

Response to school rampage criticized

Associated Press

UVALDE, Texas — Law enforcement authorities faced questions and criticism Thursday over how much time elapsed before they stormed a Texas elementary school classroom and put a stop to the rampage by a gunman who killed 19 children and two teachers.

Investigators also were unable to say with certainty whether an armed school district security officer outside Robb Elementary in the town of Uvalde exchanged fire with the attacker, 18-year-old Salvador Ramos, when Ramos arrived on Tuesday.

The motive for the massacre — the nation's deadliest school shooting since Newtown, Conn., a decade ago — remained under investigation, with authorities saying Ramos had no known criminal or mental health history.

During the siege, which ended when a U.S. Border Patrol team burst in and shot the gunman to death, frustrated onlookers urged police officers to charge into the school, according to witnesses.

"Go in there! Go in there!" women shouted at the officers soon after the attack began, said Juan Carranza, 24, who watched the scene from across the street.

Texas Department of Public Safety Director Steve McCraw said Wednesday that 40 minutes to an hour elapsed from when Ramos opened fire on the school security officer to when the tactical team shot him.

"The bottom line is law enforcement was there," McCraw said. "They did engage immediately. They did contain (Ramos) in the classroom."

But a department spokesman said Thursday that authorities were still working to clarify the timeline of the attack, uncertain whether that period of 40 minutes to an hour began when the shooter reached the school or earlier, when he shot his grandmother at home.

"Right now we do not have an accurate or confident timeline to provide to say the gunman was in the school for this period," Lt. Christopher Olivarez told CNN.

Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz did not give a timeline but said repeatedly that the tactical officers from his agency who arrived at the school did not hesitate. He said they moved quickly to enter the building, lining up in a "stack" behind an agent holding up a shield.

"What we wanted to make sure is to act quickly, act swiftly, and that's exactly what

those agents did," Ortiz told Fox News.

But a law enforcement official said that once in the building, the Border Patrol agents had trouble breaching the classroom door and had to get a staff member to open the room with a key. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk publicly.

Olivarez said investigators were trying to establish whether the classroom was locked or barricaded in some way.

Javier Cazares, whose fourth-grade daughter, Jacklyn Cazares, was killed in the attack, said he raced to the school when he heard about the shooting, arriving while police were still gathered outside.

Upset that police were not moving in, he raised the idea of charging into the school with several other bystanders.

"Let's just rush in because the cops aren't doing anything like they are supposed to," he said. "More could have been done."

"They were unprepared," he added.

On Wednesday night, hundreds packed the bleachers at the town's fairgrounds for a vigil. Some cried. Some closed their eyes tight, mouthing silent prayers. Parents wrapped their arms around their children as the speakers led prayers for healing.

Russia presses the West to lift sanctions over war

Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine — Moscow pressed the West on Thursday to lift sanctions against Russia over the war in Ukraine, seeking to shift the blame for a growing food crisis that has been worsened by Kyiv's inability to ship millions of tons of grain and other agricultural products due to the conflict.

Britain immediately accused Russia of "trying to hold the world to ransom," insisting there would be no sanctions relief, and a top U.S. diplomat blasted the "sheer barbarity, sadistic cruelty and lawlessness" of the invasion.

Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn and sunflower oil, but the war, including a Russian blockade of its ports, has halted much of that flow, endangering world food supplies. Many of those ports are now also heavily mined.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov tried to

put the blame squarely on the sanctions.

"We accuse Western countries of taking a series of unlawful actions that has led to the blockade," he said in a call with reporters.

Russia also is a significant grain exporter, and Peskov said the West "must cancel the unlawful decisions that hamper chartering ships and exporting grain."

His comments appeared to be an effort to lump the blockade of Ukrainian exports with what Russia says are its difficulties in moving its own goods.

Western officials have dismissed those claims. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken noted last week that food, fertilizer and seeds are exempt from sanctions imposed by the U.S. and many others — and that Washington is working to ensure countries know the flow of those goods should not be affected.

With the war grinding into its fourth month,

world leaders have ramped up calls for solutions.

"This food crisis is real, and we must find solutions," World Trade Organization Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said Wednesday at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

She said about 25 million tons of Ukrainian grain is in storage and another 25 million tons could be harvested next month.

European countries have tried to ease the crisis by bringing grain out of the country by rail — but trains can carry only a small fraction of what Ukraine produces, and ships are needed for the bulk of the exports.

At the same time, the Russian Defense Ministry proposed a corridor to allow foreign ships to leave Black Sea ports and another to allow vessels to leave Mariupol on the Sea of Azov.

Turkey outlines demands for Nordic NATO bid

Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey — A senior Turkish official insisted Wednesday after talks with Swedish and Finnish officials that Turkey would not agree to the two Nordic countries joining NATO unless specific steps are taken to address Ankara's objections.

"We have made it very clear that if Turkey's security concerns are not met with concrete steps in a certain time frame, the process will not progress," Ibrahim Kalin told a news conference after the talks in Ankara that lasted about five hours.

Kalin is the spokesman of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and a senior presidential aide.

