Esper: US, Taliban take step toward talks

Defense secretary tells allies that agreement in principle to reduction of violence could lead to peace deal

By John Vandiver
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. and Taliban have agreed in principle to a “seven-day reduction in violence” in Afghanistan, which could lead to a peace deal that could end 18 years of war in the country, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said Thursday at the end of a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels.

Seven days would be “sufficient” to test whether the Taliban was serious about moving toward a peace deal, Esper said.

“But in all things, our approach to this process will be conditions-based,” Esper said. “Let me say it again: conditions-based. So it will be a continual evaluative process as we go forward, if we go forward.”

Esper declined to comment on whether the U.S. would cease counterterrorism operations during any period of reduced violence, saying talks were ongoing.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said allies supported U.S. efforts to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban.

“We welcome any steps that can lead to the reduction of violence, but the Taliban have to show a real will and a real ability to deliver a reduction of violence on the ground,” Stoltenberg said.

American and Taliban negotiators have also laid the foundations for a political agreement in Afghanistan, Esper said.

SEE ESPER ON PAGE 3

Thousands of Marines enter Persian Gulf with USS Bataan Amphibious Ready Group

By Joshua Karsten
Stars and Stripes

MANAMA, Bahrain — The amphibious assault ship USS Bataan transited the Strait of Hormuz into the Persian Gulf on Wednesday, becoming the first U.S. Navy “big deck” to enter the strategic waters in 2020.

“Our passage through this important strait and continued presence in the area plays a critical role in maintaining the freedom of navigation key to regional security and stability here,” Capt. Lance Lesher, the group’s commodore, said in a statement.

Bataan and its amphibious ready group comprises 2,500 Marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the transport dock ship USS New York and the dock landing ship USS Oak Hill, the statement said.

Also traveling with the group is the destroyer USS Carney and cargo ship USNS McClean.

The last big deck to transit the strait before the Bataan was the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, which

SEE BATAAN ON PAGE 6
FRIDAY IN THE PACIFIC

Baghdad 63/42
Djibouti 83/74
Riyadh 70/38

FRIDAY IN EUROPE

Brussels 49/37
London 42/39

SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC

Guam 58/41
Sasebo 62/49

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Bahrain 63/59
Kuwait 66/47

WEATHER OUTLOOK

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

INTEREST RATES

Euro costs (Feb. 14) $1.1162
Dollar buys (Feb. 14) 0.8959
British pound (Feb. 14) $1.34

* Diesel EF D ** Midgrade

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RELOCATION GUIDE

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Esper defends Stars and Stripes decision

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Thursday defended the Pentagon’s effort to strip Stars and Stripes of all of its federal funding as part of its fiscal year 2021 budget request, telling reporters in Brussels that the independent news organization is not a priority.

“So, we trimmed the support for Stars and Stripes because we need to invest that money, as we did with many, many other programs, into higher priority issues,” Esper said during a news conference at NATO headquarters. He listed space, nuclear programs, hypersonic missiles and “a variety of systems” as places the money — slightly more than $15.5 million — could be reinvested in the $705.4 billion Defense Department spending proposal.

Pentagon officials acknowledged Wednesday for the first time that the budget proposal completely cuts the subsidy that the department provides Stars and Stripes to print and distribute newspapers to troops deployed around the world, including remote and often dangerous locations in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria.

Stars and Stripes receives about $8.7 million annually in operations and maintenance funds and about $6.9 million in contingency operations funds, said Maritime Lt. Col. Chris Logan, a spokesman for Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist.

The cut to Stars and Stripes’ annual Pentagon subsidy equals about half of the news organization’s annual funds to pay expenses. Stars and Stripes’ remaining money comes from sales, subscriptions and advertising.

Pentagon officials confirmed Monday that the budget request would cut at least some funding to Stars and Stripes, but they declined to provide monetary figures attached to the proposal. Stars and Stripes’ leadership was informed of the proposed cuts by Pentagon leadership also Monday, after The Wall Street Journal reported the news organization was eyed for a funding reduction.

Stars and Stripes first appeared during the Civil War, and it has been continuously published since World War II. It produces daily newspapers for U.S. military troops around the world and a website, which is updated every 24 hours a day. Though it is part of the Pentagon’s Defense Media Agency, Stripes retains its editorial independence and is constitutionally mandated to be governed by First Amendment principles.

In Logan’s statement Wednesday, he acknowledged Stars and Stripes’ value during its seven decades of continuous service to the U.S. military community.

“Their hard work and dedication in reporting on issues that matter the most to the military community continues to be of value,” he said. “However, as we look forward to the current budget proposal and beyond, the DOD must prioritize spending to support our warfighters in the most critical areas of need. Therefore, the department made the difficult decision that, beginning in fiscal year 2021, it will no longer provide appropriated funds to Stars and Stripes.”

The news organization’s value to American troops has been proven, said Ernie Gates, Stars and Stripes’ ombudsman. He said the newspaper not only provides service members the “welcome diversion” from tough missions, but it also provides independent, free-flowing information that they need to exercise their rights as Americans.

The newspaper has received pushback from various directions, including lawmakers, a former commander of U.S. European Command and a key journalism advocacy and education organization.


“Stars & Stripes was a link to home when I was in Iraq and Okinawa,” wrote Gallego, a Marine veteran. “It’s an A+ indie take on everyday DoD news, f*** ups, and Administration & General Officer BS. No wonder this President wants to cut it. He’s got a fight on his hands.”

Cisneros, a Navy veteran, wrote Stars and Stripes “provides a crucial voice on the DOD, VA, and other military matters.”

“We need their reporting,” he tweeted.

Other members of Congress reached this week for comment said they needed to take a close look at budget documents before speaking. One member expected to be briefed on the Stars and Stripes funding proposal this week.

In an email, a former top commander of American and NATO troops in Europe defended Stars and Stripes.

“Every day in my office as commander of U.S. European Command, I would read Stars and Stripes,” retired Navy Adm. James Stavridis, who served as EUCOM chief and NATO Supreme Allied Command from 2009 to 2013. “It was an invaluable, unbiased, and highly professional source of information which was critical to me in my role overseeing U.S. military throughout Europe.”

The Society of Professional Journalists called on Esper to rethink the funding cut to Stars and Stripes, which it said would be “a huge disservice to the men and women who serve our country” who rely on the physical newspaper in areas where they cannot access the internet.

“Since it was first published during the Civil War, Stars and Stripes has been a balanced and authoritative source of information for members of the military,” SPJ National President Patricia Gallagher Newberry said Wednesday in the statement. “Its ability to provide that information is critical to them and must not be hindered.”

Spc. Angel Ruszkiewicz, 21, a combat cameraman specialist from Milwaukee, reads a copy of Stars and Stripes in Erbil, Iraq, in December before a flight to Syria.

Chad Garland/Stars and Stripes

US: Troops killed Syrian combatant

Associated Press

BEIRUT — The U.S. military said Thursday its troops fired on and killed a Syrian combatant when government supporters attacked an American convoy in northeastern Syria a day earlier.

The clash Wednesday was a rare direct confrontation between a Syrian pro-government group and U.S. troops deployed in the increasingly crowded area near the border with Iraq and Turkey.

A convoy of U.S. armored vehicles drove into a government-controlled area and was attacked by pro-government supporters, including armed men who fired at the soldiers and pelted them with stones and Molotov cocktails.

Spokesman for the U.S-led coalition Col. Myles Caggins said the person killed was a combatant. He said the U.S. soldiers had come under fire and responded in self-defense. Syrian government media maintained the person killed was a civilian.

The U.S. maintains hundreds of troops in the area as part of its fight against Islamic State group militants. In recent weeks, and following a Turkish invasion of villages and towns along its border, the area has been swarming with Russian, Syrian government and Turkish troops. They are deployed in part to maintain the peace but also in the latest tug over territorial control in Syria’s four-year-old conflict.

Caggins said the patrol was planned, and the route passed through a government-controlled area. The convoy of U.S. armored vehicles passed through a Syrian military checkpoint, but government forces were also present.

The U.S. maintains lines of communication with Russia, Damascus’s ally, to avoid such confrontations. It wasn’t clear if the route was deconflicted.

Esper: NATO defense ministers vow to contribute more to Iraq effort

FROM FRONT PAGE

“Progress has been made on this front and we’ll have more to report on that soon, I hope,” he said.

During the two-day meeting of NATO defense ministers, in addition to consulting with allies about the potential pause in fighting in Afghanistan, Esper got commitments from them to contribute more troops to Iraq.

