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Bill aims to aid life on ships under repair

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sailors assigned to ships undergoing lengthy maintenance work such as the aircraft carrier USS George Washington could receive extra pay and quality-of-life improvements next fiscal year as lawmakers seek to mitigate a military suicide crisis.

Amendments included in a House draft of the 2023 defense policy bill would pay an additional \$200 per month to sailors working on ships docked for nuclear refueling and complex overhauls, subsidize the cost of moving closer to the shipyard and force the Navy to confront low morale caused by poor working and living conditions aboard the vessels.

The legislation sets a staffing floor of four behavioral health specialists per aircraft carrier and requires the Navy to fill at least 75% of billets on ships undergoing extensive overhauls. It also requires Navy leadership to include the ships in under-staffing reports and provide Congress with additional reports on the feasibility of limiting tour lengths for first-term sailors to two years and improving housing and parking options for sailors with long commutes.

The proposals initiated by Reps. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and Navy veteran Elaine

Luria, D-Va., follow a rash of suicides among the crew of USS George Washington, which saw three sailors take their own lives in the span of a week in April. Seven sailors assigned to the aircraft carrier have died in the past year.

The George Washington has been docked at the Newport News shipyard in Virginia since 2017 for a mid-life overhaul that includes the refueling of the ship's two nuclear reactors. The process has stretched well beyond its typical four-year length and is now slated for completion in March 2023.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin during congressional testimony last month blamed the delays on coronavirus pandemic-related disruptions but acknowledged shortcomings with housing sailors on ships that effectively transform into construction zones.

Most of the George Washington's 2,700 crew members went home after their shifts but about 400 sailors lived aboard the ship before the Navy made accommodations for more than half of them to move off-site in May. Sailors told reporters and lawmakers that they suffered through constant construction noise, power outages, a lack of hot water and mundane repair work that sharply contrasted with the jobs that they had enlisted to do.

A government watchdog report in February found morale and mental health issues cropped up among sailors even during intermediate maintenance periods, defined by the Navy as minor work that can allow a ship to get underway within four days for a mission.

Ten ship crews interviewed for the report said workforce shortages and long, demanding workdays led to sailors taking leave for mental health evaluations, according to the Government Accountability Office. One ship's crew members said they lost one person to suicide and a dozen other personnel experienced mental health problems during a period of seven months.

Russell Smith, master chief petty officer of the Navy, told lawmakers last month that sailors on the precipice of suicide must wait an average of five weeks for a mental health appointment. In April, Smith stood before the crew of USS George Washington and said sailors needed to temper their expectations for life aboard a ship undergoing an overhaul.

"I understand that we still have a problem and the department has been focusing on it, but the problem is beating suicide is like beating cancer," he said. "There are many different causes, many different reasons."

Opposition to Supreme Court abortion ruling mounts

Associated Press

YARDLEY, Pa. — The shock quickly turned to sadness for Victoria Lowe.

The 37-year-old lawyer, working outside a cafe in suburban Bucks County, Pa., said she couldn't believe the Supreme Court stripped away the constitutional right to abortion that women have had her entire life. She started to cry.

"I don't understand how they could reach this conclusion," she said.

In the immediate aftermath of one of the Supreme Court's

most consequential rulings, it was too soon to know how deeply the political landscape had shifted. But in this politically competitive corner of one of the most important swing states in the U.S., embattled Democrats hope to harness the emotion from women like Lowe to reset what has been an otherwise brutal election year environment.

For much of the year, the threat to abortion rights has seemed somewhat theoretical, overshadowed by more tangible economic challenges, particularly inflation and rising gas

prices. But the Supreme Court's decision ensures that abortion will be a central issue in U.S. politics for the foreseeable future.

From the White House on Friday, President Joe Biden urged protesters to keep the peace, even as he described the court ruling as "wrong, extreme and out of touch."

The Democratic president also called on voters to make their voices heard this fall: "Roe is on the ballot."

At the same time, members of the Democratic National Com-

mittee raised the prospect of a silver lining within the high court's historic gut punch.

"Democrats have a real opportunity right now to harness this anger, to harness the sadness," Democratic strategist Mo Elleftho said during a meeting of a DNC subcommittee. "We are setting the foundation to ensure that Democrats stay in the White House, so that the next time, there's an opening on the bench, on the federal bench anywhere, that we've got a Democratic president making that appointment."

Russia trying to blockade Lysychansk

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces are trying to cut off the strategic city of Lysychansk in eastern Ukraine, the Luhansk regional governor said Saturday, after the relentless assault on nearby Sievierodonetsk forced Ukrainian troops to begin withdrawing.

Serhiy Haidai, governor of Luhansk province, said on Facebook that Russian and separatist fighters tried to blockade

Lysychansk from the south. The city lies next to Sievierodonetsk, which has endured a relentless assault and house-to-house fighting for weeks.