Sweden and Finland submitted their written applications to join

NATO last week, in a move representing one of the biggest geopolitical ramifications of Russia's war in Ukraine that could rewrite Europe's security map.

Turkey has said it opposes the countries' membership in the Western military alliance, citing grievances with Sweden's — and to a lesser extent Finland's — perceived support of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and other entities that Turkey views as security threats.

The PKK, which is listed as a terror organization by several of Turkey's allies, has waged a decades-long insurgency against Turkey, a conflict that has cost the lives of tens of thousands of people.

The Turkish government also accuses Finland and Sweden of

imposing arms export restrictions on Turkey and refusing to extradite suspected "terrorists."

Turkey's objections have dampened Stockholm's and Helsinki's hopes for joining NATO quickly amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine and put the trans-Atlantic alliance's credibility at stake.

All 30 NATO members must agree on admitting new members.

The Swedish and Finnish delegations met with Kalin and Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal. The Swedish delegation was led by state secretary Oscar Stenstrom, while Jukka Salovaara, the foreign ministry undersecretary, headed up the Finnish delegation, Turkish officials said.

Kalin said Turkey's proposal to lift arms export limits was met

with a "positive attitude" by the Swedish and Finnish delegations. He added that talks would continue once the Nordic governments had responded to Turkey's demands.

Turkey also expects the extradition of 28 "terrorism" suspects from Sweden and 12 from Finland, Kalin said, adding that there was "no legal or judicial basis" not to extradite them.

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said following a meeting with European Council President Charles Michel in Stockholm that her country wanted to "clarify" claims that have been floating around during discussions with Turkey.

"We do not send money or weapons to terrorist organizations," Andersson said.

Navy provides local option for mental health care in Bahrain

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

U.S. troops deployed to Bahrain now have certain mental health services available locally for themselves and their family, freeing them of the necessity of returning stateside for care, Naval Forces Central Command announced Thursday.

A two-year pilot program will allow people in military families who are experiencing acute mental health issues to receive up to a month of inpatient care from providers in Bahrain, a NAVCENT statement said.

The new program also allows for intensive outpatient care, 5th Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Tim Hawkins said in an interview Thursday with Stars and Stripes.

"The protocols in place prior to this pilot program did not allow the military to refer our service members and their families to community-based providers

in Bahrain for inpatient care beyond about one week, and intensive outpatient care at all," Hawkins said.

Naval Support Activity Bahrain includes about 6,000 U.S. active duty and reserve troops, 1,200 family members, 500 military civilians and 300 contractors, Hawkins said.

Inpatient treatment in a hospital can be beneficial for people who are severely ill or suicidal, according to a mental health services guide from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Inpatient treatment typically includes medication and individual and group counseling, according to the mental health handbook, published in 2012.

The same handbook defined intensive outpatient care as involving a minimum of nine hours per week at a clinic, with the goal of helping to bring a serious mental illness under better control.

Mom talked out of suicide on Guam is a US sailor

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A suicidal mother whom police coaxed away from the ledge of a 400-foot seaside cliff on Guam after several hours on Sunday is a U.S. sailor stationed on the island, the Navy confirmed Wednesday.

The sailor, whose name and age have not been released, was carrying her 1-year-old daughter, who was later pronounced dead at a hospital, the Guam Police Department said in a news release.

The Navy is working with the police department's investigation of the death, Lt. Cmdr. Kelli Roesch, a spokeswoman with Joint Region Marianas, said in a phone interview Wednesday.

She referred all other questions to the Guam police, which did not provide an update requested by Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

Police were called early Sunday morning to Two Lovers Point, a popular tourist site on the north-

west side of Guam, where a distraught woman was holding her child, the police news release said. After several hours, members of the department's crisis negotiation team convinced the woman to hand over the child, who was unresponsive at that point. The child was taken to Guam Regional Medical where she was pronounced dead, the release said.

An off-island medical examiner is scheduled to perform an autopsy at the request of the Guam Office of the Attorney General, the Guam Daily Post reported on Wednesday. The sailor was taken to U.S. Naval Hospital Guam, the Post reported.

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith told a House committee last week that it is currently taking more than a month for sailors struggling with thoughts of suicide to get a mental health appointment.

Economy fell 1.5% in Q1, but people kept spending

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy shrank in the first three months of the year even though consumers and businesses kept spending at a solid pace, the government reported Thursday in a slight downgrade of its previous estimate for the January-March quarter.

Last quarter's drop in the U.S. gross domestic product — the widest gauge of economic output — does not likely signal the start of a recession. The contraction was caused, in part, by a wider trade gap: The nation spent more on imports than other countries did on U.S. exports. The trade gap slashed the first-quarter GDP by 3.2 percentage points.

And a slower restocking of goods in stores and warehouses, which had built up their inventories in the previous quarter for the 2021 holiday shopping season, knocked nearly 1.1 percentage points off the January-March GDP. Analysts have said the economy has likely resumed growing in the current April-June quarter.

The Commerce Department estimated that the economy contracted at a 1.5% annual pace from January through March, a slight downward revision from its first estimate of 1.4%, which it issued last month. It was the first drop in GDP since the second quarter of

2020 — in the depths of the COVID-19 recession — and followed a robust 6.9% expansion in the final three months of 2021.

