Military, federal civilians set for largest pay boost in years

By Slobodan Lekic
Stars and Stripes

January will usher in the biggest pay raise since 2010 for U.S. service members, and also bring a long-awaited salary increase for federal civilian employees.

Service members and Defense Department civilians are each slated to receive an average 3.1% bump in annual pay as part of the $737 billion military budget for 2020 — $22 billion more than last year’s defense measure.

Congress passed the record-setting defense bill in December with strong bipartisan support. It includes the creation of a Space Force, one of President Donald Trump’s top priorities for the Pentagon, and provisions aimed at improving military housing conditions. The Department of Veterans Affairs will get a 9% boost in funding, its largest budgetary increase ever.

The 2020 raise is the largest for service members since a 3.4% annual pay hike in 2010. Since then, annual increases have ranged between 1% and 2.6%.

For federal civilian employees, the 3.1% average increase will constitute the largest raise since 2008, when they received a 3.5% average pay adjustment, statistics published by the Federal News Network stated. For much of the 2010s, federal employees received either no raise or a 1% annual hike.

The White House had originally planned to freeze federal pay in 2020 but reversed course in August and allowed a 2.6% across-the-board increase. On Friday, Trump signed an executive order putting into effect a measure that also includes locality pay averaging an extra 0.5%.

The civilian increases statewide should range from 2.85% to 3.52% with locality pay factored in, a Federal News Network analysis found. The highest average increases will come in the Washington metro area and around other large cities.

SEE PAY ON PAGE 5

Tax bills for moving benefits coming due for civilian employees

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Iraqi protesters storm US Embassy

Militiamen breach compound shouting ‘Death to America’ in wake of airstrikes

By Qassim Abdul-Zahra
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Dozens of Iraqi Shiite militiamen and their supporters shouting “Death to America” broke into the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Tuesday, smashing a main door and setting fire to a reception area, angered over deadly U.S. airstrikes targeting the Iran-backed militia. U.S. guards fired tear gas and palls of smoke rose over the grounds.

An Associated Press reporter at the scene saw flames rising from inside the compound and at least three U.S. troops on the roof of the main embassy building. There was a fire at the reception area near the compound’s parking lot but it was unclear what had started it. A man on a loudspeaker urged the mob not to enter the compound, saying, “The message was delivered.”

SEE EMBASSY ON PAGE 6

By Khalid Mohammed/AP

Iraqi protesters damage property inside the U.S. Embassy.

Protesters burn property in front of the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad on Tuesday.
**BUSINESS/WEATHER**

**Former Nissan boss Ghosn flees to Lebanon over ‘injustice’**

Associated Press

TOKYO — Nissan’s former chairman, Carlos Ghosn, said Tuesday from Lebanon that he was not fleeing justice but instead left Japan to avoid “injustice and political persecution” over financial misconduct allegations during his tenure leading the automaker.

Ghosn had been released on bail by a Tokyo court while awaiting trial but was not allowed to travel overseas. He disclosed his location in a statement through his representatives that did not describe how he left Japan, where he had been under surveillance.

“I am now in Lebanon and will no longer be held hostage by a rigged Japanese justice system where guilt is presumed, discrimination is rampant, and basic human rights are denied,” the statement said.

Japanese media quoted prosecutors speaking anonymously who said they did not know how Ghosn had left.

Ghosn, who is of Lebanese origin and holds French, Lebanese and Brazilian passports, was arrested in November 2018 and was expected to face trial in April 2020.

Ghosn has been charged with under-reporting his future compensation and breach of trust.

Japan does not have an extradition treaty with Lebanon. It is up to the international insurance to decide what steps authorities might take.

**EXCHANGE RATES**

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**INTEREST RATES**

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**PCSing? RELOCATION GUIDE**

Every Friday in the European and Pacific editions of Stars and Stripes AND online daily at www.stripes.com/relo
**PCS tax bills for civilian employees are coming due**

By Caitlin Doornbos  
Stars and Stripes

Just before the holidays, Mo Bak, an engineer for the federal government, received a letter demanding $1,600 to reimburse the Defense Department for taxes it paid to move him and his family from their home in Arkansas to Australia.

She’d relocated with her two children in 2019 from Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni to Yokota Air Base, both in Japan. The bill covered taxes on the cost to ship her property about 525 miles from one base to the other.

“(I) honestly didn’t think it was going to be such a huge amount — and this was just on a move in-country,” Bak said. “If I was coming from the states it would be even more insane.”

Bak, like hundreds of other federal employees hired after Jan. 1, 2018, was caught by a change in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 that did away with a deduction for moving expenses, including what the government paid to move its own employees. That money instead was redefined as taxable income.

Now many of those employees must repay the Defense Finance Accounting Service the money it paid the IRS on their behalf.

Some will also have to file amended returns for 2018 reflecting the moving benefit.

The 2017 tax law change left DFAS to implement a new system to withhold taxes on moving benefits for DOD civilian employees.

In September 2018, it began withholding taxes on moving-related reimbursements to employ- ees, but a system to withhold taxes on payments to vendors — such as shipping or storage companies — was not implemented until the following year.

That meant employees who moved before September 2019 were still on the hook for Medi- care, Social Security and federal income taxes on the money the government paid directly to packing, moving and shipping companies.

Those tax bills are now coming due, and thousands of federal employees like Bak should expect debt letters and updated federal income returns in their mailboxes in coming weeks, according to DFAS.

DFAS in November began noti- fying those DOD employees by email of upcoming tax bills, DFAS said.

Since then, Stars and Stripes interviewed more than a dozen affected workers who reported receiving tax bills between $1,500 and $15,000 for moving benefits.

### Tax bill breakdown

All moving benefits are taxable now, but because withholding started in September 2018, tax refunds are related only to money paid directly to vendors. Other moving costs such as airfare or hotels were already taxed when the employee submitted a claim for reimbursement.

For those who moved in 2018, DFAS paid the IRS the Social Security and Medicare taxes on money it paid third-party ven- dors — such as commercial moving com- panies. For 2019 moves, DFAS also paid the 22% income tax on those payments.

The DFAS tax letters are to reimburse the agency those expenditures.

Employees who moved in 2018 must pay the IRS directly the 22% income tax on the money paid to outside vendors, DFAS said. Those employees will receive corrected federal wage and earnings forms — called W-2s — amending their 2018 reported income to reflect both earned wages and federal income tax paid to move them.

### Reimbursement

Affected federal employees can recoup the money they pay in taxes on their moving allowances by applying to either of two pro- grams: Withholding Tax Allowance or Relocation Income Tax Allowance.

A loophole that previously ex- cluded new, retired or separated employees since 2018 from receiving reimbursement was fixed in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

Prior language in the U.S. tax code enacting those programs used the word “employee” when defining eligibility for those programs. That meant people techni- cally between jobs — those who left a civilian job, moved and started a federal job or who quit a federal job — were considered in- eligible for reimbursement of the tax on their moving benefit.

“In the case of retirees, it was a betrayal of promises made to them years or even decades ear- lier, when they first joined (feder- al work),” the Federal Education Association said in a Dec. 12 statement.

But the defense authorization act — signed into law Dec. 20 — changed the language from “employee” to “individual,” mak- ing incoming and outgoing em- ployees eligible for the Relocation Income Tax Allowance.

The change is also retroactive, extending the program to those who moved “anytime in the past two calendar years,” according to the teacher’s union.

Affected employees can file for tax reimbursement through the RTA program after their 2019 or amended 2018 tax returns are submitted, according to DFAS.

### Former Marine pitches Australian-US amphibious force

BY SETH ROBSON  
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and Australia should establish a combined amphibious force including 2,000 Marines and a similar number of sailors based in Darwin, Australia, to build regional support for counter- standing China’s ambitions in the western Pacific, according to a former Marine colonel.

Grant Newsham, now a senior researcher with the Japan Institute for Strategic Studies, Tokyo, said Monday that the Marine Corps, which rotates 2,500 Marines through Darwin during the summer, needs to see Australia as more than just a great place to train.

“I look at it as more of an oppor- tunity to influence not just in Aus- tralia but right out to the heart of Southeast Asia,” Newsham said.

Darwin is a lot farther from Chinese shore-based missile bat- teries than places where the Ma- rines already have a permanent presence in the region, such as Okinawa.

Gen. David H. Berger, com- mandant of the Marine Corps, wrote in a commentary published Dec. 5 by War on the Rocks, a website on national security, about the challenges posed by the rise of Chinese military power in the Pacific.

Berger wrote that U.S. “for- ward bases and legacy infra- structure within the adversary’s weapons engagement zone are now extremely vulnerable.”

Newsham said an “Australian- American Amphibious Force” supported by amphibious ships from both nations could solve that problem. Such a force could be home-based in Darwin along with facilities such as American schools and shops, he said.

The facility could serve as a schoolhouse for amphibious forces from other nations in the region such as New Zealand, Sin- gapore, Japan and South Korea. And Darwin could host an amphibi- ous version of the Rim of the Pacific exercise that is held in Hawaii every other year, he said.

“Draw foreign militaries into your orbit to have them see them- selves as trusted partners and equals,” he said.

Darwin-based Marines could travel to nearby Southeast Asia to train with locals and establish a presence, Newsham said.

“The more you do and the more places you do it, the more influ- ence you are going to have,” he said. “Otherwise you are like the Harlem Globetrotters — you show up once in a while and go away.”

Darwin is the perfect spot to work on guidance from Berger to send small contingents of Ma- rines throughout the region, New- sham said.

“The Marines haven’t done the work to get the access to put that policy into effect, but Darwin is a great place to build influence,” he said.

The port already has plenty of room for amphibious ships but creating a purpose-built base would make it even better, he said.

The U.S. and South Korea armies activated their first com- bined division by adding South Korean troops to the 2nd Infantry Division in 2015. Newsham suggested that doing something similar in Australia would be a simpler task.

The Australian and New Zea- land Army Corps, for example, was formed in 1914 during World War I.

The new amphibious force wouldn’t require stationing an aircraft carrier Down Under, Newsham said. Air support for the Marines could be provided by aircraft operating from bases in the Northern Territory or new F-35B stealth jets flying off the decks of amphibious ships, he said.

James Holmes, a strategist at the Naval War College, wrote in Dec. 9 in National Interest maga- zine that concerns about China could boost Australian support for a permanent U.S. military presence Down Under.

