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STARS AND STRIPES
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AFFGHANISTAN
US troops will drop to 8,600

Trump: More than 5,000 will leave country when deal reached with Taliban

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Thursday that the U.S. would pull more than 5,000 troops out of Afghanistan once it reaches an accord with the Taliban, though he seemed to rule out a complete withdrawal of American forces from the country’s 18-year war.

“We’re going to keep a presence there,” Trump told Fox News Radio on Thursday morning. “We’re reducing that presence very substantially, and we’re going to always have a presence. We’re going to have high intelligence.”

He said the U.S. would reduce its presence in Afghanistan — where American troops train and advise Afghan forces and conduct counterterrorism operations — from about 14,000 troops to about 8,600. The Pentagon did not immediately confirm the withdrawal plans, and officials said they were not anticipating such an announcement Thursday.

Trump did not indicate precisely when troops would begin exiting Afghanistan.

The president’s statement came just one day after Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon talks of any withdrawal were premature.

SEE TROOPS ON PAGE 6

COMBAT CONDITIONS ON THE CONTINENT

Military living deployment-style in Poland as future force takes shape

By Jennifer H. Svan
Stars and Stripes

POZNAN, Poland

Months after Washington and Warsaw agreed to boost the number of American troops in Poland, questions remain about where they will come from, how many will eventually arrive and how long they will live in conditions that remind them of combat deployments.

President Donald Trump might address those issues in Poland this weekend when he visits Warsaw to commemorate the 80-year anniversary of the outbreak of World War II.

While dignitaries attend the ceremonies in Warsaw, U.S. troops at Powidz, a base around 160 miles west of the capital that serves as a logistics and aviation hub for American military personnel training in Eastern Europe, will be living in a tent city with spotty internet service, water coming out of faucets at a trickle and a chow hall that serves ample field rations.

In summer, soldiers say they’d rather be in the air-conditioned tents than the hot barracks building, which doubles as workspace.

SEE POLAND ON PAGE 7

PHOTOS BY BRIAN FERGUSON/Stars and Stripes

A soldier walks through a tent city on a military base in Powidz, Poland, on Tuesday. The tents and an old dorm house almost 600 U.S. military personnel on the installation.

Sgt. Lauren Meza does pullups while Maj. Joshua Rookus lifts weights on base in Powidz on Tuesday. The soldiers deployed to the base are on rotations lasting up to nine months.
Army veterinarians get practice on stuffed animals at teddy bear clinic

By Martin Egnash
Stars and Stripes

VILSECK, Germany — Army veterinarians practiced their suturing techniques on stuffed animals this week in the second teddy bear suture clinic held here.

At least 16 animal care technicians from U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria participated in the exercise. They operated on several dozen stuffed animals that were brought to the clinic, primarily by soldiers’ families.

Sewing up the toys gives the veterinary technicians valuable training in suturing, a skill they don’t often get to practice, said Sgt. Toni Weaver, one of the technicians at the clinic.

“It’s always different when the patient is alive and moving around, but it’s still good to get hands-on experience like this,” Weaver said. “And the place looks really cute with these [stuffed animals] everywhere.”

After the success of the inaugural clinic last year, the exercise was expanded, with families from the Hohenfels and Ansbach military communities invited to bring their stuffed animals to Vilseck for care.

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Improved Osan bump cap provides comfort and protection for airmen

By Matthew Keeler
Stars and Stripes

OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — The 51st Fighter Wing’s safety office came up with a simple and, it hopes, a popular solution to a problem that plagues aircraft maintainers across the Air Force.

From 2015 to 2017 Air Force maintainers reported 802 on-duty injuries from striking their heads on aircraft or weapons, injuries that cost the service nearly $2.5 million in medical care and impacts on combat capability, according to data provided by the wing safety chief, Maj. Philip Budenbender.

The Air Force tried a prototype “bump cap” — an adjustable cap embroidered with the Air Force logo and fitted around a hard-shell insert to protect the semblar dome — to prevent the user’s head from being struck by a low-hanging antenna, sharp edges on weapons or other hazards such as low-hanging antennas, sharp edges on weapons or pylons capable of holding weapons or additional fuel. Depending on the severity of a head strike, an airman could be out of work for four days and on light duty until fully recovered.

“The strike to the head, you have to consider the long-term effects as well, so it might not be immediate,” Budenbender said.

Senior Airman Austin Cline, of Assumption, Ill., an F-16 maintainer for the 51st Maintenance Squadron, was selected out of nearly 1,400 airmen to participate in the trial. He said the cap performed as expected when he bumped his head pretty hard on the door of an F-16 Viper’s main landing gear.

“I thought I had clearance and came up and hit it,” he said. “I might have split my head open.”

Each aircraft presents its own hazards such as low-hanging antennas, sharp edges on weapons and wings, and pylons capable of holding weapons or additional fuel. Depending on the severity of a head strike, an airman could be out of work for four days and on light duty until fully recovered.

“Any strike to the head, you have to consider the long-term effects as well, so it might not be immediate,” Budenbender said.

The 51st Fighter Wing is still searching for a cap that features the best comfort, flexibility and breathability without compromising the airmen’s safety and effectiveness. It expects to present its findings at a safety symposium in October to see if Pacific Air Forces would incorporate the bump cap on a larger scale.

“It’s an initiative; we try lots of things in the Air Force, and we try to cut back on injuries over the years,” said Col. John Gonzales, commander of the 51st Fighter Wing. “I think we have a really good contender and a winner here.”

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Resiliency class helps combat suicide in Tokyo

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — Spouses may spot suicidal tendencies or mental health issues that an airman hides at work, according to servicemembers and spouses involved in a resiliency workshop Thursday at the home of U.S. Forces Japan in Tokyo.

About a dozen Yokota-based Air Force spouses joined the workshop, which mirrored the sort of resiliency training airmen get, said 374th Operations Support Squadron 1st Sgt. Arthur Scruuggs, who oversaw the event.

“I think we are going to have a really good contender and a winner here.”

However, spouses sometimes tell their servicemember that their military career “is more important than mental health and that’s a mistake,” he said.

Airmen get to notice if our [airman] is acting differently,” she said. “They are probably going to hide that in the workplace.”

A servicemember who attended the workshop, air traffic controller Staff Sgt. Suzi Twiley, 27, of Arcadia, Fla., said her husband, also an airman, recently deployed to the Middle East.

“During the 30-day trial, we had several head strikes that resulted in zero visits to the emergency room,” Budenbender said.

The modified caps saved about $43,000 in medical and other costs from 33 head strikes airmen reported during the trial, he added.

Aircraft Maintenance Unit, wears a bump cap as he inspects an A-10 Thunderbolt II at Osan Air Base, South Korea, on Wednesday.

Two squadron bump caps are displayed alongside a prototype Air Force bump cap at Osan Air Base, South Korea, on Wednesday.

Spouses see servicemembers in a different light, Scruuggs said.

“They will recognize mental health issues that people at work might not see,” he said.

Stars and Stripes reporter Matthew M. Burke contributed to this report.

Twitter: @SethRobson1

Burke contributed to this report.

Spouses are more resilient and less prone to depression it makes it easier to have a happy life. If you have a happy family life and have that kind of safety of being able to go home and get away from everything else,” she said.

“During the 30-day trial, we had several head strikes that resulted in zero visits to the emergency room,” Budenbender said.

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The modified caps saved about $43,000 in medical and other costs from 33 head strikes airmen reported during the trial, he added.
Citizenship change hits some military kids

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Service-members and civilians stationed overseas who have a child who is not an American now face a new process when applying for the child’s citizenship under policy changes announced Wednesday.

The new policy, which goes into effect Oct. 29, addresses the definition of “residence” in the Immigration and Nationality Act and affects children of servicemembers and civilians living abroad who did not acquire citizenship at birth or while they were living in the United States. These children will no longer be considered “residing in the United States,” one of the ways for anyone born overseas to obtain citizenship automatically.

The policy update announced by the Department of Homeland Security’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is estimated to affect between 20 and 25 people annually. The estimate is based on data compiled by USCIS during the last five years from overseas applications with Army or Air Force Post Office and Fleet Post Office mailing addresses, according to a USCIS official who spoke Thursday about the policy change on the condition of anonymity.

As of June 30, more than 200,000 servicemembers and Defense Department civilians are permanently assigned overseas, according to Defense Department data. The number does not include U.S. personnel in Afghanistan, Syria, or Iraq.

But the announcement of a citizenship policy change triggered widespread confusion Wednesday night about what it meant and who would be affected.

“The policy update does not affect children who were born outside the United States and were not U.S. citizens,” Ken Cuccinelli, the acting director of USCIS, said Wednesday in a statement. “This does not impact birthright citizenship. This policy update does not deny citizenship to the children of U.S. government employees or members of the military born abroad.”

Under Section 320 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, a child who was born outside the United States can automatically become a citizen if they are physically living in the United States with their parent who is a citizen. This section no longer applies for those children living overseas with their parent. The policy update now requires parents who are stationed overseas with their child to file Form N-600K. “Application for Citizenship and Issuance of Certificate Under Section 322,” to apply for citizenship on behalf of the child before he or she turns 18 years old. Parents who submit an application for citizenship before the policy change will have it considered under the old policy.

Parents who are U.S. citizens and whose child is born overseas at a military base or at an off-base hospital outside of the United States can submit for a Consular Report of Birth to the State Department or a Certificate of Citizenship from USCIS for their child to be a citizen at the time of their birth, according to a USCIS document about the policy change.

Military bases outside of the United States are not considered within the United States for birthright citizenship, so children gain citizenship through their parents, according to USCIS.

The change in the policy guidance was made because it conflicted with the definition of “residence” in the Immigration and Nationality Act, according to the USCIS document. Children of servicemembers were considered residing in the United States under INA 320 and also residing outside of the United States under INA 322, Mariu Cabrera, a spokeswoman with USCIS, wrote in an email.

The guidance now clarifies these children are considered living overseas for citizenship purposes.

By AYA ICHIHASHI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The first Family Activity Box event sponsored by the USO on Okinawa proved to be such a hit the organization has already scheduled another.

Initially, 25 families signed up for Wednesday’s event at the USO on Camp Foster. However, 61 families expressed interest, so another event has been scheduled Sept. 18 for the remaining 36, said center manager Angela Tom.

“Family Activity Box is a care package program that affords families a customized, connective family experience,” she said.

A box assembled “by hand” by USO staff and volunteers provides items for the whole family along with age-specific comfort items selected by the USO, she said. Those include stuffed animals with a pacifier for infants, crayons for kids and journals for teenagers.

Dooms of boxes bearing family names were waiting when families arrived at 5 p.m. Inside were four activities designed to bring families closer along with “table topics” cards for family-time conversation starters.

In one activity, called “when we feel so apart,” family members painted four individual tiles and then joined them together to make one piece of art.

Christine Wuornos, 32, of New York, mother to Ella, 4, and Evie, 7, told Stars and Stripes that her husband, Maj. Sam Wuornos, 34, of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 265 at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, just returned from 2½ months on deployment.

“This program is a great opportunity to spend time together and connect with the family,” said Wuornos, who attended Wednesday’s event with her husband and kids.

Two military and family life counselors were also on hand to listen to families experiencing hardships. Participating families also took advantage of “Pasta Wednesday” at the USO during the family box event.

Tom said she hopes to grow the program, which the USO officially launched last winter, and enable other centers on Okinawa to host them in the future.
US carried out cyberstrike on Iran to protect shipping

By Ellen Nakashima and Paul Sonne

The Washington Post

American military cyber forces in June knocked out a crucial database used by Iran’s elite paramilitary force to target oil tankers and shipping traffic in the Persian Gulf hours after that force shot down an unmanned U.S. surveillance drone, according to U.S. officials.

The retaliatory strike by U.S. Cyber Command against the system used by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps was approved by President Donald Trump, who that same day called off a military airstrike against Iran because killing Iranians would not be “proportional to shooting down an unmanned drone.”

The Air Force’s Cyber Command did not address questions on the secret operation. “As a matter of policy and for operational security, we do not discuss cyber operations, intelligence, or planning,” Elissa Smith, a Pentagon spokeswoman, said in a statement.

The operation was first reported by The New York Times. It has not been publicly acknowledged by the U.S. government.

The cyberstrike was in the works for weeks if not months, officials have said, adding that the Pentagon proposed launching them after Iran’s alleged attacks on two tankers in the Gulf of Oman earlier in June.

The cyber response to a military shootdown of an unmanned drone shows how the Pentagon is expanding its repertoire of options to integrate cyber into military plans, officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe a sensitive operation.

It also shows how CYBERCOM, which coordinated the strike with U.S. Central Command, which oversees the Middle East, is able to support regional commanders to achieve strategic aims — in this case to preserve freedom of navigation in one of the world’s most important shipping lanes.

The cyberstrike was designed to be debilitating — Iran is still trying to restore data — but proportionate and not so provocative as to result in escalation, officials said.

“When you’re in this realm there’s always the chance for miscalculation,” said one official, adding “there were concerns generally about Iranian responses,” perhaps against U.S. or Israeli interests. But the feeling was the strike would not lead to a retaliatory spiral, the official said.

The cyberoperation did not target missile and rocket launch systems, as The Washington Post previously reported, said U.S. officials.

It nonetheless represents a flexing of offensive muscle by Cyber Command, led by Gen. Paul Nakasone, who was elevated to a full combatant command in May 2018. It leveraged new authorities granted by the president, that have streamlined the approval process for such measures.

Iran said the drone flew into its airspace, while the United States said it was in international airspace.

“To the extent that Iran is conducting unlawful operations, I think (the cyberstrike) was an appropriate measure to take to preclude their ability to conduct further unlawful operations,” said Michael Schmitt, international law professor at the U.S. Naval War College. “Sometimes cyberspace allows you to take operations that are not as escalatory as other options on the table. And this would strike me as one such operation.”

Jason Healey, a former White House and military cyber official, said that though such operations may prove less escalatory, they may also encourage U.S. adversaries to imitate them.

“China might say, ‘You did it to Iran, we’re just doing it to Taiwan. What are you getting so upset about?”’

