games.

They were undone by a sputtering offense which managed just nine goals against Montreal following a 4-1 series-opening win, and an anemic power play that went 0-for-17 against the Canadiens.

"Pretty terrible feeling," Golden Knights captain Mark Stone said. "I'm the captain of this team, the leader of this team and take a lot of responsibility for what just occurred."

The game was decided off a faceoff in the Montreal end, and after Price held his ground to stop former Canadiens captain Max Pacioretty set up in the left circle. Danault gained the Vegas zone, drew two defenders in the middle and slipped a no-look pass to his left to Lehkonen, who lifted a shot beating Robin Lehner high on the short side.

"Just trying to go high and hit the net," Lehkonen said. "We're trying to keep it going one game at a time and not think things too much far ahead. I feel like we showed up today and it's a big win for us and we have four more to go."

Leave it to the Canadiens' checking line to finish off a series in which Montreal smothered the Golden Knights.

"Obviously, Pricey makes a big save, so we take the draw and we left (the zone)," Danault said. "We just capitalized, saw an opening and hell of a bury by Lecky. ... It was a great image of our series."

No. 2 Texas stays alive in CWS, eliminates Virginia

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Ivan Melendez and Zach Zubia finally broke out offensively, and just in time to keep Texas alive in the College World Series.

Melendez doubled and scored the Longhorns' first run, and hit the tiebreaking single in the eighth inning to help Texas eliminate Virginia with a 6-2 victory in a weather-delayed game that ended early Friday.

"As you guys saw the last few weeks, I was slumping it," said Melendez, who entered the game 3 for his last 19. "I hit one to the warning track against Mississippi State and another against Tennessee and I've been drawing a few walks. I was hitting the ball hard, so that was

a start."

Zubia was 3 for his last 29 when he stepped to the plate in the ninth, and he broke open a one-run game with a bases-clearing double into the left-center gap. He had struck out twice and grounded out in his first three at-bats.

"Trusting yourself and your work — I think I showed that in my last at-bat," Zubia said. "The first three were not the results any of us wanted. I was still grinding away and keeping my head down and taking each at-bat as new."

The No. 2 national seed Longhorns (49-16) won their second elimination game to reach the Bracket 2 final. They'll play Mississippi State and need to

win Friday night and again Saturday to advance to the best-of-three finals next week.

Mike Antico singled and stole second before Melendez ripped a grounder up the middle to break a 2-2 tie in the top of the eighth, and the Longhorns got an inning-ending double play in the bottom half to turn back a threat by Virginia.

Zubia gave Texas a cushion with his two-out double. It looked as though Virginia might keep it a 3-2 game when shortstop Nic Kent saved a run by picking up a deflected ball and making an off-balance throw to get Douglas Hodo III at the plate on a close play upheld on video review.

"Huge blow by Zach right

there after a great play by their shortstop," Texas coach David Pierce said. "This is what they've been doing. They like competing. They keep going. That's the beauty about this team."

The loss ended an impressive postseason run for the Cavaliers (36-27), who made the NCAA Tournament as a No. 3 regional seed and were playing their seventh elimination game.

"This is as special a team in this uniform at this university. ... What they persevered through and the resiliency in the last two weeks was remarkable," Cavs coach Brian O'Connor said. "All the teams we have at Virginia are special in their own way, but this one is at the top."

Clippers secure crucial Game 3 win

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — This time, Paul George didn't flinch. Playoff P showed up and dragged the Los Angeles Clippers back from the brink.

George scored 27 points and the Clippers pulled away in a dominant third quarter, beating newly returned Chris Paul and the Phoenix Suns 106-92 on Thursday night in Game 3 of the Western Conference finals.

"We continue to chip away, try to find ways we can be better and impose our will on opponents," Clippers guard Reggie Jackson said. "We showed a lot of heart, a lot of fight."

The Clippers cut their series deficit to 2-1, ending the Suns'

franchise-record playoff winning streak at nine games.

"Our guys keep grinding, keep fighting," Clippers coach Tyronn Lue said. "We never give in."

Kawhi Leonard remained out with a right knee sprain, leaving George to carry the load again. After missing two crucial free throws in a one-point loss in Game 2, George had 15 rebounds and eight assists and played a game-high 43 minutes. He made 6 of 7 free throws.

"I knew I had to be better," George said. "All my energy was directed toward a better game."

The Suns got Paul back after he missed the first two games

while being sidelined since June 16 because of the NBA's health and safety protocols. The former Clipper, who was booed heartily during intros, had 15 points and 12 assists, but was 5-for-19 from the field.

"I have to get better. I shot terrible," Paul said. "You could tell they had a lot more energy. I got to pick up the pace."

Cameron Payne, who so ably filled in for Paul in the first two games, went down with a left ankle injury after playing four minutes and didn't return.

