NATO touts progress amid rifts
Allies approve Baltic defense plan while trumpeting higher spending

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump and fellow NATO leaders approved a defense plan for the Baltics and Poland on Wednesday, overcoming resistance from Turkey, which had threatened to block it unless other alliance members designated Kurdish fighters in Syria as terrorists.

Speaking at the end of two days of talks in London, Trump heaped praise on Turkey, which had threatened to block it unless other alliance members designated Kurdish fighters in Syria as terrorists.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, center front left, speaks with President Donald Trump after a group photo at a NATO leaders meeting at The Grove hotel and resort in Watford, Hertfordshire, England, on Wednesday.

President Donald Trump and fellow NATO leaders approved a defense plan for the Baltics and Poland on Wednesday, overcoming resistance from Turkey, which had threatened to block it unless other alliance members designated Kurdish fighters in Syria as terrorists.

Speaking at the end of two days of talks in London, Trump heaped praise on Turkey, which had threatened to block it unless other alliance members designated Kurdish fighters in Syria as terrorists.
Google co-founders step aside

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Google’s co-founders are relinquishing their executive positions just as state and federal regulators, not to mention the Department of Justice and Congress, are taking a keen interest in possible abuse of its privacy practices and market power.

But their long-foreshadowed successor, Sundar Pichai, has been well-prepped to serve as the public face of the company in addition to his current role as chief executive.

Larry Page and Sergey Brin are stepping down as CEO and president, respectively, of Google parent company Alphabet.

The move caps more than two decades during which the pair have shepherded the one-time startup they founded in a Silicon Valley garage.

Pichai, who has been Google’s CEO since 2015, will now also head up Alphabet. The company isn’t filling Brin’s position.

Google is facing increasing criticism and investigations from authorities in the U.S. and Europe about its privacy policies and nature of its many-legged business. That will now fall to Pichai to wrangle and push through — though Brin and Page, both 46, have noticeably backed out of the spotlight already.

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RELOCATION GUIDE

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Accountability sought in base housing crisis

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

Senators expressed outrage Tuesday over the lack of accountability among military and business leaders who oversee base housing amid continuing complaints of poor living condition for military families.

“There’s got to be somebody who can be held accountable for what’s going on in what looks like endemic non-enforcement,” said Sen. Angus King, I-Maine, who was frustrated with how the private companies have not forced to hold up their end of the deal. “I want somebody who can do that.”

The Senate Armed Services Committee last heard from the military brass in March as they plan their plans to fix problems such as mold and vermin infestations, lead paint exposure and substandard maintenance that plague on base housing.

Tuesday’s hearing, the Senate committee’s third on the subject this year, was meant to be an update on fixing the problems. But King had been stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent years, Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the committee chairman, said in his opening statement.

“I continue to hear regularly from families across the country about questionable practices, poor workmanship and housing contractors not caring about the families they’re supposed to be serving,” he said. “When is enough enough?”

Since the Senate’s March hearing with military leaders, all three services have new secretaries. At Tuesday’s hearing, Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly and Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett sat alongside their service chiefs, the commandant of the Marines and a representative from the Government Accountability Office. For two hours, the secretaries expressed their frustration on housing solutions, with an emphasis on how to hold someone accountable for allowing such poor conditions.

In McCarthy’s opening statement, he said one-third of housing on Army bases is rated in poor condition and needs to be reworked, Sen. James Inhofe, R-Okla., the committee chairman, said in his opening statement.

“The management companies all operate in the private sphere and compete hard,” Kaine said. “Then they ‘treat military tenants like they’re captives, like a captive audience.’”

Root of the problem

Though contracts, spanning 50 years, require management companies to meet federal and state housing standards, service secretaries were quiet when King asked who within their ranks is responsible for making certain those guidelines are met.

“I don’t understand why not a single garrison commander has yet been fired over a failure to maintain these standards,” Duckworth said, garnering applause from the military families who filled the committee room.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., pointed his blame toward the private companies, asking if any criminal charges have been referred related to housing. While McCarthy and Modly said no, Barrett said the FBI and the Air Force Office of Special Investigations are looking into instances of fraud reported by the media.

“Some housing issues involve concern about possible allegations that some owners manipulated data to increase their incentive awards,” Barrett said in her opening statement.

“At the end of the day, I don’t care whether you’re part of the company or the military, if people came to you with a problem, you’ve got to fix it. If you don’t do anything about it, you’re part of the problem,” she said. “The job was just not done.”

Twitter: @Rose_Lori

Charges dropped against most Marines arrested at morning formation

By ANDREW DYER
The San Diego Union-Tribune

CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — Military prosecutors dropped human trafficking and drug trafficking charges against the majority of the dozens of Marines recently arrested in front of their Camp Pendleton battalion, days after hundreds of troops were arrested over an unlawful violation of their rights, Marine Corps officials confirmed Tuesday.

The Marines’ cases will be dealt with administratively, outside the military court system, according to a 1st Marine Division statement. Many of them will be discharged from the Marines.

“Thirteen Marines submitted and have approved pretrial agreements requesting separation in lieu of courts-martial or waiving administrative separation boards,” the Marines statement said.

Also, six Marines have pleaded guilty at courts-martial, and four still face criminal charges, the statement said. Until now, the Marines had not answered questions or responded to requests for information about the cases.

On July 25, 16 Marines were called to the front of their unit — 1st Battalion, 5th Marines — and accused of human smuggling. They were arrested by a swarm of 40 to 50 law enforcement agents and marched away in handcuffs.

Another eight Marines suspected of unspecified drug offenses were also taken out of formation. Some of them were detained by battalion personnel and taken to the Camp Pendleton brig, Lt. Col. Eric Olson, the battalion commander, testified at a court hearing Nov. 15.

Marines in the formation that day testified at the hearing that their commanders called the accused Marines a ‘cancer’ on the battalion.

Charges against the Marines fell apart after that hearing. The judge ruled the mass arrest — conducted in front of an 800-person crowd — an unlawful violation of their rights, attorneys involved in two of the cases said.

Marine Capt. Charles Whitman, who represents a Marine charged with drug offenses, successfully argued that the arrests amounted to unlawful command influence.

“After that ruling, I think the government saw the writing on the wall and wanted to get this out of the court system,” Whitman said in an interview Tuesday.
GAO: 102 bases at risk of facing water shortages

Report criticizes Pentagon’s data collection

By Corey Dickstein  
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than 102 U.S. military installations face water shortages, according to the Government Accountability Office, which warned that the Pentagon needs better standards for monitoring and determining the bases that could be affected.

The federal watchdog cautioned in its Nov. 27 report that bases in the United States had already experienced water shortages that affected critical operations and said more installations were likely to be affected by climate change-related issues and increasing severe weather events.

In all, GAO listed 102 military locations on bases in 32 states and the District of Columbia as vulnerable, noting the Defense Department relies on billions of gallons of water to operate — some 84 billion gallons in fiscal year 2018.

The Pentagon defines water scarcity as a lack of enough water to meet needs for a wide range of critical missions on installations including drinking water, weapons testing, firefighting and providing drinking water, hygiene and sanitation services.

Vulnerable installations are at risk because their water sources are located in states with some level of water shortage in recent years, the GAO reported.

The new report also examined a trio of assessments conducted this year by the Office of the Secretary of Defense for assessing water shortage vulnerabilities and conducting a new, department-wide analysis.

“Drought and wildfires among the top issues that could lead to water shortages,” the report said.

Specifically, the GAO reported, the OSD did not always identify how much water was currently available at its installations and how much water was expected to be available in the future or take into account sources of available water to those locations it examined.

“Installing can face water shortages for a variety of reasons. In January, the Defense Department identified threats of flooding, drought and wildfires among the top issues that could lead to water shortages,” the report said.

The GAO identified installations facing drought — as many as 43 bases — as those most vulnerable. Those bases included Marine Corps Air Station Yuma in Arizona, Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico and several California installations, including the Marines’ Camp Pendleton, Naval Air Station Fallon, Naval Ammunition Depot Coronado and Vandenberg Air Force Base.

“GAO found that these assessments did not reflect four of five leading practices for identifying and analyzing water scarcity — practices that contribute to a reliable assessment of water entitlements,” the report said.

Specifically, the GAO reported, the OSD did not always identify how much water was currently available at its installations and how much water was expected to be available in the future or take into account sources of available water to those locations it examined.

The Pentagon has identified sites affected by water shortages for a variety of reasons. In January, the Defense Department identified threats of flooding, drought and wildfires among the top issues that could lead to water shortages. Specifically, the GAO reported, the OSD did not always identify how much water was currently available at its installations and how much water was expected to be available in the future or take into account sources of available water to those locations it examined.

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North Korea lashes out at US threat of force

By Kim Gamel
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea lashed out Wednesday at President Donald Trump’s threat to use military force if necessary to achieve denuclearization, warning that “the use of armed forces is not the privilege of the U.S. only.”

Trump called on North Korean leader Kim Jong Un on Tuesday to live up to promises to rid his country of nuclear weapons.

“Now, we have the most powerful military we ever had, and we are by far the most powerful country in the world, and hopefully we don’t have to use it,” Trump told reporters at the NATO summit in London. “But if we do, we’ll use it.”

Those remarks drew a sharp response from Pak Jong Chon, the chief of the general staff of North Korea’s army, who said he and Kim Jong Un were “displeased” to hear Trump’s comments.

“One thing I would like to make clear is that the use of armed forces is not the privilege of the U.S. only,” Pak said. “I clearly state here that if the U.S. uses any armed forces against (North Korea), we will also take prompt corresponding actions at any level.”

North Korea and the United States “are still technically at war and the state of truce can turn into an all-out armed conflict any moment even by any accidental case,” he said in a statement published by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

Both sides have ratcheted up their rhetoric as nuclear talks remain stalled ahead of an end-of-year deadline imposed by North Korea for Washington to offer concessions such as sanctions relief and security guarantees.

Trump has frequently touted his friendship with the North Korean leader as progress, despite a resurgence of weapons tests by the communist state in recent months.

On Tuesday, however, the president reverted to using his nickname “rocket man” for the North Korean leader, while insisting they maintain a “very good relationship.”

Kim “likes sending rockets up, doesn’t he? That’s why I call him ‘rocket man,’” Trump said.

Trump spoke hours after the North released a Christmas gift to the United States if Washington fails to offer a more flexible stance in talks, which stalled after a second summit in Vietnam in February. The North demanded extensive sanctions relief but the Trump administration said it must first give up more of its nuclear weapons program.

In London, Trump called on Kim to stick to his promise to denuclearize.