BY JULIA BERGMAN

The (New London, Conn.) Day

GROTON, Conn. — Defense Secretary Mark Esper, a month into the job, toured Electric Boat in Groton on Tuesday, including a walkthrough of the Navy’s newest attack submarine, USS South Dakota, which is undergoing a major upgrade to make the already stealthy submarine even quieter in response to continued advancement by China and Russia in their undersea fleets.

Esper’s focus of late has been on China, which is increasingly staking a claim in the Indo-Pacific region, and which recently tested multiple anti-ship ballistic missiles. He told a crowd at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I., earlier in the day that the Pentagon is looking at ways to increase its presence in the region.

Addressing a group of EB workers and crew members of the South Dakota, Esper said the U.S. is back in an era of great power competition.

“The Russians and Chinese have been at it for a while and we’ve kind of missed the ball, but we’re back on our game right now,” he said.

Where the U.S. has a distinct advantage, he said, is in its submarine fleet — “well-built machines of war, if you will.”

“We have to maintain that overmatch, and that means we have to continue to grow the fleet and build capabilities into each version,” Esper said.

Officials have spoken generally about the improvements being made to the South Dakota, such as quieter machinery, a hull coating that will better absorb sound, and new sonar capabilities to improve threat detection. South Dakota is considered the test ship for the improvements, and any insights gained will drive future technological advancements.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who invited Esper to tour EB, said Esper emphasized to him at the end of the visit “the need to prioritize undersea warfare and the submarines made here because it’s an area where we are clearly ahead of our adversaries and where that superiority makes all the difference.”


Blumenthal said he thought Esper’s visit would lead to further investment in the U.S. submarine fleet. Nine attack submarines are currently under construction between EB’s facilities in Groton and Quonset Point, R.I., company President Jeffery Geiger said Tuesday.

At one point during the tour, Esper asked Geiger, after Geiger had explained EB’s construction process, whether the Russians “build subs this way ... because they build good subs.” Russia builds its submarines in a similar fashion, Geiger said, and while its submarines are advanced, it does not have a lot of them.

China, for its part, is expected to have a fleet of 70 submarines — both diesel and nuclear — by 2020, and “that number is going to continue to grow as they’re getting more proficient in submarine construction,” said Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., who also attended Tuesday’s tour.

Esper is “picking up” where former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis left off “in terms of highlighting the challenge that exists in the Indo-Pacific region with China’s posture out there,” Courtney said.

Submarines, given their stealth, are able to operate in that environment unimpeded, he said. That’s what’s driving the work at EB, he said, “this new strategic reality that the submarine fleet is uniquely positioned to lead the way.”

Defensive Secretary Mark Esper meets with sailors during a visit to the USS South Dakota Graving Dock in Groton, Conn., on Tuesday.

By BRANDY N. MEJIA

BRANDY N. MEJIA/Department of Defense

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., added that China’s posture out there, “is uniquely positioned to lead the way.”

“We have to maintain that overmatch, and that means we have to continue to grow as they’re advancing, particularly by China and Russia in their undersea fleets,” he said.

“Where the U.S. has a distinct advantage, he said, is in its submarine fleet — ‘well-built machines of war, if you will.’

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"China might say, ‘You did it to Iran, we’re just doing it to Taiwan. What are you getting so upset about?’"
By Dan Lamothe and Missy Ryan

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The United States is in a “very politically turbulent time” that has required military officials to address displays of partisanship by some U.S. troops, the Pentagon’s top general said Wednesday, emphasizing that the majority of servicemembers have acted professionally.

“With very few exceptions, they have conducted themselves in a manner very consistent with our ethos and with our values,” said Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “They have done exactly what we’ve asked them to do, by and large.”

Dunford, who is expected to retire next month, did not list any of the incidents in question. But some servicemembers at public events have displayed banners, hats and flags featuring the “Make America Great Again” political slogan favored by President Donald Trump. Such displays violate military regulations designed to enforce political neutrality in uniform.

Dunford and Defense Secretary Mark Esper appeared before an overflow crowd of dozens of reporters in the Pentagon press briefing room in the first event of its kind this year, a reflection of turmoil after former defense secretary Jim Mattis’ resignation in December over differences the agreement over how Trump treats U.S. allies.

On Wednesday, The Wall Street Journal published an essay adapted from Mattis’ upcoming book in which he wrote that he “did as well as he could for as long as he could.” Mattis warned that tribalism is dividing the nation and “that our democracy is an experiment — and one that can be reversed.”

The Pentagon’s current top leaders have expressed warm feelings for Mattis in the past but did not address his criticisms directly Wednesday, saying that they are trying to keep the military out of politics by avoiding partisanship themselves.

“I’ve worked very hard to remain apolitical and not make political judgments,” Dunford said, adding that doing so is “not in my nature.”

“I will not now, nor will I, when I take off the uniform, make judgments about the president of the United States or the commander in chief,” he added. “I just won’t do it.”

The Pentagon officials addressed a wide range of other issues in the hourlong news conference, including the future of the war in Afghanistan, relations with Turkey and tensions between the United States and Iran.

On Iran, Esper expressed cautious optimism that Washington and Tehran may be on a better path than in June when Iran shot down a U.S. Navy surveillance drone over the Strait of Hormuz and the Pentagon nearly responded with a strike on Iranian targets before Trump called it off.

Esper said he is “not sure I’m ready to call the crisis over yet, but so far so good.”

The Pentagon chief also reaffirmed a line he has drawn in regard to Turkey buying the S-400 missile defense system from Russia. The purchase prompted the Pentagon to cancel Turkey’s involvement in the F-35 program, preventing the NATO ally from flying any of the U.S. military’s most advanced jets in the future.

Esper, asked whether Turkey could obtain F-35s if the nation promised to put the S-400 in warehouses, said “not in my book.” But the United States will reevaluate its position if Turkey acknowledges it made a mistake and gets rid of the Russian system, he said.

“I’ve been very clear, in both my public comments and private with my Turkish counterpart, it’s either the F-35 or the S-400,” Esper said. “It’s not both. It’s not park one in the garage and roll the other one out. It’s one or the other.”

Esper: VA to take lead on care for potential service-linked cancer

By Tara Copp

 McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs will take the lead on improving access to medical care for military members exposed to potentially cancer-causing compounds during their service, Defense Secretary Mark Esper told reporters Wednesday.

In response to a question about the rising number of cancers in the military that could be connected to compounds servicemembers were exposed to while deployed overseas or during training, Esper acknowledged the role of both the Pentagon and VA may grow.

It’s one of the areas where we want to improve and make sure we are doing everything we can to assist soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines as they transition out of the service into the VA system,” Esper said.

VA has the lead on this, he added.

Earlier this year, the military service organization TAPS said that the top cause driving new survivors to join its organization will soon be military members exposed to firefighting foam. TAPS, the Trau- matic Assistance Program for Survivors, is a support organization for spouses and family members who have lost a service member.

The Pentagon will continue to take the lead on addressing the number of military bases and communities with ground and well water contaminated by per- and polyfluoroalkyl, or PFAS, compounds, which are cancer-linked chemicals found in the military’s firefighting foam.

There’s already some momentum within the Pentagon and Congress to address the impact of Aqueous Film Forming Foam, which has been used since the 1970s to fight aircraft fires. The foam has concentrated amounts of PFAS compounds that are linked to cancers and birth defects.

The compounds are found in everyday household products but are concentrated in firefighting foam.

Troops: US servicemembers will continue Afghanistan fight until deal reached

FROM FRONT PAGE

The United States’ top military officer said removing American forces from Af-ghanistan would be tied to guarantees of lower levels of violence from the Taliban. Afghan forces now require American military power to keep from being overwhelmed by the Taliban, Dunford said. However, the general said he was optimistic ongoing U.S.-Taliban negotiations would result in a reduction of violence across the country as well as an agreement to the insurgent group to negotiate a peace deal with the central Afghan government.

Senior State Department and Taliban officials in recent days have indicated the two parties have inched closer to an agreement to end American involvement in the nation’s longest war.

“I am not using the withdraw word right now,” Dunford said Wednesday during a televised news conference alongside De-fense Secretary Mark Esper, the first such briefing held at the Pentagon in a year. “I am using: We’re going to make sure that Afghanistan is not a sanctuary (for terror-ism) and we’re going to try to have an effort to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan.”

Trump is a longtime critic of the war in Afghanistan, which top officials have conceded has been stalemate for at least four years. Trump has expressed interest in a candidate in 2016 to bring home Ameri- can troops.

In recent days, he has said any withdrawal would be based on security conditions in the country, but he also de- clared U.S. forces mission there as a “ridiculous” police operation.

Trump repeated the critique Thursday morning.

“We’re not fighting a war over there — we’re just policemen,” he said. “We could win that war so fast if I wanted to kill 10 million people ... but I don’t. I’m not look- ing to kill a big portion of that country.”

Nonetheless, 2019 has proven the deadli- est year for American troops in Afghan-i stan since 2014, when former President Barack Obama announced a formal end to the U.S. combat mission there in exchange for specific details about the ongoing Doha talks, referring questions to the State De- partment. However, they said that until an agreement is reached, the United States will continue to fight the Taliban alongside its Afghan partners.

Their comments came just days after the top State Department official negoti- ating with the Taliban, Zalmay Khalilzad, strongly denied Taliban-issued statements that the United States could cut ties with the Afghan government as a result of a bi-lateral agreement between the parties.

“Let me be clear: We will defend Afghan forces now and after any agreement (with the Talibs),” Khalilzad wrote Monday on Twitter. “All sides agree Afghanistan’s future will be determined in intra-Afghan negotiations.”

The Taliban have publicly denied they are willing to negotiate with the Afghan government, which the group has dis- missed as an American puppet regime. However, Khalilzad, Dunford and Esper indicated such dialogue would be a cornerstone of any U.S.-Taliban agreement.

“The key to resolve this conflict is a po- litical agreement” between Afghan fac- tions, Esper said Wednesday. “We’re on that path right now.”

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Poland: Soldiers see improvements to temporary housing areas

FROM FRONT PAGE

“By this is a rotation, not a deployment.” Improvements to the areas temporarily hosting U.S. troops in Poland are slowly coming, soldiers said.

At Poznan, American troops are hosted at a small base in the historic city, with a metro area of more than 1 million and a large population of college students who speak English well. Air conditioning is being installed on base for some 80 soldiers who live and work in an old concrete building.

“We all have between two to three roommates,” said Sgt. Jennie Banks, 25, a human intelligence collector with the 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley.

Buildings are being renovated to house soldiers and provide them with places “to do our jobs and protect forces in the area,” said Maj Jon Allen, a spokes-man for the Mission Command Element, a headquarters based in Poznan that oversees rotational forces in Europe.

But before major infrastructure projects begin, “we need to know how many people are going to be in which places on a permanent basis,” Allen said.

Handling uncertainty

It’s still uncertain if the Pentagon will establish a division head-quarter at Poznan or elsewhere in Poland.

The U.S. mission already includes a rotational Army armored brigade, a U.S.-led multinational NATO battle group positioned near the Russian military enclave of Kaliningrad and an Air Force detachment at Lask. A small contingent of sailors are at Redzikowo, a northern Polish town near the Baltic coast, where work on a missile defense site continues.

Experts say the presence of U.S. forces in Poland can deter Russia, which countries in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region have eyed warily since it seized Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

“The U.S. would be in position to introduce its forces into a crit- ical area and then Russia would have to make the choice of killing American soldiers if it wanted to go to war, and that would have huge political consequences,” Michael Kofman, a Wilson Center fellow, said in a phone interview.

Where an additional 1,000 troops that the U.S. will deploy to Poland will come from, a decision announced in June, is also up in the air.

U.S. diplomats and officials have suggested they may come from Germany. The U.S. ambassador to Germany and others have criticized Berlin for not meeting a NATO target calling for each alliance member to spend 2% of gross domestic product on defense by 2024.

Pulling troops from Germany and placing them in Poland “would be a real mistake,” said retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the former commander of U.S. Army Europe.

“Germany is our most impor- tant ally in Europe,” Hodges said by phone. Bases provided to the U.S. in Germany allow the Amer- ican military to forward deploy from halfway around the world, he said.

“To be able to replicate the quality of training facilities, mainten- ance facilities … plus, by the way, our dependence on civil- ian employees … working in Eu- rope, you can’t just pick them up and move them,” Hodges said.

Hodges added that he does sup- port rotating noncombat troops into Poland and he has long advo- cated for infrastructure improve- ments in Eastern Europe to aid allied military movements.

Big plans and a big lake

For now, many of the projects in Poland are designed to support military operations, not quality of life.

Outside Powidz, one of the larg- est airfields in Europe, a swath of forest has been cleared to make way for a NATO-funded $260 million storage site for tanks and other U.S. combat vehicles.

A munitions bunker and rail- head improvements are also in the works, said Maj. Ian Hepburn, executive officer for the Maine National Guard’s 286th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, part of the current task force at Powidz.

A diagram in Hepburn’s office details the plans, including moving the logistics operations area, “where everyone lives, eats, sleeps, does maintenance,” closer to the airfield with new facilities.

“I think there’s a commitment to it but no actual funds yet,” he said.

Army Capt. Dustin Martin, the 286th Combat Support Sustain- ment Battalion headquarter’s company commander and Powidz base mayor, said plenty of projects are underway, from improvements to the motor pool area to the front entry control point. “But nothing to improve the necessities,” he said.

Despite the challenges on post, servicemen say they wel- come the opportunity to expe- rience a country that feels safe and seems to appreciate Americans there.

The natural attractions and local food are also a draw. Spc. Dominick Pisco, 25, civil affairs specialist with the Army Reserve 407th Civil Affairs Bat- talion, said the sailboat-dotted lake near the base in Powidz reminds him of home in Minnesota. He’s enjoyed trying pierogies and Zurek, a Polish rye soup with sau- sage and eggs.

He’s even managed to squeeze in a trip to Italy on a long weekend.

For Hepburn, who said he grew up as the Cold War was nearing an end, “It’s fascinating to be over here and in an area once behind the Iron Curtain.

“It’s almost like history is re- peating itself.”

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**Russian-Turkish talk of new jets adds to tension**

By Amie Ferris-Rotman and Kareem Fahim

The Washington Post

MOSCOW—Russia and NATO-member Turkey are in talks over the possibility of creating a new fighter jet, Russian government officials said Wednesday, a step that could further challenge the United States and Ankara's standing in the Western military alliance.