“Stationing military forces overseas inspires trust. In turn, an unbreakable bond between America and Australia could give China the next time it con- template making mischief,” he wrote.
The military’s health care system will now pay for some service members with severe razor bumps to receive laser therapy treatment at civilian facilities.

TriCare says it will foot the laser bill for active-duty personnel suffering from pseudofolliculitis barbae, or PFB, once skin creams and other conservative treatments have failed.

Laser therapy can be expensive but it’s considered the most effective treatment for severe PFB, a persistent irritation most common on the face and neck caused by shaving.

The new TriCare policy was announced in December and first reported by Military.com. It follows the Navy’s decision in October to end permanent shaving waivers for sailors after concluding that facial hair can hinder the effectiveness of breathing mask and respirator seals.

Razor bumps are caused when curly hair curves back into the skin after being shaved, causing inflammation. The condition, which can be painful, affects many African Americans, according to past studies.

The Navy estimates that of more than 337,000 sailors in its ranks, about 6,000 are treated for the condition annually.

Some sailors with the condition previously received a shaving waiver, or “no-shave chit.” Under the new Navy policy, sailors are able to obtain only a temporary shaving waiver and must see a doctor every six months if the condition continues.

The Navy says treatment options include the use of medicated creams to make hair easier to shave; shaving with gentle equipment; and shaving techniques to minimize the risk of irritation and hair reentry into the skin.

The service said in October that laser hair reduction “is the most reliable approach allowing a return to Navy grooming standards.”

Laser therapy may take up to three to seven sessions to be effective, said a study published in April by the U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

The average cost of a laser hair removal session in 2016 was $306, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.
As deadline passes, Kim calls for ‘offensive’ countermeasures

By Kim Gamel
and Yoo Kyong Chang
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — The stage was set for an increase in tensions as the United States missed North Korea’s end-of-year deadline to break the deadlock in nuclear talks on Tuesday amid fears the communist state plans to resume long-range missile tests.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for “offensive political, diplomatic and military countermeasures” to protect his country’s security and sovereignty in a seven-hour speech on Monday, according to the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

The communist state has threatened to adopt an unspecified “new way” if Washington fails to propose a more flexible approach to talks that have stalled over conflicting demands for sanctions relief and more extensive steps toward denuclearization.

Kim, who was also widely expected to make a New Year’s speech on Wednesday, didn’t mention nuclear weapons or specify the countermeasures that should be taken in his remarks to a meeting of the central committee of the ruling Workers’ Party.

But he stressed the need to develop “the party into a militant party full of vitality and vigor,” KCNA reported on Tuesday.

The third-generation leader also called for measures to improve the country’s economy, which has been hard-hit by international sanctions.

South Korea said it was closely watching the party meeting but declined to speculate on the meaning behind Kim’s words, Lee Sang-min, a spokesman for the Unification Ministry, said.

The meeting, which KCNA said was ongoing, was being closely watched for signs that Kim is preparing to abandon diplomacy with the United States in what would be a blow to a key foreign policy goal of President Donald Trump’s administration.

Pay: Union had complained of stagnant salaries

FROM FRONT PAGE

Prior to the passage of the bill, the American Federation of Government Employees had complained that its members were earning less in 2019 than at the start of the decade because salaries had failed to keep pace with inflation. It said government agencies were struggling to recruit employees due to noncompetitive salaries that lagged behind private sector pay.

More than 30% of federal workers are veterans, the Office of Personnel Management stated in 2017.

Last week, the OPM published the 2020 pay tables and a general salary calculator at www.opm.gov.

Big steps

A recruit with Bravo Company, 1st Recruit Training Battalion, goes down the rappel tower at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., on Monday.

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THE NEW SANNO
Taliban prisoners see peace deal as ticket to freedom

BY KATHY GANNON
Associated Press

PUL-E-CHARKHI, Afghanistan — Thousands of Taliban prisoners jailed in Afghanistan as insurgents see a peace deal being hammered out between the United States and the Taliban as their ticket to freedom.

They know a prisoner release is a key pillar of any agreement that brings an end to Afghanistan’s 18-year war, Washington’s longest military engagement.

A list of about 5,000 Taliban prisoners has been given to the Americans, and their release has been written into the agreement under discussion, said a Taliban official familiar with the ongoing negotiations with the Trump administration. If the Taliban agree to the release, it would be the biggest prisoner exchange since the Taliban took power in 2001.

But they also insisted that they accept it would not be the same now and that, though they still wanted what they call Islamic rule, they no longer call for some of their previous tactics, like the ban on education and on girls and women working.

On Sunday, the Taliban ruling council agreed to a temporary cease-fire in Afghanistan, providing a window in which a peace agreement with the U.S. can be signed, Taliban officials said. They didn’t say when it would begin.

The Taliban have well-organized communication networks inside Afghanistan prisons that record the latest arrests, province by province, as well as who is sick and who has died. It all gets delivered to a prisoners’ commission, devoted to their release and headed by Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, who during the Taliban rule served as justice minister and the “virtue and vice” minister in charge of religious police.

Built in the 1970s to house 5,000 prisoners, Pul-e-Charkhi now has 10,500 prisoners, or, according to the wardens, Akhtar Nooroz. “Around 3,000 prisoners classified as Taliban are in their own block. The prisoners had free rein in a room where they could mingle, pray and study. The room was lined with small desks at which the Taliban sat on the carpeted floor in traditional style. The AP interviewed the prisoners in a nearby room, unscheduled and with no guards or administrators present. The prisoners themselves report on others among whom they would be interviewed, without interference — at least none visible — from the administration.

Maulvi Niaz Mohammad emerged as the leader among the prisoners, although no one identified him as such. He was sentenced to 15 years. During the Taliban rule, he served with Qari Ahmadullah, a Taliban intelligence commander who controlled much of northern Afghanistan. He said barely 1,000 of the prisoners in the block are actually Taliban. The rest were accused of being sympathizers or members of the group, often to settle old scores; others were criminals.

Analysts and even the United States’ own Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John F. Sopko said neither the Afghan nor the U.S. is ready for the Taliban prisoners’ release.

Every past attempt at reintegration has been costly and a failure.

A report released in September — one of several “Lessons Learned” treatises done by Sopko’s team during America’s 18-year and $1 trillion involvement in Afghanistan — said Afghans on both sides of the conflict need to avoid the missteps of the past.

Sopko said Congress should consider funding reintegration programs. If a peace deal proves a framework for reintegrating ex-combatants, there is strong monitoring of the process and violence is dramatically reduced.

Embassy: More troops being sent to protect compound; no evacuations planned

FROM FRONT PAGE

There were no reports of casualties, but the unprecedented breach was one of the worst attacks on the embassy in memory. It followed deadly U.S. airstrikes on Sunday that killed 25 fighters of the Iran-backed militia in Iraq, the Kataeb Hezbollah. The U.S. military said the airstrikes were in retaliation for last week’s killing of an American contractor in a rocket attack on an Iraqi military base that it blamed on the militia.

President Donald Trump blamed Iran for the embassy breach and called on Iraq to protect the diplomatic mission.

“Iran killed an American contractor, wounding many. We strongly responded, and always will. Now Iran is orchestrating an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Iraq. They will be held fully responsible. In addition, we expect Iraq to use its forces to protect the Embassy, and so notified,” he tweeted from his estate in Palm Beach, Fla.

By early evening, protesters had set up tents outside the embassy where they said they intended to stage a sit-in. Dozens of yellow flags belonging to Iran-backed Shiite militias fluttered atop the reception area and were plastered along the embassy’s concrete wall along with anti-U.S. graffiti.

Trump, who is spending the holiday week at his Florida home, is in “close touch” and receiving regular updates from his national security team, said White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham.

The U.S. will send more troops to protect the embassy compound and does not plan an evacuation, the Pentagon and State Department said.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said the U.S. has taken actions to ensure the safety of American citizens, military personnel and diplomats. “And to ensure our right of self-defense. We are sending additional forces to support our personnel at the Embassy.”

The extra force will consist of a small additional detachment of Marine security guards, two defense officials in Washington said. They would be from the Marine Corps’ Security Force Group, which is trained specifically to provide security at U.S. diplomatic missions. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to be identified.

“U.S. personnel are secure,” added an official from the State Department. “There are no plans to evacuate Embassy Baghdad.”

The developments represent a major downturn in Iraq-U.S. relations that could further undermine U.S. influence in the region and also weaken Washington’s hand in its maximum pressure campaign against Iran.

Iraq has long struggled to balance its ties with the U.S. and Iran, both allies of the Iraqi government. But the government’s angry reaction to the U.S. airstrikes and its apparent decision not to prevent the protesters from reaching the embassy signaled a sharp deterioration of U.S.-Iraqi relations.

A video obtained by the AP showed militants trashing the embassy’s reception area and also taking away paperwork.

Multiple officials told the AP that the U.S. ambassador was already traveling outside Iraq before the attack on the compound.

The U.S. airstrikes and the subsequent calls by the militia for retaliation represent a new escalation in the proxy war between the U.S. and Iran playing out in the Middle East.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday’s strikes send the message that the U.S. will not tolerate actions by Iran that jeopardize American lives.

The U.S. military said “precision defensive strikes” were conducted against five sites of Kataeb Hezbollah, or Hezbollah Brigades, in Iraq and Syria. The group, which is a separate force from the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, operates under the umbrella of the state-sanctioned militias known collectively as the Popular Mobilization Forces. Many of them are supported by Iran.
NEW YORK — An anti-robo-call measure signed into law Monday by President Donald Trump should help reduce the torrent of unwanted calls promising lower interest rates or pretending to be the IRS, though it won’t make all such calls disappear.

The new law gives authorities more enforcement powers and could speed up measures the industry is already taking to identify robocalls. And when phone companies block robocalls, they must do so without charging consumers. That should help Americans dodge many of these annoying calls.

“American families deserve control over their communications, and this legislation will update our laws and regulations to stiffen penalties, increase transparency and enhance government collaboration to stop unwanted solicitation,” White House press secretary Stephanie Grisham said.

The law is a “big victory,” said Consumer Reports’ Maureen Mahoney. “The key is requiring these phone companies to help stop the calls before they reach the consumer and do it at no additional charge.”

The robocall problem has exploded because cheap software makes it easy to make mass calls. Americans collectively get billions of robocalls each month. Such calls have disrupted operations at hospitals by diverting staff time to deal with calls faked to look as though they are coming from inside the hospital.

Scams conducted through such calls have also defrauded people out of millions of dollars. Many people now avoid answering calls altogether if they come from unknown numbers.