Russia's Interfax news agency quoted a spokesman for the separatist forces, Andrei Marochko, as saying Russian troops and separatist fighters had entered Lysychansk and that fighting was taking place in the heart of the city. There was no immediate comment on the

claim from the Ukrainian side

Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk have been the focal point of a Russian offensive aimed at capturing all of eastern Ukraine's Donbas region and destroying the Ukrainian military defending it — the most capable and battle-hardened segment of the country's armed forces.

The two cities and surrounding areas are the last major pockets of Ukrainian resistance in Luhansk, 95% of which is un-

der Russian and local separatist control. The Russians and separatists also control about half of Donetsk, the second province in the Donbas.

After Haidai said Friday that Ukrainian forces had begun retreating from Sievierodonetsk, military analyst Oleg Zhdanov said some of the troops were heading for Lysychansk. But Russian moves to cut off Lysychansk will give those retreating troops little respite.

Quake deals new blow to Afghans shaken by poverty

Associated Press

GAYAN, Afghanistan — Afghanistan's deadly earthquake this week struck one of the poorest corners of a country that has been hollowed out by increasing poverty. Even as more aid arrived Saturday, many residents have no idea how they will rebuild the thousands of homes destroyed in villages strung through the mountains.

The quake, which state media says killed at least 1,150 people, hit hardest in a region of high mountains where the Paktika and Khost provinces meet the Pakistani border. There is little fertile land, so residents eke out what they can while largely relying on money sent by relatives who have migrated to Pakistan, Iran or further abroad for jobs.

"We are facing many problems. We need all kind of support, and we request the international community and Afghans who can help to come forward and help us," said Dawlat Khan, a resident of Paktika's Gayan District. Five members of his family were injured when his house collapsed.

Overstretched aid agencies said the disaster underscored the need for the international community to rethink its financial cut-off of Afghanistan since Taliban insurgents seized the country 10 months ago. That policy, halting billions in development aid and freezing vital reserves, has helped push the economy into collapse and plunge Afghanistan deeper into humanitarian crises and near famine.

The effort to help the victims has been slowed both by geography and by Afghanistan's decimated condition. Rugged roads through the mountains, already slow to drive on, were made worse by quake damage and rain.

Aid groups said that while they are rushing to help the quake victims, keeping Afghanistan just above catastrophe through humanitarian programs is not sustainable.

"We are basically letting 25 million Afghan people to starve, to die, not to be able to earn their own living if we keep on with this financial blockade," said Rossella Miccio, president of the aid organization Emergency that operates a network of health care facilities and surgical centers across Afghanistan.

Terrorism suspected in Norway shooting during Pride week

Associated Press

OSLO, Norway — A gunman opened fire in Oslo's nightlife district early Saturday, killing two people and leaving more than 20 wounded in what the Norwegian security service called an "Islamist terror act" during the capital's annual LGBTQ Pride festival.

Investigators said the suspect, identified as a 42-year-old Norwegian citizen originally from Iran, was arrested after opening fire at three locations in down-

town Oslo.

Police said two men, one in his 50s and the other his 60s, died in the shootings.

Ten people were treated for serious injuries, but none of them was believed to be in life-threatening condition. Eleven others had minor injuries.

The Norwegian Police Security Service raised its terror alert level from "moderate" to "extraordinary" — the highest level — after the attack, which sent panicked revelers fleeing into

the streets or trying to hide from the gunman.

The service's acting chief, Roger Berg, called the attack an "extreme Islamist terror act" and said the suspect had a "long history of violence and threats," as well as mental health issues.

He said the agency, known by its Norwegian acronym PST, first became aware of the suspect in 2015 and later grew concerned he had become radicalized and was part of an unspecified Islamist network.

Norwegian media named the suspect as Zaniar Matapour, an Oslo resident who arrived in Norway with his family from a Kurdish part of Iran in the 1990s.

The suspect's defense lawyer, John Christian Elden, said his client hadn't talked to investigators, and he cautioned against speculation on the motive.

Police attorney Christian Hatlo said it was too early to say whether the gunman specifically targeted members of the LGBTQ community.

Court blocks FDA ban on Juul e-cigarettes

Associated Press

Juul can continue to sell its electronic cigarettes, at least for now, after a federal appeals court on Friday temporarily blocked a government ban.

Juul filed an emergency motion earlier Friday, seeking the temporary hold while it appeals the sales ban.

The e-cigarette maker had asked the court to pause what it called an “extraordinary and unlawful action” by the Food and Drug Administration that would have required it to immediately halt its business.

The FDA said Thursday that Juul must stop selling its vaping device and its tobacco and menthol flavored cartridges.

The action was part of a sweeping effort by the agency to bring scientific scrutiny to the multibillion-dollar vaping industry after

years of regulatory delays.

To stay on the market, companies must show that their e-cigarettes benefit public health. In practice, that means proving that adult smokers who use them are likely to quit or reduce their smoking, while teens are unlikely to get hooked on them.

The FDA said Juul’s application left regulators with significant questions and didn’t include enough information to evaluate any potential health risks. Juul said it submitted enough information and data to address all issues raised.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit granted Juul’s request for a hold while the court reviews the case.