Many analysts have expressed concern that the two sides may return to traded threats and long-range missile tests that pushed the Korean Peninsula to the brink of another war in 2017.

The comments came hours after the North released photos of leader Kim visiting a sacred mountain on horseback for the second time in two months.

In past years such visits have been harbingers of major policy shifts.

Pyongyang also announced that it will convene a rare meeting of senior ruling Workers Party officials later this month, signaling a major announcement may be in the works as the deadline to resume talks nears.

North Korea has conducted several weapons tests since May, but it has stopped short of lifting its self-imposed moratorium on intercontinental ballistic missile or nuclear tests.

Some 28,500 American troops are based in South Korea.
by David C. Knadle; his wife, Silkey; daughter, Starling; and son, Eason Bertone, reunite in Fort Hood, Texas, in July 2016, after the Army pilot finished a rotation in Germany. Knadle died Nov. 20 in Afghanistan when his helicopter crashed.

Apache pilot ‘gladly and willingly’ accepted risks of deployment

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

Five-year-old Starling Knadle sat on her mother’s lap, her 15-year-old brother sitting beside her wearing a cavalry Stetson, as six Army pallbearers loaded their father’s coffin into a waiting hearse during a ceremony at Fort Hood, Texas, on Tuesday.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 David C. Knadle, 33, was killed last month when his attack helicopter crashed while on a mission providing security for ground troops in eastern Afghanistan.

After the dignified transfer of the Apache pilot’s remains, his daughter insisted she be allowed to put on her father’s dog tags, her mother said in a phone interview Wednesday.

“We talked about Daddy and his big muscles,” Silkey Knadle said — he had recently placed second in a bodybuilding competition. “She said her daddy is an angel in heaven with the biggest muscles and the biggest wings.”

The Texas native and his co-pilot on the fatal mission, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kirk T. Fuchigami Jr., 25, of Keaau, Hawaii, had been assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division. Both members of 1st Battalion, 272nd Aviation Regiment, 1st Air Cavalry Brigade were posthumously awarded Bronze Stars.

David Knadle “could do anything,” Silkey Knadle said. “And if he didn’t know how to do it, he could figure it out.”

The two met while working at a financial firm in Fort Worth, Texas. Both had high-paying jobs, but he told her this dream was to become a pilot.

“You’re not getting younger,” Silkey Knadle recalled telling him. “If you’re going to do it, go do it now.”

He joined the Army in 2013. Two years later, he was a pilot and had started a family that by then included their infant daughter, Starling, and his wife’s son, Eason Bertone.

An avid athlete who began competitive bodybuilding shortly before his death, Knadle had bonded with Eason through rock climbing. He often teased that he wanted to toughen up Starling, but with tickles and kisses, his wife said.

This fall, despite having orders to Colorado, he made a deal with a friend so he could deploy to Afghanistan, his wife said.

“Never a person to shy away from a fight, “he knew the enemy was still there and active and looked forward to meeting them in person, ” said his friend, Chief Warrant Officer 2 Travis Schroder.

“He knew when he strapped on the machine exactly what it meant and the dangers that came with it,” Schroder said. “He accepted these gladly and willingly.”

He left behind his mother and flew his final mission the following month. Officials are investigating the Nov. 20 crash in Logar province that killed him and Fuchigami, a newlywed, the Pentagon said last month.

The Taliban, who often fabricate or embellish reports of their battlefield exploits, claimed to have shot down the helicopter, but Afghan officials said the downing was not caused by enemy fire.

The aviators’ deaths brought to 19 the number of Americans killed in Afghanistan so far this year, which has been the deadliest for U.S. forces since the end of the U.S.-led invasion launched in response to the 9/11 attacks.

A funeral for Knadle will be held on Thursday at Vista Community Church in Temple, Texas.

A Japanese doctor killed in attack

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A chopper crash in eastern Afgha

nistan on Wednesday killed a Japanese physician and aid worker widely respected and loved in the war-scarred nation, triggering an outpouring of grief and condolences of the attack that took the life of Tetsu Nakamura and also killed five Afghans, including the doctor’s bodyguards, the driver and a passenger, hospital spokesman Gulzada Sanger said.

Nakamura, 73, had worked in the eastern Nangarhar province for more than a decade, taking the lead in water projects in rural areas, which earned him the nickname “Uncle Murad” for his services to the people.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani awarded him honorary Afghan citizenship in April. Nakamura died of his wounds shortly after gunmen opened fire on his car Wednesday morning on a road in Nangarhar. According to the provincial governor’s spokesman, Attaullah Khogyani, Nakamura was heading to the provincial capital, Jalalabad, when the attack took place.

He was critically wounded and underwent surgery at a local hospital but died while being airlifted to the Bagram Airfield hospital in the capital, Kabul, said Sanger.

Nakamura had headed the Japanese charity Peace Medical Service in Nangarhar since 2008. He came to Afghanistan after a Japanese colleague, Katsuya Itô, was abducted and killed.

The Taliban was credited with changing a vast desert stretch in Nangarhar known as Gamber to lush forests and productive wheat fields.

The Taliban quickly denied responsibility for Wednesday’s shooting that killed Japanese Dr. Tetsu Nakamura, as well as five Afghans, including the doctor’s bodyguards, the driver and a passenger.

Court hears war crimes probe appeal

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The International Criminal Court opened a three-day hearing Wednesday at which prosecutors and defence lawyers are expected to make a decision on the investigation into alleged crimes in Afghanistan’s brutal conflict.

Fergal Gaynor, a lawyer representing the hundreds of Afghan victims, called it “a historic day for accountability in Afghanistan.”

President Donald Trump said the U.S. and Taliban have been engaged in talks and insisted the Taliban “want to make a deal after heavy U.S. fire in recent months.

The State Department statement said Khalidzad’s Kabul and Doha talks are a follow-up to Trump’s recent visit and to discussions on support for “informed efforts to get all parties to intra-Afghan negotiations.”

In Doha, Khalidzad will be pushing for a cease-fire or at least a reduction in violence with an eye to an eventual end to fighting.

The Taliban official said the U.S. has been pressing for a cease-fire, even a temporary one during the time of an agreement signing. While there has been no formal announcement of a reduction in violence, Taliban attacks at least in the cities appear to have decreased in recent weeks.
Two of the family’s children watched everything from their hiding place, the court was told earlier.

The marks around the mother’s mouth indicated that the force the suspect was applying could have led to her suffocating, the court heard in earlier hearings.

The American father chased the fourth home invader; H.M., down the stairs and out of the house, stabbing him three times. H.M. died of his wounds on the side-walk in a nearby village, where his accomplices had left him with J.M., one of his brothers.

J.M.’s and J.R.’s sentences were slightly less than prosecutors had sought because the burglary was unsuccessful and they had both entered guilty pleas, the judge said.

The loss of his brother was another reason why J.M. was sentenced to 4½ years instead of five, the judge said.

Mitigating factor in J.R.’s sentence was that his family had raised 1,000 euros for the American family, which the court deemed fair compensation for damages.

Johannes Berg, counsel for the American family, said he was satisfied with the sentences but added that the family’s ordeal was far from over.

A third suspect, whose case was spun off from the other two because a prior criminal record, is expected to be sentenced in mid-December.

“This is not the end for the family,” said Berg. “The trial of the third man is still ongoing.”
Trump: Japan, South Korea should pay more for troops

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

Japan and South Korea can and should pay more to host U.S. forces, President Donald Trump told reporters alongside NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg on Tuesday in London.

Trump, in a video of the press conference posted online by Euronews, said he had recently persuaded South Korea to up its annual contribution to the cost of stationing U.S. troops on the peninsula from just under $500 million to nearly $1 billion and that he wants to increase that figure.

“We do a great job. We have 32,000 soldiers there,” Trump said, who added he thinks it’s fair for Seoul to “pay substantially more.”

“In some cases, you have countries that need help that don’t have money … and there’s trauma … and that’s a different situation,” he said.

Late last month, U.S. negotiators stormed out of a meeting with their South Korean counterparts to discuss the Special Measures Agreement, as the defense cost-sharing agreement is known, in Seoul. Neither side released a figure or confirmed reports that the Trump administration is demanding a fivefold increase to nearly $5 billion per year.

U.S. and South Korean negotiators resumes cost-sharing talks Tuesday in Washington, according to Voice of America.

Trump also said he had asked Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to help America out.

“You are a wealthy nation and we are paying essentially for your military,” he told the reporters in London.

Japan contributes nearly $1.8 billion annually toward the cost of basing about 50,000 U.S. troops in the country, according to figures published Wednesday by the Mainichi newspaper.

Last month, Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono refuted reports that his country had been asked to fork over five times as much as it now pays to support U.S. forces stationed there.

Yoshihide Suga, Japan’s chief Cabinet secretary, said at a press conference Wednesday he was aware of Trump’s comments in London, and added a comment on what Trump and Abe had discussed. A video of Suga’s remarks was posted on the prime minister’s website.

“Being that said, the current expenses for stationing of the U.S. Forces in Japan has been properly allocated by an agreement between Japan and the U.S.,” he added.

NATO leaders appear to gossip about Trump in unguarded chat

By Jill Lawless
Associated Press

WATFORD, England — While NATO leaders professed unity on Wednesday at a summit near London, a spat rippled under the surface after several were caught in an unguarded exchange on camera apparently gossiping about President Donald Trump’s behavior.

Trump branded Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau “two-faced” after the remarks captured during a reception in London at Buckingham Palace.

Trudeau was seen standing in a huddle with French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Britain’s Princess Anne, daughter of Queen Elizabeth II, at Tuesday evening’s event.

After Johnson asked Macron, “is that why you were late?” Trump could be heard saying “he was late because he takes a 40-minute press conference off the top.” That appeared to be a reference to Trump’s long and uncharted question-and-answer session with journalists earlier Tuesday.

Trudeau also said, “You just watched his team’s jaws drop to the floor.”

Trump wasn’t mentioned by name during the exchanges.

Footage of the palace reception was recorded by a pool camera. The clip was posted online by Canadian broadcaster CBC and has been viewed more than 5 million times.

Trudeau said Wednesday that Trudeau was likely upset because the U.S. president had broached the fact that Canada falls short of the NATO target of spending 2% of its gross domestic product on defense.

“Well he’s two-faced,” Trump told reporters Wednesday. “And, honestly, with Trudeau, he’s a nice guy — I find him to be a very nice guy — but you know the truth is that I called him out on the fact that he’s not paying 2% and I guess he’s not very happy about it.”

Trudeau’s office had no immediate comment. Trudeau spoke briefly to Trump as NATO leaders gathered for a summit Wednesday in Watford, outside London, and the two men shook hands.