Another important step is getting rid of “spoofed” numbers, or when a scammer fakes Caller ID to look like it’s coming from an important government agency like the IRS. The industry is developing a system to tell people when the Caller ID number is real. The new law requires all phone companies to put this system in place.

BY TOREY VAN OOT
(St Paul, Minn.) Star Tribune

The Federal Election Commission has asked for more detail about thousands of donors to Rep. Ilhan Omar, D-Minn., who gave less than $200 each, a group of contributors who poured more than $800,000 into her reelection bid over a three-month period.

Agency staff sent a letter to Omar’s campaign in late November seeking more information about the large share of cash from individuals giving $200 or less — the maximum allowed before triggering donor disclosure requirements — in her latest quarterly filing. Such contributions accounted for more than 75% of the $1.1 million Omar reported raising between July and September.

The letter, sent Nov. 26, asked Omar to either amend the filing to identify any donors who exceeded the threshold or affirm that all $833,961.64 in unitemized contributions came from individuals who gave less than $200 over the course of the year. Failure to respond, the agency added, could result in an audit or enforcement action.

Omar’s campaign responded to the agency in a letter sent last week, saying the committee is aware of the limits and “endeavors to fully comply” with the law. The response, signed by campaign treasurer Kate Wittenstein, adds that contribution tracking software used by the committee “flags and aggregates such contributions accordingly.”

“If for any reason the Committee were to identify any clerical or other reporting errors the Committee will, of course, amend accordingly,” Wittenstein wrote.

Omar’s campaign had previously said it received contributions from 55,577 donors in the third quarter of 2019, with an average donation of $14.55. More than 99% of contributions received during the period were under $200, the campaign said at the time of the October filing.

An FEC spokeswoman confirmed receipt of the letter and said staff could follow up with the committee if they have additional questions or need clarification.

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Biden is asked about sharing 2020 ticket with Republican

**By John Wagner**
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Tuesday accused Democrats of seeking to avoid an impeachment trial in the Senate to protect Joe Biden and his son Hunter, whose service on the board of a Ukrainian energy company while his father was vice president has come under scrutiny.

Trump weighed in on Twitter as an impasse continued over the timing and scope of an expected Senate trial. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has held back the two articles of impeachment — abuse of power and obstruction of Congress — passed this month by the House.

She and Senate Democrats are seeking guarantees that a Senate trial will include several witnesses, notably acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton, who declined to participate in the House impeachment proceedings. Democrats also are pushing for the release of documents relevant to Trump’s conduct toward Ukraine that the White House has refused to provide.

“This is nothing to do with a trial in the Senate in order to protect Sleepy Joe Biden, and expose the millions and millions of dollars that Joe Biden and his father by Trump and his defenders are a diversionary tactic,” Trump said in a tweet.

“Joe Biden was paying Hunter $850,000 a year while he was leading the board of a Ukrainian energy company while he was leading anti-corruption efforts in the country, an implicit criticism of the controversy that has snarled his 2020 Democratic presidential rival Joe Biden.

Hunter Biden’s position on the board of the company Burisma has been a rallying point for Republicans as they try to defend President Donald Trump against impeachment charges over Trump asking Ukraine’s new president to investigate the former vice president and his son while also withholding crucial U.S. military aid. 

Biden said. and a trial is not held.

Doctors: Sanders is fit enough for presidency

**By Will Weisbett and Louran Neergaard**
Associated Press

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., takes questions from the audience in Newport, N.H., on Sunday. His doctors say he has recovered from his recent heart attack and is fit enough to continue campaigning and serve if elected.

Bernie Sanders suffered “moderate heart muscle damage” during his recent heart attack but has since recovered well and is fit enough for the rigors of the presidential campaign trail and the White House should he win it, according to letters released Monday by his primary care physician and two cardiologists.

The 78-year-old Vermont senator is the oldest candidate in the 2020 presidential race and had vowed to release detailed medical records by the end of the year.

His campaign did so the day before New Year’s Eve, and the letters provide the most detail it has given to date showing that Sanders received prompt treatment to reopen his clogged artery with stents following his heart attack, which occurred while he campaigned in Las Vegas on Oct. 1.

After a first heart attack, standard questions include the likelihood of another and whether the heart’s muscle was damaged badly enough to trigger later heart failure. While his heart was damaged, Sanders has had no other symptoms, his blood pressure and heart rate are “in optimal ranges,” and his heart is functioning normally, with the ability to exercise “well above average,” wrote his cardiologist, Dr. Martin LeWintor, of the University of Vermont Medical Center.

The key test to show that was a treadmill exercise test in which doctors watch for signs of trouble during strong exertion. Sanders’ exercise capacity this month was “average” for a healthy man his age without heart disease, and he was able to exercise to a level about 50% higher than men his age who do have heart disease, University of Vermont cardiac rehabilitation chief Dr. Philip Aides and exercise physiologist Patrick Savage wrote in a separate letter.

“At this point, I see no reason he cannot continue campaigning without limitation and should be elected, I am confident he has the mental and physical stamina to fully undertake the rigors of the presidency,” LeWintor wrote, also noting that Sanders had made an “uneventful” recovery from his heart attack.

Biden is asked about sharing 2020 ticket with Republican

**By Hunter Woodall**
Associated Press

EXETER, N.H. — Former Vice President Joe Biden entertained the idea of choosing a Republican as a 2020 running mate as he campaigned Monday — though he conceded he didn’t have anyone specific in mind.

A voter told Biden during an event Monday afternoon in Exeter that her son had wondered if the Democratic presidential contender would consider choosing a Republican as a running mate.

“I refuse to accept the proposition that we’ll be in a state of perpetual war with Republicans, because you can’t govern the country if that’s the case,” Biden said. “We are a democracy, and our democracy depends upon consensus. We have to be able to pull the country together.”

Biden is sometimes asked about possible running mates by voters on the campaign trail. During his answer Monday he noted that it was presumptuous to talk about the idea at this point in the campaign.

If he becomes the Democratic nominee, Biden said, he’d want to pick someone “sincapable” with him and his priorities, telling voters there are “a lot of qualified women,” and “a lot of qualified African Americans.”

“There’s a plethora of really qualified people,” Biden said.

Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden takes a selfie during a campaign stop in Exeter, N.H., on Monday. When asked, Biden said he would consider a Republican as a running mate.
NATION

Firearms instructor shot guneman at Texas church

Associated Press

WHITE SETTLEMENT, Texas — Alarms went off in Jack Wilson's head the moment a man wearing a fake beard, a wig, and a prison jumpsuit stepped onto a Texas church for Sunday services.

That was the moment the man approached a communion server and pulled out a shotgun, Wilson and another security volunteer were already reaching for their own guns. The attacker shot the other volunteer, Richard White, and then the server, Antonio "Tony" Wallace, sending congregants scrambling for cover. The gunman was heading toward the front of the sanctuary when Wilson shot and killed him.

"I didn't have a clear window," Wilson, referring to church members who "were jumping, going chaotic." Wilson, 71, a firearms instructor who has also been a reserve sheriff's deputy, said: "They were standing up. I had to wait about half a second, or a second, to get my shot. I fired one round. The subject went down."

Wilson's single shot quickly ended the attack that killed Wallace, 64, and White, 67, at the West Freeway Church of Christ in the Fort Worth-area town of White Settlement. He said the entire confrontation was over in no more than six seconds. More than 240 congregants were in the church at the time.

"The only clear shot I had was his head because I still had people in the pews that were not all the way down as low as they could be," Wilson said Monday from his home in nearby Granbury. "As Wilson approached the fallen attacker, he noticed five or six other members of the volunteer security team he had trained with their guns drawn. Wilson said they had their eyes on the man since he arrived. During the service, White and Wilson had stationed themselves at the back of the church, watching him."

The Texas Department of Public Safety on Monday identified the attacker as Keith Thomas Kinnunen, 43. His motive is under investigation.

Speaking outside the church Monday, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said authorities "can't prevent mental illness from occurring, and we can't prevent every crazy person from pulling a gun. But we can be prepared like this church was." Paxton is the state's top law enforcement official and a Republican politician who is currently running for Texas governor.

After the shooting, Texas officials hailed the state's gun laws, including a measure enacted this year that affirms the right of licensed handgun holders to carry a weapon in places of worship unless the facility bans them. That law was passed in the aftermath of the deadly church shooting in Texas history, which was also at a church. In the 2017 massacre at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, a man who opened fire on a Sunday morning congregation killed more than two dozen people. He later killed himself.

GOP lawmakers in 2 states seek to prevent red flag laws on guns

Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. — Republicans in two Midwestern states where GOP-controlled legislatures have gun rights majorities are proposing measures aimed at preventing guns from being taken away from gun owners in states from taking guns away from residents whom the courts deem a danger to themselves.

Neither Oklahoma nor Kansas has red flag laws through which relatives or police can obtain a court order to remove firearms from someone's possession. However, the proposals in those states also would prevent local city and county governments from enacting such laws. They would even go so far as to make it a felony for someone to help enforce such an order.

Supporters of red flag laws say they reduce suicides and gun violence and lessen the risk of mass shootings. Gun rights supporters contend they violate not only the ability to tell the federal government, 'You can't prevent me from owning firearms,' but they also contend they violate not only the right to own firearms but other constitutional guarantees, such as the right to keep and bear arms.

The U.S. Constitution prevents states from nullifying federal laws.

"States generally do not have the ability to tell the federal government, 'Get out of our state and stop enforcing your laws,'" said Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt, a Republican gun rights supporter who's not taking a position on the measures. "But states do generally have the ability to tell the federal government, 'You are not able to commandeer state resources and compel us to enforce your laws.'"

Officials say Hanukkah attack suspect researched Hitler online

Associated Press

MONSEY, N.Y. — A man charged with federal hate crimes Monday in a bloody attack on a Hanukkah celebration had handwritten journals containing anti-Semitic references and had recently used his phone to look up information on Hitler and the Holocaust, authorities said.

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In 2019, Florida leads way in weird news

**By Tamara Lush**

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG — In 2019, Florida Banana managed to eclipse Florida Man. From alligator antics to naked people doing wacky things, Florida did not disappoint in the weird news department this year.

(So. Many. Naked. People.)

In December, a Miami couple spent more than $100,000 on the “unicorn of the art world” — a banana duct-taped to a wall — during Art Basel. The piece was widely copied and mocked on social media, and then someone at the art fair ripped it off the wall and ate it.

Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan sold three editions of “Comedian,” each in the $120,000 to $150,000 range.

“We are acutely aware of the blatant absurdity of the fact that ‘Comedian’ is an otherwise expensive and perishable piece of produce and a couple inches of duct tape,” one couple that purchased the banana said. “Ultimately, we sense that Cattelan’s banana will become an iconic historical object.”

Florida is known for many things. Sunshine, beaches and oranges. The magic of Disney and the glamour of South Beach. It’s also known for having the most bananas news in the United States.

As they often do, alligators topped the list of odd stories. Perhaps the most visually interesting happening in October, when Paul Bedard, who is contracted with the state’s nuisance alligator program, responded to a call of a gator in a swimming pool in Parkland. Bedard “played” with the 8-foot long reptile until it became tired. Then he lifted it out of the water and held it over his head for an Instagram post.

“I haven’t had a good-sized gator in a swimming pool in probably a year, so I was kind of looking forward to this when I got the call,” he said. The alligator was relocated to a wildlife park.

Humans tangled with gators in a multitude of other ways. One reptile knocked on a woman’s door the night before Thanksgiving in Fort Myers. In Martin County, two men poured Coors beer into an alligator’s mouth. They were arrested.

Alligators weren’t the only animals making headlines in Florida. In August, a restaurant in Stuart canceled its “Monkey Mondays” when a 9-month-old capuchin named Joldo bit a child’s finger.

Also in August, a Lake Worth Beach man began feeding a kinkajou (a raccoon relative with a prehensile tail that’s native to Central and South America), but one day, it attacked his leg. “It was not a nice kinkajou. It was super aggressive,” the man’s girlfriend told The Palm Beach Post.

And a Labrador retriever somehow got behind the wheel of a car and did doughnuts in Port St. Lucie.

Some claim Florida’s weird news surfaces because of the state’s open public records laws, while others chalk it up to the fact that it’s the third-largest state, with more than 21 million people packed on a peninsula — many wearing scant clothing because of infernal heat most of the year.

Whatever the reason, taking stock of the year’s strange stories in Florida is a time-honored tradition. This year’s no different, because the unusual is met with a chuckle and shrug precisely because it’s so normal. (Honestly. In 1986, the state’s official tourism slogan was “Florida … The Rules Are Different Here.”)

Consider Patrick Eldridge, of Jacksonville, who parked his tiny Smart Car in his kitchen because he was worried it would blow away during Hurricane Dorian.

The owners of a Port Orange funeral home gave away a free cremation as part of its grand reopening.

A toilet exploded in Port Charlotte when lighting struck the home’s septic tank. No one was injured, and homeowner Marylou Ward expressed relief: “I’m just glad none of us were on the toilet.”

Folks attacked one another with all manner of items, including (but not limited to) pancake batter, Pop-Tarts, a fake Christmas tree, swords, McDonald’s condiment packets and roach spray.

In the city of Port Richey, two mayors were arrested in the span of 20 days — one on charges of obstruction of justice; the other on allegations he was practicing medicine without a license in his home.

Lest you think all Floridians are strange, a few did some remarkably kind things.

Chicago Bears linebacker Khalil Mack went to his hometown of Fort Pierce and stopped by a Walmart store in December. He paid off all the layaways, to the tune of $80,000, according to the Chicago Tribune.

A Florida 9-year-old gave his third grade teacher all the fees when he offered his $15 of birthday money as a solution to the problem of teachers being underpaid.

But it’s the weird that attracts the most attention here. A number of people were nude, or partially nude, when they made the news.

In Polk County in December, a Florida man was “buck naked” when he showed up to the front door of a home where an undercover sex sting operation was being conducted, sheriff’s officials said. A naked Florida man broke into a elementary school in Apopka and spread feces throughout the building. Cops chased a lot of naked people through parking lots, swamps and stores, too many to list here.

In Miami in March, motorists captured on camera a nearly nude man wearing hot pink socks, sneakers, skimpy underwear and a pink headband, bicycling backward down I-95.

As one does.

Forest ecologist helps refashion Barbie dolls as scientists

**By SioBHan Morrissey**

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — When Nalini Nadkarni was a kid, she’d run home from school, climb into one of the eight maple trees in her parents’ backyard and spend an afternoon there with an apple and a book.

That time in the treetops set the tone for the rest of her life. She’s now a forest ecologist at the University of Utah who’s dedicated her career to studying rain forest canopies.

She’s also always looking for new ways to get people interested in science, from fashion made with nature imagery to science lectures at the state prison. “I’ve tried for years and years to bring the science I do and understand to people outside of academia,” she said.

Her childhood memories made her particularly interested in reaching children. After her own 6-year-old daughter asked for a Barbie, Nadkarni decided to refashion the iconic dolls as a scientist-explorer in rubber boots rather than high heels.

“Lots of girls, and some little boys, love Barbie,” Nadkarni said. “It’s almost aspirational; they want to be Barbie.”

That was about 15 years ago. Nadkarni said Barbie-maker Mattel wasn’t interested in the idea then, so she decided to redo dolls herself, using gear she collected. She scoured thrift stores and eBay for Barbie dolls and enlisted help from volunteer seamstresses. She called the creation “Treetop Barbie” and began selling them at cost on her website.

Last year, Mattel began working with National Geographic to create a new line of scientist Barbies. Nadkarni has a long-standing relationship with National Geographic, so when the nonprofit reached out for help, she quickly agreed.

Nadkarni also joined a team of female scientists advising Mattel as it made the line of dolls that includes a marine biologist, astrophysicist, photographer, conservationist and entomologist.

Sales began in the summer. As a thank-you, Mattel sent Nadkarni a one-of-a-kind doll with tree-climbing gear and full dark hair woven with strands of white that made the doll resemble the scientist.

For Nadkarni, the company’s investment in the dolls reflects a broader cultural shift toward recognizing women in science, math and technology that could spark an appreciation for science even among kids who don’t end up entering the field.

Mattel said in a statement that the purpose of Barbie dolls for the last 60 years has been to “inspire the limitless potential in every girl,” pointing out that Barbie was portrayed in science and math-based careers long before the new line.
Big buoy missing for 2 years has beached

FL NEWSMYRNABEACH — A big red navigation buoy that bounced along Atlantic waves for two years has beached in Florida, where it’s drawing attention.

Crowds of spectators streamed to New Smyrna Beach for a close-up view and some pictures with the buoy navigational marker that some described as “the size of a truck,” news outlets reported.

The buoy came from South Carolina and was displaced since 2017, said Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Duncan, spokesman for the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Jacksonville.

The Coast Guard plans to bring in a crane sometime this week to remove the buoy.

Officials remove bear from campus stadium

TN KNOXVILLE — A 200-pound black bear showed up as a walk-on at the University of Tennessee’s baseball stadium but ended up being sent back to its home territory.

A UT police officer notified the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, saying the bear had been wandering around campus and got stuck inside Lindsey Nelson Stadium, according to a post on the agency’s official Facebook page.

Sgt. Roy Smith and Wildlife Officer Jeff Roberson were able to tranquilize and remove the bear with the help of UT police.

The officers released the bear into the Foothills Wildlife Management Area in Blount County.

Couple returns to Dunkin’ to take vows

MA WORCESTER — A Massachusetts couple reunited for extra-sweet wedding vows at the same Dunkin’ Donuts where their young love splintered nearly 30 years ago.

Valerie Sneade and Jason Roy were joined by family, friends and customers buying coffee and pastries at a Dunkin’ Donuts in Worcester.

Sneade and Roy mostly didn’t see each other for 25 years after a conversation about their future at the same shop in 1992 led the young, in-love couple to step back from their relationship.

When Roy learned Sneade was performing a Valentine’s Day-themed musical revival in Worcester in February 2018, he showed up and sat in the front row. Roy proposed that New Year’s Eve.

Workers help woman who mouthed ‘help me’

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Workers at a McDonald’s in northern California helped rescue a woman who mouthed the words “help me” as she pulled up to the drive-thru window.

The woman initially entered the restaurant asking employees to call 911 and urging them to hide her from a reportedly violent man, The San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Chasing snowballs

Atlas jumps for a snowball in Zach Dysart’s hand on Sunday at Spencer Park in Sioux Falls, S.D. The rain and snow Sunday brought the year’s precipitation total to 39.27 inches, breaking the previous record of 39.17 inches set last year.

THE CENSUS

5 The number of mountain lion attacks on dogs in a central Idaho community in a week. The Idaho State Journal reported a Labrador retriever was attacked near Hailey after its owners let the dog outside in their unfenced backyard. It marked the fifth case in the Wood River Valley in the span of a week, according to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The Labrador has since recovered and returned home, but at least three other dogs have died.

Creamery fined for dumping milk into river

OR SALEM — The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality fined a creamery for river water pollution caused by dumping milk, officials said.

The $26,574 fine was levied against Organic Valley for dumping its McMinnville Creamery, The Statesman Journal reported.

The creamery discharged 87 gallons of condensed skim milk and 384 pounds of milk solids into a storm drain that leads to a tributary of the South Yamhill River on Jan. 5, the environmental quality department said.

Another library ends fines for overdue books

OH CHARDON — Another Ohio library is moving to a fine-free system, becoming part of a national trend of dropping fines to eliminate barriers to library access.

The Geauga County Public Library in northeastern Ohio eliminated overdue fines beginning Wednesday except for telescopes, new video games and Blu-Ray DVDs, The News-Herald reported.

Rather than amassing fines, borrowers will have their cards blocked 21 days after the due date. Returning the overdue items unblocks the card.

Art helps city celebrate 150 years in 2020

MS TUPELO — A city in northeast Mississippi made a bold statement to celebrate its 150th anniversary.

An art piece consisting of three big red numbers — 1, 5 and 0 — was installed at a park near City Hall in downtown Tupelo. Each is 12 feet tall.

Tupelo was incorporated on July 20, 1870. The city is planning a sesquicentennial celebration on July 20, 2020.

Tupelo Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Neal McCoy said the big numbers will remain in the park through December 2020 before moving to the permanent location at the Oren Dunn City Museum.
‘Cats’ set to lose at least $70 million

Universal Pictures is bracing to lose at least $70 million after its critically panned movie “Cats” bombed over the holidays, according to a person close to the project.

“Cats” has drawn just $38.3 million in total box office business, according to Box Office Mojo—a disaster for a big holiday movie based on the Andrew Lloyd Webber hit musical.