Esper has called on NATO to do more in Iraq so that the U.S. can reduce some of its roughly 5,000 troops there and refocus them on other missions. Allied defense ministers agreed “in principle” to enhance the NATO mission in Iraq. Neither they nor Esper said which countries would be adding forces to an alliance training mission in the country.

Allies also considered ways that NATO can do more in the broader Middle East and North Africa, which has been a priority for U.S. President Donald Trump.

BY COREY DICKSTEIN  Stars and Stripes

Esper: NATO defense ministers vow to contribute more to Iraq effort
Philippines plan to end pact is ‘fine’ with Trump

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump said he’s “fine” with the Philippines’ intent to terminate a security pact with the United States despite the move’s potential fallout on the Philippines, which can efforts to contain China’s influence in the South China Sea.

“That’s fine — we’ll save a lot of money,” Trump said Wednesday in the Oval Office in response to a reporter’s question. “I have a very good relationship with Duterte, I really don’t mind if they would like to do that.”

Philippines Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. said Tuesday that a notice of termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement, which allows U.S. forces to train and visit in the former American colony, had been submitted to the U.S. Embassy in Manila the day the pact, which has been in place since 1999, is scheduled to end 180 days after that notification.

Adm. Philip S. Davidson, commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, said Thursday that he hoped the 180-day timeframe would “allow some time for diplomatic efforts to be pursued here.”

“Hope we can get to a successful outcome,” he told a foreign policy think-tank in Sydney.

As we try and bolster our presence and compete with [China] in this era of great power competition, I think it’s a move in the wrong direction,” he added. “It’s a long-standing relationship we’ve had with the Philippines for their strategic location, the ties between our peoples, our countries,” Esper said.

Duterte spokesman Salvador Panelo said Wednesday the termination should have come “a long time ago” because it was advantageous only to the U.S., according to a statement released by his office.

He said Esper’s reaction was expected, “given that the VFA favors the U.S. and its abrogation affects its global strategic defensive positioning.”

Panelo told reporters Tuesday that Manila is expecting “preferential attention” from the U.S. following the revocation of the special status.

On Thursday, Philippines Senator Vicente Sotto said lawmakers may take Duterte’s decision to end the military pact to the country’s Supreme Court, according to ABS-CBN News.

The Visiting Forces Agreement was approved by lawmakers and needs their concurrence if it’s to be set aside, the broadcaster quoted Sotto as saying. Sotto told a Philippine radio station that a petition to review Duterte’s unilateral decision may be filed as early as next week.

Early in his term, Duterte signaled he would not implement the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the U.S., which was signed by the former administration.

The agreement gave America greater access to rotate troops and store supplies in a handful of military bases throughout the country.

But Duterte was confronted with “resistance within his own military and defense bureaucracy” and appears to have waited for “a more opportune moment” to alter the military status quo, said Renato Cruz De Castro, a professor in the International Studies Department at De La Salle University, Manila, in a commentary posted online Tuesday by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank.

Now, two years before the end of his term, Duterte “believes that the [Armed Forces of the Philippines] will now support his move since he has increased the defense budget, funded the military’s modernization program, and promoted senior officers who will be loyal to him,” Cruz De Castro said.

US, Philippines expected to hold Balikatan drills

By Matthew M. Burke
Stars and Stripes

Joint military exercises with the United States will go on as planned ahead of the termination of a long-standing security pact between the two nations in six months’ time, Philippines National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said Thursday.

The multinational Balikatan exercises have taken place in the Philippines every spring for 35 years. However, Philippines officials announced Tuesday they had notified the U.S. Embassy in Manila of their intention to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement, which permits U.S. troops to deploy in the country.

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte ordered the termination after Washington reportedly canceled the U.S. visa of Sen. Ronald dela Rosa, a stalwart ally and former Philippines National Police chief. dela Rosa has been cited for human rights violations related to Duterte’s bloody drug war that began when he was elected president in 2016.

The agreement, in place since 1999, is slated to end 180 days after that notification.

“With the formal serving of the notice of termination of the Visiting Forces Agreement, this year’s planned military exercises with the Americans shall proceed as scheduled,” Lorenzana said Thursday in a statement released by his office.

“However, our American counterparts may opt to discontinue the scheduled exercises before the 180 days are up.”

Once the termination is final, the Philippines would “cease to have exercises” with the U.S., Lorenzana said.

The U.S. Embassy in Manila could not be reached for comment Thursday afternoon. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command did not immediately respond to requests for comment, and a spokesman for the III Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa, Japan, referred all questions to the embassy.

Gen. Felimon Santos Jr., chief of staff of the Philippines armed forces, said the Philippines would look to “increase” training and exercises with other allied nations like Japan and Australia to make up for the absence of U.S. troops, the ABS-CBN television network reported Thursday.

The Visiting Forces Agreement requires both countries to defend one another should they be attacked by a third party.

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that ending the Visiting Forces Agreement could do real damage to the long-term Pacific allies’ defense relationship as well as harm U.S. efforts to deter China in the South China Sea.

The Philippines is locked in a series of maritime territorial disputes with China and military cooperation between the Philippines and the U.S. is seen as key to containing China and pushing back against its territorial claims.

“Washington will [be less likely to] continue to commit to Philippine defense in the South China Sea, given that there was no way for its troops to be in Filipino territory,” Jeffrey Ordanil, an assistant professor of international security studies at Tokyo Interna-

ional University, told Stars and Stripes in January.

“One of the very few options available for the U.S. to influence China’s behavior in the South China Sea, long term, is to work with its alliance with the Philippines,” he added. “It’s difficult to deter China in maritime South- east Asia from Guam, Okinawa or Darwin. They’re simply too far away ... Beijing will certainly be happy with this.”

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the agreement has not been terminated “a long time ago,” because it was “very good relationship there, but I really don’t mind if they would like to do that.”

A Duterte spokesman said Wednesday that the agreement has not been terminated “a long time ago,” because it was “very good relationship there, but I really don’t mind if they would like to do that.”

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New rotational brigade transitions to S. Korea

By Kim Gamel
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Tanks and other armored vehicles rolled off a ship onto the Korean Peninsula this week in preparation for the arrival of the new rotational brigade.

The Fort Riley, Kan.-based 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, known as the Dagger Brigade, will be the eighth rotational brigade to serve in South Korea since the system began in 2015.

It is replacing the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, which will return to Fort Hood, Texas, after its nine-month rotation.

The transition comes as the U.S. and South Korean militaries are expected to begin joint exercises next month. The allies have reduced the scale of the drills in a bid to avoid antagonizing North Korea amid stalled diplomatic efforts to persuade it to give up nuclear weapons.

The brigades bring their own equipment to the peninsula and remove some of it when they leave, including M1 Abrams tanks and M2 Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

“The logistical process allows for proper maintenance and service of the old equipment and aligns our deployed forces with current Army-wide modernization and readiness efforts,” the military said Thursday in a press release.

The equipment was offloaded at the southern port of Gwangyang, then taken to its destination on the South Korean rail system, it added.

The brigades will hold the official transfer of authority ceremony in early March, officials said. It’s the Dagger Brigade’s first rotation to South Korea.

The rotational system was introduced in 2015 when the Army deactivated the permanently stationed unit that had served near the border with North Korea for five decades.

The Army said that it exposes more soldiers to South Korea’s operating environment and enhances the alliance between the two countries that fought together in the 1950-53 Korean War.

Maj. Gen. Patrick Donahoe, the Eighth Army’s deputy commander for operations, praised the outgoing Greywolf Brigade, which arrived in June 2018.

“They arrived at a high state of readiness and we’re returning them to Fort Hood better trained and more experienced, like any unit marked for rotation” to South Korea, Donahoe said. “We’re really looking forward to the Dagger Brigade’s arrival and expect nothing but the best from a unit of the Army’s oldest division.”

North Korea, which commonly denounces U.S. activities on the divided peninsula as threats, has criticized plans for the rotational deployment of the new unit after it was officially announced in early December.

State-run media called it a violation of the spirit of negotiations, as Washington has insisted that it remains open to talks despite the prolonged stalemate.

The brigade announced the launch of transfer of its latest tanks and armored vehicles, the Korean Central Broadcasting Station was quoted as saying in mid-January. “Such U.S. attitude discloses the deceitfulness of its call for dialogue, which it has been speaking of in front of the world.”