The nation remains stuck in the painful grip of high inflation, which has caused particularly severe hardships for lower-income households, many of them being people of color. Though many U.S. workers have been receiving sizable pay raises, their wages in most cases haven't kept pace with inflation. In April, consumer prices jumped 8.3% from a year earlier, just below the fastest such rise in four decades, set one month earlier.

High inflation is also posing a threat to President Joe Biden and Democrats in Congress as midterm elections draw near. A poll this month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Research found that Biden's approval rating has reached the lowest point of his presidency — just 39% of adults approve of his performance — with inflation a frequently cited contributing factor.

Still, by most measures, the economy as a whole remains healthy, though likely weakening. Consumer spending — the heart of the economy — is still solid: It grew at a 3.1% annual pace from January through March. Business investment in equipment and other items that are intended to improve productivity rose at a 6.8% annual rate last quarter.

US making COVID antiviral drug available at further testing sites

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House on Thursday announced more steps to make the antiviral treatment Paxlovid more accessible across the United States as it projects COVID-19 infections will continue to spread over the summer travel season.

The nation's first federally backed test-to-treat site is opening Thursday in Rhode Island, providing patients with immediate access to the drug once they test positive. More federally supported sites in Massachusetts and New York City are set to open in the coming weeks.

Next week, the U.S. will send authorized federal prescribers to several Minnesota testing sites, turning them into test-to-treat locations. Federal regulators have also sent clear-

er guidance to physicians to help them determine how to manage Paxlovid's interactions with other drugs, with an eye toward helping prescribers find ways to get the life-saving medication to more patients.

Despite a nationwide surge in COVID-19 cases, deaths from the virus have remained largely stable over the past eight weeks, as vaccine booster shots and widely accessible treatments have helped delink infections and mortality.

It's the first time in the course of the pandemic that the two have not trended together, said White House COVID-19 coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha. He called it an important development in helping Americans get back to normal life.

Census shows big city losses, Sunbelt gains

Associated Press

Eight of the 10 largest cities in the United States lost population during the first year of the pandemic, with New York, Los Angeles and Chicago leading the way. Between July 2020 and July 2021, New York lost more than 305,000 people, while Chicago and Los Angeles saw 45,000 and 40,000 residents leave their respective towns.

The population estimates released Thursday by the U.S. Census Bureau capture a time early in the pandemic and don't reflect changes since last summer. Whether the virus has permanently changed the urban landscape of America remains an open question.

San Francisco suffered the largest rate of decline, losing almost 55,000 residents, or 6.3% of its 2020 population, the highest percentage of any U.S. city.

Among the 10 largest U.S. cities, only San Antonio and Phoenix gained new residents, but they added only about 13,000 people each, or less than 1% of their populations, according to the bureau's 2021 vintage population estimates.

Among the largest U.S. cities, Austin and Fort Worth in Texas; Jacksonville, Fla.; Charlotte, N.C.; and Columbus, Ohio also registered modest population gains.

In March, the Census Bureau released estimates for metro areas and counties showing changes from mid-2020 to mid-2021. The new estimates offer a more granular perspective.

For instance, the March data showed metro Dallas had the largest population gain of any metro area in the U.S., adding more than 97,000 residents, but Thursday's estimates show the city of Dallas lost almost 15,000 residents. Meanwhile, the growth occurred in Dallas suburbs like Frisco, McKinney and Plano.

Reasons for population changes vary from city to city, driven by everything from housing costs, jobs, births and deaths. The pandemic and the lockdown that followed in spring 2020 made living in a crowded city less appealing for a time, and those who could leave — workers who could do their jobs remotely, for example — sometimes did.

Brookings Institution demographer William Frey said he believes the population declines in most of the largest U.S. cities from 2020 to 2021 have been "short-lived and pandemic-related."

Oz, McCormick to recount in Pa. Senate primary

Associated Press

HARRISBURG, Pa. — Pennsylvania's top election official said Wednesday that the margin between the top two candidates in last week's Republican primary for U.S. Senate is tight enough to trigger a statewide recount, dragging the outcome into June as the candidates fight in court.

The state's acting secretary of state, Leigh Chapman, said the difference in vote totals for the top two finishers — celebrity heart surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz and former hedge fund CEO David McCormick — fall within the margin in state law for a mandatory recount.

Oz, who is endorsed by former President Donald Trump, led McCormick by 902 votes, or 0.07 percentage points, out of 1,343,643 ballots reported by the state as of Wednesday.

One question for McCormick's campaign is whether there are enough outstanding ballots for him to make up the difference with Oz.

The Department of State estimated that counties had about 10,000 provisional and absentee ballots remaining to count, but it did not know how many were cast by Republican voters.

There are another 860 Republican mail-in ballots without handwritten dates on their en-

velopes that are the subject of court cases, department officials said.

In a recount, most of the ballots are simply rescanned electronically. Election workers check ballots by hand if a scanner recorded no vote or dismissed it as a double vote, and they may find more voters there, election lawyers have said.