The studio expects domestic box office sales to reach at least $30 million, after production costs of about $100 million and a few million more in marketing costs, according to estimates from those close to the project. Those were not authorized to comment.

Such losses are a painful reminder of the risky film business and further evidence of the challenges studios face drawing audiences to theaters, even for favorites with such stars as Taylor Swift, Jennifer Hudson and Idris Elba.

Even though this year has set new records for individual movies, it has also delivered other major flops, including STX Entertainment’s “Playmobil: The Movie” and Warner Bros.’ “The Grounds.”

However, unlike other misfires from 2019 such as Fox’s X-Men saga “Dark Phoenix” or Paramount’s “Terminator: Dark Fate,” “Cats” isn’t tied to a larger franchise that would be the basis for future sequels and spinoffs.

After “Cats” was released on Dec. 20, executives expressed hope that the movie would eventually tap into its target audience during the holidays.

“The story isn’t necessarily over with this film. ‘Cats’ becomes self-distributing domestically,” said Jim Orr, president of domestic distribution at Universal Pictures. “But clearly our distribution group doesn’t necessarily rush out on opening weekends.”

Universal would not rank among Hollywood’s biggest write-offs, which include a $200 million hit taken by Disney in 2012 for the movie “John Carter.”

One rival executive privately pointed to Universal Pictures’ release strategy, such as its choice of trailers that became a laughingstock on social media. A person close to the project said Universal Pictures’ streaming service, AT&T Inc.’s WarnerMedia, is due in coming months.

Netflix still relied on some Disney sequels to fill out its lineup in 2019. In fact, “Incredibles 2,” the animated movie from Disney’s Pixar unit, was Netflix’s third-most-popular new film for the year.

The data is both revealing and limited. Netflix only publicly verified the lists, which Netflix based on viewership in the first 28 days after a film was released. The numbers count people who watched at least two minutes of a program, and Netflix relied on projections to calculate the popularity of shows and movies that were just released in December.

“Cats” was released Dec. 20, and so little data over the years, the lists offer some rare insight into what works on the service.

Netflix’s original movies and shows dominated across every category in both the U.S. and abroad. “Murder Mystery,” which stars Adam Sandler and Jennifer Aniston, was the No. 1 program in nine countries, including Australia and Colombia.

More ‘Surviving’ to come

This time, R. Kelly will be in jail when docuseries airs

By MARK KENNEDY
Associated Press

Few TV documentary series can boast having a more powerful real-world impact than “Surviving R. Kelly.”

Though allegations of sexual abuse against minors followed R&B superstar R. Kelly for years, it was a six-part series aired by Lifetime last January featuring testimonials by alleged survivors that sparked new attention from authorities.

A year later, Lifetime is readying a follow-up series, “Surviving R. Kelly Part II: The Reckoning,” with one major difference: this time, R. Kelly will be behind bars when it airs.

Brie Miranda Bryant, senior vice president of unscripted development at Lifetime, said the new series takes a wider and deeper look at some of the issues the first one raised. The first had 54 interviews; the follow-up has almost 70.

“It’s not really about R. Kelly. It’s about sexual violence against women in general and how we change that dialogue,” she said.

Surviving R. Kelly Part II: The Reckoning will premiere Jan. 2 statewide on Lifetime. The six-hour series will run for two hours a night for three consecutive nights.

The new series includes interviews with two alleged survivors who haven’t spoken publicly before and includes Tiffany Hawkins, the first alleged survivor who filed sexual charges. Other new voices include music executive Damon Dash, Beyoncé’s father Mathew Knowles, lawyer Gloria Allred and Illinois prosecutor Kimberly Forx.

One new voice is Jimmy Maynes, a veteran artist manager and former Jive Record executive who represents artists including Salt-N-Pepa.

That groundbreaking hip-hop group toured with R. Kelly and Maynes was initially approached by the documentary makers about what he witnessed on the road.

“I had not physically seen R. Kelly with any underage children, however I did feel like there was a high probability that things had been going on behind closed doors that I would not have approved of,” Maynes said.

While not a direct witness, Maynes does talk about being asked by Jive Records in 2002 to go to Chicago and buy up all the VHS and DVDs he could find that allegedly showed R. Kelly engaging in sexual acts with an underage girl. He said he later confronted the superstar, who claimed the man in the video was his twin brother. He has no twin.

Maynes also offers a critical look at the music industry, which he argues creates a culture that gives superstars like R. Kelly unquestioned authority. He hopes the music industry learns to reform itself and not surround its stars with enablers.

“R. Kelly was responsible for keeping the lights on at the label. There’s a particular amount of manipulation that goes with that territory. So I think the music industry should hold some responsibility,” he said.

An estimated 26 million people saw all or some of the original Lifetime documentary series that brought together dozens of people who accused the singer of sexual misconduct and kidnapping.

The series faced backlash and finger-pointing. Some blamed the music industry. Some blamed the media and law enforcement for ignoring the alleged conduct because the victims were black women. Some blamed the parents of the alleged victims for not doing enough.

“It just felt like a ton of finger-pointing without real answers. We wanted to be able to answer those questions as best as possible,” Bryant said.

Kelly, 52, is currently in jail, scheduled to stand trial in Cook County in September, then in federal court in Chicago in April and again in federal court in New York in February.

Kelly has denied all the allegations related to sexual assault with minors, but the #MeTooRKelly movement has damaged his financial stability. He did himself few favors when he portrayed himself as a victim in a combative interview with Gayle King in which he poured out his heart and yelled into the camera.

Bryant said the indictments against R. Kelly were never the goal of the series. She said some alleged survivors want restorative justice, some want apologies. “Justice looks like a lot of different things for a lot of people,” she said.

Lifetime plans a follow-up series to its 2019 six-part series on R. Kelly, showing a Chicago courthouse June 6. The new series is “Surviving R. Kelly Part II: The Reckoning.”

‘Murder Mystery,’ ‘Stranger Things’ most popular on Netflix in 2019

Bloomberg

Netflix, touting the success of its original programming, said the most popular releases on its streaming service in 2019 were things it produced: the comedy movie “Murder Mystery” and the third season of its 1980s sci-fi show “Stranger Things.”

The company on Monday disclosed lists of its top 10 programs in 35 countries, offering the most expansive report to date of what is being watched on the world’s most popular online TV service.

Netflix’s “6 Underground,” the Michael Bay-directed action movie and its monster-hunting fantasy “The Witcher” also drew large U.S. audiences.

Netflix, which once filled its service with shows and movies from other studios, is now relying more than ever on its own programming to keep viewers loyal.

Partners such as Walt Disney Co. are taking back their properties to focus on their own streaming services. Disney’s platform launched in November, and ones from Comcast Corp.’s NBCUniversal and 21st Century Fox are due in coming months.

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PERTH, Australia — Wildfires burning across Australia’s two most populous states on Tuesday trapped residents of a seaside town in apocalyptic conditions, destroyed many properties and caused at least two fatalities.

About 12.35 million acres of land have burned nationwide during the wildfire crisis, with 12 people confirmed dead and more than 1,000 homes destroyed.

The annual Australian fire season, which peaks during the Southern Hemisphere summer, started early after an unusually warm and dry winter. Record-breaking heat and windy conditions triggered wildfires in New South Wales and Queensland states in September.

In the southeastern town of Mallacoota in Victoria state, around 4,000 residents fled toward the waterside as winds pushed an emergency-level wildfire toward their homes. The town was shrouded in darkness from the smoke before turning an unnerving shade of bright red.

Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews said there were plans to evacuate the trapped people by sea. There also were grave fears for four people missing. “We can’t confirm their whereabouts,” Andrews told reporters Tuesday. Andrews has requested assistance from 70 firefighters from the United States and Canada.

Police in New South Wales said Tuesday that two men, believed to be father and son, died in a house in the wildfire-ravaged southeast town of Cobargo, while there are fears for another man missing. On Monday, a firefighter was killed when extreme winds flipped his truck. Samuel McPaul, 28, was the third volunteer firefighter in New South Wales to have died in the past two weeks. He was an expectant father.

WARSAW, Poland — The U.S., German and Israeli ambassadors in Warsaw weighed in Monday against claims by Russian President Vladimir Putin that Poland bears part of the blame for the outbreak of World War II.

“Dear President Putin, Hitler and Stalin collaborated to start WWII. That is a fact. Poland was a victim of this horrible conflict,” Ambassador Georgette Mosbacher said on Twitter in English and Polish.

The Russian Embassy countered with a tweet saying, “Dear Ambassador, do you really think that you know about history any more than you do about diplomacy?”

World War II began on Sept. 1, 1939, when Nazi German troops invaded Poland. Two weeks later, the Soviet Red Army also attacked embattled Poland from the east, in what Poles still refer to as a “stab in the back.” Days earlier, Germany and Russia had signed a pact with a secret protocol to carve up Poland and the Baltic states between themselves. Some 6 million Poles lost their lives during the whole of WWII.

Recently, Putin has argued that collusion between Western powers and Adolf Hitler paved the way for World War II. He also cast Poland as an anti-Semitic country that welcomed Hitler’s plans to destroy Europe’s Jews.

German Ambassador Rolf Nikel and Israeli Ambassador Alexander Ben Zvi took a stand Monday to blame the war’s outbreak on the August 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact.

Polish historian Mariusz Wolos told the Onet portal that Putin is aiming at “creating discord between Poland and the U.S. and the international Jewish diaspora.” He said Putin is trying to erase Stalin’s alliance with Hitler from history.

British historian Roger Moorehouse tweeted to say that Putin’s words “provoked a much better popular understanding of the pact’s true nefarious nature and significance.”

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**Off Duty? Amuse Yourself**

Concerts, events, TV, movies, music, video games, celebrity antics...