Twitter: @kimgamel

Maj. Gen. Patrick Donahoe
Eighth Army deputy commander for operations

Jewish American soldiers killed in WWII receive Star of David headstones

By Matthew M. Burke
Stars and Stripes

The American Battle Monuments Commission at a ceremony Wednesday replaced Latin crosses on the graves of five Jewish soldiers buried at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines.

The crosses were originally installed in error following the soldiers’ deaths during World War II, officials said. The new grave markers were requested by the families of the fallen soldiers with support from Operation Benjamin, a nonprofit dedicated to rectifying grave marker errors for Jewish-American soldiers around the world.

The ceremony was attended by family members of the service members, U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines Sung Kim and officials from the monuments commission.

“These young men left their families, the comfort of their homes and their faith communities to answer their nation’s call,” commission secretary William Matz said in a statement.

The soldiers whose headstones were replaced include:

- Pvt. Louis Wolf, 25, of Philadelphia and the 455th Ordnance Company (aviation), who was captured at Corregidor and died of malnutrition and dehydration in a Japanese prison camp in 1945.
- Pvt. Arthur Waldman, 27, of Detroit and the 200th Coast Artillery Regiment, who survived the Bataan Death March and died of beriberi heart failure at a Japanese prison camp in Tokyo in 1944.
- First Lt. Robert Fink, 25, of New York City, and the 583rd Signal Air Warning Battalion, who died of scrub typhus on his birthday at a Papua New Guinea hospital in 1944.
- Pvt. Allan Franken, 20, of New York City, and the 24th Infantry Division, who died from a gunshot wound in Mindanao, Philippines, in 1945.
- Sgt. Jack Gilbert, 37, who was born in Poland and drafted in New York, of the 161st Signal Photographic Company. He was killed by an enemy shell on Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, in 1944.

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Rise in friction with Iran so soon after arrival in Mideast ‘like a splash of cold water in the face’

BY DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

ABOARD THE USS NORMANDY IN THE NORTH ARABIAN SEA — The captain of this warship loaded with Tomahawk missiles delivered the news to his crew: Hours earlier, the United States had killed Iran’s most powerful military commander in a drone strike.

Navy Capt. Christopher Stone said it wasn’t clear how Iran might respond to the death of Qassem Soleimani. But the Normandy, escorting the USS Harry S. Truman near the Persian Gulf, had to be ready for anything, he said.

“We must be prepared for direct military action,” Stone recalled telling the crew.

With the warning and an elevated threat level, the sailors prepared for potential combat. Additional precautions put in place on the Normandy required them to carry flame-resistant balACLavas and gloves to complement their flame-resistant uniforms, and the Internet service they used to speak to family members was temporarily cut.

Across the region, U.S. military officials made other changes as vessels were dispatched to sea, where they would be better positioned. The Navy’s schedule for ships going into port also was altered.

The previously unreported details and interviews with more than 20 sailors on three Navy warships paint a picture of a military that was bracing for war in the wake of Soleimani’s Jan. 3 death in Baghdad. Days later, Iran launched ballistic missiles at two sites in Iraq housing U.S. troops, briefly deepening the crisis until it became clear that no Americans were killed.

The events point to a new reality: When tensions have been high for the moment, the Pentagon is still feeling out whether Iran will retaliate again, and how.

“I have spent 26 years in this Navy not hoping for war, but preparing for war so that we can keep our nation safe,” Stone said in an interview on his warship. “I would say overwhelmingly, the response I saw was a crew that was very focused.”

After Iran’s missile attack, President Donald Trump-declared on Twitter that “all is well!” But defense officials have reported a growing number of service members who suffered mild traumatic brain injuries. As of Monday, the Pentagon said 109 had been diagnosed, with 75 treated in Iraq and returned to duty, 23 sent back to the United States and others still under evaluation in Germany.

“Our great American crews are more prepared for anything,” Trump said in a televised address. “Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world.”

Aboard the Normandy, sailors watched Trump’s speech, said Navy Lt. David Remmers, who oversaw weapons and is on his third deployment to the Middle East.

There was “almost an eerie feeling” afterward because the threat against U.S. forces at sea seemed to dissipate so quickly, he said. Days earlier, Remmers had told his sailors they needed to make sure the Normandy’s weapons were ready to use.

“I’ve never really spoken to anyone who has deployed to any area of operations that has experienced a threat warning level that we were at,” Remmers said.

“My experience, speaking to other people who have been in high-tension situations, is it was the highest I had ever heard.”

Chief Warrant Officer Jordan Tempest spends some time on deck to test its abilities, practiced carrying flame-resistant balaclavas and gloves to complement their flame-resistant uniforms, and the Internet service they used to speak to family members was temporarily cut.

Chief Warrant Officer Jordan Buck said Stone’s announcement about Soleimani was a “shocking moment.”

Buck said he came aboard “almost immediately after the strike on Soleimani. It was a moment of impact. Our continued commitment to our partner nations lends to our partner nations lends to the strength of nations here in the Gulf and elsewhere in the region,” LeLand said.

The transit comes after a month of tension in the region following the January killing of the U.S. of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and retaliatory rocket attacks on an airbase in Iraq that left more than 100 U.S. service members with traumatic brain injuries.

“We are always prepared in the highest I had ever heard.”

Chief Warrant Officer Jordan Buck said Stone’s announcement about Soleimani was a “shocking moment.”

With 17 years in the Navy and several deployments to the Middle East, Buck said he arrived on the Normandy on Dec. 28 and “just thought it was my luck” that the threat level was not being able to share specifics with worried family members about what was happening, she said.

Still, she added, she knew she had a job to do and put her faith in the ship’s defenses and her fellow sailors.

“At the end of the day, the carrier is one of the most protected ships, so I felt protected,” she said. “I know what we’ve got on board, and I know they don’t have anything on us.”

Navy officials declined to specify what prompted the elevated threat level or how high exactly it was, citing security concerns. They also asked The Post to withhold other specific information about the steps the Navy took in response.

The USS Tempest, a 170-foot patrol craft, was at sea shortly after the strike on Soleimani. But Lt. Cmdr. Andre Cleveland, the commanding officer, said it had been quiet throughout his crew’s deployment.

The ship, sailing out of Bahrain, is part of a rotating fleet involved in Operation Sentinel, a mission the United States established last year to protect commercial vessels from Iranian attacks. The Tempest spends some time on

sentry” duty, offering security to commercial mariners while larger warships like destroyers carry out “sentinel” duty by using powerful sensors to watch for potential attacks.

On one 12-hour day at sea, the Tempest sailed dozens of miles into the Persian Gulf. Sailors briefly deployed a battery-operated Puma drone from the ship’s deck to test its abilities, practiced facing harassment from a speedboat and sailed into formation with smaller American vessels, including two Mark 6 patrol boats and two Coast Guard cutters.

Cleveland, who has been in command of the Tempest since June, said all nations have a right to sail in international waters and that the Navy is looking to de-escalate tensions. But his crew is “ready for anything,” he said.

Rear Adm. Andrew Loiselle, who oversees the Trump, Norman- dy and other ships as commander of a carrier strike group, said even at the height of the threat from Iran, the Sentinel mission continued. But he vigorously acknowledged that it changed, saying the Navy returned to the mission “almost immediately after the cessation of hostilities.”

Standing on the bridge of the Normandy, Stone watched as a succession of fighter jets landed nearby on the Truman. A single fighter jet streaked by the Normandy’s port side with a roar, its afterburners glowing in the twilight as it pulled into a climb.

“He’s just showing off for you,” Stone said with a grin.
Governor OKs reforms in how Wis. National Guard handles assault cases

By Todd Richmond
Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Gov. Tony Evers approved a plan Monday to improve how the Wisconsin National Guard handles sexual misconduct complaints.

The plan includes a ban on internal sexual assault investigations. All complaints will be reported to the adjutant general, local police and the National Guard Bureau’s Office of Complex Investigations.

The plan also calls for a new electronic case tracking system and a new council led by the adjutant general to provide state-level oversight of all sexual assault, sexual harassment and retaliation cases. Recruiting for judge advocate, sexual assault prevention and equal opportunity employment positions are a priority.

Victims will be referred to National Guard Bureau attorneys at every step of their cases and information about disciplinary actions will be passed down the chain of command to individual soldiers and airmen while protecting victim privacy.

"There is still much work to be done to ensure our service members are safe and supported while carrying out their mission, but we are taking important steps to implement needed reforms," Evers said.

Brig. Gen. Gary Ebben, the Wisconsin Guard’s interim adjutant general, said in a statement that the plan will reassure soldiers and airmen that the Guard metes out discipline in sexual misconduct cases.