Leaders of the 29 NATO states are marking the 70th anniversary of the military alliance — and trying to patch up differences over defense spending, the alliance’s strategic direction and member nation Turkey’s military action in northern Syria.

President Donald Trump speaks during lunch Wednesday with NATO members that have met their financial commitments to the organization as NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg listens.

FROM FRONT PAGE

Macron and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

“His two-faced,’ Trump said of Trudeau during a brief news conference alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday. He paused and said, “And, honestly, with Trudeau, he’s a nice guy, I find him to be a very nice guy.”

Trump said Trudeau was likely angry over his repeated demands that Canada spend more on defense.

The dispute with Turkey also had threatened to drive a wedge between allies. Macron on Tuesday accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of aligning with ISIS elements to further Turkey’s agenda in Syria.

The common enemy today is the terrorist groups, I’m sorry to say, we don’t have the same definition of terrorism around the table,” Macron said Tuesday alongside Trump. “When I look at Turkey, they are fighting against those who fought with us shoulder-to-shoulder against ISIS, and sometimes they work with ISIS proxies.”

Erdogan, who met behind closed doors with Trump on Wednesday, did not speak publicly during the NATO meeting.

Also on Wednesday, Trump and Stoltenberg touted a defense spending increase of a combined $130 billion by the European allies and Canada since 2016. By the end of 2024, that figure is expected to rise to $400 billion, said Stoltenberg, who credited Trump with pushing members to spend more on defense.

“This is unprecedented. And it’s making NATO stronger,” Stoltenberg said.

Allies moved forward with other priorities, including implementing a plan that calls for nations to have 30 warships, 30 fighter-bomber squadrons and 30 land battalions available for combat as soon as 2030.

In a first for the alliance, NATO also held formal talks among its leaders about China’s security implications.

Throughout its 70-year history, NATO has fixed primarily on threats to the trans-Atlantic region and its immediate surroundings.

“China is the second-largest defense spender in the world next to the United States and recently displayed new modern capabilities including nuclear weapons,” Stoltenberg said. “So we have to address the rise of China together and I look forward to the allies doing that at this leaders’ meeting for the first time.”

Putting China on NATO’s agenda has been a top military priority of the U.S., which is concerned about Beijing’s ambitions in the Arctic and about Chinese 5G technology, which American officials say presents a security risk.

At the luxury hotel in Hertfordshire, northwest of central London, the leaders discussed strategy but didn’t disclose any precise steps they would take regarding China.

There were also disagreements within the alliance, most notably between the U.S. and France, on whether China should be viewed as an adversary at all.

At the conclusion of the leaders’ meeting, Stoltenberg said allies had agreed to “rely only on secure and resilient systems,” but didn’t specify if that would exclude Chinese technology.

Trump, meanwhile, said separately that some leaders he has spoken with have pledged not to use China’s 5G equipment.
Hearing: Legal experts called by Democrats back impeachment

FROM FRONT PAGE

President, the dredging up of unfounded allegations as part of an effort to undo the 2016 election and remove Trump from office.

"You just don't like the guy," said Rep. Doug Collins, of Georgia, the top Republican on the panel. He called the proceedings a "disgrace" and a "sham."

Several Republicans immediately objected to the process, interjecting procedural questions, and they planned to spend much of the session interrupting, delaying and questioning the rules.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Democrats "haven't made a decision" yet on whether there will be a vote on impeachment. She was also meeting privately with the Democratic caucus. But a vote by Christmas appears increasingly likely with the release of a 380-page report by Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee that found "serious misconduct" by the president.

Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, D-Calif., told The Associated Press: "Americans need to understand that this president is putting his personal political interests above theirs. And that it's endangering the country."

The Judiciary Committee heard Wednesday from legal experts, delving particularly into the issue of whether Trump's actions stemming from the July 25 phone call with Ukraine's president rose to the constitutional level of "high crimes and misdemeanors" warranting impeachment. The report laid out evidence that the Democrats say shows Trump's efforts to seek foreign intervention in the U.S. election and then obstruct the House's investigation.

Trump told reporters in London, where he was attending a NATO meeting, that he doubted many people would watch the live hearing "because it's going to be boring."

Trump did phone in to the House GOP's morning meeting with Pence to talk with House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy. The California Republican said impeachment didn't come up.

"The unity has been very positive," he said.

New telephone call records released with the report deepen Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani's known involvement in what House investigators called the "scheme" to use the president's office for personal political gain by freeing a foreign power, Ukraine, to investigate Democrats including Joe Biden and intervene in the American election process.

Trump told reporters he really doesn't know why Giuliani was calling the White House's Office of Management and Budget, which was withholding $400 million in military aid to Ukraine, confronting an aggressive Russia at its border.

"You have to ask him," Trump said. "Sounds like something that's not so complicated. ... No big deal."

At the hearing, the three legal experts called by Democrats backed impeachment. Noah Feldman, a Harvard Law School professor, said he considered it clear that the president's conduct met the definition of "high crimes and misdemeanors."

"Pamela Karlan, a Stanford Law School professor and former Obama administration Justice Department official, said the president's action constituted an especially serious abuse of power because it undermined democracy itself."

Republican witness Jonathan Turley, a law professor at George Washington University, said that the Democrats were bringing a "slipshod impeachment" case against the president, but he didn't excise the president's behavior.

"It is not wrong because President Trump is right," according to Turley. "A case for impeachment could be made, but it cannot be made on this record," he said.

The political risks are high for all parties as the House presses only the fourth presidential impeachment inquiry in U.S. history.

Based on two months of investigation sparked by a still-anonymous government whistleblower's complaint, the Intelligence Committee's Trump-Ukraine Impeachment Inquiry Report relies heavily on testimony from current and former U.S. officials who defined White House orders not to appear.

The inquiry found that Trump "solicited the interference of a foreign government, Ukraine, to benefit his reelection," Schiff wrote in the report's preface.

In doing so, the president "sought to undermine the integrity of the U.S. presidential election process, and endangered U.S. national security," the report said.

When Congress began investigating, it added, Trump obstructed the investigation like no other president in history.

Along with revelations from earlier testimony, the new phone records raised fresh questions about Giuliani's interactions with the top Republican on the intelligence panel, Rep. Devin Nunes, of California. Nunes declined to comment.

Schiff said his panel would continue its probe.

Republicans defended the president in a 123-page rebuttal claiming Trump never intended to pressure Ukraine when he asked for a "favor" -- investigations of Democrats and Biden and his son. They say the military aid the White House was withholding was not being used as leverage, as Democrats claim -- and besides, the $400 million was ultimately released, although only after a congressional outcry.

For Republicans falling in line behind Trump, the inquiry is simply a "hoax." Trump criticized the House for pushing forward with the proceedings while he was overseas, a breach of political decorum that traditionally leaves partisan differences at the water's edge.

Democrats once hoped to sway Republicans to consider Trump's removal, but they are now facing a ever-hardening partisan split over the swift-moving proceedings that are dividing Congress and the country.

Possible grounds for impeachment are focused on whether Trump abused his office as he pressed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to open investigations into Trump's political rivals. At the time, Trump was withholding $400 million in military aid, jeopardizing key support as Ukraine faces an aggressive Russia at its border.

The report also accuses Trump of obstruction, becoming the "first and only" president in U.S. history to "openly and indiscriminately" defy the House's constitutional authority to conduct the impeachment proceedings by instructing officials not to comply with subpoenas for documents and testimony.

For Democrats marching into what is now a largely partisan process, the political challenge if they proceed is to craft the impeachment articles in a way that will draw the most support from their ranks and not exasperate Pelosi's majority to messy divisions, especially as Republicans stand with the president.

While liberal Democrats are pushing the party to go farther and include the fraud from former special counsel Robert Mueller's report on Russian interference in the 2016 election and other actions by Trump, more centrist and moderate Democrats prefer to stick with the Ukraine matter as a simpler narrative that Americans understand.

Democrats could begin drafting articles of impeachment against the president in a matter of days, with a Judiciary Committee vote next week. The full House could vote as soon as next Tuesday. Then the matter moves to the Senate for a trial in 2020.

The White House declined an invitation to participate Wednesday, with counsel Pat Cipollone denouncing the proceedings as a "baseless and highly partisan inquiry." Cipollone, who will brief Senate Republicans on Wednesday, left open the question of whether White House officials would participate in additional House hearings.

Legal experts called by Democrats back impeachment
Carbon pollution still rising but at a slower rate

By Seth Borenstein

WASHINGTON The world continues to increase the amount of heat-trapping carbon dioxide it pumps into the air, but it’s not rising as fast as in the previous couple of years.

Led by big jumps from China and India, the world is projected to spike 40.7% in carbon dioxide into the air in 2019. That’s up nearly 255 million tons from 2018, according to two scientific studies released Tuesday.

The studies by Global Carbon Project, a group of international scientists who track emissions, show a 0.6% increase from last year.

In previous years, global carbon dioxide emissions grew by 2.1% and 1.5% after a few years in the mid 2010s when global emissions barely rose, according to the studies in Environmental Research Letters. Carbon dioxide from burning of coal, oil and gas has caused 1.8 degrees of warming since pre-industrial times, and world leaders are meeting in Madrid this week to try to limit warming to another 1.8 degrees from now.

“Emissions grew more slowly than last year but we still set a global record. It’s hard to be upbeat about that,” said study author Rob Jackson, a Stanford University climate scientist.

“The U.S. National Academy of Sciences sounded the alarm on carbon and climate 40 years ago. Since then, global carbon dioxide emissions have doubled, and the world is hurtling towards catastrophic climate change.”

The 2019 estimate is based on data through the first nine to 10 months of the year, with a few national estimates based on only six months of data, said co-author Glen Peters, a climate scientist in Norway. Past projections have proven pretty accurate, he said.

That means even by this year, people put 2.57 million pounds of carbon dioxide in Earth’s atmosphere. That’s the equivalent weight of two Airbus A380s, the world’s largest passenger airliner, going into the air every second.

Both the United States and the European Union saw emissions drop 1.7% from 2018 to 2019, but China saw a 2.8% growth and India had a 1.8% rise. China is by far the biggest carbon polluter, with 8% of global emissions.

The United States is No. 2 at 14.5%.

“Generally, I think this is bad news. Not terrible news, but bad news,” said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald, who wasn’t part of the report.

“A stronger switch from coal to solar or wind needs to happen to reach low climate targets.”

Led by 10% drops in both the United States and China, carbon pollution from coal dropped worldwide nearly 1% but increased 2.6% from cleaner natural gas, according to the studies.

Peters said.