Ronald Reagan and his successors sought to pressure Moscow to reduce its military and regional power through the use of economic sanctions and to curb its intervention in Syria, which became a proxy war in which the U.S. and Russia support different sides.

In May, Russia and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate on military and economic issues, including the creation of a new fighter jet, which is seen as a response to the U.S.-led effort to pressure Moscow to reduce its military and regional power through the use of economic sanctions and to curb its intervention in Syria, which became a proxy war in which the U.S. and Russia support different sides.

The new fighter jet is expected to be a joint venture between Russia and Turkey, with Russia providing the technology and Turkey providing the manufacturing capabilities. The jet is expected to have a range of 3,000 kilometers and a speed of Mach 2.5.

The deal was announced in the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who are expected to conduct joint military exercises in the coming weeks.

The development of a new fighter jet is seen as a major step in the strategic partnership between Russia and Turkey, which has been strained by differences over Syria and other issues.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin, left, and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan inspect a Sukhoi Su-57 fifth-generation fighter during the MAKS-2019 International Aviation and Space Show in Zhukovsky, outside Moscow, on Tuesday.**

**Local respondents gave their housing an overall score of 61, or “poor.” They also gave their property a 59, or “very poor.”**

**Navy housing survey shows poor rank for Hampton Roads**

By Courtney Mabus

The (Norfolk) Virginian-Pilot

The Navy wanted to know how sailors and their families living in privatized military housing felt about their homes.

Turns out, those in Hampton Roads are less satisfied than most. Their experiences with their homes and the company that manages them, Lincoln Military Housing, ranked fourth out of 42 installations for overall satisfaction, according to the results of a national survey.

Across the country, the Navy's housing scored 70 for overall satisfaction, or “average,” according to the survey, which was completed by CEI & Associates.

CEI distributed 35,125 surveys among residents in family housing, with a total 3,960 responses, or 22%. A total 3,960 surveys were distributed in Hampton Roads, with 22% response.

Local respondents gave their housing an overall score of 61, or “poor,” or “very poor.”

**Navy housing survey**

Overall respondents gave their housing an overall score of 77 and a 75 for property and a 78 for service.

The service contracted the survey during the spring after widespread complaints about the military's shaky living conditions, poor maintenance and bad customer service prompted congressional hearings. Previous surveys had been conducted by the privatized housing providers,prompting some residents to complain that they felt coerced into giving inflated responses.

The survey stated that declines in scores may have been the result of the negative publicity generated amid public outcry.

In addition to Lincoln's changes, Rock said he now views data every two weeks that tracks residents’ satisfaction with work orders as well as their move-in experience. He said he's seen some improvement.

The Navy is also planning to hire nearly 150 people to provide oversight of privatized housing across the service, 32 of whom will work in the Mid-Atlantic region, which extends from Wisconsin through North Carolina.

Lincoln is also working with a mediator in Hampton Roads to work things out when a resident and the company hit an impasse, Rock said.

The Navy contracts with several companies to manage its housing following a 2005 agreement to privatize military housing.

Lincoln manages about 4,400 units in Hampton Roads.

Warner took aim at those 50-year contracts. “Ultimately, if you don’t have the ability to renegotiate the lease, you’re not going to be able to hold these companies accountable,” he said in a phone interview.

Warner and Sen. Tim Kaine have pushed for reforms in the upcoming defense bill that would, among other things, allow the families to withhold their housing allowances if they’re in a dispute over housing conditions.

Kaine has previously toured homes around the Naval Station Norfolk and near Fort Belvoir. In a statement Monday, he called the housing conditions “intolerable.”
Attacks by extremists prompt debate on domestic terrorism

By Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. — A white man opens fire at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, targeting Mexicans and killing 22 people. Another man kills nine people at a synagogue in Pittsburgh.

The two mass shootings and a presidential tweet put a spotlight on the idea of domestic terrorism, adding momentum to a debate about whether such attacks should be classified and tried in the same way as crimes against America by foreign extremist groups and their supporters.

A Republican senator and a Democrat in the House of Representatives are drafting bills to do that while some Republicans call for a left-wing group to be designated a terrorist organization.

“Domestic terrorism is in our backyard and we need to call it and treat it under the law the same as other forms of terrorism,” said U.S. Sen. Martha McSally, an Arizona Republican who intends to introduce legislation when Congress returns in September.

Sally’s proposal would allow federal law enforcement to charge suspects with acts of domestic terrorism and add punishments for those crimes, including the death penalty.

Rep. Adam Schiff, a California Democrat, introduced legislation on Aug. 16 that he says is “a very high priority.”

“The goal is to put domestic terrorism at the same level of priority as ISIS- or al-Qaida-inspired terrorism, since Americans on American soil are just as likely, if not more likely, to die at the hand of a domestic terrorist motivated by some hateful ideology like white supremacy,” Schiff said in a telephone interview.

Separately, two Republican senators are calling for an anti-fascist movement known as antifa to be designated as a domestic terrorist organization.

The push comes after clashes between white supremacists and antifa in Portland, Ore., which drew a tweet from President Donald Trump suggesting domestic terrorism designation for antifa but not the white supremacists.

Such a designation does not currently exist.

While a push to rethink what should be deemed terrorism gains some momentum, it has sparked concerns about infringement of constitutional rights. It’s also not clear whether the debate will be embraced in a bipartisan way, though McSally said this week that her bill has received “a lot of positive feedback … from both sides of the aisle.”

Schiff said he hopes for “bipartisan support for an effort to put the full weight of the federal government behind the prosecution of people committing these hateful acts of domestic mass terror.”

Meanwhile, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas is working on “legislation mechanisms” that would enable domestic terrorist organizations to be treated like those on the State Department’s list of foreign extremist groups, his spokeswoman, Maria Jeffreys, said in an email.

Cruz and Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-Louisiana, introduced a resolution on July 18 condemning antifa and calling for it to be designated as a domestic terrorist organization.

As antifa activists prepared to square off against far-right demonstrators in Portland, Ore., on Aug. 17, Trump tweeted that “major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an ORGANIZATION OF TERROR.”

“Remain in Mexico”

Currently, only foreign groups can be labeled terrorist organizations. The U.S. State Department maintains that list, currently comprising 68 groups — none of which is white supremacist.

It is a crime for a person in the United States to knowingly provide “material support or resources” to a foreign terrorist organization.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Oregon, said he doesn’t believe Congress should enable the executive branch to designate groups as domestic terrorists.

“I wouldn’t trust this administration to exercise such power in an unbiased and judicious manner,” Merkley said.

The Anti-Defamation League says antifa hasn’t been accused of any murders, and that there is no comparison between the loosely organized movement and the white supremacist groups which sometimes clashes with. Antifa uses “unacceptable tactics” but rejects racism, while white supremacists use more extreme violence to intimidate minorities, the ADL said.

Schiff denounced Trump’s tweet as “a disservice to our efforts to combat domestic mass terror.”

“I see it as the same destructive political posturing we’ve come to expect from the president, that would argue white supremacists’ hate is not the problem; antifa is the problem,” Schiff said.

US, Mexico widen asylum crackdown to push back all migrants

By Maria Verza and Noman Merchant
Associated Press

NUEVO LAREDO, Mexico — A Trump administration program forcing asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico has evolved into a sweeping rejection of all forms of migrants, with both countries quietly working to keep people out of the U.S. despite threats to the migrants’ safety.

The results serve the goals of both governments, which have targeted unauthorized migration at the behest of President Donald Trump, who threatened Mexico with potentially crippling tariffs earlier this year to force action.

Some people sent to wait in the Mexican border cities of Nuevo Laredo and Matamoros said they never requested asylum, including Wilfredo Alvarez, a laborer from Honduras.

He crossed the Rio Grande without permission to look for work to support his seven children and was unexpectedly put into the program. He was sent back to Mexico with a future court date.

“We thought that if they caught us, they would deport us to our country, but it was not that way,” Alvarez said. “They threw us away here to Mexico, but we are not from here and it’s very difficult.”

Others said they were never asked if they feared persecution in Mexico, despite U.S. government rules that say migrants should not be sent there if they face that risk.

Migrants have been sent for free 11 cases involving people等待” to Mexico, many Central Americans to the Guatemalan border agents that gang members had killed her sister, leading the rest of her family to flee.

The next day, she said, the pregnant woman was back to Mexico, a promise that for many has not been kept.

Thirteen people told the AP they were not asked for any information about their cases by U.S. border agents.

“They only asked for a name, a fingerprint, and then ‘out,’” said Blanca, a Guatemalan woman who was sent back to Nuevo Laredo in July with 15 relatives. Blanca asked that her last name be withheld due to fear that she would be harmed.

She said she was prepared to tell border agents that gang members had killed her sister, leading the rest of her family to flee. She brought paperwork documenting the attack, but said, “We couldn’t even show them.”

Jodi Goodwin, an immigration attorney in Harlingen, Texas, has agreed to represent free for 11 cases involving people waiting in Matamoros, including three families and a pregnant woman from Peru. Goodwin persuaded border agents on Sunday to allow the pregnant woman inside the U.S. as well as a woman accompanied by a baby with Down syndrome.

The next day, she said, the pregnant woman had been sent back to Mexico.

Migrants wait at an immigration center on International Bridge 1 in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, in July. Some migrants say their safety has been threatened by a program forcing those seeking asylum in the U.S. to wait in Mexico.

Matthew Busch/AP

A person pauses in front of memorials to those killed in a shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh in October. Such mass killings in the U.S. have prompted a debate over domestic terrorism.

Associated Press

BY ANDREW SELSKY
Associated Press

The effort to keep migrants in Mexico is officially called the “Migrant Protection Protocols,” but it’s better known as the “Remain in Mexico” program. As a plan to crack down on asylum claims, it has been in effect since January and was expanded in July to the eastern end of the U.S.-Mexico border.

In that region, on one side of the border is South Texas’ Rio Grande Valley, where border agents apprehend more migrants crossing illegally than in any other section. On the other side is the state of Tamaulipas, known for its cartel-linked violence and corruption. Tamaulipas is the only U.S.-Mexico border state that the U.S. government warns Americans not to visit due to safety concerns.

The U.S. has said at least 32,000 people have been sent back. Mexico says around 5,500 people have been sent to Nuevo Laredo and 3,000 people to Matamoros.

Migrants in Mexican border cities said they fear they would receive help when they were sent back to Mexico, a promise that for many has not been kept.

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Hurricane Dorian expected to grow on way to Florida

BY FREIDA FRIASRO
AND ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON
Associated Press

MIAMI — Leaving mercifully little damage in its wake in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, a strengthening Hurricane Dorian posed an increasing menace to Florida on Thursday as it swirled toward a possible direct hit on the state over Labor Day weekend.

Along much of Florida's east coast, shoppers rushed to stock up on food and emergency supplies at supermarkets and hardware stores and picked the shelves clean of bottled water. Lines formed at service stations as motorists topped off their tanks and filled gasoline cans.

Forecasters said Dorian is expected to bulk up into a dangerous Category 3 storm, meaning winds of at least 111 mph, or perhaps even a catastrophe Category 4, at 130 mph or more, before broadsiding the U.S. on Monday somewhere between the Florida Keys and southern Georgia — a 500-mile stretch that reflected the high degree of uncertainty this far out.

President Donald Trump said it is "not ready." He tweeted: "Be prepared and please follow State and Federal instructions, it will be a very big Hurricane, perhaps one of the biggest!"

As of late Thursday morning, Dorian was centered about 220 miles northwest of San Juan, Puerto Rico, its winds blowing at 85 mph as it moved northwest at 13 mph.

Also imperiled were the Bahamas, with Dorian’s projected track running just to the north of Great Abaco and Grand Bahama islands.

The storm is expected to pick up steam as it pushes out into warm waters with favorable winds, said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy, adding: "Starting tomorrow, it really has no obstacles left in its way."

"If it makes landfall as a Category 3 or 4 hurricane, that's a big deal," he said. "A lot of people are going to be affected. A lot of insurance claims."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis declared a state of emergency, and local governments distributed sandbags. Some residents used community Facebook groups for last-minute grocery stores getting new shipments of water.

At NASA's Kennedy Space Center at Cape Canaveral, officials debated whether the mobile launch platform for the new mega rocket under development should be moved indoors.

Dorian blew through the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico as a Category 1 hurricane on Wednesday. Puerto Rico seemed to be spared any heavy wind and rain, a huge relief on an island where blue tarps still cover some 30,000 homes nearly two years after Hurricane Maria. The island's 3.2 million inhabitants also depend on an unstable power grid that remains prone to outages since it was destroyed by Maria.

Several hundred customers were without power across Puerto Rico, said Angel Figuerroa, president of a utility workers union. Police said an 80-year-old man in the town of Bayamon died after he fell trying to climb to his roof to clear it of debris ahead of the storm.

Dorian caused an island-wide blackout in St. Thomas and St. John in the U.S. Virgin Islands and scattered outages in St. Croix, government spokesman Richard Motta said.

No serious damage was reported in the British Virgin Islands, where Gov. Augustus Jaspert said crews were already clearing roads and inspecting infrastructure by late Wednesday afternoon.

FDA: Low risk in tainted blood pressure drug

BY MATTHEW PERRONE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. health officials on Wednesday tried to reassure patients that they face very low risks from ongoing contamination problems with widely prescribed blood pressure drugs.

Drugmakers have issued more than 50 recalls since last July linked to low levels of a probable cancer-causing chemical found in generic drugs taken by millions of Americans. The contamination underscores the Food and Drug Administration's struggle to police an industry that increasingly relies on overseas manufacturing for much of its production.

On Wednesday, an FDA official said the actual risk to patients from the tainted medications is likely lower than originally stated.

The FDA said last year that if 8,000 patients took the maximum dose of the drugs for four years, the contamination issue could cause one extra case of cancer over their lifetimes.

On Wednesday, an FDA official said the actual risk to patients is likely much lower than this "worst case scenario." That's because most patients likely "received much smaller amounts of the impurity," because not all blood pressure drugs on the market contain the hazardous chemicals.

The FDA's drug center director, Janet Woodcock, said patients should continue taking their medication because the risk of untreated high blood pressure and heart failure "greatly outweighs the potential risk of exposure to trace amounts" of contaminants.