Under Pennsylvania's recount law, the separation between the candidates must be inside the law's 0.5% margin. The Associated Press will not declare a winner in the race until the recount is complete. That could take until June 8.

The winner will face Demo-

cratic Lt. Gov. John Fetterman in November's midterm elections in what Democrats see as their best opportunity to pick up a seat in the closely divided Senate. The incumbent, Republican Sen. Pat Toomey, is retiring after serving two terms.

The deadline for counties to report their unofficial results to the state elections office was Tuesday. Even so, counties continued counting thousands of ballots on Wednesday, including provisional, military and overseas absentee ballots.

Counties will begin the recount next week and have until June 7 to finish and another day to report results to the state.

'Trump is in the past': Rising losses show limits of power

Associated Press

WOODSTOCK, Ga. — Donald Trump opened May by lifting a trailing Senate candidate in Ohio to the Republican nomination, seemingly cementing the former president's kingmaker status before another possible White House run. He's ending the month, however, stinging from a string of defeats that suggest a diminishing stature.

Trump faced a series of setbacks in Tuesday's primary elections as voters rejected his efforts to unseat two top targets for retribution: Georgia's Republican governor and secretary of state, both of whom rebuffed Trump's extraordinary pressure to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election. But the magnitude of defeat in the governor's race — more than 50 percentage points — was especially stunning and raised questions about whether Republican voters are beginning to move on from Trump.

Trump sought to play down the losses by his favored candidates, saying on his social media platform Wednesday that he had a "very big and successful evening

of political Endorsements" and insisting some races "were not possible to win."

Still, the pattern of high-profile defeats is hard to ignore.

After JD Vance vaulted from third to first place following Trump's late-stage endorsement in the Ohio Senate primary, the dynamics took a turn. Trump's pick in Nebraska's primary for governor, Charles Herbster, lost his race after allegations surfaced that he had groped women.

In Idaho a week later, the governor beat a Trump-backed challenger. In North Carolina, voters rebuffed Trump's plea to give a scandal-plagued congressman a second chance. And in Pennsylvania, a marquee Senate primary featuring Trump-endorsed celebrity heart surgeon Mehmet Oz remains too close to call.

But his biggest upset was in Georgia, a crucial swing state, where former Sen. David Perdue, whom Trump had lobbied to run and helped clear the field for, lost to Kemp. The governor was among Trump's top targets after he refused to overturn the results of the 2020 White House election in his state.

Trump ally Zinke fights claim he's too 'liberal' for Montana

Associated Press

BUTTE, Mont. — When Republican Ryan Zinke first ran for Congress, the former Navy SEAL faced false accusations amplified by Democrats that his military career had ended in disgrace.

After winning in 2014 and two years later getting picked as President Donald Trump's interior secretary, Zinke is seeking a return to Congress and facing a near-identical smear campaign — but this time from the right wing of his own party.

A website allied with one of his opponents accuses Zinke of exaggerating his military service — failing to mention two Bronze Stars that Zinke earned in Iraq — and of being demoted, which his service records refute.

It's part of a broad campaign by some Republicans leading up to the state's June 7 primary to thwart Zinke's bid for a political comeback and advance a more conservative candidate for the general election.

The political dynamics reflect the sharp right turn the

GOP has taken since Trump barnstormed across Montana's electoral scene with repeated visits during the 2018 election in a failed attempt to unseat Democratic U.S. Sen. Jon Tester.

Zinke's status as a former Trump Cabinet member is simply not enough anymore for some in his party. They have said he's too liberal and too soft on guns, and didn't do enough to build Trump's envisioned wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Zinke has also been dogged by problems of his own making, including recent revelations that he lied to a federal ethics official before his 2018 resignation from the Department of Interior.

Zinke is still acting as the front-runner, referring to himself as the "battleship" and other candidates as "canoes" while speaking to a reporter on the sidelines of a dinner last week hosted by Butte-Silver Bow County Republicans.

"Everybody wants to shoot at the battleship. Nobody shoots at the canoes," he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Missing woman found alive in forest after 8 days

VA SIMPLICITY — A Virginia woman, 69, who went missing last week was found alive Monday in a dense pine forest less than a mile from her home, the local sheriff announced.

The search for Aletha Gee Walton began May 17, when her family discovered she was missing and alerted authorities, Prince Edward County Sheriff's Office said in a statement posted online. Walton was last seen at her home in the Simplicity area two days earlier, officials said.

Search and rescue organizations and agencies from around the state joined the search and she was found about 0.8 miles from her home in a densely wooded pine forest with a thick underbrush on Monday morning, eight days after she was last seen, the sheriff's office said.

Walton was assessed by medical personnel and taken to a hospital for further evaluation.

Conservationists: Some people killing wrong moth

ME HOLLIS — Some nature advocates are worried that Maine residents are killing the wrong caterpillar as they seek to wipe out an invasive species that causes a rash with its toxic hairs.

The browntail moth caterpillar is an invasive pest that can cause a rash and respiratory distress in humans.

They're expected to be especially bad this year because of weather conditions.

Destroying the caterpillars' nests is one way to mitigate their spread.

However, some residents are destroying the nests of Eastern tent caterpillars, which are a different species, the Bangor Daily News reported.