“Emissions grew more slowly than last year but we still set a global record. It’s hard to be upbeat about that.”

Rob Jackson study co-author

Baltimore officers indicted for assaulting, threatening inmates

By Michael Kunzelman

BALTIMORE — More than two dozen correctional officers in Baltimore were charged Tuesday with using excessive force on prisoners at state-operated jails in a city plagued by decades of institutional corruption, inside and outside jailhouse walls.

“Emissions grew more slowly than last year but we still set a global record. It’s hard to be upbeat about that.”

Rob Jackson study co-author

Maryland corrections secretary Robert Green, left, listens as Baltimore City State’s Attorney Marilyn Mosby announces the indictment of 25 correctional officers in Baltimore on Tuesday.

Indicted officers used social media to publicly promote their “reputation and successes,” and they furtively used winks, nods and other body language to warn each other about the presence of supervisors and other “non-members,” the indictment says.

Gov. Larry Hogan said in a statement that his administration has no tolerance for corruption in the state’s correctional system.

“Our correctional officers have one of the most difficult jobs in all of public safety, and we will not let the criminal behavior of the few tarnish the great work of the nearly 5,000 dedicated officers who serve with distinction every single day,” he said.

Hogan, a Republican, said the department’s anti-corruption efforts have led to the arrests and convictions of more than 200 officers, inmates and “citizen accomplices.”

In 2015, Maryland closed the men’s section of a state-run Baltimore jail that was notorious for its decrepit conditions, criminal activity and corruption. In 2013, a federal indictment exposed a sophisticated smuggling ring operating inside the Baltimore City Detention Center involving dozens of gang members and correctional officers. The investigation also revealed that a jailhouse gang leader had impregnated four female guards.

Gun background checks on record pace

By Lisa Marie Pane

Background checks on gun purchases in the U.S. are climbing toward a record high this year, reflecting what the industry says is a rush by people to buy weapons in reaction to the Democratic presidential candidates’ calls for tighter restrictions.

By the end of November, more than 25.4 million background checks — generally seen as a strong indicator of gun sales — had been conducted by the FBI, putting 2019 on pace to break the record of 27.5 million set in 2016, the last full year President Barack Obama was in the White House.

On Black Friday, the FBI ran 202,465 checks.

Some analysts question how accurately the background check figures translate into gun sales, since some states run checks on applications for concealed-carry permits too, and some purchases involve multiple firearms. But the numbers remain the most reliable method of tracking the industry.

In the years since President Donald Trump took office, the industry has struggled through what has been referred to as the Trump Slump, a falloff in sales that reflected little worry among gun owners about gun control efforts.

But with the 2020 presidential election less than a year out and virtually every Democratic candidate offering proposals to restrict access to firearms, fears appear to be driving up sales again.

“The Trump Slump is real, but the politics of guns has changed a little bit over the last year,” said Adam Winkler, a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Law and an expert on gun rights and politics. “As we’re coming up upon another presidential election, Donald Trump is vulnerable, and the Democratic presidential contender are falling all over themselves to propose more aggressive gun reforms than their opponents.”

The number of background checks conducted by federal authorities is on pace to break a record by the end of this year, according to FBI statistics.
**Report: Racial divide shrinks in U.S. criminal justice system**

**By Don Thompson**  
Associated Press

**Sacramento, Calif.** — Racial disparities have narrowed across the U.S. criminal justice system over 16 years, though black people are still significantly more likely to be behind bars than white people, new federal figures show.

Racial gaps broadly declined in local jails, state prisons and among people on probation and parole, according to the study released Tuesday by the nonpartisan Council on Criminal Justice.

The divide in state imprisonment rates dropped for all major crimes but was most pronounced for drug offenses—a key driving factor for the racial shift. Black people were 15 times more likely than white people to be in state prisons for drug crimes in 2000, but that dropped to five times as likely by 2016, the most recent year available.

Many don’t realize how much the racial gap has narrowed, not only in incarceration but in parole and probation, said Adam Gelb, president and chief executive of the politically diverse council that launched in July to seek solutions to problems in the criminal justice system.

“Most people think this is a bad problem that’s getting worse,” said Gelb, whose group has brought together governors of both parties, police officials and Black Lives Matter organizers.

“It turns out it’s a bad problem that’s getting a little better, and for very complex reasons that we need to understand at a much deeper level.”

Critics contend minorities’ disproportionate involvement in the U.S. criminal justice system reflects systemic racial bias. Researchers have blamed prejudice by police, prosecutors, judges and juries; racial differences in crimes; and get-tough sentencing laws during the high crime era of the 1980s and ’90s.

While racial inequality in arrests and incarcerations narrowed, the length of prison sentences increased across all crime types for black people and partially offset the benefits, according to the report co-authored by Georgia State University professor William Sabol, former director of the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Among the other findings of the report, which is based on numbers from the bureau, the FBI and other national datasets:

- Black men were in state prisons at nine times the rate of white inmates in 2016 to a still disparate 6-to-1 by 2016. The change mostly stemmed from a 30% decline in the black male imprisonment rate, largely driven by falling drug crimes.
- Black women were imprisoned at a rate of six for every white inmate in 2000, which fell to 2-to-1 by 2016. Fewer black women were being incarcerated for drug crimes, while more white women were imprisoned for violent, property and drug crimes.
- The disparities between Hispanic people and white people also shrank across all categories since 2000.

The nonpartisan Public Policy Institute of California reported a similar marked drop in the racial divide in arrest trends since the 1980s in the nation’s most populous state but also found that black people are still far more likely to be arrested than white people.

Detective posthumously receives award for MS-13 cases

**By Michael Balsamo**  
Associated Press

**Washington** — A New York police detective who relentlessly investigated killings committed by MS-13 gang members before succumbing to cancer last year became the first law enforcement officer to posthumously receive a distinguished service award from the U.S. attorney general on Tuesday.

Attorney General William Barr presented the award to the family of Suffolk County police Detective William Maldone, who died in April 2018 after a three-year battle with colon cancer. He was one of 19 law enforcement officers from across the U.S. who were recognized with the Attorney General’s Award for Distinguished Service in Policing during a ceremony at the Justice Department’s headquarters in Washington.

Maldone had worked on the FBI’s Long Island Gang Task Force, where he was involved in prosecutions of more than 40 MS-13 members, solving more than a dozen homicides and 25 robberies. The brutal MS-13 street gang, also known as Mara Salvatrucha, is blamed for dozens of killings on Long Island since 2016.

The violence, including the 2016 slayings of two teenage girls in Brentwood, helped spark an aggressive effort by the FBI and the Justice Department to dismantle the group, which the U.S. considers one of the top transnational organized crime threats.

Maldone was first assigned to assist with investigating a young man’s disappearance and helped gather intelligence, to suggest he was actually the victim of an MS-13 killing, Barr said. Maldone and fellow detectives worked aggressively to arrest dozens of people in connection with 17 killings on Long Island and, despite having cancer, he rarely missed work, the attorney general said.

Maldone joined the Suffolk County Police Department in 1987 and was promoted to detective in 1994. His mother, his wife and his two daughters accepted the award from Barr on Maldone’s behalf.

Buffalo bishop resigns amid criticism of handling of misconduct

**By Nicole Winfield**  
Associated Press

**New York** — Pope Francis on Wednesday accepted the resignation of Buffalo Bishop Richard Malone following widespread criticism from Malone’s staff, priests and the public over how he handled allegations of clergy misconduct.

The Vatican announced the resignation in a brief statement, adding that Francis had named Edward Scharfenberger, the bishop of Albany, N.Y., to run the Buffalo Diocese temporarily until a permanent replacement is found.

The Vatican’s embassy to the U.S. said Malone offered to step down two years before the mandatory retirement age of 75 after learning the results of a Vatican-mandated inquiry into the western New York diocese and its handling of abuse cases.

In a statement, Malone said he had come to believe “that the spiritual welfare of the people of the Diocese of Buffalo will be better served by a new bishop who perhaps is better able to bring about the reconciliation, healing and renewal that is so needed.”

The diocese has been named in more than 220 recent lawsuits by people who allege they were sexually abused by priests.

Many of the allegations date back long decades, long before Malone’s arrival in Buffalo in 2012. But critics say there have been more recent missteps by Malone, including his decision to return to the ministry a priest who had been suspended by a previous bishop for including “love you” in a Facebook message to an eighth-grade boy.

Malone later endorsed the same priest for a job as a cruise ship chaplain, even after he was also accused of making unwanted advances toward young men.

Malone has admitted to making mistakes in cases involving adult victims.

But he had firmly refused to resign and insisted he wanted to stay on the job to see the diocese through a process of “renewal.”

Pressure on him to leave was intense.

In the past year, two key members of Malone’s staff have gone public with concerns about his leadership, including his former secretary, the Rev. Ryszard Biernat, who secretly recorded Malone calling a then-active priest “a sick puppy” but taking no immediate action to remove him.

Earlier, his executive assistant, Siobhan O’Connor, leaked internal church documents after becoming concerned that Malone had intentionally omitted dozens of names from a publicly released list of priests with credible allegations of abuse.

A diocesan priest, meanwhile, circulated a “no confidence” letter for signatures.

And in September, the Movement to Restore Trust, a group of lay Catholics that had been working with Malone to restore trust in the church, instead joined in calls for his resignation.

“The Vatican hasn’t released the results of the inquiry into Buffalo that was conducted by Brooklyn Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio. Malone said he had been made aware of the “general conclusions” of the report and that they had been a factor in his decision to seek early retirement.

“It is my honest assessment that I have accomplished as much as I am able to, and that there remain divisions and wounds that I am unable to bind and heal,” he said.

DiMarzio said he had conducted his investigation with “urgency” at the request of the Holy See, interviewing 80 people over several weeks.

“I pray this moment of suffering and pain will lead to a birth of new faith,” he said.
Forty years after a stampede left 11 people dead and 23 injured at a Who concert in Cincinnati, Pete Townshend regrets leaving behind the tragedy before the show, admitting that he 'wished they had let us off.'

Townshend recalled the shock of seeing bodies sprawled on the ground as they left the stadium — ‘many of whom weren’t dead,’ he said in an interview with WCPO of Cincinnati.

Townshend and lead singer Roger Daltrey both have said they’ve been haunted by the tragedy. Townshend recently told The Associated Press he was looking forward to discussing it in Cincinnati.

‘Now we can have a conversation about it when we go back,’ Townshend said. ‘We will meet people and we’ll be there. We’ll be there. That’s what’s important. I’m so glad that we’ve got this opportunity to go back.’