The affected medications are low-cost versions of lifesaving heart-regulating drugs, including valsartan, losartan and irbesartan. They are designed to allow blood to flow more easily and are sold as single-ingredient pills and tablets and in combination with other drugs.

The FDA is responsible for ensuring that U.S. medicines are produced in safe, sanitary conditions that meet quality standards. But regulators have struggled for years to inspect the supply chain as pharmaceutical production spread globally.

For decades the FDA focused its manufacturing inspections on U.S. factories. More than 90% of the drugs prescribed in the U.S. are generics, and over time, most companies have moved their manufacturing overseas to take advantage of cheaper labor and materials. Today roughly 80% of the ingredients used in U.S. medicines are made abroad, according to the Government Accountability Office.

The FDA did not open its first permanent offices in China and India until 2008 and 2009, respectively. That followed dozens of deaths and hundreds of allergic reactions in the U.S. linked to a contaminated blood thinner made at a Chinese facility.

The FDA has tried to keep pace with foreign inspections. But when the GAO's watchdog investigators last examined the issue in 2016, they estimated the FDA had never inspected nearly 1,000 of the 3,000 foreign manufacturing facilities that export drug ingredients to the U.S.

Earlier this summer House lawmakers asked the FDA to provide information about its oversight of facilities in China and India linked to the recent recalls.

"We remain concerned about whether FDA has the appropriate resources, policies, management practices, and authorities to oversee adequately foreign drug manufacturing," members of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce wrote in a June letter to the FDA.

On Wednesday, Woodcock noted that the FDA recently issued a warning letter to an India-based manufacturer, Lannett Pharmaceuticals, over traces of a carcinogen found at one of its facilities. The FDA said the company failed to "control and monitor" its manufacturing to prevent the chemical from making its way into pharmaceutical shipments.

The FDA notes that 43 blood pressure medications have not been affected by the contamination issues.
Deadline passes for Dems’ debate

By Brian Slatykos
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Struggling Democratic presidential candidates are facing the same question they did four years ago: how to spell doom for their campaigns.

Hours ahead of a midnight Wednesday deadline to qualify, New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand announced she was dropping out of the race after spending at least $4 million over the past year to be a voice in the conversation in recent months to qualify.

Gillibrand’s remarks followed scrutiny of business activities by Hunter and James Biden, the president’s older and younger brothers, respectively. The questions were the same as in 2016, when robust financial support for Hillary Clinton from foreign business interests and her husband’s financial dealings were an issue for her campaign.

But Democratic Party leaders are largely brushing aside the issues, with Biden easily qualifying for the next debate stage. And the DNC designed the requirements to bring order to an amorphous field months before Iowa caucuses.

For Biden’s campaign, the debate to who would stay in the race wasn’t a debate at all. It was more of a reaffirmation of who was in and who was out.

The top 10 candidates who qualified for September’s debate were Joe Biden, Cory Booker, Pete Buttigieg, Julian Castro, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Beto O’Rourke, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Andrew Yang.

In a still-crowded Democratic field, not qualifying for the debate was expected to severely cripple a candidate’s prospects. However, several have pledged to forge on in hopes of reaching the requirements in time for the next debate, in October.

Although the debates had lower thresholds, the DNC raised the stakes for the fall debates.

“We believe you need to show progress in your campaign,” said Democratic Party spokeswoman Xochitl Hinojosa. “There hasn’t been one candidate in 40 years who has polled under 2% the fall ahead of a primary and has gone on to be the Democratic nominee.”

The DNC designed the requirements to bring order to an uninviting field of more than 20 White House hopefuls while elevating the role of online grassroots donors who are among the party’s most fervent supporters.

In some ways, the party has succeeded. But the process has also drawn complaints from those unlikely to make the cut. They argue that the rules are arbitrary and have forced candidates to pour money into expensive online fundraising operations that can sometimes charge as much as $90 for every dollar raised.

Bennet said the threshold favored Steyer, and a memo by his campaign accused the billionaire of trying to buy his way into the debate. “Other candidates have had to spend millions to acquire donors on Facebook, instead of communicating with voters and laying the groundwork to beat” President Donald Trump, the Bennet campaign memo stated.

Steyer, a late entry in the race, was the closest to qualifying but acknowledged Wednesday night that he too had fallen short.

While I’m disappointed that I won’t be on the debate stage in Houston this month, I’m excited by all the support you’ve shown us,” he tweeted to supporters.

In a separate letter to Democratic Party Chairman Tom Perez, Bennet’s campaign asked the DNC to allow and questioned why Democrats were trying to narrow the field months before Iowa caucuses.

Hinojosa said candidates have had ample time to build support and reach the thresholds.

“We are asking Democratic candidates to hit 2% in four polls. That is not a high standard,” Hinojosa, who added the DNC is accepting the results from 21 polls.

Steyer and Gillibrand both poured millions of dollars into Facebook and TV ads to boost their standing in recent months. While Steyer met the donor threshold, he was one poll shy. Gillibrand was three polls away and had yet to lock in enough donors.

Gabbard was two polls away from the threshold, and Williamson was three polls away.

Several others who struggled had already chosen to drop out. Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar and former Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper all recently ended their campaigns.

Biden: Family, work are separate

By Bill Barrow
Associated Press

SPARTANBURG, S.C. — Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said Wednesday that in all his decades in public office, he has never talked to any family members about their private business dealings. And he promised “an absolute wall” between government and his family’s financial interests should he be elected president.

Biden’s remarks followed scrutiny of the business activities of his son Hunter and his brother James — a spotlight that, despite Biden’s campaign vigorous verification and standards process, I shouldn’t have reported it and I was wrong to discuss it on the air.”

He said on the show that he’d been told that Deutsche Bank had documents showing that Russian oligarchs had co-signed loans for Trump. He said the report came from a single source, who he didn’t identify. The documents also supposedly revealed Trump paid little in taxes, he said.

Even as O’Donnell talked about Trump’s finances, he tweeted that the story, which led Tuesday night’s broadcast, “didn’t go through our vigorous verification and standards process. I shouldn’t have reported it and I was wrong to discuss it on the air.”

It exhibits a stunning lack of rigor for a news organization that was pounced upon by Trump’s lawyers. In a letter to Susan Weiner, NBC Universal’s general counsel, and Daniel Kummer, the company’s senior vice president for litigation, Trump lawyer Charles Harder called O’Donnell’s statements “false and defamatory, and extremely damaging.”

Harder said Trump is the only guarantor for the loans, but he said it was information that was publicly recorded and could be found by an online search. The president’s attorney threatened legal action if NBC didn’t apologize and correct the report. O’Donnell has been hosting “The Last Word” on MSNBC since 2010.

MSNBC host: Russia story an ‘error in judgment’

Associated Press

NEW YORK — MSNBC’s Lawrence O’Donnell said Wednesday he made an “error in judgment” in reporting about supposed Russian ties to President Donald Trump’s finances without verifying the story.

O’Donnell’s admission came in a tweet Wednesday after a lawyer for Trump said the story was false and defamatory and called on NBC News to apologize and retract it.

MSNBC had no comment on any potential disciplinary action. O’Donnell, who was weighing in at the last minute, said he would address the matter on Wednesday’s show. O’Donnell said in his tweet that the story, which led Tuesday night’s broadcast, “didn’t go through our vigorous verification and standards process. I shouldn’t have reported it and I was wrong to discuss it on the air.”

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Even as O’Donnell talked about Trump’s finances, he tweeted that he’d covered it several times, saying “if true.”

“That would explain, it seems to me, every kind word that Donald Trump has ever said about Russia and Vladimir Putin, if true, and I stress the ‘if true’ part of this,” he said on the air.

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The Justice Department’s inspector general says former FBI Director James Comey, above, violated FBI policies by sharing memos he wrote about his private conversations with President Donald Trump.

**Watchdog finds Comey violated FBI policies in handling of memos**

By Eric Tucker
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former FBI Director James Comey violated FBI policies in his handling of memos documenting private conversations with President Donald Trump in the weeks before he was fired as director of the bureau, the Justice Department’s inspector general said Thursday.

The watchdog’s office said Comey broke FBI rules by giving one memo containing unclassified information to a friend with instructions to share the contents with a reporter.

Comey also failed to notify the FBI after he was dismissed in May 2017 that he had retained some of the memos in a safe at home, the report said.

But the inspector general also concluded that none of the information shared with the reporter was classified.

The watchdog’s office found Comey’s rationale lacking.

"I don’t need a public apology from those who defamed me, but a quick message with a ‘sorry we lied about you’ would be nice,” he wrote.

He added, “And to all those who’ve spent two years talking about me ‘going to jail’ or being a ‘liar and a leaker’— ask yourselves why you still trust people who gave you bad info for so long, including the president.”

Feds warn against pot use by youth, pregnant women

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldivar
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal health officials issued a national warning Thursday against marijuana use by adolescent and pregnant women, as more states legalize the increasingly potent drug for medicinal and recreational use.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar and Surgeon General Jerome Adams made the announcement, with Azar calling marijuana “a dangerous drug.”

Officials said President Donald Trump has donated $100,000 — one-quarter of his annual government salary — toward a digital campaign to raise awareness of the risks. Trump has forgone his official salary since taking office.

The warning comes as marijuana has grown into a $10 billion industry in the U.S., with nearly two-thirds of states legalizing it, mainly for medical uses.

Countering the opioid epidemic is a top issue for the White House, but marijuana had not gotten such high-level attention.

Adams said science shows that marijuana is harmful to the developing brains of teenagers and to the human fetus. The drug has also gotten stronger, with a threefold increase in the concentration of the active ingredient THC in cultivated plants over the last 20 years.

“This ain’t your mother’s marijuana,” Adams said.

While many states have changed their marijuana laws, federal law still treats it as a controlled substance akin to opioids.

Federal officials say they fear the trend toward legalization may make it more enticing for teenagers to try marijuana. It’s a commonly used drug among youth.

No states allow legal marijuana use by teens.

Adams said that for teens it carries a risk of affecting brain development, which continues in the 20s. Frequent marijuana use by teenagers is associated with changes in parts of the brain that are involved with attention, memory, decision-making and motivation.

Among pregnant women, marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug, with about 7% reporting they had used it within the past month in a 2017 study.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Academy of Pediatrics advise women not to use marijuana during pregnancy and to discontinue the drug if they find out they are pregnant.

HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Brett Girard said pregnant women taking marijuana to relieve morning sickness should stop.

“If you have morning sickness, talk to your physician,” he said.

Deaths caused by drivers running red lights is at 10-year high

Associated Press

DETROIT — The number of people killed by drivers running red light has hit a 10-year high, and AAA is urging drivers and pedestrians to use caution at traffic signals.

In 2017, the latest figures available, 939 people were killed by vehicles blowing through red lights, according to an AAA study of government crash data.

It’s the highest death toll since 2008 and 28% higher than in 2012. AAA says two people are killed every day in the U.S. by drivers who don’t stop for the signals.

“Drivers who decide to run a red light when they could have stopped safely are making a reckless choice that puts other road users in danger,” David Yang, executive director of AAA’s Foundation for Traffic Safety, said Thursday.

AAA isn’t sure why the numbers are on the rise or why they have increased at a far higher rate than overall U.S. roadway deaths.

Since 2012 the overall number of highway fatalities rose 10%, far short of the 28% increase in red-light running deaths.

There are more people driving more miles since the Great Recession, but that doesn’t explain why red-light deaths are increasing at a faster rate, said Brian Tefft, senior researcher for the AAA Foundation.

He said he suspects distracted driving played a role, as did traffic lights that weren’t timed optimally, perhaps with a yellow caution cycle that’s too short.

“I wish we had a better answer than we do,” he said, adding that the answer was beyond the scope of the data in the study of fatal crash data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

In its analysis, AAA also found that 28% of red-light deaths at intersections with signals happened because a driver ran a red light.

The automobile club recommends that governments increase use of red light cameras directly supervised by authorities in order to boost enforcement where needed and not to raise revenue.

It also says drivers should prepare to stop as they are entering an intersection and tap their brakes while approaching a light to warn other drivers of a possible stop. AAA also recommends waiting a second after a light changes to green before proceeding and checking to make sure crossing traffic has stopped.

For pedestrians and cyclists, AAA recommends taking a few seconds to make sure traffic has stopped before crossing a street. It also says to be visible, make eye contact with drivers and stay alert by not wearing headphones while walking or riding.
**Program seeks better prison visits for kids**

**BY PAT EATON-ROBB**  
Associated Press

ENFIELD, Conn. — Myles Brown remembers how visits with his dad used to be. There was glass between them. They had to use a phone to talk. It was kind of scary. He didn’t always want to go.

On Monday night, Myles, 11, was again inside a prison visiting Christopher Brown, 25, who is serving a 3-year sentence on firearms charges. But this time he and his sister, Chloe, 7, got to dance with their dad, play games, eat pizza and laugh. Dad also got to hold his 10-month-old daughter, Amelia.

“It really means a lot,” said Myles. “Now, I get to hug him. It was like we lost a bond and here we get to try and rebuild it.”

The family dance at the Willard-Cybulski Correctional Institution is part of a prison pilot program from the National Institute of Corrections called Family Connections, which is being tried out at Cybulski and at prisons or jails in New York, Wisconsin, Texas and Oregon.

The idea is to make it easier for parents inside to connect with their children and to resume the role of mother or father once they are released.

“We need to be there to support the families,” said Trina Sexton, the Correction Department’s director of reentry services. “The families did nothing wrong. Incarceration is not just affecting the mother or father who’s in. It’s affecting the entire family unit. So, how can we make that better?”

The program takes different forms in different prisons. At Cybulski, the last stop for prisoners before they reach their release dates, the visiting room has been created a giant 3-year sentence on firearms charges. But this time he and his sister, Chloe, 7, got to dance with their dad, play games, eat pizza and laugh. Dad also got to hold his 10-month-old daughter, Amelia.

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Guards are receiving training on how to integrate children and teenagers to create a more welcoming environment, and the inmates are taking parenting classes. “They give you different skills to bring home and techniques to use with the kids because you’ve missed a lot of their life,” said Gregory Canepa Sr., who has a parole hearing soon. He spent the evening playing and dancing with his 5-year-old son, who shares his name. “I feel like I’m absolutely ready to be his dad,” he said.