While Juul remains a top seller, its share of the U.S. e-cigarette market has dipped to

about half. The company was widely blamed for a surge in underage vaping a few years ago, but a recent federal survey showed a drop in the teen vaping rate and a shift away from Juul’s products.

The devices heat a nicotine solution into a vapor that’s inhaled, bypassing many of the toxic chemicals produced by burning tobacco.

The company said in its Friday court filing that it submitted a 125,000-page application to the FDA nearly two years ago. It said the application included several studies to evaluate the health risks among Juul users.

Juul said that the FDA cannot argue that there was a “critical and urgent public interest” in immediately removing its products from the market when the agency allowed them to be sold during its review.

Nev. county approves primary results after hand count

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — Counties across Nevada on Friday certified the last outstanding results of the state’s June 14 primary election after critics questioned the tallies by describing their own experiences at the polls and repeating conspiracy theories that nearly derailed certification in New Mexico last week.

Esmeralda County, Nevada’s least populated, became the last to certify its county-wide results Friday night less than two hours before a midnight deadline.

But it wasn’t before two county commissioners and a few election workers spent

more than seven hours hand-counting all 317 ballots in the courthouse in Goldfield — an old mining town halfway between Las Vegas and Reno.

“Everything matches,” Esmeralda County Commissioner Ralph Keyes said when he and Commissioner Timothy Hipp briefly reconvened to formally canvass the vote and approved it 2-0.

Nevada’s other 16 counties already had certified the primary results and sent their formal canvass report to the secretary state.

The largest, Clark in Las Vegas and Washoe in Reno, were among those that provided their stamp of approval earlier

Friday despite opposition from members of the public who made unsubstantiated claims about suspicions of fraud and manipulated voting machines.

The process of counties certifying election results has historically been a routine and ministerial task, reviewing the work done by local election officials to verify the accuracy of the vote count.

But these meetings have become the latest flashpoint in efforts to cast doubt on elections in the U.S. after a rural, Republican-led county in New Mexico last week initially refused to certify citing unspecified concerns about their voting equipment.

Army private pleads guilty in plot to attack his unit

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An Army private from Kentucky pleaded guilty Friday to charges that he plotted to kill members of his unit in an attack that he planned to carry out in 2020 on behalf of a group that promotes extreme violence to bring about the demise of Western civilization, authorities said.

Ethan Phelan Melzer, 24, of Louisville, Ky., entered the plea in Manhattan federal court. Sentencing was set for Jan. 6, when he could face up to 45 years in prison after pleading guilty to trying to murder U.S. military service members, seeking to support terrorists and illegally transmitting national defense information.

In court papers, federal authorities say Melzer was already a member of a radical violent group known as the Order of Nine Angles, or 09A, before joining the Army in December 2018. According to a criminal complaint, the group is an anarchist group founded in the United Kingdom and now operating around the world, including in the U.S.

Authorities said he had sought to earn a self-initiation into 09A through violence as a street-level drug dealer after shooting a marijuana dealer in the arm in 2017 near his Louisville apartment.

In one defense court filing, attorneys wrote that Melzer denies belonging to the group and told law enforcement after his

arrest that his online claims of membership in the group were “bluster — falsities designed to impress the people he was communicating with online.” The defense filing said that although Melzer had some curiosity about 09A, he believed it was “weird” and “pretty much a cult” and its beliefs were “polar opposite” of his own.

In a release Friday, authorities said he joined the military to infiltrate its ranks on behalf of the group that espouses neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and Satanic beliefs and encourages its members to infiltrate the military to gain training, commit acts of violence and identify like-minded individuals so they can try to subvert the military from within.

Biden signs landmark gun measure

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Saturday signed the most sweeping gun violence bill in decades, a bipartisan compromise that seemed unimaginable until a recent series of mass shootings, including the massacre of 19 students and two teachers at a Texas elementary school.

“Time is of the essence. Lives will be saved,” he said in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. Citing the families of shooting victims he has met, the president said, “Their message to us was, ‘Do something.’ How many times did we hear that? ‘Just do something. For God’s sake, just do something.’ Today we did.”

The House gave final approval Friday, following Senate passage Thursday, and Biden acted just before leaving Washington for two summits in Europe.

“Today we say, ‘More than enough,’” Biden said. “It’s time, when it seems impossible to get anything done in Washington, we are doing something consequential.”

The legislation will toughen background checks for the youngest gun buyers, keep firearms from more domestic violence offenders and help states put in place red flag laws that make it easier for authorities to take weapons from people adjudged to be dangerous.

The president called it “a historic

achievement.”

Most of its \$13 billion cost will help bolster mental health programs and aid schools, which have been targeted in Newtown, Conn, and Parkland, Fla., and elsewhere in mass shootings.

Biden said the compromise hammered out by a bipartisan group of senators from both parties “doesn’t do everything I want” but “it does include actions I’ve long called for that are going to save lives.”

“I know there’s much more work to do, and I’m never going to give up, but this is a monumental day,” said the president, who was joined by his wife, Jill, a teacher, for the signing.