Drake, Spotify’s most-streamed artist of the decade

Drake is the king of streaming: the rapper has been named Spotify’s most-streamed artist of the decade.

Spotify announced Tuesday that Drake has been streamed 28 billion times in the past 10 years. Ed Sheeran came in second, while Post Malone, Ariana Grande and Eminem round out the Top 5. Sheeran’s “Shape of You” was the most-streamed song of the decade.

For 2019, Post Malone is the top-streamed artist globally. Billie Eilish, Grande, Sheeran and Bad Bunny round out the Top 5. Eilish’s debut album — ‘When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?’ — is the year’s most-streamed album, while Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello’s “Seoritas” tops the list of the most-streamed songs.

The Who announced Tuesday night it will play its first Cincinnati-area concert since the stampede on April 23 at Northern Kentucky University’s BB&T Arena.

Townshend and Daltrey recalled how they were told by their manager, Bill Curbishley, telling them: ‘I’ve got something terrible to tell you.’

Townshend then described the shock of seeing bodies sprawled on the ground as they left the stadium — ‘many of whom weren’t dead,’ he said. ‘They didn’t know who was dead and who was just badly hurt,’ he added.

Townshend remembered the rage he felt toward Curbishley for not telling the band about the tragedy before the show, admitting that he ‘wanted to kill him.’

‘You could at least give (us) a choice as to whether or not to go on,’ Townshend said.

“But the choice none of us made, was that we left the building. You know, we should have stayed.”

Curbishley declined comment when contacted by The Associated Press.

Townshend added: ‘We shouldn’t be there. That’s what’s important. I’m so glad that we’ve got this opportunity to go back.’
China, US clash over bills

BELJING — Already strained relations between China and the United States were further muddied after U.S. Congress overwhelmingly approved a bill targeting Beijing’s mass crackdown on ethnic Muslim minorities Wednesday, less than one week after President Donald Trump signed separate human rights legislation on Hong Kong.

China’s ruling Communist Party has long regarded Hong Kong and the far west Xinjiang region as crucial areas for asserting territorial sovereignty, and it has responded with fury to what it considers critical areas for asserting territorial sovereignty.

“Xinjiang is China’s Xinjiang,” said a statement from China’s National Ethnic Affairs Commission, echoing another government mantra: “Hong Kong is China’s Hong Kong.”

Tensions over the recently passed U.S. bills have cast doubt over the potential for a trade deal between the two countries, which have been embroiled in a 16-month tariff war. Trump said Tuesday that he has “no deadline” for striking an agreement and turned a blind eye to Xinjiang’s efforts to combat terrorism and protect human rights in accordance with laws and regulations, but also to Xinjiang’s current economic development, social stability, national unity and religious harmony,” the commission said.

Former detainees and their family members have told The Associated Press that they were arbitrarily held in heavily secured, prison-like camps where they were pressured to renounce their faith and express gratitude to the ruling Communist Party. A recent leak of classified Chinese government documents revealed a blueprint for reviving the thoughts of ethnic minorities who had not committed any crimes.

Beijing says the measures are necessary to combat terrorism and eradicate religious extremism, calling the facilities “vocational training centers” for those who lack employable skills.

China has repeatedly criticized the U.S. for interfering in its affairs, most recently accusing Washington of being a “black hand” that has orchestrated riots in Hong Kong.

After Trump signed bills mandating sanctions on Chinese and Hong Kong officials, an annual review of Hong Kong’s favorable trade status and a ban on Chinese and Hong Kong officials, an annual review of Hong Kong’s favorable trade status and a ban on China retaliated Monday by suspending U.S. military ship and aircraft visits to Hong Kong.

It also said it would sanction a number of groups, including Human Rights Watch and the National Endowment for Democracy, that have “performed badly” in regard to the unrest in Hong Kong.

WORLD

Iranian consulate in Iraq is burned for a 3rd time

BAGHDAD — Anti-government protesters burned an Iranian consulate in southern Iraq for a third time on Tuesday as the country’s political leaders continued talks over selecting a new prime minister following weeks of widespread unrest.

Five rockets landed inside Ain al-Asad airbase, a sprawling complex in Western Anbar which hosts U.S. forces, without causing any casualties and little damage, said a statement from Iraq’s security media cell on Tuesday evening. The statement gave no further details.

President Barham Salih met with Iraq’s main political blocs as a 15-day constitutional deadline to name the next prime minister nears, two Iraqi officials said. Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Madid announced his resignation on Friday. The Sairoun bloc, led by influential Shi’ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, addressed Salih in a letter and said they gave protesters the right to support a premier of their choice.

Anti-government protesters in the holy city of Najaf burned tires and hurled them toward the main gate of the Iranian consulate, burning it for the third time in the span of a week. The building was empty at the time of the attack and there were no casualties, according to a police official.

The incident came after hours of a tense standoff with security forces earlier Tuesday when protesters surrounded a key shrine in Najaf. Demonstrators gathered around the Hakim shrine, demanding that al-Sadr help them enter and symbolically take control. Sadr commands Saraya Salam, a powerful militia group. A few protesters and some elderly tribal sheikhs were eventually permitted to enter the shrine and inspect it.

The protesters believe the shrine is a center for Iranian intelligence operations, the police official said. Officials all requested anonymity in line with regulations.

Najaf has been one of the flashpoints in the protest movement after demonstrators torched the Iranian Consulate there on Nov. 27 and again on Dec. 1. The Hakim shrine has been the focus of recent violence. Three protesters were killed and 24 wounded on Saturday as security forces used live rounds to disperse them.

Transportation

The Daily Guide to Navigating the European Business Market

Dental 902

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**STARS and STRIPES**

**OPINION**

Harris couldn’t get traction with expected base

**BY EUGENE SCOTT**

*The Washington Post*

S

en. Kamala Harris ended her bid for the White House unable to rally significant support from the voting blocs she campaigns and many political watchers thought would play a major role in sending her to the Oval Office: black voters and women.

The California Democrat’s campaign was loaded with historical symbolism from its early days: the first black woman to seek the presidency, and regularly partnered homage to late congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, D-N.Y., the first black woman to seek a major party’s presidential nomination, during her campaign.

But the biracial lawmaker with an unfamiliar name who some believed was best situated to win over white suburban voters couldn’t persuade large swaths of those who backed the former president to support her.

Despite having viral, breakout moments during the Senate’s investigation of Russia’s interference into the 2016 presidential election, Harris was largely unknown to many Americans before launching her campaign — including some among the demographic groups of people of color she regularly propels her into the upper tier of the campaign. Her campaign was a reminder that being well-known in Washington and politics is not the same thing as having national recognition. While some more established liberal candidates were working to convince voters that they were best positioned to undo President Donald Trump’s political decisions, Harris was in many ways still introducing herself. That put her at a disadvantage — even with black women, one of the Democratic Party’s most influential voting blocs.

Some of Trump’s biggest critiques come from black women — a group that votes against the GOP at higher rates than most. But while many black women have an aversion to the representation at the highest level of government, some voters questioned whether an African American woman could attract the broad support needed to defeat Trump. That concern, along with former Vice President Joe Biden’s long history with black voters, is what led to a week-long flyaround Harris in polls with black voters shortly after launching her campaign.

Despite praise, “Woke” Polls, host of the “#WokePod” podcast last week that the former vice president who enjoys widespread name recognition is a safe bet with black voters and presidential nomination, during her campaign.

“You have older black voters who are definitely on his side because they are looking to see where are the white voters are,” Democratic strategist Ruy Teixeira said on MSNBC. “We understand what oppression and discrimination looks like in a regular basis, and we understand Donald Trump to be a lethal threat to our way of life. And so we are going to go ... the way that seems the safest.”

There were questions about Harris among some of those groups she sought to win. Her history as a prosecutor and role in advocating for tough sentences for drug crimes rekindled questions that voters looking for a candidate committed to criminal justice reform repeatedly asked. And some black Americans questioned whether the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant raised by an Indian woman could respond to the issues affecting the Caribbean and West Indian Americans. “The way that Biden and Harris are to reexamine the lingering effects of slavery on racial gaps.

In her announcement ending her campaign, Harris pointed toward fundraising being the biggest obstacle that kept her from moving forward.

“My campaign for president simply doesn’t have the financial resources we need to continue,” she wrote. “And as the campaign has gone on, it’s become harder and harder to raise the money we need to compete.”

Harris noted that she was not able to self-fund her campaign like some of her billionaire competitors, but she does have more money than some of her competitors. In fact, enough to qualify for the December debate among all of her competitors have done.

With Harris’ exit, the stage for this moment is set. The Democratic Party primarily consists of white candidates and older candidates during a time when the left’s constituency is younger and more ethnically diverse. The broad assumptions of leadership remain among some voters.

Kimberly Peeler-Almon, co-founder of BlackPAC, a political action committee that helps black voters get elected to office, previously told The Washington Post, “Black women have a harder time than white men in getting people to go behind their campaign.”

I think a lot of it has to do with our perceptions of black women. There are few examples of women. For for umpteen years, the majority of selected leaders have been white men, and they are,” she said. “You come from a background of a woman — and a woman of color, and a black woman at that — seeking the highest office in the land, it’s something out of the norm.”

Harris is the first black woman, the first woman of color, and the first nonwhite woman to run for this office. And as she sounds, in politics timing is often everything.

Eugene Scott writes about identity politics for the Washington Post blog The Fix.

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**China won’t let Hong Kong resemble Tiananmen**

**BY JEFFREY WASSERSTROM**

*Los Angeles Times*

P

eople from China will often ask me, “Why are Westerners like you so obsessed with what happened in 1989?”

I’ve never been able to give direct answer to this question — until now. Time’s up. I asked, I’ll say, “I may be obsessed with 1989, but China’s top leaders are even more obsessed with it.” The events of that time still reverberate in Beijing’s response to the protests roiling Hong Kong now.

What scared the government most in 1989 was not students gathering in Tiananmen Square. It was members of its social groups — people who had supported those youths as multi-class protests erupted in other cities too. China’s leaders were alarmed by protests that spread across class lines to topple Communist rule in places like East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania.

Haunted by those epochal events, China’s top leaders have used quick and brutal methods to crush any new movement that strikes at the core of the party and how fear of the revolutions borne in that year, with the Western press filled with speculation over whether the Hong Kong government will pivot from Tiananmen, from unfolding exactly like previous ones. It matters, though, that people often imagine that the past could repeat itself and sometimes actively try to influence or decide changes to history. When historians of the future tell the story of 2019, they would do well to focus on two things: how the many protests around the world this year differ from those of 1989 and how fear of the revolutions born in that era haunt some contemporary autocrats.