Tent caterpillars serve as important forage food for Maine birds, Maine Audubon said. Unlike browntail moths, they're native to North America.

As for browntail moths, it's too late to destroy their nests because they're no longer occupied this time of the year, said Jim Dill, pest management specialist with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.

Scientists to set 1K traps for 'murder hornets'

WA SPOKANE — Scientists will set about 1,000 traps this year in their quest to wipe out the Asian giant hornet in Washington, the state Department of Agriculture said Tuesday.

Scientists believe the hornets, first detected in the state in 2019, are confined in Whatcom County, which is located on the Canadian border north of Seattle.

"We are doing pretty good right now," said Sven-Erik Spichiger, who is leading the fight to eradicate the hornets for the state Department of Agriculture. "We know about where the nests are located in Whatcom County."

The insects are the world's largest hornets, with queens reaching up to 2 inches long.

They are considered invasive in North America for their ability to kill other bee and hornet species, which is how they got the nickname "murder hornets."

The state eradicated three nests last year, and there have

been no confirmed reports of Asian giant hornet nests so far this year, Spichiger said.

The agency is also encouraging residents to set their own traps to cover more ground.

Firefighters honor hiker who survived 100-foot fall

KY LEXINGTON — A Kentucky fire department has honored a hiker who survived a fall of more than 100 feet and nearly died.

The Lexington Fire Department honored Joshua Alexander during its annual awards ceremony Saturday, WKYT-TV reported.

Alexander spent more than four months in a hospital after he fell during a hike in July and broke ribs, his legs and pelvis, and suffered other injuries.

After nearly two additional months of rehabilitation, Alexander has made an almost full recovery from his injuries.

"It was just horrific," Alexander said. "They told me that I probably wouldn't walk for a year to a year-and-a-half but with God and determination, at six months, I wasn't walking perfect ... but I was walking."

Alexander said he's thankful for the work firefighters do for their communities.

Land taken from tribe years ago to be returned

MN CASS LAKE — The federal government will soon return nearly 12,000 acres of land in northern Minnesota it wrongfully took from the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe decades ago.

The federal Bureau of Indian Affairs thought it had the power to sell tribal tracts without the consent of the majority of the

owners, a misinterpretation of an Interior Department order back in 1948, Minnesota Public Radio News reported.

Tribal District 3 Representative LeRoy Staples Fairbanks III said the land transfers were acts of outright theft.

"They mailed out letters to people," he said. "If they didn't get a response, they took them as 'Yes.' They took them as approval."

Fairbanks said he asked his staff to begin looking into the issue in 2012 after hearing from community members for many years. Then-President Donald Trump signed legislation in December 2020 allowing for the return of the land, which is located within the Chippewa National Forest in Cass County.

The land is expected to be returned to the tribe in the coming months now that the band has submitted its survey detailing each of the parcels involved.

Cosmic carp: Fish caught in lake broke record

WV S. CHARLESTON — A Pennsylvania resident caught a record carp while fishing from the bank of Summersville Lake in West Virginia, regulators said.

Ayden Minick of Mount Pleasant, Pa., caught and released the carp on May 7, the Division of Natural Resources said in a news release.

It measured by a DNR fisheries biologist at 41.2 inches long, breaking the record of 41 inches caught in 1988 by Charles Cook at Stonecoal Lake.

The carp weighed 45 pounds, which was just shy of the record of 47 pounds set in 1998 in a Preston County farm pond.

— From wire reports

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Penske ready for full house for Indy 500

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Roger Penske motioned toward the turn four grandstands at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. His father took him to those seats in 1951 and a 14-year-old Penske was instantly hooked by the sights and the sounds of “The 500-Mile Sweepstakes,” won that day by Lee Wallard.

It was the beginning of a love affair between Penske and the speedway that produced 18 victories for the owner of Team Penske and, in 2019, the unexpected opportunity to purchase the national landmark.

Penske took ownership of Indianapolis Motor Speedway just two months before the pandemic closed the country, and only now, in his third Indianapolis 500 as promoter, can he throw open the gates and host more than 300,000 guests at “The Greatest Spectacle in Racing.”

“I hope my dad is looking down and saying, ‘Son, you did a good job here,’” Penske told The Associated Press.

Penske’s crowning moment comes Sunday when the hundreds of millions of dollars he’s poured into the sprawling venue

will at last be on full display. His first Indy 500, pushed to August 2020 from its traditional Memorial Day weekend slot, was held in front of empty grandstands.

Penske was allowed to admit 40% of capacity last year and welcomed approximately 150,000 guests in what then was the largest sporting event since the pandemic began. On Sunday, the crowd will be the largest since the sold-out 100th running of the Indy 500 in 2016, with late ticket sales trending closer to that threshold.

Penske would love a sellout. It would be a reward for the financial hit he’s taken since Tony George approached him on the starting grid ahead of the 2019 season finale and said the one thing Penske’s money could never buy was now for sale.

Penske snapped up both IndyCar and the speedway that had been owned by the Hulman-George family since 1945; Greg Maffei, the CEO of Liberty Media, told AP that Penske outbid his company, which had completed its purchase of Formula One in 2017.