Rollback of other rights feared after abortion ruling

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision allowing states to ban abortion stirred alarm Friday among LGBTQ advocates, who feared that the ruling could someday allow a rollback of legal protections for gay relationships, including the right for same-sex couples to marry.

In the court’s majority opinion overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, Justice Samuel Alito said the decision applied only to abortion. But critics of the court’s conservative majority gave the statement no credence.

“I don’t buy that at all,” said Lawrence Gostin, a professor of medicine at Georgetown University and faculty director of its Institute for National and Global Health Law. “It really is much more extreme than the justices are making it out to be.”

He added: “It means that you can’t look to the Supreme Court as an impartial arbiter of constitutional rights because they’re acting more as culture warriors.”

Gostin and others pointed to a separate concurring opinion in which Justice Clarence Thomas said the court should review other precedents, including its 2015 decision legalizing same-sex marriage, a 2003 decision striking down laws criminalizing gay sex and a 1965 decision declaring that married couples have a right to use contraception.

“Today is about this horrifying invasion of privacy that this court is now allowing, and when we lose one right that we have relied on and enjoyed, other rights are at risk,” said Jim Obergefell, the plaintiff in

the landmark ruling legalizing same-sex marriage, who is now running as a Democrat for the Ohio House.

Abortion opponents celebrated the potential for states to ban abortion after nearly 50 years of being prevented from doing so. Some argued that the case did not have implications beyond that, noting Alito’s words.

“And to ensure that our decision is not misunderstood or mischaracterized, we emphasize that our decision concerns the constitutional right to abortion and no other right,” Alito wrote. “Nothing in this opinion should be understood to cast doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion.”

Kristen Waggoner, legal director for the Alliance Defending Freedom, which helped defend the Mississippi abortion law at issue in the ruling, said the high court’s decision makes it clear that “the taking of human life is unlike any other issue.” She said raising other issues shows the weakness of critics’ arguments about abortion.

Still, said Paul Dupont, a spokesman for the conservative anti-abortion American Principles Project, conservatives are optimistic about the potential for future victories on cultural issues, though getting more states to ban abortion is “a huge enough battle.”

“If there is a thought that this could apply elsewhere, you know, they’re not going to say it here, and we’re just going to have to see,” Dupont said.

Other factors could protect those rulings on birth control and LGBTQ rights, too. The Obergefell decision that legalized same-sex

marriage was based on equal protection, and hundreds of thousands of couples have relied on it to wed, a precedent that many courts would be loath to disturb.

Still, a sharp increase in anti-LGBTQ rhetoric in the U.S. and opposition to specific kinds of birth control on the right have advocates concerned that those rights are vulnerable.

Some abortion opponents treat some forms of contraception as forms of abortion, particularly IUDs and emergency birth control such as Plan B, also known as the “morning after” pill. Lawmakers in Idaho and Missouri last year discussed banning state funding for emergency contraception, and Idaho prevents public schools or universities from dispersing it.

“It’s all interconnected, because at its base, birth control and abortion are both types of health care that help people have bodily autonomy,” said Mara Gandall-Powers, director of birth control access for the National Women’s Law Center, which supports abortion rights. “I’m very concerned about where this is going to go.”

The Supreme Court’s three most liberal members argued that the majority decision “breaches a core rule-of-law principle, designed to promote constancy in the law” and “places in jeopardy” other rights.

At the White House, President Joe Biden pledged to do everything in his power to defend a woman’s right to have an abortion in states where it will be banned. He warned that the ruling could undermine rights to contraception and gay marriage: “This is an extreme and dangerous path.”

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teacher denies making Blacks pick seeds

NY ROCHESTER — A white school teacher in Rochester accused of telling his class of mostly Black students to pick seeds out of cotton during a history lesson said in a lawsuit that allegations against him are false.

Patrick Rausch said in a lawsuit that he brought a bag of unprocessed cotton into a seventh grade social studies classroom in April to demonstrate how difficult it was to pick cotton seeds out by hand. But he said he made it clear that he was not requiring any students to touch the cotton and remove the seeds. It was voluntary, according to the lawsuit.

Rausch claims two parents of students soon after began a social media campaign against him by posting false statements, including an allegation that he forced Black students to handle the cotton while white students could return to their laptops. The lawsuit said it's also untrue that he made a student put on handcuffs and that he referred to himself as "Massah."

Rausch had been placed on administrative leave, according to the lawsuit.

Officials fear bird flu after hundreds wash up

MA BOSTON — Hundreds of dead birds have washed up on Martha's Vineyard and animal control officials there think a highly contagious strain of avian flu may be responsible.

The Tisbury Animal Control posted an "avian influenza warning" on social media, tell-

ing residents that hundreds of dead cormorants have washed up all over the island and it's "extremely dangerous" for a small island.

Animal control officers collected the birds and sent many to the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife for testing.

The animal control office said the new strain could become a major issue that may take years to recover from.