Jeffrey Wasserstrom is a professor of history at University of California, Irvine and author of the forthcoming “Vigil: Hong Kong on the Brink.”

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Ernie Gates

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Bald eagle smashes into window, flies off

NORFOLK — A bald eagle made an unexpected appearance at a Virginia tax preparation office, slamming off without serious injuries.

The Virginia-Pilot reported the mature bald eagle struck a window at an H&R Block office in Norfolk, leaving a hole nearly three feet wide and scattering glass shards over the office floor.

Harry Patterson Jr., who runs a neighboring insurance office, said he was on the phone when he saw what he thought looked like a stuffed animal.

Patterson said the office is closed until tax season.

Urine sample prompts theater evacuation

NORTH BEND — A movie theater in the small Washington city of North Bend was evacuated after authorities said a package labeled as containing a “highly contagious human substance” was sent there in error.

KOMO reported the package contained a urine sample.

Sgt. Paul Graham, with Snoqualmie Police, said the package arrived at the theater and the theater manager found a box with the labeled liquid inside.

The theater was evacuated, and local streets were closed as hazmat crews responded.

Graham said the package was supposed to have been delivered to a medical clinic in Tacoma.

19 people report illness on cruise ship

LOS ANGELES — Authorities said 19 people aboard a cruise ship reported flu-like illnesses as they reached a Southern California port.

The Los Angeles Fire Department said authorities were called to evaluate patients after they fell ill on a Norwegian Cruise Line ship.

Authorities said the patients were evaluated and they declined to be taken to the hospital.

The Los Angeles Times reported that paramedics responded to the same ship a week earlier after a report that passengers were ill and four were sent to a hospital for treatment.

Elk gets tangled up in resident’s hammock

MAGGIE VALLEY — An elk is running around western North Carolina with a shredded hammock on its head, and apparently a love of apples is to blame.

News outlets reported Jim Beaver told the Haywood County Sheriff’s Office on Thursday that an elk was stuck in his yard with its antlers tangled up in a hammock. The sheriff’s office on Facebook says Cpl. Ken Stiles climbed onto the roof, cut the hammock and freed the animal.

Beaver said elk often eat apples in his yard and play with his hammock.

Evacuation slide falls from jet nearing airport

MILTON — Authorities said no one was hurt when an evacuation slide fell from an airliner into the yard of a suburban Boston home.

A company spokeswoman confirmed to the Boston Herald that the uninfanted slide fell from a Delta Air Lines flight from Paris to Boston’s Logan International Airport.

The Federal Aviation Administration said the pilot reported a loud noise as the plane approached Logan and landed safely.

Police in Milton south of Boston alerted the FAA that the slide had been found in a resident’s yard.

Wenhan Huang told The Patriot Ledger he was doing yard work when the slide took out several branches of his Japanese maple.

Man finds ring lost in sand for 50 years

WINTER HAVEN — A man using a metal detector on a Florida beach found a high school ring that another man lost nearly 50 years ago.

Kenneth Board said he lost the Auburndale High School ring on Cocoa Beach the day after the 1970 prom.

The Ledger reported Jerry Pope was sweeping his metal detector across the sand on Melbourne Beach, some 20 miles from Cocoa Beach, when he found the ring. He cleaned the green growth off of it and discovered the initials “H” or “R” as well as the last initial, “B.”

Jake White, a testing coordinator at Auburndale High, took the slide and found the match in Board.

Clown sign from closed drive-in to be preserved

OXNARD — Authorities said a sign in a Southern California garage displaced three people and a large number of reptiles.

The Ventura County Star reported that Oxnard firefighters found a dozen or two dozen reptiles after battling an electric fire in a detached garage.

Oxnard Fire Department Battalion Chief Steve McNaughten said the animals included a boa constrictor and a six-foot-long lizard.

He said several animals died in the blaze in the city about 60 miles west of Los Angeles.

Christmas around the globe

Liv Ortiz, 8, and Alexis Olson, 8, both of Bullard, Texas, play inside a giant snow globe during the Christmas Kick-off in Bullard on Monday.

The amount a northern Indiana museum received for a 19th-century sculpture at auction. The Ruthmere Museum had owned the 1894 limestone sculpture by French artist Auguste Rodin for more than 40 years.

Profits from the sale of the Rodin sculpture, named La Carlotta Tombée Portant Sa Pierre, or The Fallen Caryatid Carrying Her Stone, will help build a $10 million endowment for the Elkhart, Ind., museum.

Garage fire displaces people and reptiles

WALL — Officials said a clown sign that has smiled on motorists at a now-demolished New Jersey drive-in for two-thirds of a century will be preserved.

NJ.com reported that developers of a strip mall at the Wall Township site said they will donate the Circus Drive-In sign for preservation and display elsewhere.

The Route 35 drive-in, a vestige of car culture with a white-and-red striped roof resembling an old-fashioned circus tent, closed in 2017.

Developer Circus Partners LLC bought the site then, demolished the building last year and last week won planning board approval for the strip mall.

The census

$7.5M

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NASSAU, Bahamas — Tiger Woods is defending Phil Mickelson in his first plot since they both signed up for the second edition of the Saudi International. The European Tour, and the players who took part, came under scrutiny last year for staging an event in Saudi Arabia because of its human rights record, especially with the tournament taking place three months after the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Dustin Johnson won the inaugural event and returns this year alongside Jordan Spieth, Rory McIlroy, and Jason Day, as well as Justin Thomas and Dustin Johnson, who won the inaugural event.

May 20th said in a statement released by tournament organizers that he watched Johnson win last year and thought the course would be a great venue for the event.

“Tiger will be OK. I’m excited to experience this for the first time.”

Mickelson previously played in Abu Dhabi in 2014 and 2015.

Woods has a long history in the Middle East, first playing the Desert Classic in 2001. He played Dubai eight times, most recently in 2017, and won twice. He also played twice in Abu Dhabi.

“I remember going to Dubai for my very first time and seeing maybe two buildings on the skyline when you took off on No. 8,” he said. “Now there’s a New York City skyline back there. The game of golf has grown. I don’t think there’s a course when I first went to Dubai, now they’re everywhere, same with the Middle East.”

Meanwhile, the tournament chairman of the Waste Management Phoenix Open announced on Tuesday that Mickelson’s deal to play in Saudi Arabia was “discontinued.” Mickelson’s deal was conceived by the tournament event, the same week as the PGA Tour event he has played the last 29 years and won twice.
Heat win in OT, hand Raptors first home loss

Associated Press

TORONTO — Jimmy Butler delivered a triple-double to beat Toronto, then turned his focus to Miami’s next opponent with an uncharacteristic sense of urgency.

Butler had 22 points, 13 rebounds and 12 assists, Duncan Robinson added 22 points and the Heat spoiled Kyle Lowry’s return to Toronto’s lineup by beating the Raptors 121-106 in overtime Tuesday.

“I’m not going to say that this one is more special than any other,” Butler, who said of Miami’s third consecutive win and second straight on the road. “Just two good teams going at it. We were fortunate enough to do our job.”

Butler scored eight consecutive points in 55 seconds to begin the decisive run as the Heat recovered after blowing a seven-point lead in the final two minutes of the fourth quarter.

“When it’s closing time, he just makes whatever play is needed,” Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Heat forward Jimmy Butler drives past Pacers guard Norman Powell during the second half in Toronto.

The Celtics (7-0) are one of three unbeatens in the East, joining Miami (8-0) and Philadelphia (10-0) as the others.

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Spurs guard Lonnie Walker IV, right, is fouled by Rockets guard James Harden during the second half in San Antonio on Tuesday.

Roundup

Heat in OT, hand Raptors first home loss

Associated Press

Heat history to post a triple-double, achieving the feat for the fifth time.

“He was doing even more stuff that you won’t see in the box score: encouraging guys, talking, being in gaps defensively.” Miami’s Justise Winslow said. “He was fantastic for us.”

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Clippers 117, Trail Blazers 97: Montrezl Harrell scored 26 points. Paul George added 25 and host Los Angeles pulled away in the second half to beat Portland.

Kawhi Leonard added 11 points and 11 rebounds, helping extend the Clippers’ franchise-best start at home to 13-1.

The game was tied 10 times in the first half before George and Leonard took over to start the second. The five-time All-Star three-pointers and George had a steal and a dunk to go with a free throw from Leonard as part of a 13-6 run that gave the Clippers a 76-62 lead.

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The Clippers (11-7) are 7-0 without Kawhi Leonard, who is currently recovering from a multi-week injury.

In addition to drawing the late charge on Harden, DeRozan was also 1-for-4 on free throws in the final 30 seconds.

That’s who he is, he’s the leader of the team,” Walker said. “We expect him to score in crunch time and make big plays and that’s exactly what he did. He got us this win tonight and I’m just happy that we got the bench most of his career, took 15 shots and had 10 assists and George had a steal and a dunk to go with a free throw from Leonard as part of a 13-6 run that gave the Clippers a 76-62 lead.

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No. 1 Louisville shuts down No. 4 Michigan

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Louisville players and coach Chris Mack cared more about protecting the basket against Michigan than defending their new perch atop the rankings.

Fulfilling that priority helped the Cardinals succeed in their season debut as the nation’s No. 1 team.

Jordan Nwora had 22 points and 12 rebounds, and Louisville held No. 4 Michigan to a season-low 41 shooting mark for a 58-43 victory Tuesday night in its first game since returning to No. 1.

The Cardinals (6-0) shot just 37% but their defense stifled Michigan (7-1) much of the night as they earned a signature victory in the Big Ten/ACC Challenge one day after claiming the top spot in the AP Top 25 for the first time in six years. Though their second-year coach has downplayed rankings, the win was significant for a program he has guided back into the national championship discussion following a sex scandal and the school’s involvement in a federal corruption investigation of college basketball.

Players seem more focused on building on it.

“Our season’s not over yet,” Cardinals guard Lamarr Kimble said. “No. 1 is just a number. We’re going to continue to get better.”

As for Mack, he was most satisfied with how his team denied just about everything Michigan attempted while passing or shooting, holding the Wolverines to just better than half their scoring average (82.4 points per game). That mattered on a night when baskets were nearly as hard to come by for the Cardinals.

“The story of the game was just our defensive effort, from the beginning of the game all the way through,” Mack said. “We probably played 38½ minutes as good a defensive effort as we can play, outside of maybe the first minute of the second half.”

Louisville answered the Wolverines’ 60-spturt that got them to 30-26 with a 10-0 run keyed by six points and a couple of pivotalrebounds from Nwora, who tied his season high on the boards.

“That’s really been a big focus for us, being strong on D,” Nwora said.