“Simultaneously, our commanders, junior leaders, and all our service members will have visibility on trends and issues across the force, and see that discipline is administered consistently and with transparency across the force,” he said.

Evers issued an executive order calling for the plan in December after the NGB conducted a top-to-bottom review of Guard sexual misconduct reporting protocols. The review resulted in a report revealing multiple shortcomings.

Evers and U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin requested the review in March after Master Sgt. Jay Ellis complained to Baldwin in 2018 that commanders in his 115th Fighter Wing security squadron had brushed off at least six sexual misconduct complaints dating back to 2002.

One of the most glaring problems investigators found was commanders opening internal sexual assault investigations rather than referring complaints to Army or Air Force criminal investigators as required by federal law and Department of Defense policy.

The Wisconsin Guard’s top commander, Maj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, resigned at Evers’ request hours before the report was made public. Air Force officials confirmed last month that Dunbar is under investigation last year even though he knew about the misbehavior.

Military investigations cover military personnel accused of crimes such as assault, fraud or sexual misconduct. The NGB handles allegations involving guard service members, but it’s a federal agency and doesn’t have authority over officers, warrant officers or airmen who joined the Guard during the Vietnam War and later served in the Army National Guard. It also doesn’t have jurisdiction over Guard officers and airmen who entered active duty in the Army or Air Force during that era.

Brig. Gen. Charles Shofner, the Wisconsin Guard’s top civilian leader, said in a statement that the plan will improve internal investigations and expand the number of investigators available as the Guard meets a federal mandate to complete investigations of sexual misconduct cases within 120 days.

\[ The move will have significant impacts to time and money. \]
Special operations command statement
U.S. Marine Corps
Army unit to train African forces on security

By Caitlin M. Kenney
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Members of the Army’s 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade will deploy to Africa soon to provide training and assistance to African forces as a way to compete with Chinese and Russian influence on the continent, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

The SFAB unit, based at Fort Benning, Ga., will be deployed to conduct missions to train, advise and assist “in spotlight African countries,” said Alyssa Farah, the chief Pentagon spokeswoman, in a prepared statement, so I get the force sizing right, that the activities, the actions and tasks right in each theater of command,” Esper said Tuesday to reporters traveling with him to Europe.

For several years, AFRICOM has been focused primarily on counterterrorism operations as well as building relationships and training opportunities with African partner countries. U.S. military forces and local partners have conducted operations in Somalia against the al-Shabab terrorist group, which is seen as a serious threat in eastern Africa.

While al-Shabab is considered one of the biggest threats on the continent, “competition with Russia and China on the continent is critically important. We think we have a competitive edge there,” Maj. Gen. Roger Cloutier, the commander of U.S. Army Africa, said Wednesday to reporters at the Pentagon via a teleconference from Italy.

China has a military base in Djibouti, known as Camp Lemonnier, which sits in the Horn of Africa, and the Chinese military has been seen on the continent multiple times in the past few years.

AFRICOM has been concerned with the Chinese military efforts on the continent, as well as Russia, which has deployed military units to the African continent.

“We are a proven model. We believe we’re the partner of choice. So I don’t think they would function very well if we didn’t have a Space National Guard,” the National Guard’s current space operations force is small but growing, with some 1,100 Air National Guard troops in space operations and another 300 or so Army National Guard members. It has units that conduct space missions in Colorado, California, Florida, Alaska, New York, Ohio and Arkansas, and is in the process of establishing such units in Hawaii and Guam.

Guard space operators are involved in a variety of operations, including space intelligence, homeland missions such as missile defense, and offensive electronic warfare, the generals said.

Guard planners have proposed limiting Space National Guard operations to those nine states and territories who already have or will soon have space capabilities. They said attempting to have a Space National Guard in all 50 states and four territories, not far from the strategic American base there, and members of the Wagner group, a Russian mercenary organization, are known to operate in Libya.

Cloutier said African allies know the U.S. is a better military partner than Russia or China.

“So the competitive advantage that we have on the African continent, I think, is the professional nature of our military, the discipline of our soldiers, the great training that we can provide, and the fact that we believe we’re the partner of choice. So that’s how we compete head-to-head with them,” he said.

The U.S. Army Africa commander emphasized Esper’s review was not taking AFRICOM away from its commitments to the region.

“The message I’m relaying to my partners is that we’re not walking away. We are still engaged,” he said, adding U.S. Army Africa will have its largest exercise — Exercise African Lion — in late March with about 9,000 soldiers from the U.S., African partners and allied nations participating.

PATRICK ALBRIGHT/U.S. Army


National Guard leaders seek Space Force National Guard

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Top National Guard leaders want the Pentagon to create a Space Force National Guard, which they said Wednesday was needed to ensure continuity between guard space operators and their active-duty counterparts who will soon join the new military branch.

Most of the National Guard’s almost 1.5 million space-focused troops would be moved into a Space Force National Guard so they can keep pace with changes certain to occur as the Space Force, established late last year, grows and develops its own culture, techniques and procedures, six National Guard generals told reporters at the Pentagon.

“Personally, I don’t see how we will be Space Force if we don’t have a Space Guard,” said Air Force Maj. Gen. Michael Loh, the adjutant general for the Colorado National Guard. “I really don’t.”

Air Force Brig. Gen. Torrence Saxe, the adjutant general for the Alaska National Guard, added: “I don’t think they would function very well if we didn’t have a Space National Guard.”

The National Guard’s current space operations force is small but growing, with some 1,100 Air National Guard troops in space operations and another 300 or so Army National Guard members. It has units that conduct space missions in Colorado, California, Florida, Alaska, New York, Ohio and Arkansas, and is in the process of establishing such units in Hawaii and Guam.

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Guard planners have proposed limiting Space National Guard operations to those nine states and territories who already have or will soon have space capabilities. They are required to report their plans for such an organization to Congress by late March.

Already, top generals from many of the states that have space forces have talked with lawmakers about the need to establish a Space Force National Guard.

Army Maj. Gen. David Baldwin said he hopes Pentagon officials determine on their own that they should build a space guard, but if not, he and other top guard leaders would lobby congressional lawmakers directly to add it into the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets Pentagon policy.

“It is being received very well by the members on The Hill,” Baldwin said. “We are hopeful … we don’t have to [lobby Congress], but we are prepared to do that.”

Pentagon leaders are in the process of building the Space Force, the first new branch of the military established since the Air Force in 1947. Gen. Jay Raymond, the chief of space operations, is now the only official member of Space Force, but officials expect it to grow to about 6,000 troops during the next year, beginning with the transfer of Air Force airmen who work on space missions.

Army and Navy troops are also expected to move into the new military service.

The Space Force on Monday unveiled a $15.5 billion budget request for fiscal year 2021, which made no mention of a National Guard or reserves component. However, Air Force senior leadership, which oversees the Space Force within the Air Force Department, has backed a Space Force National Guard publicly.

The National Guard leaders said the lack of clarity is concerning, as they are preparing to begin planning for a Space Force National Guard as soon as possible.

“We are a proven model. We feel like it’s a pretty simple solution,” Effert said.

“We’re not big fans of another yearlong study to examine the same things we have already spent some time studying. We feel like it’s a pretty simple solution, we’d like to be part of the solution, and we would like to move forward with it.”

@CDicksteinDC
Soldier killed in brawl on street in Germany, Army says

**By Immanuel M. Johnson and Marcus Kloekner**

*Stars and Stripes*

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — An American soldier was injured in a brawl Saturday night on a Grafenwoehr street that’s home to several bars, German police and U.S. military officials said.

“At this time, we are investigating a 21-year-old man” who is suspected of injuring the soldier in the brawl, said Werner Stopfer, chief of police in the town of Eschenbach, whose officers responded to calls about the melee at around 2 a.m. on Alte Ambergstrasse in Grafenwoehr.

The injured soldier is from the 173rd Airborne Division, said Maj. Christopher Bradley, spokesman for the division, which has units in Grafenwoehr and in Vicenza, Italy. He was treated for his injuries and returned to duty, Bradley added.

The other person involved was also an American soldier, said Bradley, but it was unclear to which unit he was attached.

German police detained the suspect and handed him over to U.S. military police, said Stopfer. By the time German police officers had arrived on the scene from Eschenbach, about seven miles away, about two dozen people were involved in a street brawl, said Stopfer. It was unclear if everyone involved in the fight was an American service member.

Soldiers from the 173rd have been accused of being involved in numerous violent incidents in Vicenza, including a fight in which one Italian man had his jaw fractured and another sustained broken ribs.