The pandemic has prevented Penske from turning any sort of

profit — he’s pumped more than \$30 million beyond the purchase price into bringing the speedway grounds up to his standards — and despite operating in the red, Penske has no regrets.

“We had a business plan and we were counting on over 200,000 people at our first 500,” Penske told AP. “But I look forward, I can’t look back. You don’t get any credit for what you did last year. I’d do the same deal again. I’m fully engaged.”

Penske is now 85, and on Wednesday, a drizzly day off at the speedway before the festivities get into full swing, “The Captain” was surveying every corner of the media center with a maintenance worker taking notes as he trailed behind.

Doug Boles, the president of IMS, said Penske has been working triple-time to prepare for Sunday. Staffers are accustomed to receiving calls at all hours of the day — even an unexpected office drop-in — as Penske wants the facility perfect.

“Roger is an unbelievably focused person on details and execution,” Boles said. “He has

been an amazing steward through an unbelievably difficult time that he didn’t know he was going to get when he bought the speedway. He’s never complained. He used an opportunity when this place was closed during the pandemic to make this place better and it energizes everyone because he’s an energized leader.”

Penske refers to the fans who will begin pouring through the gates on Friday’s “Carb Day” as his “guests.” Every initiative is done to create a pleasant experience for those attending a Penske party.

“He doesn’t look at the speedway purely as a balance sheet,” said three-time Indy 500 winner Dario Franchitti. “He sees this as a treasured property that he’ll do anything to protect.”

Penske is also aware of evolving technology, changing times and a new generation of fans.

Sustainability initiatives have been taken to make the 500 a more environmentally friendly event, and the Snake Pit party zone in the infield returns for the first time since 2019 with musical acts geared toward a younger demographic.

Celtics run past Heat, move a win from NBA Finals

Associated Press

MIAMI — The Boston Celtics know the formula. They believe their defense, as has been the case time and again in these playoffs, will eventually wear down teams.

Hard to argue.

Jaylen Brown scored 25 points, Jayson Tatum added 22 and the Celtics are now one win from the NBA Finals. They ran away after halftime to beat the Miami Heat 93-80 on Wednesday night and take a 3-2 lead in the Eastern Conference title series.

“I think the mental stress and strain we put on some teams with our defense has

worked and carried us through the playoffs at times,” Boston coach Ime Udoka said.

Al Horford had 16 points and Derrick White added 14 for the Celtics. Tatum finished with 12 rebounds and nine assists.

Bam Adebayo scored 18 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for the Heat, who shot 32% in the game — after shooting 33% in Boston’s 20-point win in Game 4.

Miami was 7-for-45 from three-point range. It played without the injured Tyler Herro (groin), and several players were questionable entering the day.

“We are not going to make any kind of deflection or any kind of excuse,” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. “Boston beat us tonight. And let’s be clear about that. There’s guys that are far from 100% on both sides.”

Game 6 is in Boston on Friday night, where a pair of trophies bearing the names of Celtics legends will be waiting. The Bob Cousy trophy goes to the East champs, the Larry Bird trophy to the East finals MVP, and Boston is one win from hoisting them.

“We’ve got an opportunity to do something with this group that’s special,” Brown said.

“Let’s not take that for granted.”

This series has seen massive momentum swings — a 44-14 Miami run in Game 1, a 60-21 Celtics run in Game 2, a 46-20 Heat run to open Game 3 followed by a 57-33 Boston run in the same game, and a 26-4 spurt by the Celtics to open Game 4. The Game 5 run was just as big.

The score over a 6½-minute stretch of the second half: Boston 24, Miami 2. The turnaround was 59-58 Celtics to 83-60 Boston.

The Celtics outscored the Heat 32-16 in the third quarter, holding Miami to 17% shooting.

Bozak's overtime goal keeps Blues alive

Associated Press

DENVER — Tyler Bozak and the St. Louis Blues experienced just about every emotion imaginable over the course of a win-or-season-ends game in which they fell behind by three goals.

Ultimately, they landed on this improbable one — elation.

Bozak scored 3:38 into overtime and the Blues fended off elimination in Game 5 of the Western Conference semifinals, overcoming two deficits in a 5-4 victory over the Colorado Avalanche on Wednesday night.

Bozak, a fourth-line center, unleashed a shot from near the blueline that got past Darcy Kuemper, capping a remarkable comeback for St. Louis.

“It was an amazing hockey game,” Bozak said. “I’m sure everyone that was watching thought the same thing.”

Robert Thomas had two goals, including the tying tally

with 56 seconds left in regulation, for a resilient Blues team. It’s the latest game-tying goal for the team when facing elimination, according to NHL Stats. Vladimir Tarasenko and Justin Faulk also scored, Nick Leddy had four assists and Pavel Buchnevich had two.

They never doubted — even down 3-0 late in the second period and 4-3 late in the third.

“You’ve got nothing to lose, you might as well throw it all out there,” Thomas said. “That was our mentality.”