The Cardinals also kept the Wolverines and first-year coach Juwan Howard from adding another top-10 upset to the one that helped them enter the Top 25 and match Kansas (1989) for the biggest jump from being unranked in the 70-year history of the poll.

“Give them credit,” Howard said. “They do a great job of defending. Unfortunately, they did a good job of keeping us out of the paint.”

Steven Enoch had 10 points and 10 rebounds, and Dwayne Sutton pulled down 11 boards as Louisville topped Michigan 48-41 in that category.

Jonteske had 18 points and 10 rebounds for the Wolverines, who were seeking their first Big Ten win since 2016.

Jon Teske had 18 points and 10 rebounds, and the host Flyers celebrated their return to the rankings by beating the Huskies.

Dayton (6-1) played for the first time in nine days, since a win over then-No. 17 Villanova for the championship at the Myrtle Beach Invitational, where it won three games in four days.

No. 19 Dayton 99, Houston Baptist 68: Obi Toppin scored 17 points and had a soaring, one-handed slam off one of his 10 rebounds, and the host Flyers celebrated their return to the rankings by beating the Huskies.

Dayton (6-1) vaulted into the Top 25 after an impressive run at the Maui Invitational that included drubbings of Georgia and Virginia Tech followed by an overtime loss to Kansas in the title game. Dayton hadn’t been ranked in the Top 25 since February 2016.

Toppin finished with his third double-double of the season in only 24 minutes.

No. 24 Butler 67, Mississippi 58: Kamar Baldwin scored 31 points, helping the Bulldogs remain 1-0 in the nation’s toughest league with a victory over the host Rebels.

Baldwin shot 11-for-16 from the field, including 4-for-5 from three-point range, to lead Butler (5-0). He added six rebounds and three assists.
**Associated Press**

NEWARK, N.J. — John Hynes paid the price for the New Jersey Devils failing to deliver on the high expectations created by having three No. 1 overall draft picks in a row.

Hynes was fired as coach Tuesday after a 9-13-4 start that left the team in last place in the Metropolitan Division and with the NHL’s second-worst record.

General manager Ray Shero said his decision to fire Hynes after the Buffalo Sabres game, adding the team’s inconsistency and inability to hold leads all season contributed to his disappointment. It was a 0-4-2 record after six games.

“I don’t think there is any one thing, but the way you feel about yourself, you feel good about,” Shero said. “That’s the thing that is disappointing. Obviously there will be opportunities for them and to find out where we are and where we are going to go.”

Shero said Nasreddine would be given a chance to turn things around, adding there is a lot of time left in the season.

Nasreddine said he was in shock when Shero informed him of the change, calling it a bittersweet moment since Hynes had been his mentor for the last decade.

“I think everyone in that room is disappointed, but the decision rests with the owner of the team. “Everyone in that room feels responsible. Everyone in that room feels bad for the fans,” Shero said.

The Devils had high hopes entering the season after drafting Jack Hughes with the No. 1 overall pick just two years after taking Kyle Okposo and Nico Hischier with the first two picks of the 2017 NHL draft.

Hughes had 32 points (14 goals, 18 assists) in 46 games as a rookie last season, winning the Calder Trophy, while Hischier had 38 points (22 goals, 16 assists) in 72 games.

Hughes was named an alternate captain for the Devils on Tuesday.

**Scoreboard**

**Eastern Conference**

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**Note:** Two points for a win, one point for an overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

**Monday’s games**

- Vegas 4, Colorado 3
- Buffalo 7, New Jersey 1
- New York 5, Columbus 4
- Detroit 1, St. Louis 0
- Minnesota 7, Anaheim 4
- Los Angeles 5, Detroit 3
- Columbus 8, Philadelphia 4
- Edmonton 5, Vancouver 4
- Nashville 3, Philadelphia 2
- Arizona 5, Minnesota 2
- Chicago 2, Florida 0

**Tuesday’s games**

- St. Louis 6, Buffalo 4
- Phoenix 3, Vegas 2
- New York 2, New Jersey 1
- Columbus 5, Minnesota 4
- Minnesota 4, Nashville 3
- Anaheim 6, Los Angeles 3
- New Jersey 4, Columbus 3
- New York 5, Florida 1
- New York 3, Minnesota 1
- Colorado 3, Arizona 2

**Wednesday’s games**

- Vegas 4, Colorado 3
- Tampa Bay 3, Nashville 2
- New Jersey 4, Ottawa 3
- Minnesota 4, Edmonton 3
- Chicago 3, New York 2
- Arizona 5, Florida 1
- Florida 2, Dallas 0
- Detroit 3, Calgary 1

**Thursday’s games**

- New York 3, New Jersey 1
- Minnesota 1, Nashville 0
- Columbus 4, New York 2
- Calgary 2, Arizona 1
- Colorado 4, Tampa Bay 2
- Anaheim 2, St. Louis 1
- New York 4, Philadelphia 2
- Minnesota 9, New York 2

**Friday’s games**

- Vegas 4, Colorado 3
- Buffalo 7, New Jersey 1
- New York 5, Columbus 4
- Detroit 1, St. Louis 0
- Minnesota 7, Anaheim 4
- Los Angeles 5, Detroit 3
- Columbus 8, Philadelphia 4
- Edmonton 5, Vancouver 4
- Nashville 3, Philadelphia 2
- Chicago 2, Florida 0

**Associated Press**

NEWARK, N.J. — John Hynes fired the Devils’ day of change an all-too-familiar end.

Marchessault scored three straight goals in the third period to rally the Vegas Golden Knights over New Jersey 4-3 Tuesday night, hours after the Devils fired coach John Hynes.

Marchessault scored twice in the first 5:04 of the third to give the Golden Knights a 3-2 lead. He added a power-play goal midway through the period, and Vegas held on even after New Jersey’s Nico Hischier scored 20 seconds later.

The Golden Knights have won four straight to improve to 15-11-4.

“‘It’s fun,” Marchessault said. “We didn’t have that all year so far. It’s been a roll on we get it.”

Malcolm Subban had 32 saves, and Chandler Stephenson scored in his first game since being acquired Monday from the Washington Capitals.

Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 26 shots for the Devils. Kyle Palmieri and Jesper Bratt also scored.

Hynes was fired Tuesday after a 9-13-4 start that left the team in last place in the Metropolitan Division and with the NHL’s second-worst record.

General manager Ray Shero named assistant Alain Nasreddine as the interim coach and Peter Horacek, a pro scout for the team, would join the coaching staff as an assistant.

Subban has been playing for the Devils since he was added to the roster on March 5.

“John played an integral role in the development of this team in establishing a foundation for our future and we are grateful for his commitment, passion and unmatched work ethic,” Shero said in a statement. “John is a respected leader, developer of talent and friend who makes this decision difficult. We ask a team who values and takes pride in accountability to the results we produce.

Nasreddine played for six different NHL organizations during his 15-year pro career with Chicago, Edmonton, Florida, Montreal, the Islanders and Pittsburgh.

Marchessault’s hat trick leads Knights past Devils

The Golden Knights’ Jonathan Marchessault, left, celebrates with William Karlsson, center, and Nicolas Hague as Reilly Smith skates toward them to join in after Marchessault scored the first of his three goals during the third period on Tuesday. The Golden Knights defeated the Devils 4-3.

**Roundup**

**Flyers 6, Maple Leafs 1:** Claude Giroux scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period and host Philadelphia had three goals in the final 2:06 to get its fifth straight win.

Travis Konecny had a goal and an assist for Philadelphia, which has earned points in seven straight games (6-0-1). The Flyers had an NHL-best 24 points in November, going 10-2-4 to tie a franchise record for most points in a month.

**Canadiens 4, Islanders 2:** Philip Danault, Brendan Gallagher and Shea Weber each had a goal and an assist, and host Montreal beat New York to snap an eight-game losing streak.

Jeff Petry also scored and Carey Price stopped 21 shots to earn his 11th win of the season for Montreal, which ended an 0-5-3 skid.

**Lightning 3, Predators 2 (OT):** Nikita Kucherov scored at 2:35 of overtime to give visiting Tampa Bay a victory over Nashville.

Victor Hedman and Ondrej Palat also scored and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 30 shots as the Lightning snapped a three-game skid.

**Bruins 2, Hurricanes 0:** Charlie Coyle scored late in the third period, Jaroslav Halak stopped 24 shots, and host Boston beat Carolina for its fourth straight loss.

David Krejci also scored for Boston, just 1:08 after Coyle got the Bruins on the scoreboard.

**Jets 5, Stars 1:** Kyle Connor had a goal and two assists, and host Winnipeg handed Dallas its fourth straight loss.

Nikolaj Ehlers, Josh Morrissey, Patrik Laine and Mark Scheifele each had a goal and assist for Winnipeg, which is 4-1-0 in its past five games.

Miro Heiskanen scored for the Stars, who are 0-3-1 since ending a seven-game winning streak.

**Coyotes 4, Blue Jackets 2:** Darcy Kuemper stopped 33 shots and visiting Arizona beat Columbus behind goals by Clayton Keller, Christian Fischer and Lawson Crouse.

Carl Soderberg also scored and the Coyotes have won three of four.

**Wild 4, Panthers 2:** Carter Hutton stopped 29 shots, and host Minnesota beat Florida to snap a two-game skid.

**Cannucks 5, Senators 2:** Antoine Roussel scored in his first game back after being sidelined for eight months with an injury, and host Vancouver beat Ottawa.

Zack MacEwen got his first NHL goal, and Tanner Pearson, Elias Pettersson and Oscar Fantenberg also scored for Vancouver, which won for just the fifth time in 15 games (5-8-2).
Ohio State will go into championship weekend as the top team in the College Football Playoff selection committee’s rankings, followed by LSU, Clemson and Georgia.

Utah, Oklahoma and Baylor are on deck, and that could turn out to be the great debate by Saturday night.

Utah was fifth, Oklahoma sixth and Baylor seventh in the committee’s second-to-last top 25 released Tuesday. The final rankings to set the pairings for the national semifinals come Sunday after each FBS conference plays a championship game.

The most pivotal games will be LSU-Utah in the Southeastern Conference championship game Saturday; Oklahoma-Baylor in the Big 12 championship Saturday; and Utah-Oregon — 13th this week — for the Pac-12 title Friday night.

### What next?

A team has never lost its conference championship game and made the College Football Playoff. Conventional wisdom suggests that could happen this season with LSU and Utah State.

Clemson might be in the same situation, but a loss to a four-touchdown underdog might give the committee some pause. It is also really unlikely Clemson will lose to Georgia, so let’s not waste too much energy debating that unlikely hypothetical.