The incident in the Italian city’s old town in November led the 173rd Airborne Brigade’s commander to put Contra Pescherie and U.S. military police to work to get it under control. That staff has been tasked with the job of keeping the area under control.”

The Pentagon also agreed to step up investigations if they find that things are actually improving or that they’ve got this particular area under control.”

**Soldier, 21, dies at Bagram Airfield**

**By Phillip Walter Wellman**

*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — A U.S. soldier has died in a noncombat incident at Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, the Defense Department said Thursday.

Spc. Brandon Tyne Kimball, 21, from Central Point, Ore., died Wednesday at the base, which is the U.S. largest outpost in the country, the Pentagon said.

The aircraft structural repairer was assigned to 3rd Battalion, 10th Aviation Regiment of the 10th Mountain Division (Light Infantry) Combat Aviation Brigade, based at Fort Drum, N.Y.

The Pentagon provided no further details about the incident but said an investigation has been launched. “Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of Spc. Brandon Kimball during this very difficult time,” said Lt. Col. Kamil Sztalkoper, 10th Mountain Division spokesman. “He will be missed from our formations.”

Kimball joined the Army in August 2016. His awards and decorations include the National Defense Service Medal and the Afghanistan Campaign Medal with Campaign Star.

Troops from the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade deployed last fall for a nine-month rotation to support the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, replacing the 1st Armored Division Combat Aviation Brigade out of Fort Bliss, Texas. Official photos posted online show some elements of 10th CAB rotating back to the U.S. in December and January.

Kimball is the seventh U.S. service member to have died in Afghanistan this year. Four of the deaths have been combat-related.

**GAO: DOD effort on kid-on-kid sex assaults has gaps**

The Department of Defense is struggling to change how it handles the abuse of military kids, officials said Thursday.

In a report released Wednesday by the Government Accountability Office, Defense officials said they don’t know the extent of child-on-child sexual assault, in part because some officials dismiss incidents without reporting them and the Pentagon has no place to track all cases that have been logged.

Worldwide, more than 1.2 million school-age children live with military families, many on large bases that include schools, recreation centers, playgrounds and other trappings of civilian life.

In the wake of the Pentagon’s investigation into the death of a 19-year-old Italian man at an Italian military base in September, the GAO’s Farrell said the Pentagon agreed that more expertise was needed and said it was working on building that expertise.

Generally, the changes related to child-on-child sexual assault so far have focused on reviewing written policies for how to handle and track reports. The military’s equivalent of social services, the Family Advocacy Program, published new guidelines as did the Army and the Pentagon-run DoD’s Office of Defense Education Activity.

AP’s investigation documented nearly 700 sex assault reports on U.S. bases worldwide over 10 years, a certain undercount because the Pentagon did not systematize the cases.

The GAO also found that the Defense Department didn’t know the full scope of the problem because various branches was incomplete — and a centralized tracking system is a long way off. The report’s lead author, Farrell, said it awarded a contract to develop a database in mid-November.

The Defense Department “has not yet identified all information requirements, developed a plan for how it will use the data it collects, or established a school or schedule for development and implementation,” GAO said of a tracking database.

The report also found that some complaints weren’t getting classified as abuse by staff at military bases. That staff has “considerable discretion” in deciding whether complaints are reported or recorded in incident-tracking data.

In the DOD’s education system, for example, the GAO identified incidents of student misconduct, including unwanted genital contact, that bases schools didn’t treat as serious and report to the upper administration.

“As a result, systemic issues within a particular school or district may never be reported to DoDEA’s leadership,” the report said, “and any additional resources or sources that a school or district needs to prevent future incidents may not be identified.”

**Effort not flagging**

Staff Sgt. Kelsey Schroeder runs the ball up the middle during the 103rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command “Super Bowl” flag football game at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, on Sunday.
WASHINGTON — In the week since his acquittal on impeachment charges, a fully embold-ened President Donald Trump is demonstrating his determination to assert an iron grip on government, pushing his Justice De-partment to ease up on a longtime friend while using the levers of presidential powers to exact pay-back on real and perceived foes.

Trump has told confidants in recent days that he felt both vin-dicated and strengthened by his acquittal in the Senate, believing Republicans have rallied around him in unprecedented fashion while voters are tiring of the political process, according to four White House officials and Republicans close to the West Wing who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about private conversations.

Since then, Trump and his aides have moved with haste to clear his administration of those he sees as insufficiently loyal, reaching all the way back to the time of former special coun-sel Robert Mueller’s probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Democrats and outside analysts are raising red flags that Trump is exhibiting a post-impeachment thirst for vengeance that’s gone beyond bending norms and could potentially cause lasting damage to institutions.

Some Republican senators, in-cluding Tennessee’s Lamar Al-exander, Maine’s Susan Collins and Alaska’s Lisa Murkowski, said they found Trump’s effort to pressure Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky inappro-priate. But they also expressed hope following his acquittal that Trump had learned a lesson from the episode.

Murkowski acknowledged Wednesday that “there haven’t been very strong indicators this week that he has.”

After Trump vented on Twitter this week about federal prose-cutors recommending up to nine years in federal prison for his confidant Roger Stone, the Justice Department abruptly an-ounced that it would reeval-u-ate the recommended sentence. Justice officials insisted the timing was coincidental; they’d already been planning to pull the recommendation.

In recent days, the White House has yanked a senior Treasury De-partment nomination away from a former Justice Department offi-cial who supervised the prosecu-tions of several Trump advisers.

The administration also fired an EPA official who claims he was ousted because he was deemed too friendly with Democrats.

Trump even suggested this week that the Pentagon investiga-ted and potentially discipline former White House aide Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who pro-vided damaging testimony about the president in the impeachment inquiry.

That came after White House officials last week told Vindman and his twin brother, also an Army officer who had been detailed to the White House National Secu-rity Council, that their services were no longer needed and that they would be reassigned to new duties by the Pentagon.

“We are witnessing a crisis in the rule of law in America — un-like one we have ever seen be-fore,” Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said in a speech on the Senate floor Wednesday. Schumer called for the Justice Department’s independent in-spector general to probe the department’s action in the Stone case. Later, House lawmakers announced Attorney General William Barr would come before them next month to answer questions.

Former Justice Department officials struggled to recall a precedent, describing it as norm-shattering turmoil that raises troubling questions about the ap-parent politicization of an agency meant to function independent of White House sway.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Michael Bromwich, a former federal prosecutor and Justice Department inspector general who has been represent- ing former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe in a criminal in-vestigation before the same U.S. attorney’s office.

Trump turned testy during an Oval Office appearance when re-porters asked him about interfer- ing in the Stone case and whether he learned anything from his im-peachment ordeal.

He described the lesson he gleaned from being just the third president to endure an im-peachment trial: “Democrats are crooked. ... They’re vicious, they shouldn’t have brought impeach-ment and that my poll numbers are 10 points higher because of fake news.”

Sen. Sherrod Brown, an Ohio Democrat, accused Trump of being on a “retribution tour” and suggested that Senate Repub-licans — with the exception of Utah’s Mitt Romney, who voted with Democrats to convict Trump on the abuse of power count — en-couraged the president by turn-ing a blind eye to his conduct.

“It’s pretty clear the president of the United States did learn a lesson: the lesson he can do whatever he wants, whenever he wants, he can abuse his office, he’ll never ever be held accountable by this Senate,” Brown said.

President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting Wednesday with Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno in the Oval Office in Washington. Trump has begun a removal process of everyone he deems unloyal from his administration after his acquittal.

By Lisa Mascaro

WASHINGTON — Inside the Capitol, it’s as if the impeachment of President Donald Trump never happened.

One week after the historic undertaking shuttered to a close, Congress is feverishly back at work emboldened but also argu-ably diminished by the outcome.

Senate Republicans are flex-ing their new status as Trump’s unbreakable allies, turning their election pursuits to his and look-ing the other away as the presi-dent seems to dole out favoritism for friends and pay-back for critics with apparent impunity. They’re back to confirming record numbers of judicial nominees viewing impeachment politically as a net gain.

“We won and they lost,” de-clared Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell.

House Democrats are franti-cally reviving their kitchen-table agenda of health care and pock-etbook priorities, a direct appeal to voters after spending the past months focused on erecting a firewall against potential wrong-doing by the president.

What has become clear in the aftermath of the impeachment proceedings is the stark realiza-

tion that the legislative branch can only carry the country so far as a check on the executive. It’s now up to voters to decide.