The comeback offset a hat trick from Nathan MacKinnon, who looked like he might have just turned in a signature moment with goal No. 3. He went end-to-end, working his way around St. Louis defenseman Leddy with nifty stick work and lifting a shot over goaltender Ville Husso for a 4-3 lead. It was his second career postseason hat trick.

Hats hit the ice.

“Doesn’t matter,” MacKinnon said of his feat. “Looking to get a win.”

Thomas tied it up with Husso on the bench for an extra skater, setting the stage for Bozak, who played college hockey down the road at the University of Denver.

To think, he didn’t play much down the stretch of the third period, with the Blues rolling out just three lines. When he got his chance in OT, he made the most of it.

“There’s definitely no such thing as a bad shot,” Bozak said. “So just tried to get it through the traffic and it went in. So that’s awesome.”

Game 6 is Friday in St. Louis.

The Blues have rallied from a 3-1 deficit to take a playoff series twice in their history — 1999 against Phoenix and 1991 versus Detroit.

They’re looking to write another chapter.

“This team’s come from be-

hind quite a bit this year in games so they don’t give up,” St. Louis coach Craig Berube said.

Captain Gabriel Landeskog also scored and Bowen Byram had two assists for the Avalanche, who were on the verge of advancing to the Western Conference final for the first time since 2002.

The second-round has proven to be a big hurdle for Colorado. It has been eliminated at this stage in each of the last three postseasons.

“You sulk for three minutes and you move on. Simple as that,” Landeskog said. “It’s playoff hockey. It’s not supposed to be easy.”

Husso made 30 saves for the Blues. He took over in Game 3 when Jordan Binnington was injured following a collision between Nazem Kadri and Blues defenseman Calle Rosen that caused Kadri to crash into Binnington.

Sabalenka sharp in rout of Brengle at French Open

Associated Press

PARIS — The top women’s seeds keep falling at the French Open, with just three remaining after Wednesday’s second-round matches at Roland Garros.

No. 7 Aryna Sabalenka needed just 62 minutes to beat Madison Brengle 6-1, 6-3 and advance to the third round at Roland Garros for the third straight year. The other top-10 women’s seeds remaining are No. 1 Iga Swiatek and No. 3 Paula Badosa.

Sabalenka, a 24-year-old Belarusian, reached the semifinals of both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open last year.

Badosa went down a break to open the third set of her match against 68th-ranked Kaja Juvan before regrouping to grab four games in a row and was on her way to a 7-5, 3-6, 6-2 victory at

Court Suzanne Lenglen that took more than two hours.

Badosa’s best showing at a Grand Slam tournament was a quarterfinal appearance at the 2021 French Open.

She will face No. 29 Veronika Kudermetova next.

All five of the women seeded in the top 10 and placed on the bottom half of the draw are already out of the field. Badosa is in the top half, where No. 8 Karolina Pliskova lost earlier Thursday.

Some of the other big women’s names to fall include Australian Open runner-up Danielle Collins and two-time Grand Slam champion Simone Halep.

In a battle of Americans, Shelby Rogers upset 9th-seeded Collins 6-4, 6-3 to reach the third round for the first time since 2017.

Chinese teenager Qinwen Zheng pulled off the 2-6, 6-2, 6-1 upset of Halep, the 2018 Roland Garros champion, at Court Simonne-Mathieu.

The 74th-ranked Zheng amassed 27 winners to Halep’s nine to earn a trip to the third round in her French Open debut.

The 19th-seeded Halep was looking for her 21st win of the season. The 2019 Wimbledon champion had beaten Zheng in Melbourne in January.

Top-ranked Swiatek won her 30th straight match, routing Alison Riske 6-0, 6-2 to reach the third round.

It’s the longest winning streak in women’s tennis since Serena Williams won 34 in a row in 2013.

The 2020 French Open champion compiled a 23-6 edge in winners over her 43rd-ranked

American opponent.

The 20-year-old Polish player hasn’t lost in more than three months.

On the men’s side, Daniil Medvedev keeps getting more comfortable on red clay and his 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 victory over Laslo Djere means the U.S. Open champion now has made it to the third round two years in a row.

Medvedev started his French Open career with an 0-4 record by losing his opening matches in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

He snapped that skid by getting to the quarterfinals in 2021 and has won all six sets he has played so far this week and dropped a total of only 16 games.

The second-seeded Russian will play No. 28 Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia for a berth in the fourth round.

Burger's 3-run HR ends Red Sox streak

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Jake Burger hit a three-run homer off Rich Hill, Lucas Giolito overcame a shaky first inning and the Chicago White Sox beat the Red Sox 3-1 Wednesday night to end Boston's six-game winning streak.

The White Sox won for the fourth time in six games and moved over .500 to 22-21.

Burger, recalled Tuesday from Triple-A Charlotte after Luis Robert was placed on the COVID-19 injured list, hit an 0-2 breaking pitch in the fifth inning that traveled an estimated 444 feet.

"It was definitely reactionary," Burger said. "Rich was throwing well all night. The pitch before that was very similar, and I swung over it. Fortunately, he came back with it, and I got one over the plate that was a little higher than the one previous."

Giolito (3-1) threw 27 pitches in the first but still allowed fewer than two runs for the fourth time this season.