In a world where the undefeated Tigers (purple), Buckeyes and Tigers (orange) stay undefeated, the fourth and final playoff spot could become a Pac-12 vs. Big 12 debate.

Utah appears to be on deck to slide into No. 4 if Georgia is bounced, as Utah and Baylor are lurking.

Committee chairman Rob Mullens, the athletic director at Oregon, said the most vigorous debate among the 13-member panel this week was between the Sooners and Sooners.

“We spent considerable time there. More time than anywhere else on the board,” Mullens said.

How the games play out this weekend while the committee is watching, all together at a resort hotel in Grapevine, Texas, could swing the decision. But here are the resumes going in:

### Utah (11-1)

- Victories against CFP ranked teams — 2.
- Victories against Top 5 teams — 4.
- Victories against Top 10 teams — 3.
- Loss — at USC (8-4), 30-23.
- Average scoring margin — 23.7 (10th in FBS).
- Defense (yards per play) — 3.56 (5th in FBS).
- Analytics/computer ratings
  - ESPN FPI — 11th.
  - Sagarin — 7th.
  - SRS — 22nd.
- Average scoring margin — 23.7 (10th in FBS).
- Victories against FBS .500 or better — 6.
- Victories against FBS teams — 6.
- Victories against FBS teams with winning percentages above .500 — 6.
- Average scoring margin — 26.8 (15th in FBS).
- Offense (yards per play) — 5.68 (35th in FBS).
- Offense (points per play) — 6.33 (25th in FBS).
- Analytics/computer ratings
  - ESPN FPI — 8th.
  - Sagarin — 6th (strength of schedule 12th).
  - SRS — 9th (strength of schedule 19th).

### Oklahoma (11-1)

- Victories against CFP ranked teams — 2.
- Victories against Top 5 teams — 4.
- Victories against Top 10 teams — 6.
- Loss — at Kansas State (8-4), 48-41.
- Average scoring margin — 16.4 (12th in FBS).
- Offense (yards per play) — 6.41 (9th in FBS).
- Defense (yards per play) — 4.20 (4th in FBS).
- Analytics/computer ratings
  - ESPN FPI — 11th.
  - Sagarin — 6th (strength of schedule 22nd).
  - SRS — 9th (strength of schedule 19th).
- Average scoring margin — 23.7 (10th in FBS).
- Victories against FBS .500 or better — 6.
- Victories against FBS teams — 6.
- Victories against FBS teams with winning percentages above .500 — 6.
- Loss — at TCU (6-6), 41-31.
- Average scoring margin — 22.8 (18th in FBS).
- Offense (yards per play) — 6.01 (38th in FBS).
- Offense (points per play) — 7.70 (4th in FBS).
- Analytics/computer ratings
  - ESPN FPI — 11th.
  - Sagarin — 6th (strength of schedule 12th).
  - SRS — 9th (strength of schedule 19th).
- Average scoring margin — 23.7 (10th in FBS).
- Victories against FBS .500 or better — 6.
- Victories against FBS teams — 6.
- Victories against FBS teams with winning percentages above .500 — 6.
- Loss — at Texas (9-3), 52-20.
- Average scoring margin — 17.2 (20th in FBS).
- Offense (yards per play) — 6.30 (19th in FBS).
- Offense (points per play) — 7.70 (4th in FBS).
- Analytics/computer ratings
  - ESPN FPI — 11th.
  - Sagarin — 6th (strength of schedule 12th).
  - SRS — 9th (strength of schedule 19th).
The only time the Dallas Cowboys started 3-0 and missed the playoffs, Jason Witten was a sixth-year tight end for a team that had been the top seed in the NFC the previous year and was eager to atone for a crushing divisional loss to Buffalo on Thanksgiving. Elliott’s teammates agreed to vary degrees on how spirited practices have been for a team that has underachieved for weeks and simply hasn’t been able to shake the inconsistency.

There was a loss to the then winless New York Jets, which the Cowboys answered by blowing out Philadelphia with first place in the NFC East on the line. Special teams mistakes in a rainy and windy 13-9 loss at New England set off owner Jerry Jones, who ripped the coaching staff in what became the latest saga over the often-discussed future of coach Jason Garrett.

Dallas looked as if it had another answer with a quick start against the Bills, only to get outscored 26-0 over a 50-minute stretch, prompting a much calmer Jones to back his coach and entertain “dreams” of a late-season run to the Super Bowl.

Amid the wild fluctuations, quarterback Dak Prescott says he remains calm and confident. “I’ve faced adversity a lot in my life on and off the field and at this moment I’m just double down on myself and my teammates,” Prescott said. “I’ve got confidence in what I can do and what these guys around me can do and hope they’re looking my way.”

Dallas hasn’t been past the divisional round since the last of the franchise’s five Super Bowl titles to finish the 1995 season. The sixth straight divisional playoff came last year at the Los Angeles Rams for the defending division champions.

Elliott, who is likely to finish without a rushing title in a full season for the first time in his four-year tenure with the Cowboys, still confident despite underachieving run to the Super Bowl.

Weekly statistics

AFC individual leaders

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Hunt: Big tests await Bills over next 2 weeks

FROM BACK PAGE

the conference-leading Baltimore Ravens (10-2) coming to town Sunday, and Buffalo playing at New England (10-2) on Dec. 21.

Coach Sean McDermott on Monday promptly cooled talk of having any AFC East title aspirations by saying he’s solely focused on the immediate challenge ahead and noting how the dynamic Lamar Jackson-led Ravens might well be the league’s best team.

“They just can beat you in so many different ways,” McDermott said of the Ravens, who have won eight straight and had outscored their previous five opponents by a combined margin of 202-62 before eking out a 20-17 win over San Francisco on Sunday. “I don’t think there’s really been a defense that’s cracked the code to this point, so to speak.”

And yet, McDermott appreciates the national attention the Bills are suddenly generating in having matched the team’s best record through 12 games in 23 years.

The latest sign of respect came Sunday when the NFL flexed Buffalo into its most prestigious TV spot by moving the Bills’ game at Pittsburgh from a 1 p.m. start to prime time on Dec. 21. It will mark the first time Buffalo has played on Sunday night since a 56-10 loss to New England in 2007.

“We talk a lot about things being earned, and the guys have earned that. So, I don’t think we shy away from that standpoint,” McDermott said. “But we also know there’s a lot of work ahead of us, a lot of runway to go yet.”

Buffalo might still have much to prove, especially considering how it built much of its record by taking advantage of a soft early season schedule.

The perception toward the Bills, however, is beginning to change based on the dominance they’ve shown in winning three straight.

Allen, selected seventh overall in the 2018 draft and 25 spots ahead of Jackson, is finding his rhythm. He’s overseeing an offense that has combined for 1,204 yards and nine touchdowns — seven of them passing — in its past three.

The uptick in production coincides with coordinator Brian Daboll introducing a no-huddle dimension.

And Buffalo’s defense has added a more attacking element that has led to 15 sacks in the past three games after managing just 22 in its first nine.

Bills players note there is also a difference between this year’s team and the one that sneaked into the playoffs on the final day of the 2017 season by clinching the AFC’s final wild-card berth only after Baltimore was eliminated by giving up a last-minute touchdown in a loss to Cincinnati.

“That was a whole different team,” safety Micah Hyde recently said, noting how the roster was already in transition following the arrival of McDermott and general manager Brandon Beane earlier that year.

“It was kind of one of those seasons where we didn’t know what to expect,” said Hyde, one of 12 remaining holdovers. “I think going into this year, we expect to do something great. And that’s still where our mindset is.”

Rivera fired by Panthers with 4 games remaining

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Panthers owner David Tepper said he would have preferred to wait until after the season to make a coaching change.

Tepper ultimately decided he wanted to get a jumpstart on his search for a new coach, so he fired Ron Rivera, the franchise’s winningest coach, on Tuesday with the Panthers (5-7) all but out of playoff contention following a four-game skid.

“I was informed of other teams doing different types of searches out there and I’m not going to start a search and not tell Ron Rivera,” Tepper said Tuesday. “(He’s) too good of a man, and I have great respect for Ron. He’s a great human being and I’m not going to disrespect anybody like that, especially Ron Rivera.”

Rivera said Wednesday that he doesn’t believe his coaching career is over.

“I do believe I will get another opportunity, and I will coach again,” Rivera said.

The 57-year-old Rivera opened his news conference by adamantly defending his accomplishments in his nine seasons in Carolina. He took over a 2-14 team, won three straight NFC South titles and led the Panthers to the Super Bowl.

He leaves with a 73-61-1 record, more wins than any Panthers coach.

But Rivera was a coach with a defensive background, and Tepper said the NFL has implemented rules that favor the offense. The owner said that benefits teams with a head coach that has an offensive background.

“That’s why you’re having more people go that way,” said Tepper, who bought the Panthers in 2018 for a reported $2.2 billion. “I think you have a lot of people on that side accepting the more modern processes.”

Tepper has spoken repeatedly about his distaste for the “long-term mediocrity” that has plagued the organization.

Rivera said he believes the team’s struggles the past two seasons are directly tied to quarterback Cam Newton’s injuries. Newton struggled through shoulder problems in the second half of last season and played only two games this season because of a foot issue that might require surgery.

“The biggest thing that contributed to our long-term mediocrity the last two seasons is that we didn’t have our quarterback situation settled,” Rivera said. “...Our problems didn’t start until when? Until our quarterback got hurt.”

Rivera said he was surprised Tepper fired him with four games left in the season.

“I thought, if anything, it’d happen at the end of the season...but at the end of the day you have to win football games,” Rivera said.

For now, Perry Fewell will serve as Carolina’s interim coach.

By Steve Reed  
Associated Press
Bill-iieve it!
Don’t look now – Buffalo’s in thick of playoff hunt

BY JOHN WAWROW
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y.

It was only a few weeks ago when the Bills had a 7-3 record, and quarterback Josh Allen acknowledged he and his teammates had taken a peek at the playoff picture.

“I wouldn’t say we’ve started talking about it, but you do want to keep an eye on what everybody else is doing,” the second-year starter responded, before making a cautious projection. “At the end of the day, I think you need at least 10 wins to get in.”

Two weeks and two wins later, the question for Allen now might be why stop there?

Returning from an extended weekend off following their convincing 26-15 win at Dallas on Thanksgiving Day, the Bills are in the thick of the AFC playoff race.

At 9-3, the Bills will play the two teams ahead of them in the standings over the next three weeks, starting with

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Buffalo fans, wearing Buffalo wings on their heads, cheer for the Bills during their Nov. 17 game against the Dolphins in Miami Gardens, Fla.

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