The outcome leaves Congress adrift, its legislative agenda un-certain, its oversight role chal-lenged. Both parties are in flux as the nation’s political energy turns toward the presidential primaries ahead of the November election, when voters will also decide con-trol of the House and Senate.

“What’s next may be serious,” said Rep. Hakeem Jef-fries of New York, the Democratic caucus chairman, as he implored Americans to prepare to vote “as if your life depends on it.”

Democrats warn that Trump, far from having learned lessons from becoming the third im-peached president, is in fact en-gaged in an escalating pattern of retribution and political favorit-ism that started as soon as he was acquitted by the Senate.

“Republicans thought the presi-

dent would learn his lesson. The lesson the president learned was that the Republican Party will not hold him accountable no mat-ter how egregious his behavior,” he said.

Some Republicans who indicat-ed the president might temper his behavior acknowledged Wednes-day the limits.

“I said before that I would hope that the president would learn from that experience,” said Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn.

Asked if the president has learned any lessons from im-peachment, Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., said: “He seems the same as he did two weeks ago.”

Democrats, though, are dis-playing only tepid enthusiasm for digging deeper into Trump’s al- leged wrongdoings after the Sen-ate voted last week to acquit him of the charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress in the Ukraine matter.
Bloomberg aims to move past old remarks

Associated Press

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. — Michael Bloomberg sought to move past newly resurfaced years-old comments in which he defended the controversial “stop-and-frisk” policing tactic that has been found to disproportionately affect minorities.

The billionaire former New York City mayor, who is now seeking the Democratic presidential nomination, launched a two-day tour of the South intended to build relationships with African Americans, who are a crucial voting bloc for the party. During a stop in Chattanooga on Wednesday, he told reporters: “We’re going to do very well in the African American community.”

“They need a good economy, they need better schools, they need health care, they need jobs and those are the kinds of things that I can bring to the table,” he said.

His trip began the same day Bloomberg announced the launch of his presidential campaign after being considered for consideration by President Donald Trump. Bloomberg is one of several candidates seeking to capture the Democratic nomination in 2020.

Bloomberg also faced criticism over his comments about stop-and-frisk policing tactics, which he said were appropriate in some cases. He later apologized for those remarks.

But during that same event, Bloomberg weighed in on in equality in remarks that would reflect what I do every day,” he said. “The language on that tape right there at the end was just insensitive, it was inappropriate and lacking in the kind of empathy and understanding of the human condition that I know Mike Bloomberg has within him,” he said.

The January haul coincided with the most of the Senate’s impeachment trial, which resulted in the Republican president’s acquittal earlier this month.

“We already have 500,000 volunteers trained and activated, and this record-breaking support is helping us grow our grassroots army even more,” said RNC Chairwoman Ronna McDaniel.

The pro-Trump effort said that it has gained more than 1 million new digital and direct mail donors since Democrats launched their push to impeach Trump in September.

$60M raised for Trump in January

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pro-Trump groups said they raised more than $60 million in January and have more than $200 million on hand for this year’s general election, shatter-
WASHINGTON — The career U.S. diplomat who was ousted from her post in Ukraine by President Donald Trump, then was criticized by him as she testified at his impeachment hearings, warned that the State Department is facing a crisis with senior leaders who lack “vision.”

Marie Yovanovitch, accepting an award at Georgetown University on Wednesday, portrayed the department as “in trouble” and under threat even as she sought to encourage her audience of mostly students not to give up on diplomacy as a career.

Yovanovitch urged students to follow in her footsteps because the U.S. “needs diplomats that are ready and capable.”

“This country needs a robust foreign policy,” Yovanovitch, the former ambassador to Ukraine, said, as she accepted the Triner Award for excellence in diplomacy from the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown.

But she noted that the State Department is “fly under the radar under Trump and that the art of diplomacy has become less of a priority under his administration.

“Right now, the State Department is in trouble,” Yovanovitch said in accepting the award. “Senior leaders lack policy vision, moral authority and leadership.”

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has been criticized by former diplomats and others for not coming to the defense of Yovanovitch, a charge he has denied.

Yovanovitch praised the “quiet work of diplomacy” as a way to ensure peace and prosperity in the world.

“It sounds so old-fashioned in our high-tech world, but diplomacy is about human interaction, and creating relationships of trust is more important than ever,” she said. “It’s not as exciting as sending in the Marines, but it’s cheaper and usually more effective in the long term.”

Yovanovitch was making her first public appearance since her testimony to Congress about her efforts to press the government of Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to do more to fight corruption.

The president’s comments targeting Kelly came after Kelly defended Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who was among administration officials who raised concerns about Trump’s July phone call with Ukraine’s president. That call spurred the president’s impeachment inquiry, which ended in an acquittal last week.

“Like so many X’s, he misses the action & just can’t keep his mouth shut ... which he actually has a military and legal obligation to do,” Trump tweeted about Kelly. “His incredible wife, Karen, who I have a lot of respect for, once pulled me aside & said strongly that ‘John respects you greatly. When we are no longer here, he will only speak well of you!’ Wrong!”

Kelly, speaking at a public forum on Wednesday in Morristown, N.J., said that Vindman did exactly as he was trained in raising concerns to his superiors after hearing “questionable” comments from Trump, according to a report by The Atlantic magazine.

Vindman was ousted last week from his position as a Ukraine specialist detailed to the White House National Security Council.

“He did exactly what we teach them to do from cradle to grave,” said Kelly, a retired Marine general, who served as Trump’s chief of staff from the summer of 2017 until early last year. “He went and told his boss what he just heard.”

The Army officer was ousted from his job on the White House National Security Council last Friday, just two days after the Senate acquitted Trump on abuse of power and obstruction of justice charges. He is to be reassigned by the Pentagon.

Kelly came to Vindman’s defense after Trump suggested this week that the Pentagon should review Vindman’s conduct in the Ukraine episode and potentially consider disciplinary action against him.

Trump has insisted that his call to Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy was “perfect.”

Trump veto. The Democratic-controlled House passed a separate, non-binding war powers resolution last month. The House could take up the Senate resolution later this month, said Senate Majority Leader Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

Two-thirds votes in the House and GOP Senate would be needed to override an expected Trump veto.

Answering a claim by some of Trump’s allies that Trump himself that the measure would send a signal of weakness to Iran and other potential adversaries, Kaine said the opposite was true.

“We stand up for the rule of law — in a world that hunger for more rule of law — and say this ‘decision is fundamental, and that’s a message of strength, not of weakness,’” Kaine said.

Trump initially tapped Kelly for being disloyal after the ex-adviser came to the defense of key impeachment witness Marie Yovanovitch, accepting an award at Georgetown University on Wednesday.

Ex-Ukraine ambassador: State Department leaders lack vision

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate approved a bipartisan measure Thursday limiting President Donald Trump’s authority to launch military operations against Iran.

The measure, authored by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., says Trump must win approval from Congress before engaging in further military action against Iran. Eight Republicans joined with Democrats to pass the resolution by a 55-45 vote.

Kaine and other supporters said the resolution was not about impeaching him or even the presidency, but instead was an important re-assertion of congressional power to declare war.

While Trump and other president’s “must always have the ability to defend the United States,” Kaine said. “An offensive war involves Congressional debate and vote.”

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**NATION**

**Weinstein lawyer: Prosecutors have ‘movie, not case’**

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Harvey Weinstein’s lawyer told jurors Thursday that prosecutors in the rape case against him were acting like moviemakers, creating a world where “everybody is not responsible” for how they interact with men.

Weinstein is innocent, attorney Donna Rotunno said, appealing to jurors to ignore “outside forces” and use their “New York City common sense” weighing a case seen as a watershed for the #MeToo movement. It was fueled by the downfall of Weinstein, who was once one of Hollywood’s most influential figures.

Rotunno, who has taken heat from #MeToo supporters for her advocacy for the disgraced movie producer, argued that prosecu-

tors had “come up with a ‘sinister tale’ about him because they don’t have the evidence to prove the charges.”

“You have to like Mr. Weinstein,” she said. “This is not a popularity contest.”

Weinstein is charged with raping a woman in a Manhattan hotel room in 2013 and committing oral sex against another woman, Mimi Haleyi, in 2006.

Other accusers testified as part of a prosecution effort to show he used the same tactics to victimize many women over the years.

Weinstein, who did not testify, has maintained any sexual encounters were consensual.

The Associated Press has a policy of not publishing the names of people who allege sexual assault without their consent. It is withholding name of the rape accuser because it isn’t clear if she wishes to be identified publicly.