"I really lacked rhythm and tempo in my delivery, especially out of the wind-up early," Giolito said. "It led to really, really poor fastball command, at times not really knowing where my fastball was going."

"Luckily I was able to make good pitches with runners on bases early and limit the damage."

Tigers 4, Twins 2: Jeimer Candelario hit a tiebreaking two-run homer off Trevor Megill (0-1) in the 10th inning after Harold Castro went deep twice earlier as Detroit won at Minnesota.

The Twins, who had their six-game winning streak stopped, loaded the bases with no outs in the bottom half of the 10th.

Michael Fulmer struck out Carlos Correa before yielding to Andrew Chafin, who struck out Max Kepler and retired Gary

Sánchez on a foul pop for his first save this season.

Castro hit solo home runs in the sixth and eighth after going deep only nine times in his first 799 major league at-bats.

Alex Lange (1-1) got two outs for the win.

Giants 9, Mets 3: Evan Longoria homered twice and Joc Pederson hit his fourth in two games as host San Francisco went deep four times in the first two innings off rookie Thomas Szapucki.

Mike Yastrzemski also homered off Szapucki (0-1), a 25-year-old left-hander making his first major league start and second appearance after New York summoned him from the minors after Jacob deGrom, Max Scherzer and Tylor Megill got hurt.

Nationals 1, Dodgers 0: Erick Fedde (3-3) allowed four hits in six innings and combined with three relievers on a six-hitter to lead host Washington.

César Hernández had an RBI single in the sixth off Julio Urías (3-4) as the Nationals stopped a nine-game skid against Los Angeles and avoided a series sweep. Tanner Rainey stranded two in the ninth inning for his fourth save, getting fly balls from Cody Bellinger and Will Smith to end it.

Pirates 10, Rockies 5: Jack Suwinski hit a tying three-run home run in the sixth, Ben Gamel gave host Pittsburgh its first lead in the seventh with an RBI single off Justin Lawrence (1-1) and Josh VanMeter followed with a three-run homer later in the inning.

Dylan Peters (4-2) retired the last two batters in the seventh for the victory.

Astros 2, Guardians 1: Yuli Gurriel and José Siri had two hits each, Cristian Javier tied a career high with nine strikeouts and Houston beat visiting Cleveland to win their series.

It was a much-needed performance from Gurriel, who hit .319 last season to win the AL batting title but has struggled this year. He entered in an 0-for-9 slide and is hitting .224 this year.

Brewers 2, Padres 1: Rowdy Tellez doubled off Yu Darvish (4-2) to bring in the tying run in the seventh inning, Tyrone Taylor followed with a sacrifice fly and Milwaukee won at San Diego.

Former Padre Luis Perdomo (1-0) got the win, and Devin Williams pitched the ninth for his fourth save.

Yankees 2, Orioles 0: JP Sears (2-0) allowed three hits in five innings to win his first career start and the relievers finished a five-hitter that improved host New York to a big league-best record of 31-13.

Rays 5, Marlins 4: Harold Ramírez hit a two-run homer that capped a five-run first, all the runs host Tampa Bay needed before the fourth straight crowd under 10,000 at Tropicana Field.

Reds 4, Cubs 3: Joey Votto homered and tripled, then shouted at reliever Rowan Wick as host Cincinnati edged Chicago.

Braves 8, Phillies 4: Dansby Swanson put host Atlanta ahead for good at 5-4 in the fifth inning on a play that started with a wild pitch by reliever José Alvarado (0-2) and a high throw from catcher J.T. Realmuto in an attempt to keep Swanson from reaching second.

Rangers 7, Angels 2: Mitch Garver homered in his third consecutive game, Kole Calhoun hit a two-run homer and visiting Texas snapped a three-game skid.

Athletics 4, Mariners 2: Seth Brown and Elvis Andrus homered off reigning AL Cy Young Award winner Robbie Ray (4-5), dropping host Seattle into last place in the AL West.

Colleges facing new challenges with legal gambling

Associated Press

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — The NCAA stance against gambling on sports by its athletes and those who work in college athletics is summed up simply by the slogan on the posters the association provides to its member schools: "Don't Bet On It."

The rules have been unambiguous for decades, part of the bedrock guidance in place for a half-million amateur athletes. But

with sports betting now legal in more than half the states and millions flowing to once-apprehensive professional sports leagues, college conferences are starting to explore ways to cash in, too.

The Mid-American Conference was the first to jump in, selling rights to its data and statistics to a company called Genius Sports, which will in turn sell it to sportsbooks.

Expect others to follow, but the

additional revenue will come with increased responsibility. And at a time of sweeping change in college sports, with athletes now able to earn money on their fame and the viability and necessity of the NCAA in question, legalized and easily accessible gambling represents more new terrain to navigate.

While the NCAA isn't standing in the way of these sorts of business deals, actual sports betting

remains a violation for those involved in college sports.

"They were able to turn the other way before and say, 'Oh, that's all happening over here.' But the second you're directly getting paid from sports betting, it also comes with some responsibilities," said Matthew Holt of U.S. Integrity, a company that works with professional sports leagues and college conferences to monitor for gambling improprieties.