



World Cup drama playing out exactly as FIFA hoped it would

SPORTS, 1B

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CELEBS TAKE THEIR SWINGS



Basketball Hall-of-Famer Charles Barkley hits a tee shot during the first round of the American Century Championship at Edgewood Tahoe Resort on July 10. Tennis player Mardy Fish took the trophy, his third Tahoe celebrity golf win; Barkley finished 69th out of 89 competitors. **Read the full story in Sports.**

TOM R. SMEDES/SPECIAL TO RGJ

ANALYSIS



Flags in Washington, DC, were lowered, including at the White House and at the U.S. Capitol, as federal law requires flags to be flown at half-staff following the death of a member of Congress. JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

McConnell return becomes paramount

Graham death intensifies narrow margin in Senate

Zachary Schermele, Thao Nguyen and Terry Moseley
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – The death of Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, has increased the urgency for Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky to return to work to cushion the GOP’s increasingly slim voting majority in the Senate.

McConnell, 84, has been gone due to medical issues for a month. That plus Graham’s unexpected death on July 11 leaves Senate Republicans down two key voting members.

South Carolina’s governor was expected to appoint Graham’s interim replacement, who will serve until January, on July 13. However, GOP lawmakers might not have enough support to advance key legislative priorities – or block certain Democratic bills – especially with McConnell having no definitive return date.

The question is especially pressing given that Republican absences in the Senate have led to significant problems lately for President Donald Trump – most notably the passage of a largely symbolic rebuke of the war in Iran. Now that the conflict in the Middle East has ramped up again after Trump’s peace deal deteriorated, similar votes could again be on the legislative horizon. It may not be easy for Republicans to succeed in blocking them.

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White House to push AI power cost pledge

Jarrett Renshaw and Laila Kearney
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The White House plans to bring together utility companies and data center developers to make a voluntary pledge designed to ensure that rapid growth in electricity demand from artificial intelligence does not drive up power bills for households and businesses, according to three people familiar with the plans.

An event to announce the initiative is expected in the coming weeks, with several companies taking part and vowing to protect current ratepayers

from shouldering all the costs of AI expansion.

The guest list is still being finalized, the sources said.

Surging demand from power-hungry data centers has prompted regulators, consumer advocates and lawmakers in several states to warn that households could end up subsidizing grid upgrades needed to serve some of the world’s largest technology companies, raising questions over whether the pledge will deliver concrete commitments or remain largely symbolic.

As President Donald Trump’s administration pushes to accelerate the

expansion of AI infrastructure, it hopes to avoid a political backlash over rising electricity bills.

Earlier this year, Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft, OpenAI, Oracle and xAI signed a voluntary “Ratepayer Protection Pledge” at a White House ceremony, committing to finance the electricity infrastructure needed for their AI projects rather than passing those costs on to existing utility customers.

The companies agreed to help pay for new power generation, grid upgrades and other costs tied to their data

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