Rock slide damages pier at cruise ship port

AK ANCHORAGE — A rock slide damaged part of a cruise ship dock in the historic Klondike Gold Rush community of Skagway in southeast Alaska.

At least one cruise ship diverted from Skagway after the slide damaged part of the Railroad Dock.

Cruise ships are either using other docks or taking passengers by tenders to the nearby Small Boat Harbor, Jacqueline Taylor-Rose, a spokesperson for the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad said in an email.

There were no injuries in the slide, she said.

Engineers have begun assessing the slide area. The dock remains closed to passenger and vehicle traffic.

College suspends men's hockey club over hazing

IA AMES — Iowa State University announced that its men's hockey club will be suspended from competition for the next academic year after an investigation found the club engaged in hazing, alcohol abuse and personal humiliation

of new or rookie members.

The club was put on interim suspension in May and a subsequent investigation also found that since at least 2018, the club coerced money from new members for status in the club, the university said in a statement.

The club was ordered to develop a plan for new team education, complete anti-hazing and alcohol abuse training and restructure to become a traditional, student-led sports club.

If those requirements are met by Dec. 16, the club could resume practices and squad scrimmages in the spring but it won't be allowed to participate in competitions or league games until the summer of 2023.

In a statement Thursday, the club's players, parents and alumni denied all the university's allegations and said Iowa State had an agenda to restructure the hockey club.

Doctor indicted in equipment scheme

NC CHARLOTTE — A doctor has been indicted in connection with a scheme that defrauded federal programs of more than \$11 million, a U.S. attorney said.

Dena J. King, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, said in a news release that Sudipta Mazumder, 46, of Charlotte, is charged with six counts of making false statements relating to health care matters and a single count of health care fraud.

The indictment says that during 2019 and 2020, Mazumder was a doctor in Charlotte and worked as an independent contractor for a Delaware-based telemedicine company. During

that time, Mazumder allegedly signed fraudulent orders for knee braces, leading to the filing of thousands of fraudulent reimbursement claims to Medicare and TRICARE.

According to the indictment, Mazumder falsely stated in those orders that she performed medical examinations of Medicare and TRICARE patients and certified that the braces were medically necessary.

Instead, prosecutors said, Mazumder received from the telemedicine company unsigned orders for orthopedic braces, which she signed and returned to the telemedicine company in exchange for \$20 for each purported assessment that she performed.

Cops: Teens wanted to 'murder a police officer'

AZ GLENDALE — Two teenage boys in Glendale are accused of opening fire on police officers in an unprovoked attack.

Glendale authorities said both boys, ages 13 and 14, have been booked on several felony charges including aggravated assault, unlawful discharge of a firearm and attempted murder.

Officers were looking into a robbery call when they were nearly hit by several rounds of gunfire. Through ShotSpotter technology, investigators traced the gunfire from a nearby apartment complex. They located security cameras that had footage of the shooting.

Police say younger boy fired one round and then the older boy fired several. The younger teen told authorities he "wanted to murder a police officer."

— From Associated Press

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Bolts force 6th game in Stanley Cup Final

Associated Press

DENVER — The Stanley Cup was in the building and just waiting to be paraded around the ice.

Pack it up. It's heading back to Florida.

The resilient Tampa Bay Lightning spoiled Colorado's party to stay in the hunt for a third straight Stanley Cup title, beating the Avalanche 3-2 on Friday night in Game 5.

Ondrej Palat scored with 6:22 remaining and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 35 shots in front of a raucous crowd hoping to celebrate the Avalanche's first championship in 21 years.

"That's what good teams do — you find a way," Lightning forward Corey Perry said. "Keep plugging along. This is fun. This is what hockey's all about, different guys stepping up at different times."

Game 6 is Sunday night in Tampa. The Lightning trail the best-of-seven series 3-2.

"Listen, this is a huge challenge for us," Lightning forward Pat Maroon said. "An ex-

citing challenge, too. You've got to be excited for this challenge and embrace it."

The Cup was all shined up and ready for the moment — almost beckoning to the Avalanche from the side. It's back on the road for the Avalanche, where they're 8-1 so far in their playoff run.

"We have belief in our room that we can win every game we go out and play," defenseman Devon Toews said. "We feel like we had a decent game tonight, pretty good game. Obviously it wasn't enough tonight."

Nikita Kucherov and defenseman Jan Rutta also scored for the Lightning. Valeri Nichushkin and Cale Makar had goals for Colorado. Makar's third-period tally bounced off the skate of Erik Cernak and through the pads of Vasilevskiy to tie it at 2.

That set the stage for Palat, whose shot slipped through the pads of Darcy Kuemper. It was Palat's 16th career go-ahead playoff goal, which trails only Brayden Point (18) in franchise history.

"I thought I played it well, slid over," Kuemper said. "It just found a little hole."

Tampa Bay regrouped after an emotional Game 4 loss at home on an overtime goal from Colorado forward Nazem Kadri. The Lightning felt the Avalanche might have had too many players on the ice on the winner.