In other states, changes can be as simple as revising the forms inmates fill out when they enter to system to include information about their families, said Alina Martinez, a program manager with Community Works-West, a research and advocacy group that provides training for the Family Connections program. That allows the prison system to know which inmates are eligible for family services or programs both inside and outside of prison.

Other prisons are allowing contact visits for the first time.

“Most of these changes are low-cost and high impact. Research has shown that if inmates have a better tie to their families, more of a connection, they are less likely to return to prison and they are more likely to have success with reentry,” Martinez said.

About 5 million children in the United States have a parent in prison.

Connecticut Correction Commissioner Rollin Cook said he hopes to expand the family program to other prisons in the state.

“Every one of us relies on our family when we need something, need help or start something new,” he said. “It’s also so important for the kids to have these people in their lives. We want to begin that process.”

Jy’aja Wells, 7, had been counting down the days to the dance and the opportunity to see her dad, TySon Wells.

“I will give him a hug,” she said.

Her father, who is serving time for robbery, said it has been two years since they last able to do that. He is hoping to be released from prison after a parole hearing this week.

“I will do everything I can do to be the best father I can be,” he said. “This has given me motivation to go out and do the right thing. I want to show her that we can be a family and I love her.”

**Tourists alerted to rolling balls of poop in Great Smoky Mountains**

**BY MARK PRICE**  
The Charlotte Observer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — In what may be the oddest public notice ever issued by the National Park Service, tourists are being alerted that brown balls seen rolling around as part of their birthing process, according to a National Park Service Facebook post.

“It’s like they always say: “When life gives you crap ... roll it into a ball, lay an egg inside it, bury it, and use it to nourish your offspring!” the post explains. “At least, that’s what dung beetles and tumblebugs do.”

Anyone who thinks the canthon beetles are cute should keep in mind they also like to eat poop, according to N.C. State University researchers.

As if to prove beetles are moving the poop, the park service posted a video of one of the bugs using its back legs to roll a perfectly formed ball across a trail. Off to one side can be seen the pile of scat (and a few flies) from which the ball was carefully crafted.

The video has been viewed nearly 10,000 times since Friday, and inspired many puns, from “waste not want not” to “this is a bunch of crap.”

Female tumblebugs lay one egg each in their dung balls, so the larvae can develop “without having to compete with their siblings” for nourishment, according to the National Park Service.

“The male will help bury the balls of dung in the ground for safe keeping,” the park service says.

In doing so, the beetles also do hikers the service of keeping trails free of aromatic decomposing animal dung, park officials said.

**VIDEO SCREENSHOT COURTESY OF GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK/TNS**

This tumblebug is one of the several beetles found in the Smokies that rely on animal waste to complete their life cycle.
Tesla owner has chip implanted to control her car

By Peter Holley
The Washington Post

Last year, after placing an order for Tesla’s recently unveiled Model 3, Amie Dansby began to ponder an ambitious idea.

Because of its many high tech features, she knew the car was regularly compared to a computer on wheels. Dansby — a software engineer from Dallas — pondered whether it might be possible to control that mobile computer the way a growing number of people are controlling other devices, opening doors, turning on lights and retrieving food from vending machines — with a microchip implanted in her body.

Some people laughed when she detailed her dream, and others told her it was impossible, a sentiment, she said, that only strengthened her resolve.

“I realized that nobody had ever done it with a Tesla, and that made it so much more of a challenge that I wanted to overcome,” said Dansby, 34, who began formulating a plan about a year ago. “But it’s one of those things so new there’s nothing on Google to help you.”

To the uninformed, Dansby’s desire to control her surroundings with an implanted microchip might sound like it was plucked from some dystopian future. But microchips aren’t exactly new and have been used to tag “pets and livestock” as well as track deliveries.

A growing number of companies and people are also opting to outfit their bodies with technology that monitors their health, controls their electronic devices or even lights up when activated for aesthetic purposes.

Biobax International, a Swedish company, has implanted microchips in several thousand customers, allowing them to ride trains without using tickets, turn on the lights in their apartments and access a gym the company has partnered with. The company claims the microchips are used only to enhance systems that are “completely under your control.”

Proponents of medical microchips point out that the devices could contain someone’s entire medical history. If a patient were unconscious or suffering from memory loss, for example, those records could be critical for emergency room doctors who might be unfamiliar with the person’s prescribed medications or history of illness.

Critics say the practice raises serious privacy concerns, especially when considering who would be responsible for the mountains of personal data that microchips are capable of producing about an individual’s movement, behaviors and health.

When she decided that she wanted to place a chip in her arm that would allow her to control her Tesla, Dansby already had an RFID implant in her left hand that gives her basic access to her personal computer and lets her open her front door. (An RFID chip is a chip that uses radio frequency signals to exchange information.)

Dansby initially considered syncing that chip to her Tesla as well but eventually realized controlling the car meant she’d have to place a separate chip in her opposite arm.

After a series of tests, she decided to remove the chip in her Tesla key card, a credit-card size piece of plastic that allows vehicle owners to access and start their car. To do that, she dissolved the key card in acetone until the plastic casing disappeared, leaving the chip.

Dansby had the chip encased in a biopolymer, a natural material that can safely remain under her skin like the silicon that is used for breast implants. That, she said, is when the hard part really began.

“The longest part of this whole process was emailing doctors who didn’t want to risk losing their medical license,” Dansby said, noting she’d entered talks with three doctors, all of whom eventually backed out.

After six months of searching,

Social media content conundrum: How to handle offensive posts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Take the post down. Put it back up. Stop policing speech. Start silencing extremists.

That’s just a sampling of the intense, often contradictory demands facing tech companies and their social media platforms as they try to oversee internet content without infringing on First Amendment rights.

The pendulum has swung recently to trying to oversee internet content with companies and their social media platforms as contradictions facing tech companies and people are also opting to outfit their bodies with technology that monitors their health, controls their electronic devices or even lights up when activated for aesthetic purposes.

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Dansby turned to a tattoo shop that specializes in body modifications, where a professional piercer inserted the implant into her right arm just beneath her wrist through a hollow needle.

A few days later, after her arm had healed, Dansby was able to unlock and start her car with a wave of her arm.

Her appendage has to be just a few inches from the vehicle for the chip to be effective because its range is limited.

The entire process, including research, took about a year, she said.

“People think chips in your body are weird, but we think Botox and breast augmentation or Lasik are normal — and those are all body modifications,” she said. “Imagine how it must have felt to be one of the first people who decided to put two silicon implants in their chest and now it’s so completely forgettable.”
**WORLD**

**Johnson’s Parliament plan met with major opposition**

**BY DANICA KIRKA**  
Associated Press

LONDON — Political opposition to Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s move to suspend Parliament crystallized Thursday amid protests, legal action and a petition to block the move which has gathered more than 1 million signatures.

Johnson’s maneuver gives his political opponents even less time to prevent a chaotic no-deal Brexit before the Oct. 31 withdrawal deadline. The decision outraged critics and is serving as a unifying force for the disparate opposition, who have confirmed they will press on with measures to block a departure from the European Union without a deal despite Johnson’s actions.

“We will seek to try and put through the appropriate legislation in this constrained timetable that the government has now put before us,” said Barry Gardiner, the opposition Labour Party’s spokesman on international trade.

Thousands packed College Green outside Parliament on Wednesday evening, waving EU flags and placards to express their anger. Smaller rallies took place in other towns and cities while 25 bishops from the Church of England released an open letter about their worries about the “economic shocks” of a no-deal Brexit on the poor and other vulnerable people.

A petition on a government website demanding that Parliament not be suspended has gathered more than 1 million signatures — guaranteeing that it will be considered for debate.

Legal challenges loom. Lawmakers already are asking a Scottish court to rule that suspending Parliament is illegal. Businesswoman Gina Miller, who won a ruling in the Supreme Court in 2017 that stopped the government from triggering the countdown to Brexit without a vote in Parliament, has another legal challenge in the works.

House of Commons leader Jacob Rees-Mogg dismissed the fury and described Johnson’s move as constitutional and proper.

“I think the outrage is phony and it is created by people who don’t want us to leave the European Union and are trying very hard to overturn the referendum result and don’t want the benefits of leaving the European Union,” he told the BBC. “This is completely constitutional and proper,” he said. “There is going to be a lot of time to debate before Oct. 31.”

The move has prompted ruptures across the political spectrum, including among members of Johnson’s Conservative Party. Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson, who has differed with Johnson in the past, resigned Thursday. Though the popular leader cited family reasons, the timing of such a decision following Johnson’s seismic move suggested that she disagreed with his tactics.

**WHO: Major increase of measles in Europe**

**Associated Press**

LONDON — The World Health Organization says there has been a “dramatic resurgence” of measles in Europe, in part fueled by vaccine refusals, with nearly 90,000 people sickened by the virus in the first half of 2019.

In a report issued Thursday, the U.N. health agency said the number of measles cases from January to June this year is double the number reported for the same period in 2018.

Measles is among the world’s most infectious diseases and is spread mostly by coughing, sneezing and close personal contact.

Although numerous European countries have introduced stronger vaccination policies, stubborn pockets of vaccine refusal have fueled epidemics across the continent. Last month, the German government proposed making measles immunization mandatory for children and employees at kindergartens and schools, there have been more than 400 cases of measles in Germany this year.

With more than 84,000 cases, Ukraine accounted for the vast majority of measles in Europe, followed by Kazakhstan and Georgia. In February, Ukraine’s health ministry said eight people had died of measles.

An expert WHO committee said four countries — Albania, the Czech Republic, Greece and the U.K. — have now lost their status as having eliminated measles.

Measles is preventable with two doses of the vaccine, but there is no effective treatment once people are infected.

In some developed countries, measles vaccination rates dropped sharply following the publication of a flawed study in the late 1990s that linked the combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine to autism. Health officials have struggled to debunk misperceptions about the vaccine’s safety ever since.

In 2017, the WHO estimated about 110,000 people died from measles worldwide, mostly children under 5 years old.

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‘Dark Crystal’ prequel director knew he had a lot to live up to when revisiting Jim Henson puppet world for Netflix

By Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

Louis Leterrier knew he'd immediately face scrutiny from superfans of “The Dark Crystal” when he became director of its prequel. After all, he's a superfan, too.

The French director calls Jim Henson's groundbreaking 1982 fantasy puppet feature “a jewel of creation” and says it's the main reason he became a filmmaker. He knew messing with its legacy was a dicey proposition.

“The keepers of that jewel are really hardcore about it. They really are ultra-protective and fearful. I've known that for a while. I've known that because I was one of them,” he said.

Fans will get a look at what Leterrier has achieved with “The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance,” a 10-episode prequel that debuted Friday on Netflix. They'll find something remarkably respectful and vast — 83 puppeteers and 70 different creature species.

“I tell people it's the biggest puppet production in history,” said Lisa Henson, daughter of the creator and chief executive of his family entertainment company. “The scale of it is very awesome.”

The 1982 film, which Jim Henson co-directed with Frank Oz, was the first big live-action feature to feature mostly human actors. While not a runaway success, the film has achieved cult status, ruffled about on “South Park” and its music was sampled by the Crystal Method.

The new series is set on the same planet of Thra many years before the events of the movie, but has familiar characters — the kind, elf-like Gelflings and the evil dinosaur-buzzard Skeksis. As in the original, it is often the wonderfully realized minor creatures, insects and plants that really wow. Leterrier's camera swirls and soars over this dynamic planet.

The new filmmakers were faithful to Henson’s sense of handcrafted art, using computers only when necessary — flying or swimming — or to enhance the characters, with, say, tongues that wrap around food. Some technology tricks — 3D printers, animatics or filming scenes and then going back to cut out the puppeteers — were employed but no giant leaps from Henson’s legacy were made. If the Skeksis in the original film required six puppeteers, the same is the case for the series. Foam latex skin was also used for both projects.

Actor Taron Egerton jumped at the chance to join the new series, voicing a Gelfling named Rian. Egerton saw the 1982 film with his father and found it enchanting.

“It was otherworldly and completely different to anything I had seen at that age. And it's still completely different to anything I've seen. I think that's the wonderful thing about ‘The Dark Crystal. It is totally its own thing,” he said.

Netflix has taken some risk resurrecting such a beloved title. The main writers — Jeffrey Addiss and Will Matthews — had never done TV or undertaken anything so sprawling, while Leterrier, whose big-screen credits include action movies like “The Transporter” and “The Incredibles,” had no experience in TV or with puppets.

But he had passion, discussing various techniques and plot ideas with Henson's heirs. “Here's a Frenchman pouring his heart out and telling them how important Jim Henson is and ‘The Dark Crystal’ was to me,” he said.

After he accepted the job, he admitted he freaked out. "I realized, ‘What did you do, Louis? You're such an idiot!’ You're going to ruin it! You don't know. You've just done action movies and karate movies. You cannot do this thing. Why, why, why?” he recalled thinking. Then he joked: “I guess they were impressed by the accent.”

Leterrier and Henson's children didn't initially decide on a prequel. They first thrashed around for a way to create a sequel. But they couldn't seem to get beyond the 1982 film’s ending — the grand unification of the Skeksis and Mystics and the healing of the crystal. Leterrier calls it “an enormous exclamation point — one of the biggest in movie history.” So instead of building a sequel, they teased out the mythology of the first film along with input from the original filmmakers. They came up with a sweeping story that deals with environmental degradation and tyranny.

“These were the things that 37 years ago Jim Henson was worried about and was thinking about. Now more than ever, it's in the forefront of the news,” said Leterrier. “I guess that's also why this movie stayed close to my heart — the stakes felt real.”

Netflix bankrolled a test to see how the series would look, and the six-month process of building sets and characters became a school for Leterrier. “I mean, it's not like I'm casting Brad Pitt. I have to create Brad Pitt,” he said, laughing.

Leterrier also visited some original “Dark Crystal” puppets at the Center for Puppetry Arts in Atlanta to see how they moved — piano wire over wooden skeletons. This time, the puppets are lighter but the workload was bigger. To fill 10 hours, the series features 75 sets and 170 puppets, some of which took eight months to build. There's even a puppet show within the puppet show.