Get entertained with...
**Eugene Sheffer Crossword**

**ACROSS**
1. Grazing land
4. Danson of “Cheers”
7. “Breaking Bad” actress Anna
8. Bit of gossip
10. James Bond portrayer Daniel
11. Martini garnishes
13. Perfume variety
16. Ambulance initials
17. Grating
18. Actor McShane
19. Bloke
20. Incite
21. Gulf War missiles
23. Binge
25. Stadium cheers
26. Songs for one
27. Equal (Pref.)
28. Very small
30. Historic time
33. Roy Orbison hit
36. “Queen of Soul” Franklin
37. Alpha’s opposite
38. In progress
39. Rowboat needs
40. Connections
41. Parched
19. Gloomy guy
20. Swiss canton
21. Malta’s sister
22. “Quantum Healing” author Deepak
23. Electronics giant
24. Flooring material
25. Carnival city
26. Attack
28. Rockies range
29. Group character
30. Nail smoother
31. Alger’s “before”
32. Santa — winds
33. Mortgage again, for short
35. Sharif of
37. “Funny Girl”

**DOWN**
1. Walkiki wingdings
2. Oklahoma city
3. Tickled off
4. Dutch bloom
5. Poet Dickinson
6. Peace symbol
7. Metric measure
8. Perch
9. Go to bed
10. Middling grade
12. Play place
14. Catches some rays
15. Away from WSW

**Answer to Previous Puzzle**
SPICEZ MEC ZULU
LOG COX JESUS
AURA TRUMPET
TRUSTY LENDER
LAT UNO
SHEEP TRUCKER
SUM AOL ASA
TRANCY SKYPE
RUE COO
STORM TRUDEAU
TRUE BLUE ISIS
EATS UTA AARP
MYST GUM KISS

**CRYPTOQUIP**

```
FJLRWUX KLWXRSLY RXTJLSF
S BX S ONM RXI NIUC
JTNRMTL SBTNMAB
JBXTKXWRFSF: JTLFRTWJISWNI
```

Yesterday’s Cryptquip: IF SICK FOLKS RECEIVE TREATMENT INSTRUCTIONS FROM DOCTORS, YOU MIGHT SAY THEY ARE ILL-ADVISED.

Today’s Cryptquip Clue: R equals C
**Eugene Sheffer Crossword**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Across</th>
<th>Down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Papa’s mate</td>
<td>1. Poile address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Designer</td>
<td>2. La Scala solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claihorne</td>
<td>3. Niger’s neighbor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Not many</td>
<td>4. Refrain (from)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Bedouin</td>
<td>5. On the up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Inventor Whitney</td>
<td>6. —de-France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Has a bug</td>
<td>8. Limber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Division word</td>
<td>10. Superlative suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Rum cocktail</td>
<td>11. One of the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. “Damn Yankees” vamp</td>
<td>5. Five’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Wife of Louis XVI</td>
<td>19. Picnic crasher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Unspoken</td>
<td>1. Promote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Menagerie</td>
<td>1. Promote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Flair</td>
<td>3. Barnum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Heavy weight</td>
<td>8. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Kill wearer</td>
<td>7. Guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. R-V link</td>
<td>6. Intensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>35. Harry Potter pal</td>
<td>5. Intensive</td>
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<td>36. Green sauce</td>
<td>4. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Shadowy outline</td>
<td>3. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Antelope’s playmate</td>
<td>2. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Art props</td>
<td>1. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Olympian queen</td>
<td>1. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. Savings plan acronym</td>
<td>1. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. With (Fr.)</td>
<td>1. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50. Gorbod’s “Prince —”</td>
<td>1. Intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51. Poile address</td>
<td>1. Intensive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I-2**

**CRYPTOQUIP**

M D N Y F G D H V H E H X D P Y J H I U

R I V R P G , H L R G S E C P H I U


H I - X I R N X - F R F G .

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: SPECIAL MEDICATED CARPETS THAT YOU CAN ONLY PROCURE THROUGH PHARMACISTS: PRESCRIPTION RUGS.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: M equals B
Why electric cars still don’t live up to the hype

BY DOYLE MC MANUS
Los Angeles Times

With a new decade starting shortly, it’s time for conscientious columnists to undergo their self-administered decennial performance review. I’ll start — and try to keep it focused.

For the past 10 years, I’ve wagered a quixotic counteroffensive against the glib boosterism, raining skepticism on the vehicles’ potential to cure climate change, mass transit and the clean, green wave of the transportation future. More than a few people (my Tesla-owner friends very much included) have questioned this fixation, and I freely admit it’s an odd one. I just figured that someone in another increasingly credulous press had to sort through the cloud of the industry’s political rhetoric and sheer commercial hype surrounding this subject, and it might as well be me.

Mass adoption of electric cars is not going to occur unless they can do everything gas-powered vehicles can do — including the ability to get from one end of Los Angeles County to the other without refueling, and refusing easily — at a comparable total cost of ownership. Otherwise, electric cars are unlikely to be a successful product for upper-income folks. And government subsidies for them will be a regressive transfer of social resources in return for little climate change benefit.

Tesla’s Model 3 is the nearest thing to a mass-market electric car on the market, with 111,000 sold in the first nine months of 2019. Owners say it’s still the same: getting the total cost of owning an EV down to that of a gas equivalent. There’s uncertainty about key variables such as how much battery costs will fall and the global supply of rare-earth elements.

President Donald Trump recently wrote that EV-gas cost parity may happen “within a decade.” Honda CEO Takahiro Hachigo told Automotive News Europe, “I don’t believe there will be a dramatic increase in demand for battery vehicles, and I believe in 20 years.”

A mid-2018 report by JPMorgan Asset Management noted that the median global forecast for EVs on the road worldwide by 2030, which would be less than 10% of the total. “I’m talking about less than 15% of the global population,” the report’s author, Michael Cembalest, added.

So, let’s reconvene in 10 years to see who wins that wager, and to assess the true costs and benefits of the bet that big government and big business have placed on the electric car as a substitute for oil dependency in the United States — less than one-half of 1% of the total. Households earning $100,000 or more per year own two-thirds of all EVs, and are benefiting from a $7,500 federal tax credit. Globally, electric-vehicle adoption is also modest. There are 85 million, and 37-year-old gay mayor of a small city? Inconceivable, I thought. Iowa voters may shortly prove me wrong.

I did see Elizabeth Warren coming. Her focus on plans to make the economy work better for the middle class was effective. I wrote. Then Warren stumbled on health care. When she belatedly offered a plan, it proposed a government-run health insurance system, but only after a long transition period. That doesn’t sound smart, I wrote. It’s not clear that voters agree.

To be fair, I did get some things right. I figured out that the controversies over Biden’s Hyde Amendment were just questions for his about his he’ll be on Inauguration Day; is he up to the job? I wrote. And I was right: Democratic voters aren’t Bernie Sanders-style socialists, and that the progressive “litmus test” that dominates the primary will fail. “Medicare for All,” the Green New Deal and abolishing the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency weren’t a sure path to winning primaries.

And I got some things right on the other big events of 2019: my prediction that the impeachment of President Donald Trump. I wrote last February that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi was backing off, but her Democrats were heading in that direction. “Call this phase ‘pre-impeachment,’” I wrote. “I was wrong and she was right, but I thought any US Congress would do whatever they wanted, and they did.”

They were mostly just waiting for an impasse. The White House did them in, as it did, in the form of Trump’s self-incriminating telephone call with the president of Ukraine, readers should not have been surprised that the Democrats moved as quickly as they did.

It remains to be seen the likely verdict of an impeachment trial in the Senate. With 53 Republicans on the jury, Trump is in little danger of conviction. The toughest question is what impact impeachment will have on the presidential election. Trump says he thinks it will help him. I wrote that it could help the Democrats instead.

David Axelrod, President Barack Obama’s former adviser, thinks it won’t have much impact — that by November, voters will have largely forgotten a trial that happened in January. He’s probably right.

Campaign reporting is at its best when we investigate the candidates, their histories and their proposals, and when we talk to voters to learn what they think. We’re at our worst when we make forecasts without warning how fallible we are. In 2020, I hope you’ll return to this column for the reporting, the analysis and the occasional insight. Just don’t ask me who’s going to win.

By Doyle McManus is a Washington columnist for the Los Angeles Times and director of the journalism program at Georgetown University.

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<th>AP ranking</th>
<th>Record</th>
<th>Wins by double digit margins</th>
<th>Losses by double digit margins</th>
<th>AP average</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>29-2</td>
<td>26-0</td>
<td>3-2</td>
<td>2.64</td>
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<tr>
<td>Florida (6)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25-7</td>
<td>22-0</td>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>2.16</td>
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<td>23-9</td>
<td>20-2</td>
<td>3-7</td>
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<td>22-10</td>
<td>19-3</td>
<td>3-7</td>
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<td>18-1</td>
<td>3-11</td>
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<td>20-13</td>
<td>17-2</td>
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<td>13-6</td>
<td>3-18</td>
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<td>0-23</td>
<td>3-30</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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<td>3-30</td>
<td>0-24</td>
<td>3-31</td>
<td>1.06</td>
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<td>Stephen F. Austin (11-1)</td>
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<td>2-31</td>
<td>0-25</td>
<td>3-32</td>
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<td>1-32</td>
<td>0-26</td>
<td>3-33</td>
<td>0.98</td>
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</table>

**Notes:**
- One point for a 25th-place vote and last place.
- Ties are determined by most points available at the end of Dec. 29.
- The top 25 teams in The Associated Press women’s basketball poll are determined by AP Sports Editors on the basis of games played through Dec. 29.
- The Associated Press men’s basketball poll is released on Monday and does not reflect the vote of The Associated Press women’s basketball poll.

**Related articles:**
- Associated Press
- VILLANOVA, Pa. — Villanova coach Jay Wright led his team to a 68-62 victory over Xavier on Monday night in the Big East Conference opener for both teams.
- Clutch Gillespie lifts Villanova past Xavier
- That’s what the Big East is all about: A Villanova team that gets the job done in every way, night or day.
Jaguars keep Marrone, Caldwell despite losses

By Mark Long
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The Jacksonville Jaguars are retaining coach Doug Marrone and general manager Dave Caldwell despite consecutive losing seasons.

Owner Shad Khan made the announcement Tuesday after “positive meetings” with Marrone, Caldwell, their staffs and several players.

“This is not the time to consider an overhaul of our organization,” Khan said.

Marrone and Caldwell have two years remaining on their contracts, and Khan made it clear that expectations are high for 2020.

Jacksonville has two first-round draft picks, Nos. 9 and 20 overall, to help rebuild a roster that lacks talent and depth. Rookies Gardner Minshew, Josh Allen and Jawaan Taylor are a few of the building blocks in place for Marrone and Caldwell moving forward.

But there are plenty of holes, especially if the Jaguars part ways with several expensively overpaid veterans to create salary cap space.

Khan fired top executive Tom Coughlin two weeks ago, identifying the old-school coach’s overbearing ways as the main problem. Coughlin’s heavy-handed approach upset players, with cornerback Jalen Ramsey forcing his trade to the Los Angeles Rams, as well as some assistants.