A similar too-many-players-on-the-ice scenario unfolded Friday — and this time it was called. With 2:43 remaining, the Lightning went on the power play and made it so that Colorado couldn't pull Kuemper until the final moments. They weathered the Avalanche's late barrage.

Just the Lightning showing their championship mettle. They've already rallied back from a 3-2 deficit to Toronto in the first round, and climbed out of a 2-0 hole against the New York Rangers in the Eastern Conference finals.

Completing this comeback series win would put them in an entirely different category. Only one team has rallied to cap-

ture a Game 7 in the Final after trailing 3-1 in a series — the 1942 Toronto Maple Leafs.

This is a gritty Lightning squad that's showing no signs of slowing down against a speedy Avalanche team and even after all the contests they've logged. Tampa Bay has played in 67 postseason games since the start of the first round in 2020, nearly an entire extra season.

Their resolve has impressed Lightning coach Jon Cooper. His team improved to 3-0 this season when facing potential elimination games.

"The mental fortitude you have to have to not buckle in the environment we were just in and play the type of game they did, there's a reason they've got a couple rings on their fingers," Cooper said.

The Avalanche are trying to capture their first title since 2001. The Avalanche fans were out in full force — both inside the building (an upper-level ticket on game day was going for around \$1,500) and outside at a nearby watch party.

Similar underdogs OU, Ole Miss set for CWS finals

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Less than a month ago, Mississippi players and coaches didn't know if they would make the NCAA baseball tournament.

This weekend, the Rebels will play for the national championship.

Next up is Oklahoma in the College World Series finals. The Sooners also had doubts about whether they would make the 64-team field until they got hot in the second half of the season and won the Big 12 Tournament for the conference's automatic bid.

The best-of-three finals was set to begin Saturday night, and all 16 national seeds will watch from home. An unseeded team will leave Omaha with the

championship for the first time since Coastal Carolina in 2016.

"We've always thought we were this good," Ole Miss pitcher Hunter Elliott said Friday. "I think at one point we were ranked No. 1. But like in baseball, sometimes you scuffle, and we were scuffling there for a while, but we just continued to believe and knew we were good enough, and we ended up here."

Ole Miss (40-23) and Oklahoma, as No. 2 regional seeds, both had to go on the road for regionals and super regionals. Oklahoma (45-22) went 3-0 in CWS bracket play to make the finals; Ole Miss went 3-1 and had to beat Arkansas in a second bracket final.

"In a lot of ways they're similar to us," OU center fielder

Tanner Tredaway said. "They do a lot of small things well. They've got power in the lineup. They're a really good ballclub. They've been playing with a chip on their shoulder just like we have. They were in question for a regional, and they're here to make a statement just like we are."

Ole Miss' pitching staff entered the tournament with a 4.68 ERA but 11th nationally at 10.7 strikeouts per nine innings. The Rebels have been dominant on the mound the entire tournament, posting back-to-back shutouts in their super-regional sweep at Southern Mississippi and allowing seven earned runs in 36 innings (1.75 ERA) while striking out 38 in Omaha.

No one has been better than

Dylan DeLucia, who tossed a four-hitter in a 2-0 win over Arkansas on Thursday. He has surrendered just one earned run in 16⅓ CWS innings.

Calvin Harris, Kevin Graham, Justin Bench and Kemp Alderman have provided most of the offense, combining to bat .397 (25-for-63) and drive in 15 runs. Tim Elko, who came to Omaha with 22 homers, hit a three-run shot in a 13-5 win over Arkansas but otherwise has been mostly quiet.

As they were in the regular season, the Sooners have been led offensively by Tredaway and Peyton Graham at the CWS. Tredaway is batting .500 (7-for-14) and Graham .545 (6-for-11). Jimmy Crooks has hit two homers.

Bowman seeks big Nashville weekend

Associated Press

LEBANON, Tenn. — Alex Bowman looks back at last year's return to Nashville Superspeedway as a bit of a bust.

The weekend opened just fine: Hendrick Motorsports announced a two-year contract extension with Bowman that locked him in the No. 48 Chevrolet through 2023. The deal aligned Bowman with sponsor Ally's commitment to the program.

But Ally also had gone all-in on NASCAR's return to Music City as the title sponsor of the first Cup race in the Nashville area in 37 years. Ally was all over the city as it hosted industry events at popular tourist stops, displayed stock cars on Lower Broadway, and branded its logos all over Nashville Superspeedway.

Bowman felt an obligation to perform, but instead finished 14th as Hendrick teammate Kyle Larson won.

"I feel like we definitely underperformed at Nashville," Bowman said. "It was a bummer for it being the Ally 400, so we're all in on trying to get our race car better. Anything Ally does, they are all in on. I'm excited for all of the weekend's activities and just trying to do our

best to put on a good show."

He heads into Sunday's race with one victory this season — Bowman won a career-best four times last year — and at ninth in the Cup standings he's currently solidly locked into the playoffs.