The new and the old “Dark Crystal” projects actually share DNA. Brian Froud, the conceptual artist for the 1982 film and Henson’s puppet-builder wife, Wendy, both worked on the new series. Their son, Toby, is the design supervisor. (He also was the baby abducted by David Bowie in Henson’s “Labyrinth.”)

Lisa Henson said the creators tried to keep two different audiences happy.

“Both the people who loved ‘The Dark Crystal’ and for whom it is a very special memory and those who've never heard of ‘The Dark Crystal’ and couldn't imagine that they would watch 10 hours of puppets on television,” she said, adding: “We went back and forth between those two mind-sets to think about those audiences while we were making the show.”

Sheeran announces break from touring

After more than two years on the road, rocker Ed Sheeran will be taking some time off, he announced at the final show of his “Divide” tour.

“I was told before I came on that we're 4.5 hours out of this show. I've played to 9 million people around the world. It is the biggest tour ever;” Sheeran said Monday night, according to the Sun.

“It’s been an emotional day for a lot of people backstage. It kind of feels like a weird thing — that you're breaking up with a girlfriend that you've been with for years.”

Sheeran has been on the road since March 2017. The singer-songwriter said the show in Ipswich, England, was his last gig “for probably 18 months.”

Sheeran privately married childhood sweetheart Cherry Seaborn in December but has barely spent time with her since then. He has spoken recently about wanting a more normal life.

“The Shape of You” singer told Charlamagne Tha God in July that he was thinking about crafting a touring life where he could have kids and be around to raise them, going on the road for only a month or so at a time.

The pop singer-songwriter also said Monday that it might be his last loop-pedal tour, according to the Sun. Sheeran typically has played solo on stage using only his guitar and a loop-pedal box, which allows him to record his guitar, vocals and harmonies, and layer the sounds to back himself up.

That means when he's back on stage again, it could be with a backing band.

Viewership down, social media up for VMAs

If Taylor Swift, Missey Elliot and a 90s rap reunion concert can't halt the shrinkage of MTV's television audience for its Video Music Awards, perhaps nothing can.

The show was watched by 5.9 million live viewers Monday on U.S. channels across 12 Viacom-owned networks, the Nielsen company said. That's down from last year's audience of 5.2 million, as the annual event has slid in television viewers each year since reaching 10.3 million in 2014.

MTV considers that more a reflection of changing media habits among young people than declining interest in its marquee show.

In the weeks leading up the show, social media engagements — liking, sharing or commenting upon announcements about the nominees or the show — doubled over last year. No TV program this summer triggered more social media activity, the network said.

Other news

■ Donnie Fritts, a Muscle Shoals songwriter, artist and actor who was a frequent collaborator of Kris Kristofferson and wrote the song “We Had It All,” recorded by numerous artists including Waylon Jennings and Ray Charles, died Tuesday. He was 76.

From wire services
China rotates new troops into Hong Kong amid mass protests

Associated Press

HONG KONG — China's military deployed fresh troops to Hong Kong on Thursday in what it called a routine rotation amid speculation that it might intervene in the city's pro-democracy protests.

Video broadcast on China Central Television showed a long convoy of armored personnel carriers and trucks crossing the border at night and troops in formation disembarking from a ship. Earlier, scores of soldiers ran in unison onto trucks, which the state broadcaster said were bound for ports and entry points across the state.

The newly arrived Chinese troops have been educated on Hong Kong's laws and vowed to fight any attempts to threaten the city's government, according to officials speaking on condition of anonymity.

The fighting between forces loyal to the internationally recognized government and the separatists has added another layer to the complex civil war in the Arab world’s most impoverished country.

Col. Mohamed al-Oban, a commander of the special forces in Abyan province, said the troops were on the road, headed from Abyan toward Aden on Thursday, when the crashes took place. He didn’t say who carried them out, saying only the planes were from the Saudi-led coalition. The UAE also maintains warplanes as part of the coalition in Yemen.

Yemen's Foreign Ministry tweeted a statement by Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Abdullah al-Hadrami saying, “The UAE must condemn the Emirati airstrike on government forces.

“We hold the UAE fully responsible for this explicit extra-judicial targeting” of the government forces, the statement said, adding that the airstrikes also left several civilians dead.

The government statement also urged the U.N. Security Council to condemn the airstrikes. The attacks came a day after government forces pushed into Aden to try and retake the city from UAE-backed separatists.

Earlier Wednesday, government troops wrested back control of Zinjibar, the capital of neighboring Abyan province, from the separatists and headed toward Aden.

Information Minister Moammar al-Maxmoudu said Wednesday that government forces also re-claime Aden's airport, the main hub for the country’s south, but the separatists denied that. According to officials speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter, loyal forces loyal to Saudi-backed Yemeni President Mansour Abed Rabbo Hadi gained some ground at the Aden airport complex before the separatists forced them to retreat.

Former Colombian negotiators say they are taking up arms again

Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia — A group of former peace negotiators for the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia announced they are taking up arms again following what they considered the failure of conservative President Ivan Duque to guarantee their political rights after the signing of a landmark peace deal.

In a video published before dawn Thursday, former chief rebel negotiator Luciano Marin appealed alongside a group of some 20 heavily armed guerrillas condemning Duque and his supporters for standing by idly as hundreds of leftist activists and more than 150 former rebels have been killed since the 2016 peace deal, which sought to end a half-century of fighting.

“When we signed the accord in Havana we did so with the conviction that it was possible to change the life of the most humble and dispossessed,” Marin, better known by his alias Ivan Marquez, said in the more than 30-minute video. “But the state hasn’t fulfilled its most important obligations, which is to guarantee the life of its citizens and especially avoid assassinations for political reasons.”

In the video, Marin, speaking from what he said were Colombia’s western jungles in the Amazon rain forest, stood alongside several former FARC leaders, including ideologue Seuxis Hernandez, alias Jesus Santrich, who abandoned the peace process after his arrest was sought by the U.S. on drug charges.

Rodrigo Londono, who had been the FARC’s top military commander and now heads its political party known by the same acronym, distanced himself from his former comrades, with whom relations have been strained in the past year. In an interview with Blu Radio he apologized to his fellow Colombians and the international community, saying the vast majority of rebels remain committed to the peace process despite the rising security risks.
**American Roundup**

### Woman charged with kidnapping car dealer

**WA** — A judge set bond at $20,000 for a woman accused of kidnapping a car dealer during a test drive in Spokane. KXLY-TV reported Kassandra Ayala, 32, was arrested on charges of kidnapping, taking a motor vehicle without permission and assault.

Spokane police Sgt. Terry Preuninger said a Dave Smith Nissan employee called for help during the test drive after the woman refused to pull over or let him out.

### Lane change violation leads to drug charges

**NE** — Court records said a North Carolina man was charged with possession of marijuana for sale after Nebraska troopers found hundreds of pounds of suspected marijuana in his vehicle.

Hamilton County Court records said David Shang, 27, of Raleigh, N.C., also is charged with lacking a tax stamp.

**GA** — Police said a pickup plunged off a bridge and landed on Interstate 75, killing its driver.

Cobb County police said the Chevrolet Silverado sped up a ramp over I-75. It then crashed through a concrete barrier and fell onto the freeway below, landing between the southbound and northbound lanes.

Video from Atlanta TV stations showed the truck’s crushed cab on the pavement below with its rear wheels in the air.

Police said they identified the driver as Dennis Furee, 33, of Dallas, Ga.

### Sheriff: Blood trail led to vandalism suspect

**NC** — Sheriff’s deputies in North Carolina said they traced a trail of blood to the home of a 68-year-old woman who’s accused of vandalizing property, keying cars, breaking windows and trying to steal license plates.

The Charlotte Observer reported the McDowell County Sheriff’s Office said that deputy Robert Watson responded to Crowder Cable’s residence in western North Carolina twice on July 23. The first time, they found her intoxicated; the second time, she was bleeding.

Police said Watson traced a trail of blood from the scene of the vandalized cars to Cable’s house next door.

Cable was charged with property damage, attempted larceny, breaking and entering a motor vehicle, attempted breaking and entering and trespassing.

**TX** — Police in suburban Houston are looking for a woman who used a power tool to break into a Botox clinic and steal anti-aging products.

Sugar Land police said surveillance cameras captured the burglary at the Botox RN MD Spa.

The footage shows a woman approaching the locked door of the spa and trying unsuccessfully to open it. She then retrieves a battery-powered grinding saw from a light-colored Mercedes SUV and uses it to cut into the clinic’s front door.

Authorities said the woman stole an undisclosed amount of products from the clinic before driving away.

### Rowing at sunrise

A quad scull of rowers begin their workout on Casco Bay as the sun starts to peek over Great Diamond Island in Portland, Maine, on Wednesday. Calm winds and flat water made for ideal conditions for the Portland Community Rowing Association’s final outing of the year.

**MI** — A popular Labor Day weekend festival in western Michigan is turning to beer to raise cash.

Organizers of the festival in Belding hope a beer tent will help pay bills and build a financial cushion for 2020. The event hasn’t had a beer tent since the 1970s. The beer tent will be open only one night. Amber Rood, co-chair of the Belding Labor Day Committee, believes people might spill into area bars after last call.

### Snake Road closing to cars to let snakes cross

**IL** — Snake Road in southern Illinois is closing to cars so snakes can cross without getting run over.

The Southern Illinoisan reported that the road winding through the Shawnee National Forest will stay closed until late October.

It’s not just snakes. Frogs, turtles, newts and salamanders are also starting to migrate across the road from swamps to limestone bluffs where they’ll spend the winter.

Some are endangered, so the Forest Service goes the extra mile to ensure their safety.

### Derby winner charged with drunken driving

**IN** — A jockey who won the Kentucky Derby three times faces a drunk-eriving charge in southern Indiana.

WDRB.com reported that Calvin Borel was stopped in Harrison County. Online court records show he’s charged with operating a vehicle while intoxicated and operating a vehicle while intoxicated endangering a person.

Borel, a Louisiana native, won the Kentucky Derby in 2007, 2009 and 2010. He also won the Preakness Stakes in 2009.

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Facebook leaves loopholes in new ad rules

Apple apologizes, limits Siri eavesdropping

By Barbara Ortutay
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Facebook is tightening its rules around political advertising ahead of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, acknowledging previous misuse. But it’s not clear if it will be enough to stop bad actors from abusing its system.

The changes include a tightened verification process that will require anyone wanting to run ads pertaining to elections, politics or big social issues like guns and immigration to confirm their identity and prove they are in the U.S.

Beginning in mid-September, such advertisers confirm their group’s identity using their organization’s tax identification number or other government ID.

The verified group name will be listed on the “paid for by” disclaimer that disclose the backers of ads. Facebook says it will verify this information against government records and will note in the disclaimer for confirmed ads that they’re placed by a “confirmed organization.”

That process won’t apply to everyone, as Facebook says it would bar some smaller but legitimate grassroots groups and local politicians from running political ads. But a loophole that will allow small groups to run political ads could also continue to allow bad actors to take advantage of the process.

Advertisers who don’t have tax ID numbers, government websites or registrations with the Federal Election Commission will still be able to post ads by providing an address, verifiable phone number, business email and website. These advertisers won’t get a “confirmed” designation. Previously, only a U.S. address was required. But it’s not inconceivable that bad actors will find a way to spoof phone numbers and email addresses.

“We’ve acknowledged that these tools will not be perfect,” Sarah Schiff, a Facebook product manager, said in an email. “But we are committed to making it more difficult for bad actors to misuse and abuse our platform” without penalizing smaller organizations.

Schiff also reiterated the company’s calls for regulation of online political advertising. Critics have said that Facebook’s attempts at self-regulation are merely a way for the company to preempt stricter government crackdowns.

While the company has beefed up its fight against misinformation and coordinated attacks by malicious nation-states, the same can be said for those trying to game its systems.

EXCHANGE RATES

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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1  "It's a Wonderful Life" director  52 100 percent
6  Sit-up targets  53 Swelled head
9  Schedule abbr.  54 Aquarium
12 "— Grows in Brooklyn"  55 Observe
13 "The Bells" author  56 Nine-digit ID
14 Green shade  57 English county
15 Suit  28 Warning sound
16 Like many  30 24 hours
18 Belly button types  32 WWII vessels
20 "CasaBlanca" role  33 CBS logo
21 Blunder  34 Roulette bet
23 Docs' org.  36 Winter, for one
24 Laundromat machine  38 Spanish snacks
25 Broadway flop  39 Paris school
27 Second course?  40 Shade of black
29 Abutting  42 Diminish
31 "True Colors" singer Cyndi  45 Plead
35 Zesty dip  46 In debt
37 Eyelid woe  49 In a proper way
38 Irritable  50 Fury
41 Epoch  51 Levy
52 100 percent  53 Swelled head
54 Aquarium  55 Observe
56 Nine-digit ID  57 English county
52 100 percent  17 Boeing rival
19 Spur on  21 Recede
22 Shad product  24 Genetic stuff
26 Casual eatery  28 Warning sound
30 24 hours  32 WWII vessels
33 CBS logo  34 Roulette bet
36 Winter, for one  38 Spanish snacks
39 Paris school  40 Shade of black
42 Diminish  45 Plead
46 In debt  49 In a proper way
50 Fury  51 Levy

DOWN
1 Taxi  33 CBS logo
2 Noshed  34 Roulette bet
3 Celeb-promoting groups  36 Winter, for one
4 Check  38 Spanish snacks
5 Insurance giant  39 Paris school
6 Charm  40 Shade of black
7 Marshy areas  42 Diminish
8 Sun. talk  45 Plead
9 In a proper way  46 In debt
10 Della or Pee Wee  49 In a proper way
11 Doppler device  50 Fury
11 Doppler device  51 Levy

Answer to Previous Puzzle
ALF ARM ARMS ART
BAD BASE BASH BEH
CER CER CEU CHE
EAT EAT EAT EAT
END END END END
FRU FRO FRO FRO
GEE GEE GEE GEE
ICH LCH LCH LCH
KID KID KID KID
LNA LNA LNA LNA
LET LET LET LET
MIS MIS MIS MIS
MUS MUS MUS MUS
PAT PAT PAT PAT
PO PE PE PE
QUE QUE QUE QUE
RAT RAT RAT RAT
RUB RUB RUB RUB
SAL SAL SAL SAL
SHE SHL SHE SHE
TEL TEL TEL TEL
UNI NUN NUN NUN
URS URS URS URS
UTM UTM UTM UTM
VAC VAC VAC VAC
WIL WIL WIL WIL
XJX XJX XJX XJX
YFY YFY YFY YFY
ZAM ZAM ZAM ZAM
ZAH ZAH ZAH ZAH
ZEN ZEN ZEN ZEN
ZUN ZUN ZUN ZUN

8-30 CRYPTOQUIP

RXSOBWBIDHFBABIHMODZSIFMQYISSZSayB
ZISBNVWIDHNAVQSOQBYDMO
YXBYRBQWDOS-YDOCADOC
Yesterday's CRYPTOQUIP: IF THERE WERE A PIOUS RELIGIOUS GROUP FOUNDED BY ONE OF THE BEATLES, WOULD THEY BE LENNONITES?
Today's CRYPTOQUIP CLUE: W equals P

THE FIRST PVN

I don't get it.
Trump’s candor delights supporters, worries critics

By Andrew Malcolm

McClatchy Washington Bureau

T he British comedic Eddie Izzard has a slice of stage bit where, nodding, he announces to his audi- ence some outrageous plan. Pause. Silence. Giggle. Pause. He nods again. Audience laughs. Shakes his head. Louder laughter. He nods once more. Guffaws. Donald Trump wasn’t going for laughs in recent days. So, his remarks and behavior, jumping from one announced policy change to another, from one seem- ingly outrageous plan to abandoning it, generated laughter but also serious con- cerns among many.