"We missed him a lot," Suns guard Devin Booker said.

Suns coach Monty Williams said he played Paul too much in his first game back.

"Probably got tired," Williams said, "but it hurt us when Cam couldn't come back so I left Chris out there for a longer stretch and that's on me."

Deandre Ayton led the Suns with 18 points.

Jackson added 23 points for the Clippers, and Ivica Zubac had 15 points and tied his career playoff high with 16 rebounds.

Game 4 is Saturday night at Staples Center.

Jae Crowder, who assisted on Ayton's winning dunk on Tuesday, fouled out with 4:51 remaining. He had nine points, six rebounds and six assists.

The Suns were just 35-for-90 from the floor, despite getting decent looks.

Berry set to impact world in finals of hammer throw

Associated Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Gwen Berry raised her fist, then thumped it against her chest two times and set off on her quest for an even bigger stage to spread her message.

The hammer thrower, who forced the U.S. Olympic world into an uncomfortable conversation about raised fists, kneeling and other demonstrations at the games, finished sixth in qualifying at the track and field trials Thursday. She'll be in the final Saturday competing for one of three tickets to Tokyo.

"Today means a lot to me," said the 31-year-old mom, who wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the words "Activist Athlete." "My message is very powerful. I want to impact the world."

She's hardly the only athlete using their platform to send a message.

Emma Coburn, who serves as vice president of the athlete advocacy group Athletics Association, won her ninth national title in the steeplechase and will

head to her third Olympics. Coburn won her race in a meet-record 9 minutes, 9.41 seconds, then dedicated the victory to her mother, who was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer late in 2019.

"To have her be well is even more special than going to Tokyo," Coburn said. "Sharing this with her means everything."

Allyson Felix also ran Thursday. Felix, who qualified for the 400 meters four nights earlier, made it through the first round of the 200. Because of the way the schedule is set, she wouldn't be able to run both distances in Tokyo, but that wasn't on her mind as she scooped up her 2-year-old toddler, Cammy, and headed off the track.

"I know it's going to be difficult, but trying to sharpen myself up a little bit and just keep going," said Felix, who has been speaking out for moms in the wake of her rupture with Nike over the company's pregnancy policies.

Malone makes case for Tokyo in gymnastics trials

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Brody Malone is competing like an Olympian. By the end of the weekend, he likely will become one.

The 20-year-old NCAA and national champion surged to the lead at the U.S. Olympic Trials on Thursday night, posting an all-around score of 85.250 to make a compelling case to be on the plane to Tokyo regardless of how things go during Saturday night's finals.

Two weeks after ending six-time national champion Sam Mikulak's long reign as the top American men's gymnast, Malone solidified his bid for an Olympic spot with six sublime and occasionally spectacular routines.

The Stanford star finished in the top three on four events, including high bar, where his series of daring high-risk releases electrified the (somewhat) socially distanced crowd inside The Dome at American Center.

Malone's only misstep during his sprint to a national title

came on parallel bars in the finals, where a fall briefly opened the door for the rest of the field. There were no such issues on Thursday. Steady from start to finish, Malone stuck his dismount as the final competitor of the night, an exclamation point on his ascendance to the upper reaches of his sport.

Shane Wiskus was second at 84.300, followed by 2017 national champion Yul Moldauer and two-time Olympian Mikulak.

The all-around leader following Saturday night's finals will automatically earn a spot on the team, with the runner-up also guaranteed a spot provided they finish in the top three in at least three events. Wiskus is in position to do so thanks to top-three performances on parallel bars, vault and high bar.

Men's high-performance director Brett McClure said the emphasis for the four-man team will be on the top all-arounders.

Four Cubs combine to throw no-hitter

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — After Craig Kimbrel struck out pinch-hitter Will Smith to end the game, the Chicago Cubs' closer was curious why catcher Willson Contreras celebrated with a bigger-than-usual fist pump.

Fellow reliever Ryan Tepera then ran onto the field at Dodger Stadium and whispered in Kimbrel's ear: "You have no idea what happened."

The Cubs' fearsome bullpen had just teamed up with starter Zach Davies for the first combined no-hitter in franchise history — and none of the three relievers who followed Davies onto the mound had any idea they were pitching their way into history until after they finished.

The four Cubs combined for the seventh no-hitter in the majors this year, matching the most in a season since 1900, as Chicago blanked the Los Angeles Dodgers 4-0 Thursday night. The Dodgers drew eight walks, getting at least one from

each opposing pitcher, but managed no other baserunners.

The tension was palpable in the Cubs' dugout, where Davies watched with trepidation after reluctantly agreeing with manager David Ross' decision to pull him for a pinch-hitter after 94 pitches. Davies (5-4) issued five walks while scrapping through six spotless innings against the defending World Series champions.