The jury had scheduled to hear the prosecution closings Friday before getting instructions on the law from Judge James Burke next week and starting deliberations.

In often emotional testimony, Weinstein’s accusers said he lured them to hotels in New York and Los Angeles on the pretense of promoting their acting careers and then sexually assaulted them. The defense countered by confronting some accusers with warm emails and other communications with Weinstein that continued for months or even years after the alleged attacks.

In her closing argument Thursday, Rotunno said the emails offered “real-time evidence” of what happened between Weinstein and the women.

She pointed to a 2007 message from Haleyi asking how Weinstein was doing and signing off with “lots of love” — the year after he allegedly sexually assaulted Haleyi, whom he had gotten a job on the Weinstein-produced TV show “Project Runway.”

“Not an email you send to your sexasser, even in the world they want to create,” Rotunno told jurors. “This is where you need to say, ‘Wait a minute — do I have doubt about the story she’s telling? How could you not?’”

Witnesses testified about wanting a professional relationship with Weinstein, Rotunno said, “because if they label it what it was, we wouldn’t be here.”

During the trial, the jury also heard about emails in which the victim of the alleged rape wrote to Weinstein afterward to accept party invitations from him, give him new phone numbers and even express gratitude. One message read: “I feel so fabulous and beautiful, thank you for everything.”

Rotunno delivered her closing argument less than a week after she came under fire on social media for telling The New York Times’ podcast “The Daily” she’d never been attacked “because I would never put myself in that position.”

Prosecutor Joan Illuzzi-Orbon rebuked Rotunno for calling the prosecution’s witnesses “liars” in the interview.

Harvey Weinstein defense attorneys Donna Rotunno and Arthur Aidala, left, arrive at court for his rape trial, in New York, on Thursday.

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**Census Bureau at risk of being unprepared, report says**

By Mike Schneider

Associated Press

With the start of the 2020 census just a month away for most U.S. residents, the U.S. Census Bureau is behind in recruiting workers and establishing partnerships with civic groups, and it is at risk of missing some information technology testing goals, according to a report released Wednesday.

While the Census Bureau has succeeded so far in early tasks of verifying addresses across the U.S. and launching an advertising campaign, the agency’s readiness for upcoming operations is mixed, according to the report from the Government Accountability Office.

The report was made public Wednesday during a hearing by the House Committee on Oversight and Reform.

The GAO report said the bureau was at risk of missing testing milestones for five IT operations, including one that will allow people to self-report and another for following-up with households that haven’t answered the questions on their own.

“Where the risk is, is just time. We have a significant amount of time to get things done,” said Nick Marinios, the GAO’s director of information technology.

Kasten, she told jurors hearing Wednesday to get an update from Census Bureau director Steven Dillingham and other agency officials on its readiness for the largest and most complex head count in U.S. history.

Dillingham testified that the bureau was on its way toward reaching its goals for hiring and partnerships.

“We are confident that we are on mission, on budget and on target,” Dillingham said. “The 2020 census is positioned for success.”

The chairwoman of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform said the GAO report was sending “flashlighting red lights” that the bureau wasn’t ready.

Whether through incompetence or intentional action, this administration’s failures risk causing grave harm to this year’s census that could jeopardize a complete and accurate count, Democratic Rep. Carolyn Maloney of New York said.

U.S. Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Debra Haaland of New Mexico, both Democrats, asked what the Census Bureau was doing to overcome misperceptions that there was a question about citizenship on the 2020 questionnaire.

The U.S. Supreme Court last year rejected a Trump administration attempt to add a citizenship question to the form.

Research indicates that people respond to positive messages about the 2020 census, so instead of focusing on what could be considered a negative, like the citizenship question, “we enforce the positive,” Dillingham answered.

Other lawmakers, led by Democratic Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, were unhappy that the bureau hadn’t yet shared with them a breakdown by congressional district of the partnerships the agency had established in each congressional district.

Dillingham said some partners have balked at participating for their affiliation with the Census Bureau public.

The 2020 Census started last month in a remote part of rural Alaska.

But the rest of the nation won’t be able to start answering the questionnaire until the middle of next month.

For the first time, the U.S. Census Bureau is encouraging most participants to fill out the form online, although they can still answer the questions by telephone or by returning a paper form.

The 2.0 count will help determine the allocation of $1.5 trillion in federal spending and how many congressional seats each state gets.

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**Official says Puerto Rico lost $2.6M in email scam**

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Puerto Rico’s government has lost more than $2.6 million after falling for an email phishing scam, according to a senior official.

The finance director of the island’s government company, Rubén Rivera, said in a complaint filed to police Wednesday that the agency sent the money to a fraudulent account.

Rivera said the government agency transferred the money on Jan. 17 after receiving an email that alleged a change to a banking account tied to remittance payments, according to a police statement.

Manuel Laboy, executive director of the agency, told The Associated Press that officials found out about the incident earlier this week and immediately reported it to the FBI.

“This is a very serious situation, extremely serious,” he said. “We want it to be investigated until the last consequences.”

Laboy declined to say how officials found out about the scam, whether anyone has been dismissed or how the company’s operations have been affected by the missing funds. He said an internal investigation is underway to determine whether someone was negligent or did not follow standard procedure, adding that government officials are trying to recover the money.

“I cannot speculate about how these things might happen,” he said, addressing heavy criticism from Puerto Ricans who were incredulous upon hearing the news.

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Suit seeks to block transgender athletes

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — The families of three female high school runners filed a federal lawsuit Wednesday seeking to block transgender athletes in Connecticut from participating in girls sports.

Selina Soule, a senior at Glastonbury High School, Chelsea Mitchell, a senior at Canton High School and Alanna Smith, a sophomore at Danbury High School are represented by the conservative nonprofit organization Alliance Defending Freedom. They argue that allowing athletes with male anatomy to compete has deprived them of track titles and scholarship opportunities.

“Methodically and physically, we know the outcome before the race even starts,” said Smith, who is the daughter of former Major League pitcher Lee Smith. “That biological unfairness doesn’t go away because of what someone believes about gender identity. All girls deserve the chance to compete on a level playing field.”

The lawsuit was filed against the Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference and the boards of education in Bloomfield, Cromwell, Glastonbury, Canton and Danbury.

“Forcing girls to be spectators in their own sports is completely at odds with Title IX, a federal law designed to create equal opportunities for women in education and athletics,” attorney Christiana Holcomb said. “Connecticut’s policy violates that law and threatens nearly 50 years of advances for women.”

The Connecticut Association of Schools-Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference says its policy follows a state anti-discrimination law that says students must be treated in school by the gender with which they identify and the group believes the policy is “appropriate under both state and federal law.”

The lawsuit follows a Title IX complaint filed last June by the girls’ families and the Alliance Defending Freedom with the U.S. Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights, which is investigating the policy.

The lawsuit centers on two transgender sprinters, Terry Miller and Andraya Yearwood, who have frequently outperformed their cisgender competitors.

The two seniors have combined to win 15 girls state indoor or outdoor championship races since 2017, according to the lawsuit.

The three plaintiffs have competed directly against them, almost always losing to Miller and usually behind Yearwood.

Mitchell finished third in the 2019 state championship in the girls 55-meter indoor track competition behind Miller and Yearwood.

“Our dream is not to come in second or third place, but to win fair and square,” Mitchell said. “All we’re asking for is a fair chance.”

Yearwood, a senior at Cromwell High School, and Miller, a senior at Bloomfield High School, issued statements vehemently defending their right to run in girls events.

“I have faced discrimination in every aspect of my life and I no longer want to remain silent,” Miller said. “I am a girl and I am a runner. I participate in athletics just like my peers to excel, find community, and meaning in my life. It is both unfair and painful that my victories have to be attacked and my hard work ignored.”

Yearwood also is a runner and has been hurt by the efforts to “tear down my successes.”

“I will never stop being me!” she said in her mant. “I will never stop running! I hope that the next generation of trans youth doesn’t have to fight the fights that I have. I hope they can be celebrated when they succeed instead of feared. For the next generation, I run for you!”

The American Civil Liberties Union said it will represent the transgender teens and defend the Connecticut policy in court.

Attorney Chase Strangio, deputy director for Trans Justice with the ACLU LGBT & HIV Project, said transgender girls also are protected by Title IX.

“The idea that the law only protects the individuals with XX chromosomes as compared to individuals with XY chromosomes is found nowhere in the legislative history of Title IX, in any implementing regulation or in any other aspect of the interpretation of Title IX over the last 50 years by the courts,” he said.