It’s a measure of the confusing and tir- ing turmoil ascending in U.S. politics and perhaps so many actions simultaneously igniting pro-TESTS about Trump’s mental state among his overeager critics and admiration among determined sup- porters. He has a tendency, which President Dwight D. Eisenhower suggested that Nixon, his running mate, might have a better chance to succeed him if he moved up to the Cabinet position, like secretary of defense, in a second Eisenhower term. Nixon decided he would run for president.

Trump’s style can also cause lasting criticism. This was generally portrayed not as having firmly decided no, but as having changed his mind again.

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What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Israel’s escalation of tensions related to Iran puts GIs at risk

The Washington Post

A fresh attempt to jump-start talks between the United States and Iran got plenty of attention over the weekend at the Group of 7 summit, but the results were no less serious than it seemed. Though President Donald Trump agreed with French President Emmanuel Macron that a meeting between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani could happen within weeks, Iran’s foreign minister dismissed the prospect on Tuesday as “unimaginable.” Meanwhile, the hype over a possible diplomatic breakthrough obscured a much more ominous development: another escalation in Iranian tensions across the Middle East, this time driven by Israel.

Since July, Israel has quietly expanded its covert campaign against assets controlled by Hezbollah, its main ally in Lebanon, and its proxy militias across the region. That faction reacted to the attack by threatening both Israel and the United States and the United States and the United States and the United States government. The editorials on arms storehouses controlled by Iran-linked militias are also believed to have been targeted by such operations.

On Sunday, a drone attack on a Shiite militia convoy in western Iraq reportedly killed commander in charge of an Iraqi militia and wounded others. The previous night, an Iranian air raid in Syria killed two operatives of the Lebanese group Hezbollah, which also launched a missile attack on a U.S. base in Iraq since 1981. Three other recent attacks on arms storehouses controlled by Iran-linked militias are also believed to have been targeted by such operations.

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Mobile

Mobile apps with constantly updating news, featuring breaking news and stories from reporters at overseas bases. Unique galleries of images available nowhere else presented in an uncluttered interface and a responsive, intuitive design. One iOS app serves both phone and tablet devices.

In print, we serve military stationed overseas in contingency areas, Europe and Pacific. Daily editions focus on military news and include sports, comics and opinion. Available by mail delivery to any U.S. address.

Newspaper

Discover unique stories from reporters at bases around the world and embedded with downrange forces at Stripes.com, along with military news from every part of the country and photo galleries you’ll see nowhere else. DoDDs sports also gets good coverage online. If it concerns our U.S. forces, you’ll find it on our website.

Web

STARS AND STRIPES®

UNBIASED NEWS WHATEVER WAY YOU WANT IT.
## MLS

### Stadiums

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Away</th>
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<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
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</table>

### Statistics

- **دةوين أورلاندو: 2, دوين شيكAGO: 1**
- **ندورادوري بين لي: 2021.37**

### Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Home Team</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Away Team</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Robert Morris vs. Buffalo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lafayette vs. Indy</td>
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</table>

### Results

- **دالاس: 5, سان جيaturday: 1**
- **بوسطن: 3, كوفينفيل: 0**

### Notes

- D.C. United at Montreal
- FC Dallas vs. Houston
- LA Galaxy vs. San Jose
- Seattle vs. New York City FC

---

## College football

### Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Team 1</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Team 2</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<td>North Carolina vs. South Carolina</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Richmond, Va.</td>
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</table>

### Results

- **وورليهاردز: 3, دالاس: 2**
- **دالاس: 5, سان جيaturday: 1**
- **بوسطن: 3, كوفينفيل: 0**

### Notes

- D.C. United at Montreal
- FC Dallas vs. Houston
American League East Division

New York 88 47 .622
Boston 72 62 .537
Toronto 44 84 .333
Baltimore 39 91 .304
Tampa Bay 46 84 .378

National League East Division

Atlanta 51 44 .537
Philadelphia 69 63 .523
Miami 47 85 .356
St. Louis 73 59 .563
Chicago 68 65 .513
Cincinnati 56 77 .421

Wild-card race

AUG. 31

Baltimore 76 58 .567 at Peninsula
Boston 76 58 .567
Tampa Bay 76 58 .567
Minnesota 81 51 .614
Milwaukee (Anderson 6-3) at Chicago
L.A. Angels 5, Texas 2
Boston 10, Colorado 6
Baltimore 2, Washington 0
Pittsburgh at Colorado
Seattle at Texas
Minnesota at Chicago White Sox
Kansas City 6, Oakland 4

BREWERS CARDS

STARS AND STRIPES

32,013 (47,943).

TREINEN PITCHED TO 4 BATTERS IN THE 9TH INNING. CINCINNATI 3, MILWAUKEE 0. T—3:09. A—25,539 (41,168).

HILL, W, 2-0 2 0 0 0 0 3
JUNIS 6 7 4 4 1 5
PROFAR 2B 3 0 0 0 PHILLIPS CF 4 0 0 0
SOGARD 2B 4 0 0 0 SPRINGER RF 4 0 1 2
FLAHERTY L, 8-7 6 5 1 2 1 7
CARPENTER PH 1 0 0 0 LYLES P 2 0 0 0 WHITTLE 2 0 0 0
EDMAN 3B 4 0 0 0 CAIN CF 1 0 0 0

6. 2B—Santander (18), Rendon (36), Cabrera (15). 3B—Castellanos. HR—Dickerson (34), Bell (34), Marte (23), Dickerson (2). 2B—Walks: Rendon (36). 3B—Castellanos. HR—Dickerson (34), Bell (34), Marte (23), Dickerson (2). 2B—Walks: Rendon (36).

TOURNEY'S GAMES

N.Y. Yankees 7, Seattle 3
cleveland 10, detroit 1
Cubs 4, Pars 1

TUESDAY'S GAMES

Baltimore 2, Washington 0
Cleveland 10, Detroit 1
Kansas City 2, Oakland 1
Texas 8, Tampa Bay 2
Chicago 7, Minnesota 5

Brewers at Royals

Hendricks P 2 0 1 0 Diaz P 0 0 0 0
Bryant 3B 5 2 2 0 Conforto RF 4 1 2 1
DeSclafani W, 9-7 7 2 0 0 1 8
Hendricks 4.

HENDRICKS 4.

Reds at Astros

Sogard 4R, 4B, 4HR, 4RBI, 4RBIs, 4HRs, 4RBIs, 4RBIs.

Pittsburgh 9, Milwaukee 2

Reds at Browns

Sogard 4R, 4B, 4HR, 4RBI, 4RBIs, 4HRs, 4RBIs.

Hendricks P 2 0 1 0 Diaz P 0 0 0 0
Bryant 3B 5 2 2 0 Conforto RF 4 1 2 1
DeSclafani W, 9-7 7 2 0 0 1 8
Hendricks 4.

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Reds at Browns

Sogard 4R, 4B, 4HR, 4RBI, 4RBIs, 4HRs, 4RBIs.
Phillies push past Pirates with 17 hits

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — J.T. Realmuto had three hits, including a homer and a triple, Corey Dickerson also went deep and the Philadelphia Phillies got 17 hits in a 12-3 victory over the Pittsburgh Pirates on Wednesday night.

Cesar Hernandez contributed three hits and three RBIs. Rhys Hoskins doubled, tripled and drove in a run to help the Phillies stay close in the NL wild-card race.

Every position player who started for the Phillies had at least one hit and RBI.

Starling Marte homered and had three hits for Pittsburgh, and Joe Musgrove had a two-hitter.

Pirates rookie Bryan Reynolds, who began the day leading the NL in batting, went 0-for-3 to snap his seven-game hitting streak and avoid five hits with five strikeouts and a walk.

Mitch Keller (1-3), a 23-year-old rookie making his seventh career start, pitched into the fifth for Pittsburgh and gave up eight runs on 11 hits with eight strikeouts and five walks.

Yankees 7, Mariners 3: Aaron Judge homered and drove in three runs, Jordan Lyles turned in another strong start and host Milwaukee snapped St. Louis’ six-game winning streak.

The NL Central-leading Cardinals had won 15 of 18. The Brewers are firmly in the postseason hunt. And that’s a big reason they are at least one hit and RBI.

The Indians are 14-1 against the last-place Tigers this year, and that’s a big reason they are firmly in the postseason hunt.

Atlanta reliever Luke Jackson (8-2) pitched 3 1/3 innings to win his fifth strikeout.

Cubs 10, Mets 7: Kyle Schwarber hit one of his team’s three homers against a stunned Noah Syndergaard, and Chicago built an early nine-run lead before closer Craig Kimbrel held off host New York in the ninth.

Nicholas Castellanos and Ian Happ also took Syndergaard (9-7) deep in the worst start of the 2016 All-Star’s career. Syndergaard allowed 10 runs and three homers — both his most in the majors — and was pulled after three miserable innings.

Kimbrel entered with a three-run lead and let his first two batters reach in the ninth. He escaped a dicey 3-0 count against red-hot Amed Rosario with a fielder’s choice, struck out Juan Lagares and got Todd Frazier to fly out for his 12th save.

Royals 6, Athletics 4: Hunter Dozier homered before driving in the go-ahead run in the seventh inning, Ryan O’Hearn also went deep and Kansas City held on to beat Oakland.

Tim Hill (2-0) tossed two perfect innings in relief of Jakob Junis for the Royals, and Ian Kennedy survived a harrowing ninth inning to pick up his 23rd save.

Nationals 8, Orioles 4: Max Scherzer struck out eight to reach 200 for the year, and the Nationals won for the sixth time in seven games.

Astros 6, Rays 3: George Springer tied a tie with a bloop RBI single in a three-run seventh inning and host Houston rallied to beat Tampa Bay and extend its winning streak to six.

Aless Bregman had three hits and an RBI and Yuli Gurriel hit a two-run homer for the Astros.

Twins 8, White Sox 2: Jona- than Schoop hit two homers and drove in four runs, Mitch Garver also connected and Minnesota won at Chicago for its fourth straight victory.

It was the 13th multim homer game of Schoop’s career and fifth this year. Jose Abreu and Matt Skole each drove in a run for the White Sox.

Rangers 3, Angels 0: Ariel Jurado pitched six innings of two-hit ball to earn his second victory since June, and Delino DeShields reached over the center field fence to make a spectacular homer-stealing catch as Texas won at Los Angeles.

Reds’ Aquino hits 13th homer in August

Associated Press

MIAMI — After seeing five Cincinnati teammates go deep earlier this week, Aristides Aquino joined the party party.

Aquino tied a National League rookie mark with his 13th home run this month, leading Anthony DeSclafani and the Reds over the Miami Marlins 5-0 Wednesday night.

Eugenio Suarez hit his 38th homer, connecting in the fourth consecutive game for the Reds. Cincinnati used the long ball to take the first two games at Marlins Park, and Aquino quickly got into the swing.

Aquino hit a three-run drive in the first inning, keeping up a surge that began after he was promoted from the minors Aug. 1. The 24-year-old outfielder matched the NL homer binge after he was promoted from the fourth inning, keeping up a surge that used the long ball to take the first two
tive game for the Reds. Cincinnati connecting in the fourth consecutive game for the Reds over the Miami rookie mark with his 13th home run.

The major league rookie record for homers in a month is 18 by Rudy York of Detroit in August 1937. Aquino, who got one at-bat in the majors last year, also doubled as the Reds beat Miami for the third straight day.

“You’re back and forth with the ad-justments and he’s been able to keep up with that,” Bell said.

DeSclafani (9-7) had his longest outing of the season, throwing seven innings of two-hit ball. He struck out eight and walked one.

“My last few outings I’ve felt very good,” DeSclafani said. “Trying to get ahead and mix speeds. I made the pitch when I needed to and had some defensive plays. It’s all good.”

Tucker Barnhart’s double off Sandy Alcantara (4-12) in the fourth increased Cincinnati’s lead to 4- 0. Barnhart drove in Aquino, who reached on a leadoff double.

“I’m just trying to grind out at-bats, put hits together and drive guys in when they’re on base,” Barnhart said.

Alcantara gave up four runs and six hits, struck out eight and walked one in six innings. Miami’s representative in this year’s All-Star Game, Alcanta-ra lost his sixth consecutive decision and is winless since June 21.
Serbia's Novak Djokovic receives treatment on his left shoulder from a trainer Wednesday during his second-round win against Argentina's Juan Ignacio Londero as the U.S. Open in New York span of basically a month.

And that doesn't even count what it took for players to individually reach Las Vegas and Los Angeles, the site of the two training camps, or the promotional trip to China that Dono-

...
NCAA’s rulings on transfers bringing teams angst, relief

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

With the college football season set to start for most teams this weekend, the NCAA has been handing down rulings left and right in waiver cases involving transfers seeking immediate eligibility.