"I think every pitcher wants to continue in the game, regardless of his pitch count, but it worked," Davies said. "Chafe, Tep and Craig shut the door. A part of history. I'm excited for the guys that were on the field. I can't complain at all."

But incredibly, the relievers remained blissfully oblivious to the stakes as Tepera, Andrew Chafin and Kimbrel went to the mound and preserved a zero they couldn't see, thanks to the position of the Dodger Stadium bullpen.

"The whole bullpen had no idea," said Chafin, who pitched

the eighth. "It was completely oblivious. But in our defense, in that bullpen, from our perspective on the field, all we can see is batting averages and the count, stuff like that. We can't see the scoreboard with the hits."

Tepera and Chafin each walked a batter during their inning on the mound, but Los Angeles couldn't capitalize.

Kimbrel then walked Chris Taylor leading off the ninth, but the ferocious closer struck out Cody Bellinger, Albert Pujols and Smith to finish the Cubs' 17th no-hitter since 1880.

With this no-hitter — the 312th in baseball history — 2021 matches 1990, 1991, 2012 and 2015 for the most in a single MLB season since 1900. That's one shy of the record eight in 1884, the first season overhand pitching was allowed.

The other no-hitters this year were thrown by San Diego's Joe Musgrove (April 9), Carlos Rodón of the Chicago White Sox (April 14), Baltimore's John

Means (May 5), Cincinnati's Wade Miley (May 7), Detroit's Spencer Turnbull (May 18) and the New York Yankees' Corey Kluber (May 19).

In addition, Arizona's Madison Bumgarner pitched a seven-inning hitless game in a doubleheader on April 25 that is not recognized as a no-hitter by Major League Baseball.

The Cubs actually did something that's been much harder than throwing a no-hitter over the past two seasons: They beat Walker Buehler, who hadn't lost in 23 straight regular-season starts.

Buehler (7-1) took his first loss since Sept. 21, 2019, for the Dodgers despite throwing six innings of five-hit ball. Buehler made it through six innings for the 17th straight start, but lost his streak of 30 straight games overall without a defeat.

"Two really bad pitches to two really good hitters, and they took advantage of them," Buehler said. "Just can't leave fastballs in the middle like that."

Astros extend winning streak to 11 games

Associated Press

DETROIT — Carlos Correa had three hits, walked twice and drove in three runs, helping the Houston Astros beat the Detroit Tigers 12-3 Thursday night to extend their winning streak to 11.

"This has obviously been a lot of fun," Correa said. "I feel really good, and everyone is getting good at-bats. The pitchers have been great, and we're all making plays."

Houston's streak is one shy of the team record, set in 1999 and matched in 2004 and 2018. The Astros have outscored opponents 91-24 during the winning run.

"This team expects to win, so they aren't really talking much about a winning streak," Astros manager Dusty Baker said. "We're hitting the ball well and we're getting pitch counts up by the fifth or sixth inning. That's a huge advantage."

The Astros loaded the bases in six innings, including each from the second

through the sixth. They scored twice in each inning from the second through the fifth, and finished with 18 hits, six walks and 28 baserunners.

Luis García (6-4) won his fourth straight start, allowing two runs and seven hits in six innings.

Yankees 8, Royals 1: Aaron Judge homered for the first of his three hits, Gary Sánchez connected for the second straight game and host New York beat Kansas City for its first blowout victory in a month.

Rays 1, Red Sox 0: Kevin Kiermaier broke up a combined no-hit bid by Boston with a one-out double in the eighth inning and Manuel Margot scored on a wild pitch in the ninth for host Tampa Bay.

Nationals 7, Marlins 3: Kyle Schwarber homered twice, raising his season total to 21 by hitting 12 in his past 13 games, and visiting Washington beat Miami for its 10th win in 11 games.

Blue Jays 9, Orioles 0: At Buffalo, N.Y.,

Lourdes Gurriel Jr. hit his first grand slam in a six-run first inning, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. took over sole possession of the major league home run lead with his 24th and Toronto extended Baltimore's road losing streak to 20 games.

Pirates 8, Cardinals 2: Bryan Reynolds had a three-run homer among his three hits, Chad Kuhl pitched six strong innings and visiting Pittsburgh snapped a nine-game losing streak against St. Louis.

Athletics 5, Rangers 1: At Arlington, Texas, Chris Bassitt (8-2) won his eighth consecutive decision, allowing five singles in seven innings for a series split.

Indians 4, Twins 1: Eddie Rosario broke an eighth-inning tie with a two-run single and visiting Cleveland defeated Minnesota.

Reds 5, Braves 3: Tony Santillan (1-1) allowed one run in six innings to earn his first major league win and Nick Castellanos hit a two-run homer to lift host Cincinnati over Atlanta.