Coughlin had difficulty making the transition from the sideline to the front office.

Coughlin’s position as executive vice president of football operations will not be filled. Marrone and Caldwell will report directly to Khan.

“I want to see what we produce under a new organizational structure in 2020,” Khan said. “Goals have been established. Accountability will be paramount.”

Khan expressed his disappointment with the team’s 6-10 season. Jacksonville was 4-4 and in the hunt in the AFC South before losing five straight and falling out of playoff contention. The Jags responded by losing all five by at least 17 points.

Marrone is 23-28 in three seasons, including 11-21 following a trip to the 2017 AFC title game. Marrone has expressed his frustration with the roster, much of which Coughlin put together, but knows there are enough pieces in place to be more competitive. Jacksonville lost seven games by double digits this season.

The slide began in the offseason. The Jaguars had to cut several good players, including defensive tackle Malik Jackson and safety Tashaun Gipson, after botching the quarterback position again. Caldwell chose Blake Bortles with the third overall pick in the 2014 draft, and even though the quarterback showed more struggles than strides, Caldwell and Coughlin gave him a three-year extension worth $54 million.

Jacksonville released Bortles in March, leaving the team with a $16.5 million dead-money hit on the 2019 salary cap, and signed former Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles to a four-year, $88 million deal.

Foles broke his left collarbone in the opener, missed eight games and was benched in his third game back. Minshew was one of several bright spots, going 6-6 in 12 starts and becoming just the 14th rookie in NFL history — and first drafted after the fourth round — to throw at least 20 touchdowns passes.

But the Jaguars have significant holes at tight end, receiver, linebacker, safety and defensive tackle.

---

Top Scores for Week 17

**56** gbpack Europe

**55** Songtanpack Pacific

**54** jeanfontenot United States

**52** Lek-cellent Pacific

**51** cowboy48 United States

**49** KINGKAPP Pacific

**47** syxela United States

**45** Tnewel199 Europe

**44** PurplePeopleEaters Pacific

**43** Park Avenue Europe

---

Top 10 Overall Scores

**1428** gbpack Europe

**1417** PurplePeopleEaters Pacific

**1395** Park Avenue Europe

**1393** jeanfontenot United States

**1387** KILRDRIVR United States

**1386** 820th Horseman Middle East

**1382** armydude1212 Pacific

**1371** cowboy48 United States

**1369** gobrownies43 Europe

**1368** scober75 United States

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Thank you for playing!
Malkin’s 2 goals spark Penguins’ rout of Senators

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Evgeni Malkin’s goal in the first minute of the second period set the tone for the Penguins in their 5-2 win over the Ottawa Senators on Monday night at the United Center.

Senators coach Guy Boucher was not happy with the score.

“I thought we played well,” Boucher said. “Our game was good. Malkin just kind of ate up too much.”

The Penguins have won five straight games and are in second place in the Metropolitan Division.

Malkin scored twice and teammate Jake Guentzel scored once for the Penguins.

“Mark was the first player out of the locker room to congratulate him,” Malkin said. “He’s been a huge contribution.”

Senators coach Guy Boucher did not know Malkin had scored two goals.

“I thought we played well,” Boucher said. “The game was good. Malkin just kind of ate up too much.”

The Penguins have won five straight games and are in second place in the Metropolitan Division.

Malkin opened the scoring in the first minute of the second period and added his second goal of the game in the third.

“I was just trying to get the puck out of the corner and make a play,” Malkin said. “I thought we played well. We’re in second place in the Metropolitan Division.”

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The Penguins have won five straight games and are in second place in the Metropolitan Division.
Leonard led the way in the NBA with his big play

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

He was the Fun Guy. The board man who got paid. He overcame injury to win his rightful place as one of the very best basketball players on the planet. He conquered the NBA world for a second time, bringing a championship to Canada. And then he joined the Los Angeles Clippers, ready to start anew.

“What do it, baby?”

For Kawhi Leonard in 2019, there finally is an answer to his infamous question: He did everything, without talking much.

Leonard is The Associated Press’ male athlete of the year for 2019, comfortably winning a vote by AP member sports editors and AP beat writers. He becomes the fifth NBA player to win the award, joining Larry Bird (1986), three-time recipient Michael Jordan (1991 through 1993), three-time recipient LeBron James (2013, 2016, 2018) and Stephen Curry (2015). The award has been made annually since 1931, and Simone Biles was announced Thursday as the women’s recipient for 2019.

Leonard was the NBA Finals MVP for the second time, leading Toronto to its first championship — five years after he first smudged his fingerprints on both trophies with the San Antonio Spurs. He wound up leaving the franchise into one of the top teams in the league.

“The ride was fun,” Leonard said earlier this month on his return trip to Toronto, summing up his year with the Raptors. “I had a great time.”

By now, it’s no secret that Leonard is a man of few words.

He is not a man of few accomplishments.

He received more than twice as many points in the balloting as any of the other 18 vote-getters. Baltimore Ravens quarterback Lamar Jackson was second, followed by Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes, tennis star Rafael Nadal and reigning NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo of Milwaukee.

“Kawhi’s pretty steady,” said San Antonio coach Gregg Popovich. Leonard’s former coach with the Spurs. “He’s not a big talker. He doesn’t try to find the limelight or anything like that. He’s just a good guy who wanted to be good.”

Somewhere along the way, he became great.

Leonard was the best player in last season’s playoffs, after a regular season where he missed 22 games mostly because of what has become known as “load management” — the fancy term used on nights when he would sit out to rest. Leonard missed most of the 2017-18 season with the Spurs because of a complicated leg issue, and the NBA said last month that he is still dealing with “an ongoing injury to the patella tendon in his left knee.”

He was limping at times in the playoffs, but it didn’t matter. He averaged 30.5 points and 9.1 rebounds in the postseason, his 732 points in last year’s playoffs ranking as the third-most in any NBA playoff year. In the biggest times, he came up the biggest — 15 points in the fourth quarter to carry Toronto past Milwaukee in the series-turning Game 5 of the Eastern Conference finals, and 17 points in the fourth quarter of Game 4 of the NBA Finals against Golden State to put the Raptors on the cusp of the title.

And, of course, he made The Shot: the four-bounce-off-the-rim, at-the-buzzer jump shot from the corner to beat Philadelphia in Game 7 of the second round.

“Without a doubt,” Raptors coach Nick Nurse mused during the playoff run, “the best thing about this thing is that somehow I wound up on the sideline getting to watch this guy play up close.”

Leonard performed at that lofty level even while dealing with a major distraction. During the NBA Finals, it was revealed that Leonard filed a federal lawsuit against Nike and claimed the footwear and apparel giant was blocking him from using a logo that he believes he owns.

“There’s a lot of guys that are like, ‘Look, I’m going to find a way to win and in a seven-game series I’m going to get the best of you in the end,’” said Miami’s Jimmy Butler, who was with Philadelphia last season and saw up-close what makes Leonard tick. “But he’s definitely up there. Your respect just grows. Push, pull, whatever he’s got to do. He’s going to find a way.”

During the playoffs, Leonard’s “I’m a fun guy” quote that he offered on his arrival in Toronto became a meme and a marketing slogan. So did his “Board man gets paid” line. And after the Raptors won the title, Serge Ibaka’s video of Leonard went viral — they were in the back of a car, on the way to the parade, and Ibaka teed him up for the next unforgettable saying.

“Fun Guy, what’s up baby?” Ibaka asked.

The answer was classic Leonard. Short, sweet, to the point.

“I’m playing to have fun and try to be the best player I can be,” Leonard said. “I’m happy with myself and what I have done in my career and I’m just going to keep on from there. It’s not about me being famous or wanting to have more fame than those guys. It’s about me playing basketball and having fun on the floor.”

Leonard left the Raptors in the summer for the Los Angeles Clippers, returning to his native Southern California and turning the franchise into one of the top teams in the league.

## MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

### Voting totals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athlete</th>
<th>Pts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kawhi Leonard</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Mahomes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael Nadal</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giannis Antetokounmpo</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tom Brady</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks Kępka</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zion Williamson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyle Busch</td>
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<td>Caeleb Dressel</td>
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<td>Pieter-Steph du Toit</td>
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<td>Stephen Strasburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mike Trout</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Novak Djokovic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis Hamilton</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory McIlroy</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mohamed Salah</td>
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</table>

Toronto Raptors forward Kawhi Leonard, center, celebrates his game-winning basket as time expired at the end of an NBA Eastern Conference semifinal basketball game against the Philadelphia 76ers.

Leonard helped the Raptors win the NBA title, his second championship.

### Keev Kawn Leonard

*On winning the NBA title with the Toronto Raptors, then signing with the Clippers*

“It’s not about me being famous or wanting to have more fame than those guys. It’s about me playing basketball and having fun on the floor.”

On winning the NBA title with the Toronto Raptors, then signing with the Clippers...
Greatest gymnast — it’s a Simone thing

By Will Graves
Associated Press

They’re called “Simone Things,” a catchall phrase for the casual ease with which Simone Biles seems to soar through her sport and her life.

The irony, of course, is that there’s nothing casual or easy about it. The greatest gymnast of all time and 2019 Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year only makes it seem that way.

Those jaw-dropping routines that are rewriting her sport’s code of points and redesigning what can be done on the competition floor? Borne from a mix of natural talent, hard work and a splash of ego.

The 25 world championship medals, the most by any gymnast ever? The result of a promise the 22-year-old made to herself when she returned to competition in 2017 after taking time off following her golden run at the 2016 Olympics.

The stoicism and grace she has shown in becoming an advocate for survivors — herself included — and an agent for change in the wake of the Larry Nassar sexual abuse scandal that’s shaken USA Gymnastics to its core? The byproduct of a conscious decision to embrace the immense clout she has become synonymous with her sport’s royalty.

It can lead to a bit of a balance act. In some ways, she’s still the kid from Texas who just wants to hang out with her boyfriend and her dog and go to the grocery store without being bothered. In other ways, she’s trying to be respectful of the world she’s built.

She said. “I’m definitely going to soak in the moment and enjoy it and be thankful. I feel like this is the beginning of a whole new chapter in my life.”

The attention figures to only grow in the run-up to Tokyo, where she will attempt to become the first female gymnast in more than half a century to repeat as Olympic champion. Her smiling face serves as the exclamation point at the end of every television promo for the Summer Games.