Tennessee and Iowa got good news on a couple of high-profile players. Georgia Tech got one of its two waiver requests. And at Virginia Tech, offensive lineman Brock Hoffman’s father posted a letter directed at NCAA President Mark Emmert that many fans thought was going viral.

But Hoffmann’s case highlights the frustration many players, parents, coaches, schools and fans have with the immediate eligibility waiver. When an NCAA directive opened the door last year for more athletes to gain immediate eligibility through the waiver process after transferring, it seemed like a reasonable compromise between the longstanding transfer rules in football and some other sports that allow all transfers to switch schools without sitting out. Instead, it has created even more outrage directed at the NCAA.

Tim Nevius, an attorney and former NCAA investigator who has worked on transfer waiver cases, said the NCAA needs to make uniform transfer rules across all college sports regarding transfers and immediate eligibility.

“I also think because of the perception that there are inconsistent decisions made on eligibility waivers that that puts a lot of pressure on the system to change as well,” said Nevius, a former college baseball player.

The revised waiver process led to quarterback Shea Patterson playing last season for Michigan and four-time all-American defensive lineman James Hudson, who previously played at Virginia Tech, being granted immediate eligibility.

The final ruling from the NCAA on Hoffmann was announced Tuesday. His response on Twitter was to thank those who supported him and say he is looking forward to playing in 2020. His job at the NCAA came in the form of an old photo posted on Twitter of former Oklahoma quarterback Bo Swofford, who was granted eligibility to the NCAA, wearing a T-shirt that read National Communists Against Athletes.

For Former Tennessee defensive lineman Aubrey Solomon and Iowa receiver Oliver Martin, both Michigan transfers, NCAA rulings that came down this week were cause for celebration.

Both were granted immediate eligibility.

“I was very excited for Aubrey,” Tennessee coach Jeremy Pruitt said. “I know it’s been hard on him. They were denied his request before, and they were granted his request this time.”

No. 2 Alabama got the go-ahead to bring in two defensive linemen and receiver John Metchie III, with the SEC its second early signing class.

“I’m excited for Aubrey,” Tennessee coach Jeremy Pruitt said. “I know it’s been hard on him. They were denied his request before, and they were granted his request this time.”

Former Michigan defensive back Myles Sims, now at Georgia Tech, was among the transfers granted immediate eligibility.

By Steve Megargs
Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — This is the time of year when the Southeastern Conference usually validates its claim as the best league in college football by dominating neutral-site, non-conference matchups.

No. 8 Florida’s 24-20 victory over Miami last week at Orlando, Fla., improved the SEC’s record to 21-6 in regular-season, non-conference games against Power Five opponents at neutral sites since 2012. Alabama is 9-0 in these types of games since 2008.

“We’ve had a lot of games in Atlanta, we’ve had some in Dallas,” Nebraska coach Scott Frost said. “We’ve had other games in other places that have given the program a lot of exposure, which I think is really important.”

Florida coach Dan Mullen said, “I think when you play a good opponent early on, the whole focus in the off-season, spring practice, fall camp is always a little better because players feel they’re going to be challenged in the first game.”

No. 2 Alabama meets Duke in Atlanta on Saturday while No. 16 Auburn faces No. 11 Oregon at Arlington, Texas, and South Carolina plays North Carolina at Charlotte, N.C.

These neutral-site showdowns might not be so common years from now. More of them could take place on campuses instead of NFL stadiums.

SEC schools are upgrading schedules by adding noteworthy home-and-home, non-conference series.

Alabama has added series with Notre Dame (2028-29), Oklahoma (2032-33), Texas (2022-23), West Virginia (2026-27), and Wisconsin (2024-25). Georgia scheduled Florida State (2027-28), Oklahoma (2023 and 2031) and Texas (2028-29). Florida set up dates with Colorado (2028-29), Miami (2024-25) and Texas (2030-31).

“With more home-and-homes coming on board here, that might restrict and cut into the number of neutral-site games moving forward,” said Dave Brown, the former ESPN head of college football scheduling whose Gridiron software is used by many schools to arrange non-conference matchups.

The SEC represents a change in philosophy for some schools. Florida hasn’t played a non-conference, home-and-home series outside the Sunshine State since facing Memphis (then known as Memphis State) in 1988-89. The Gators haven’t played a non-conference, regular-season, road game outside of Florida since visiting Syracuse in 1991.

“We are looking at it and saying, ‘OK, the future of college football is this home-and-home games,’” Florida coach Dan Mullen said. “I think they may possibly make it more attractive for people to come to the games and create that game-day environment that (makes it) more exciting to see a different opponent.”

The SEC has led all conferences in average attendance every year since 1998, but it’s not immune to industry-wide struggles to attract spectators. Average attendance in the league has slipped three straight seasons and hit 73,994 last year, its lowest mark since 2002.

“TV people talk about content — content is king,” Texas A&M athletic director Ross Bjork said. “We have to look at it the same way. What content do we have to drive our fan experience, drive ticket sales, help promote the university, market the university?”

SEC programs often make more money from a home game than a neutral-site contest.

For instance, Tennessee received $2.85 million for facing Georgia Tech in Atlanta’s Mercedes-Benz Stadium in 2017 and got $2.9 million for meeting West Virginia in Charlotte last year. Tennessee expects to receive $3.8 million per home game in ticket sales alone this season, before parking or concession revenues are included.
EAGAN, Minn. — Karter Schult and his Salt Lake Stallions teammates were assembled one day this spring for what began as a position group gathering for the defensive linemen when someone in the room glanced at his phone.

Their employer, the American Alliance of Football, was halting operations just two months into its first and only season.

“The coaches didn’t know. Our general manager wasn’t at the facility at the time,” Schult said. “We were still skeptical. Then sure enough, we had a team meeting about 20 minutes later telling us that the league is gone.”

The news, mostly met with shrugs or smirks among sports fans across the country if not unnoticed altogether, sent the players into quite the scramble, perhaps none more disrupted than Schult. The 25-year-old defensive end, who is currently with the Minnesota Vikings, the fourth NFL team that has had him on the roster, was a mere four days away from getting married when the announcement came.

Fortunately for Schult, a former FCS star at Northern Iowa, he wasn’t going to be out of a job. His agent had a verbal agreement with the Vikings, who were already interested in signing him after the AAF season ended. The Vikings had a contract waiting for Schult, but he had to pass the requisite physical exam at headquarters first.

Even though the wedding was in Iowa, their home state, making it to Minnesota prior to the ceremony would have been too tight. “We were trying to go home and set up the venue and stuff, and I didn’t want to give my wife a heart attack,” Schult said, “so I asked if they could move it back a week. The Vikings were gracious enough to wait.”

Well, at least for a little while. “My wife went on the honey- moon without me,” Schult said, smiling.

As he joined his new teammates for offseason workouts, Schult’s bride Marissa took the two-week trip to Italy with another family member. The newlyweds will wait for the next soft spot on the pro football calendar to take their official voyage as husband and wife.

At the end of this week, more than 800 players around the NFL will be unemployed as teams reduce their rosters for the games that count. Most of them will return to the not-so-glamorous, reliably nomadic lifestyle of working out on their own, driven by the hope their agent will get another call from an NFL club.

Another developmental league will commence next year, the reprise of the XFL, which will try to avoid the fate of the AAF, the latest failed league to land on the scrap heap of alternatives to the NFL. That doesn’t mean the experience was for naught, though. “In the offseason, what you want to do is right your wrongs,” said Denver Broncos cornerback DeVante Bausby, who played for the San Antonio Commanders. “So, what better way to right your wrongs than actually playing? That’s how I looked at it.”

Enduring the chaos and disappointment ought to serve these players for the better as long as their professional football career lasts. The experience Memphis Express players had was as rough as any, with some players purportedly stuck with hefty hotel bills when the AAF was suspended. Center Demetrius Rhaney, who signed with the Buffalo Bills earlier this month after spending time with the Express, wound up with an invoice for an MRI.

“They don’t know who to get in contact with to pay it,” Rhaney said. “So I might just bite the bullet.”

When he picked up the mail, he was hoping it was one last paycheck. “But it was a bill. The total opposite,” Rhaney said. He added: “If that’s the price I have to pay to get game film, it’s well worth it.”

That’s the way it has to be for these dream chasers. “You never know when your last opportunity will come about,” Schult said, “and you’ll play your last snap of football.”
The team had petitioned the NFL to paved the way for the current athletically gifted players who said. “So that's tough to hear.”

Browns RB Hunt can't be with team during suspension

By Tom Withers

CLEVELAND — Kareem Hunt will have to spend his NFL suspension isolated from his team.

The suspended Browns running back, who must serve an eight-game ban for physical alterations, will not be permitted inside the team's facility starting Saturday at 4 p.m., league spokesman Brian McCarthy said Wednesday in an email to The Associated Press.

The team had asked Commissioner Roger Goodell to allow Hunt to be around teammates or staff inside the team's building in Berea, Ohio, until his punishment ends in November.

It's impossible the league could adjust its policy and amend its stance on Hunt, who was signed as a free agent by Cleveland in March, three months after being released by the Kansas City Chiefs. But to this point, Hunt will not be able to interact with his teammates or staff inside the team's building in Berea, Ohio, until his punishment ends in November.

“Guys aren’t blocking,” Walker said. “You feel like that chip is what helped me elevate my game. So that chip is going nowhere.”

The numbers game, however, could make it tough for him to stick. To keep Spencer, he's done enough to earn a look elsewhere if Pittsburgh doesn't work out. He'd prefer, however, not to have to pack up and move. The trip to Carolina offers an opportunity to put more things on tape, things besides just getting to the quarterback.

Steelers’ roster hopefuls keep faith

By Will Graves

PITTSBURGH — Pressure is relative.

So forgive Kameron Kelly if the Pittsburgh Steelers safety isn't getting caught up in whether he'll still have a job in the NFL once teams pare the rosters from 90 to 53 on Saturday and Sunday.

"Just ball," Kelly said Tuesday. “These are all my brothers. I don't want any of us to get cut.

"The ability of playing professional football for a living, won't allow it. Brotherhood aside, Kelly is well aware of the cutthroat nature of the business. He loved it last spring while playing for the San Diego Fleet of the Alliance of American Football.

One afternoon, Kelly was in a meeting with his Fleet teammates when he stepped outside during a quick break and opened Twitter on his phone. The news wasn't good. The fledgling league was broke. He was out of a job. So was everyone else in the building.

So Kelly bailed. Immediately. Not even bothering to take any of the modest swag the players were given. Called his mom, his dad and his agent, then went back to his hotel room and slept.

When he woke up, he headed to Mexico for a three-day vacation wondering if any realistic fist reaching the NFL was over. Now that's pressure. Wondering if he's going to stick with the Steelers — an opportunity he wasn't sure would materi-

Besides, Kelly probably doesn't need to be concerned. He's done so well while play-

ing both safety spots in addition to carving out a role in nickel and dime packages he's almost certain to survive cut day. Not that he wants to talk about it.

“I don't ever want to think I have it on lock,” Kelly said. “I always want to play with that chip on my shoulder because I feel like that chip is what helped me elevate my game. So that chip is going nowhere.”

Maybe, but three dozen of the men Kelly shared the field with on Thursday night will be. While stars like Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger and cornerback Joe Haden can turn their attention to the season opener at New England on Sept. 8, the majority of players who were expected to see extended playing time against Caro-

The best tight ends are probably guys that did both pretty well,” Payton said.

Rob Gronkowski excelled at catching and blocking for New England during his nine-year career, which ended with his retirement last spring. Lions coach Matt Patricia said Gronkowski’s impact up close for eight sea-

Arteral the season opener at Pittsburgh on Sept. 8, the majority of players who were expected to see extended playing time against Car-

The New England Patriots’ Rob Gronkowski was one of the athletically gifted players who paved the way for the current crop of pass-catching tight ends.

Steelers defensive back Kam Kelly, top left, celebrates with linebacker Bud Dupree after the Titans’ Marcus Mariota was sacked in the end zone for a safety on Sunday.

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BY TOM WITHERS

Associated Press

From Back Page

The best tight ends these days are too fast for linebackers to defend, and too big for defen-

sive backs to cover. Teams often are sending two tight ends on the field — usually one pass-catching tight ends are so in vogue.

Best tight ends pose matchup problems for linebackers, defensive backs

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Steelers defensive back Kam Kelly, top left, celebrates with linebacker Bud Dupree after the Titans’ Marcus Mariota was sacked in the end zone for a safety on Sunday.

The best tight ends these days are too fast for linebackers to defend, and too big for defen-

sive backs to cover. Teams often are sending two tight ends on the field — usually one
Game changers

Talented trio shows how NFL tight ends are evolving as pass-catching threats

By Larry Lage
Associated Press

The day before Tony Gonzalez was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame this month, he was asked about being something of a pioneer at tight end. A guy who changed his position — and the game itself.

Gonzalez sort of shrugged. “I guess everyone is doing it now,” he admitted of tight ends being used in a manner that Gonzalez didn’t exactly invent, but certainly perfected.

The pass-happy, vertical-stretching NFL is shifting away from relying heavily on formations with one tight end in a three-point stance. Instead, many teams feature offenses with one tight end next to a tackle on the line while sending a tight end to the slot or spread out even wider in some formations.

Star tight end Jason Witten, who returned to the Cowboys after one year working on “Monday Night Football,” said Gonzalez, whose 17-year career ended in 2013, changed things with his route-running and pass-catching skills at the position.

“Gonzalez kind of paved the way of my generation of, ‘All right, this is a mismatch,’” said Witten, who will get strong consideration to join Gonzalez in Canton one day.

Two of the best active tight ends are coming off record-breaking seasons, and another one just had the best year of his career.

Eagles star Zach Ertz made 116 receptions, a season record by a tight end.

San Francisco’s George Kittle had 1,377 yards receiving, setting another record at the position.

Two-time All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce was spectacular as well, setting career highs in catches (103), yards receiving (1,336) and touchdowns (10) last season.

Kittle, 25, keeps track of peers on his iPad, studying every move made by most of the starting tight ends. He takes a particularly close look at how Kelce, 29, and Ertz, 28, are perhaps the best in the business at the position.

“I just try to pull stuff from them,” Kittle said. “Ertz and Kelce are two of the top guys in the league, so if I can learn something from them, I can get to that level, too.”

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