The pressure still exists, though, in part because of Bowman's long journey to earn one of NASCAR's top Cup rides. He drove bad cars for two years, signed a deal with Hendrick in 2016 as a reserve driver for 10 races while Dale Earnhardt Jr. was injured, and then didn't get a single start in 2017.

Hendrick put Bowman in Earnhardt's car in 2018 when Earnhardt retired, and he stayed in the No. 88 for three seasons. But when seven-time champion Jimmie Johnson said he was leaving NASCAR at the end of the 2020 season, Ally told Rick Hendrick it wanted Bowman in the No. 48.

"I'm not going to lie to you, when Mr. Hendrick told me that I was driving the No. 48, I was super nervous," Bowman said. "I didn't know anybody at Ally yet. I just didn't know how it was going to go. It has been awesome."

And his season so far? Well, like all of Hendrick Motor-

sports, Bowman is still adapting to the Next Gen car. Hendrick collected its eighth win of the season at Nashville last year, and Bowman's win the next week at Pocono gave the organization six consecutive Cup wins.

This year the Hendrick drivers have just five wins through the first 16 races as NASCAR returns for its second season at Nashville Superspeedway following its only off weekend on the 38-race schedule.

"I don't think we're quite where we want to be. I think we've had a rough couple of weeks," said Bowman, who said NASCAR's Cup debut in St. Louis last month "wasn't pretty for any of the HMS cars and I think we've got a little bit of work to do.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how we come out after the week off and the little bit of a reset we've had. Hopefully we're really strong in Nashville. I think a lot can change after a weekend off, so we'll see where we stack up."

Building confidence

NASCAR rookie Todd Gilliland used the only off weekend on the Cup schedule to go racing. It paid off with a win as Gil-

liland made his debut driving for his father and won the Truck Series race at Knoxville Speedway.

It was a huge boost for the 22-year-old rookie with Front Row Motorsports. Gilliland's best finish this season is 15th and he's 29th in the Cup standings.

"We did kind of talk about how the Cup Series will knock you down quick," Gilliland said. "To get a win is huge. It's kind of almost like a different mindset."

After feeling he was making steady progress in his first few Cup races, Gilliland has now learned what a roller coaster a NASCAR season can be for a rookie.

"At the beginning of the season, it seemed like we were slowly getting a little bit better — a few spots every week," he said. "You could just really feel the progress and then once it stalls out it's really hard to look for any small victory at all. But I think recently we've been unloading faster with more speed. For a while there we were really far off when we would unload.

"Even though we haven't really gained a ton of spots, we've gained quite a bit of time based on where we were at the beginning of the year."

Athletes react to Supreme Court overturning Roe v. Wade

Associated Press

U.S. national soccer team star Megan Rapinoe expressed her anger Friday over the Supreme Court's decision to strip the nation's constitutional protections for abortion, decrying an erosion of rights that women have had for a generation.

"I think the cruelty is the point because this is not pro life by any means," said Rapinoe, who was close to tears at times as she expressed her outrage.

The always outspoken Rapinoe was joined by some of the country's leading sports figures in publicly sharing their dismay, anger and concern after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, which guar-

anteed a woman's constitutional right to abortion.

Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James tweeted that the ruling was about "power and control," and he retweeted a couple of posts about the effect of the decision on Black women.

Just a day before the ruling, Billie Jean King celebrated the anniversary of Title IX and its impact on women and sports.

"This decision will not end abortion. What it will end is safe and legal access to this vital medical procedure. It is a sad day in the United States," King said in a statement.

In her 2021 autobiography "All In," King

said she had an abortion in 1971 in California, where it was legal. Her name also appeared on a petition to legalize abortion in a 1972 edition of Ms. Magazine, joining several prominent women stating they'd had an abortion.

The criticism of the court's decision came cascading down from women coaches, players, teams and unions.

In a joint statement, NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and WNBA Commissioner Cathy Engelbert said the leagues "believe that women should be able to make their own decisions concerning their health and future, and we believe that freedom should be protected."

Verlander, Astros end Yanks' home streak

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Justin Verlander was amped up, throwing nine of his 20 fastest pitches this season.

"Maybe it was the adrenaline," he said.

Looking as strong as ever in his return season from Tommy John surgery, Verlander pitched four-hit ball for seven innings against the major league-leading Yankees. Kyle Tucker hit a three-run homer in the sixth inning, powering the Houston Astros' 3-1 victory Friday night that stopped New York's 15-game home winning streak.

Exactly what the Astros needed, given their worn-down bullpen after Thursday's late meltdown in the series-opening 7-6 loss. Asked during batting practice how he would navigate through his relievers, Astros manager Dusty Baker quipped: "My navigation system is Verlander."

Verlander positioned Houston well.

Verlander (9-3) averaged 95.5 mph with his fastball, up from 94.8 mph coming in. The 39-year-old right-hander, a two-time Cy Young Award winner, struck out three and walked one, lowering his ERA to 2.22.

Dodgers 4, Braves 1: Trea Turner had three hits, including a home run, Freddie Freeman reached base three times to help Los Angeles win in his emotional return to Atlanta.