Take the GOAT thing. It’s a title she embraces — Biles wore a goat-themed leotard during training at the national championships in August — but also takes with a grain of salt, determined to stay grounded even as the hype around her grows.

Biles has become aware over the last three years that her word and action carries greater weight than she ever imagined. Her most impactful moment of 2019 might not have come during a meet but sitting for an interview on the eve of winning her record sixth national title, when she fought back tears while talking about how USA Gymnastics, the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee and the FBI failed to protect athletes during an investigation into Nassar’s abusive behavior.

Above: Simone Biles practices on the vault for the senior women’s competition at the 2019 U.S. Gymnastics Championships in Kansas City, Mo. Below: She won five gold medals at the Gymnastics World Championships this year in Stuttgart, Germany. She is the first gymnast to win the Associated Press Female Athlete of the Year award twice and the first to win it in a non-Olympic year.

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<tr>
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<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Rapinoe</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mikaela Shiffrin</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>Elena Delle Donne</td>
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<td>Ash Barty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sifan Hassan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabrina Ionescu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jin-Young Ko</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda Nunes</td>
<td>1</td>
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The moment went viral, as most things surrounding her do. “I’m starting to realize it’s not just the gymnast anymore,” Biles said, using the term for her sport’s dedicated fans. “It’s an overall thing. It’s weird to get that kind of attention, but at the end of the day, I feel gymnastics has been overlooked in non-Olympic years. Yeah, it puts pressure on me. But I’m not trying to think about all the attention from the outside world.”

The attention figures to only grow in the run-up to Tokyo, where she will attempt to become the first female gymnast in more than half a century to repeat as Olympic champion. Her smiling face serves as the exclamation point at the end of every television promo for the Summer Games.

Let it be known: The smile is real. That might not have always been the case, but is now. Heading into the final months of a singular career, she is trying to revel in the journey while anxiously awaiting what’s next. Add it to the list of Simone Things.

“I feel like this is the beginning of my life and I don’t want gymnastics to be my whole entire life,” she said. “I’m definitely going to soak in the moment and enjoy it so 10 years from now I can look back and say I had the time of my life out there … rather than ‘I was good, but I was miserable.’"
Karma had hand in feel-good moments

BY JIM LITKE
Associated Press

Karma had a career year in 2019. She draped a green jacket on Tiger Woods, handed soccer's World Cup to a touch-as-nails U.S. Women's National Team, shipped the NBA's Larry O'Brien Trophy to a cool-as-a-cucumber他们-come rookie coach and players from the Great White North, righted a wrong that became a right in the right way, and wrote him off, Woods claimed his fifth green jacket in April.

"It's overwhelming, just because of what we've done," she said. "It's surreal." - the sordid, pain-riddled, decaying in them.

Through it all, Woods some-what kept nurturing his love for golf. And eventually, he found his hand in feel-good moments.

Angels center fielder Mike Trout gestures toward a photo of Tyler Skaggs in center field prior to a game against the Detroit Tigers, in Anaheim, Calif., on July 29. Skaggs passed away on July 1. "We're always going to be thinking about him," Trout said.

MARK J. TERRILL

Woods' win at Augusta was an uplifting escape

BY EDDIE PELLS
Associated Press

A green jacket. A heart-melting embrace. A stirring return to the top of golf by one of the sport's all-time greats.

In choosing Tiger Woods' victory at the Masters as The Associated Press sports story of the year, voters went with the uplifting escape of a great comeback over options that were as much about sports as the issues that enveloped them in 2019: politics, money and the way sports have their dad win a major championship (1997), and 2016 or 2017, and at the end of 17, he conceded his back was so bad that his days of competitive golf might be behind him.

There were four risky back surgeries. Woods also required a good deal of inner healing after a mortifying DUI arrest in 2017 that exposed his reliance on painkillers.

Through it all, Woods some-what kept nurturing his love for golf. And eventually, he found his game again. He climbed his way back to the top. He had close calls at two majors in 2018 — the British Open and PGA Championship — and then won the season-end- ing Tour Championship, as good a sign as any that, at 43, he could take on the best and win.

Regular tournaments are not the majors, though, and no major is the Masters.

It was on the hallowed grounds of Augusta National where Woods set the marker. He blew away the field by 12 strokes in 1997 to win the first of his five green jackets and 15 major titles.

On that day, Woods came off the 18th green and wrapped himself in a warm embrace with his father, Earl, whose death in 2006 left an undeniable void in the player's life.

Although there had been a handful of close calls between his U.S. Open victory in 2008 and his No. 1 ranking, the 22-year-old's career was in tatters after being arrested for driving under the influence in early 2017.

In the first heat of victory in April — also fit into that category.

His downfall began in the wee hours of the day after Thanksgiving in 2009, when he ran over a fire hydrant outside his house in Florida, triggering an avalanche of bad luck and the breakup of his marriage and play into the near-destruction of his career.

Part 2 was the injuries. Woods came close but did not return to his dominant form after his return to golf following his breakup with his wife. As time went on, his physical condition deteriorated. He didn't play in 2016 or 2017, and at the end of 17, he conceded his back was so bad that his days of competitive golf might be behind him.

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Regular tournaments are not the majors, though, and no major is the Masters.
Florida running back Lamical Perine, right, had 181 total offensive yards with two rushing touchdowns and a touchdown catch in a 36-28 defeat of Virginia in Monday’s Orange Bowl in Miami Gardens, Fla.

**Perine powers No. 6 Florida**

Senior RB has 3 TDs in Orange Bowl defeat of Virginia

**BY STEVEN WINE**

**Associated Press**

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Lamical Perine scored on a 61-yard run in the opening minute and didn’t stop until he climbed onto a platform for the postgame ceremony to receive the Orange Bowl’s most valuable player trophy.

Perine totaled 181 yards rushing and receiving with three touchdowns Monday to help No. 6 Florida beat Virginia 36-28. The win means the Gators (11-2) will likely finish in the Top 10 in consensus season polls for the first time since 2008-09. Second-year coach Dan Mullen credited Perine and the rest of the senior class with leading the resurgence.

“They restored the Gator standards and are building what we want to build,” said Mullen, who improved to 21-5 at Florida.

Perine carried 13 times for a career-high 138 yards rushing at the end of a so-so senior season. He came into the game with only 538 yards rushing this year in the Gators’ pass-oriented offense.

“He’s one of the top running backs in the SEC,” Mullen said. “People say, ‘The stats say this, the stats say that.’ But every time we needed a big run this season, he came up with it.”

Perine was too quick and speedy for the Cavaliers, as his 65-yard touchdown run in the third quarter showed. He also scored on a 16-yard touchdown pass from Kyle Trask.

The Cavaliers (9-3) lost their final two games but still posted their highest win total since 2006.

Trask capped a storybook ju-

nior season by throwing for 305 yards. He was lightly recruited and in late September became a starter for the first time since the ninth grade.

“This game is huge for this program,” Trask said. “We just continued to grind every single week, and here we are winning the Orange Bowl. It’s pretty incredible.”

Florida totaled 549 yards, in-

cluding a season-high 244 rushing, and didn’t punt until midway through the third quarter. The Gators exposed the weaknesses in a Virginia defense that allowed more than 23 points per game and gave up 62 to Clemson in an Atlantic Coast Conference title game loss.

“Tonight we faced a team that they decided they were going to stop the pass and drop a lot of guys into coverage,” Mullen said. “We were able to take what they were giving us.”

The Cavaliers’ offense tried valiantly to keep up. Senior Bryce Perkins threw for 323 yards and four scores in the final game of his career. Closing it out

Tanner Cowley’s 52-yard catch-

and-run led to a Cavaliers touch-

down that cut their deficit to 27-21 early in the fourth quarter. The Gators answered with a touch-

down set up by Perine’s 23-yard run to the 1. Virginia drove 75 yards for a touchdown with 38 seconds left, but Florida recovered the ensu-

ing onside kick.

“We were a few plays short,” Perine said. Cavaliers coach Bronco Menden-

hall said.

**Bowl roundup**

Cardinals rally past Bulldogs

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Micale Cunningham threw for 279 yards and two touchdowns and ran for 81 more, and Louisville capped coach Scott Satterfield’s debut season by beating Mississippi State in the Music City Bowl.

The Cardinals (8-5) rallied from a 14-point deficit by scor-

ing 17 straight points to finish their season 2-10. Louisville also final-

ly beat Mississippi State on the field for the first time since 2013 and on the third time since the end of World War II. Instead, the Bull-

dogs go home having lost a bowl game in each of coach Joe Moor-

head’s two seasons.

**California 35, Illinois 20:** Chase Garbers threw four touch-

down passes and ran for another score, leading the Bears over the Illini in the Redbox Bowl in Santa Clara, Calif.

Christopher Brown Jr. ran for 120 yards on 20 carries, and Makai Polk caught five passes for a season-high 105 yards as Cal (8-5) won its first bowl game since 2015.

Brandon Peters passed for 273 yards and one touchdown for Ill-

inois (6-7) in his return after sit-

ing out the regular-season finale with a concussion. Peters, who was shaken after diving out of bounds following a scramble late in the fourth quarter, completed 22 of 37 passes and added a team-

A 68-yard rushing yard.

**Western Kentucky 23, West-

ern Michigan 20:** Freshman Cory Munson kicked a career-long 52-

yard field goal with no time left after a rules review to give the Hilltoppers a victory in the First Responder Bowl in Dallas.

Western Kentucky (9-4) drove 36 yards in 27 seconds before Munson kicked his third field goal. The clock had expired on a desperation heave that was knocked down, but Munson was given a chance on an additional play after a defensive substitution penalty against the Broncos for having 12 players on the field.

**Scoreboard**

College Football

**Bowl schedule**

Friday, Dec. 20

Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl

Saturday, Dec. 21

Tulsa (Okla.) vs. Tulsa (Okla.)

Sunday, Dec. 22

Long Beach State vs. New Mexico State

Monday, Dec. 23

Buffalo, N.Y.

Tuesday, Dec. 24

Camps...
Tiger Woods celebrates as he wins the Masters on April 14 in Augusta, Ga. Fourteen years after his last Masters victory and 11 years after his last major, Woods claimed his fifth green jacket.

Senior RB Perine scores 3 TDs as Florida defeats Virginia in Orange Bowl

Jags stand pat after going 6-10

NBA's Leonard is AP Male Athlete of the Year, Page 20

Gymnast Biles voted top female athlete, Page 21

Karma had a great sports year in 2019, Page 22