Mets 5, Marlins 3: Francisco Lindor homered, doubled and drove in four runs to lead visiting New York past Miami.

Padres 1, Phillies 0: Austin Nola hit an RBI single off younger brother Aaron in the sixth inning, and host San Diego edged Philadelphia.

Orioles 4, White Sox 1: Austin Voth and four relievers combined on a one-hitter, Jorge Mateo had a heated exchange with Chicago starter Michael Kopec after getting nailed by a pitch in visiting Baltimore's victory.

Tigers 5, Diamondbacks 1: Javier Báez hit a grand slam to homer for the third straight game, lifting visiting Detroit over Arizona.

Rays 4, Pirates 3 (10): Harold Ramirez scored Vidal Brujan with a game-ending pinch single in the 10th, lifting host Tampa Bay over Pittsburgh.

Cubs 3, Cardinals 0: Kyle Hendricks carried a shutout into the eighth inning, Nico Hoerner homered and visiting Chicago topped St. Louis.

Red Sox 6, Guardians 3: Christian Arroyo hit a two-run homer in the seventh and had three RBIs in his return from the COVID-19 injured list, powering red-hot Boston over host Cleveland.

Rockies 1, Twins 0: Germán Márquez pitched 7⅓ scoreless innings and visiting Colorado prevailed in its first trip to Minnesota since 2017.

Royals 3, Athletics 1: Zach Greinke tossed six innings of one-run ball, Edward Olivares hit two solo homers and host

Kansas City beat Oakland.

Blue Jays 9, Brewers 4: Alejandro Kirk went 4-for-4 and homered for the third straight game before leaving with a bruised left hand in the seventh inning of visiting Toronto's victory over Milwaukee.

Mariners 4, Angels 3: Julio Rodríguez homered and scored twice, Eugenio Suárez had three hits and an RBI, and visiting Seattle defeated Los Angeles despite Mike Trout's sixth home run against the team this season.

Nationals 2, Rangers 1: Josh Bell hit a go-ahead RBI single in the eighth inning and also had a triple and double while scoring his team's only other run in his return home, as Washington won in its first interleague game at Texas in 17 years.

Reds 4, Giants 2: Rookie right-hander Graham Ashcraft bounced back from two poor starts, pitching a career-high eight innings to help visiting Cincinnati stop its seven-game losing streak.

Serena returns to site of injury that kept her out a year

Associated Press

WIMBLEDON, England — Serena Williams walked out on Centre Court under a closed retractable roof on Friday afternoon, taking advantage of Wimbledon's new policy of allowing players to practice there and at No. 1 Court before the tournament begins next week.

Accompanied by coach Eric Hechtman — who has worked with her older sister, Venus, and replaces longtime coach Patrick Moratoglou, now with Simona Halep — and hitting partner Jarmere Jenkins, Williams returned to the site of her last official singles match anywhere, nearly a full year ago at the All England Club. That ended after less than a set, when Williams slipped on the slick turf and injured her right leg.

Wearing an all-white outfit and visor, Williams followed No. 1-ranked Iga Swiatek into the main stadium and went through about 45 minutes of training, from groundstrokes to volleys and overheads to her best-in-the-game serve. The court-side "mph" monitors were switched off, so there was no way to tell just how fast her serves were zipping, but the echoes produced by her hard-hit shots reverberated off the arena's thousands of empty green seats and the white cover overhead as a light rain fell outside.

The scene played out a few hours after the draw determined that Williams will begin her Wimbledon comeback by facing Harmony Tan, a 24-year-old from France who is ranked

113th and owns a 2-6 career record in Grand Slam matches.

Because of her lack of activity over the past 12 months, Williams — who has been No. 1 in the rankings for a total of 319 weeks — is outside the WTA's top 1,200 and could have ended up anywhere in the field. She only returned to the tour this week by playing two doubles matches at a tune-up event in England.

While the 40-year-old American's track record would merit a seeding, the All England Club adheres strictly to the rankings for seeds.

Williams has won seven Wimbledon championships, part of her total of 23 Grand Slam singles titles, a record for the professional era. Tan, meanwhile, will be making her debut at the

grass-court tournament.

If Williams gets past Tan, next up could be a match against Sara Sorribes Tormo, who is seeded 32nd but has never been past the third round in 19 past major appearances.

The projected women's quarterfinals based on seedings are Swiatek vs. No. 8 Jessica Pegula, Pliskova vs. No. 4 Paula Badosa, No. 2 Anett Kontaveit vs. No. 5 Maria Sakkari, and No. 3 Ons Jabeur vs. No. 7 Danielle Collins.

The potential men's quarterfinals are top-seeded Novak Djokovic vs. No. 5 Carlos Alcaraz, No. 3 Casper Ruud vs. No. 7 Hubert Hurkacz, No. 2 Rafael Nadal vs. No. 6 Felix Auger-Aliassime, and No. 4 Stefanos Tsitsipas vs. No. 8 Matteo Bertolini.