The attorneys for Alliance Defending Freedom have sued the state to prevent the transgender girls from competing while the lawsuit moves forward.

No hearing on that request had been scheduled Wednesday or before a court-appointed special master is to be closed to the public, according to court filings that the confidential emails show executives joined in the archdiocese’s “pattern and practice of concealing its crimes.”

Attorneys contend that included taking an active role in helping to shape the archdiocese’s list of 57 credibly accused clergy, a roster an AP analysis found was undercounted by at least 20 nanes.

“While it is my desire to stay in this role and see this process through to completion, I do believe it is time for the Iowa Democratic Party to begin looking forward, and my presence in my current role makes that more difficult.”

Price said his departure would occur as soon as the state party elects a replacement, and he called an emergency Saturday meeting to do so.

After a breakdown in tallying the results on Feb. 3, it took until Feb. 6 for the state party, which operates the series of roughly 1,700 local meetings statewide, to issue what it said are complete results.

In those figures, released by the party, former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg leads Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders by two state delegate equivalents out of 2,152 counted. That is a margin of 0.09 percentage points. The Associated Press said it was unable to declare a winner, based on the available information. The results as reported by the Iowa Democratic Party, the AP believes, may not be fully accurate.

Price had called the delays in reporting results “embarrassing.”

He said the party would conduct a “thorough, transparent and independent examination” of what caused the delays.

He apologized for the breakdown in the process.

Iowa Democratic Party chairman resigns in wake of caucus chaos

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party announced his resignation Wednesday after a disastrous caucus process beset by technical glitches led to a dayslong delay in reporting the results, inconsistencies in the numbers and no clear winner.

The embarrassing episode also threatened Iowa’s cherished status as the first voting contest of the presidential primary season and led both front-runners to request a partial recanvass of the results.

“The fact is that Democrats deserved better than what happened on caucus night. As chair of this party, I am deeply sorry for what happened and bear the responsibility for any failures on behalf of the Iowa Democratic Party,” Chairman Troy Price wrote in a resignation letter a week and a half after Iowa’s caucuses.

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Media seek open hearing on NFL team’s emails with church

Associated Press

New Orleans news outlets were set to argue Thursday for an open hearing on the confidentiality of emails between Roman Catholic officials and the city's largest franchise concerning clergy sex-abuse scandals.

As The Associated Press reported last month, victims' lawyers allege that hundreds of Saints emails show team executives did not want to damage the franchise's reputation or liability.

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Perhaps use: “The AP was allowed to intervene in the effort to get the emails released and lawyers for the news cooperative are being allowed to participate in arguments for release of the emails. However, the Feb. 20 hearing before the special master was not to be closed to the public.”

The owners of The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate, WWVE-TV, WWL-TV and WDSU-TV have filed a motion for access to the emails.

Benson

Judge Ellen Hazeur was set to hear arguments at Civil District Court in New Orleans.

The Saints, whose devoutly Catholic owner Gayle Benson is close friends with the local archbishop, have disputed as "outrageous" any suggestion that the team helped cover up crimes.

They have accused plaintiffs' attorneys of mischaracterizing what is in the emails.

Benson said in a news release Monday that the NFL team played no role in determining which priests would be named in the list of "creatively named" clergy published by the archdiocese.

Attorneys for about two dozen men suing the church alleged in court filings that the confidential emails show executives joined in the church's "pattern and practice of concealing its crimes."
A ship sails into the harbor at Pago Pago, American Samoa. Residents of the U.S. territory are concerned about how a court ruling on citizenship will affect their way of life.

‘We are so proud of who we are’

American Samoans weigh in on federal court’s ruling on US citizenship

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Growing up in American Samoa, Filipo Ilaoa’s neighbors were his cousins on a plot of land full of bananas and breadfruit trees shared by his extended family and overseen by a chief elected by his relatives.

He worries that a federal judge’s recent ruling in Utah saying those born in the U.S. territory should be recognized as U.S. citizens could threaten “fa’a Samoa,” the Samoan way of life. This includes cultural traditions like prayer curfews, communal living and a belief that the islands’ land should stay in Samoan family hands.

“Basically, what it comes down to is freedom — the freedom to own communal land,” said Ilaoa, 66, a retired Marine Corps sergeant major who works at the American Samoa government’s office in Hawaii.

In December, U.S. District Judge Clark Waddoups sided with three people from American Samoa who live in Utah and sued to be recognized as citizens. The judge ruled that the Utah residents are entitled to birthright citizenship under the 14th Amendment. He then put his ruling on hold pending appeal.

The U.S. government, which argues that automatic citizenship should be a decision for Congress, filed an appeal Friday. The American Samoa government filed its notice of appeal Monday, said Michael Williams, a Washington lawyer representing the territory in challenging the lawsuit.

“We look forward to showing the Court of Appeals that Judge Waddoups’s decision is incorrect as a matter of law and needlessly dismissive of Samoans’ self-determination rights,” he said in a statement.

American Samoa is the only U.S. territory where residents have no birthright claim to citizenship. Instead, those born in the cluster of islands some 2,600 miles southwest of Hawaii are granted “U.S. national” status, meaning that they can’t vote for U.S. president, run for office outside of American Samoa or apply for certain jobs. The only federal election they can cast a vote in is the race for American Samoa’s nonvoting U.S. House seat.

Supporters of automatic citizenship say that it would benefit the estimated 150,000 to 160,000 nationals who live in the states. The territory’s population is about 55,000. Yet many there say they’re happy being nationals and worry that birthright citizenship would influence customs, like their unique land ownership system.

“Right now, the government of the United States doesn’t own a square inch of land in American Samoa,” said Ilaoa, who left his village of Leone at 18 to join the Marines and later became a citizen to qualify for military jobs that require top-secret clearance.

“We build what we want. Any time we want.”

Most property in American Samoa is owned communally among families. Family members select chiefs, or matai, to regulate village life and oversee the land. Samoa lawrestricts the sale of most property to anyone with less than 50% Samoan ancestry.

Some are uncomfortable with a faraway judge making decisions about their relationship with the U.S., Williams said.

“Everybody else will come and impose their right in the village that is perfectly designed to fit every family’s need that occupies that land,” said Tisa Fa‘amulii, who owns Tisa’s Barefoot Bar in the village of Alega on Tutuila, the largest island in the American Samoa archipelago.

“At the end of the day, we are so proud of who we are,” she said. “We love who we are, and we don’t want to change that.”

There are also concerns that automatic citizenship would disrupt religious norms such as prayer curfews that are enforced by local leaders in a territory where 100% of Samoans report being Christian, according to the American Samoa government.

Bonnelley Pa‘uulu, acting director of the American Samoa government’s office in Hawaii, remembers how village police would ring a 6 a.m. bell that signaled it was time to go indoors for family prayer.

Imposing “blanket adult curfews to United States citizens could be unconstitutional under existing case law,” the American Samoa government said in a court filing opposing the lawsuit. A path to U.S. citizenship exists for those who want it, but some say that it’s costly and cumbersome.

Roy J.D. Hall Jr., who lives in the village of Viato, says that he became a citizen more than 50 years ago, when it was easier. As an attorney, he helps others obtain citizenship, which he said now requires more documents and a $750 fee. Such roadblocks are unfair, he said.

Pa‘uulu opted to remain a national, even though her soldier husband became a citizen.

Maintaining the land ownership structure is important to Pa‘uulu, in part because she plans to return someday. The land “ties you back to your family name, and it’s like where you belong,” she said.

From a legal perspective, citizenship won’t lead to the downfall of American Samoa’s land ownership system, said Rose Cui-son-Villazor, an expert in immigration, citizenship and property law at Rutgers Law School in New Jersey.

“Citizenship would not have the domino effect people are worried about,” said Sean Morrison, a former American Samoa assistant attorney general now living in New Orleans. “I think the biggest worry is … you don’t know what a future judge might say.”
Spike in China cases with new way of counting

BY YANAN WANG
Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Thursday reported a sharp spike in deaths and infections from a new virus after the hardest-hit province of Hubei applied a new classification system that broadens the scope of diagnoses for the outbreak, which has spread to more than 20 countries.

The new diagnostic approach came on the same day that Hubei and its stricken capital, Wuhan, replaced their top officials in an apparent response to public criticism of how authorities had handled the epidemic.

The death toll in China reached 1,367, up 254 from the previous day. The number of confirmed cases jumped 15,152 to 59,804. The unusually large increases were due to the change in Hubei’s approach.

The total now includes more than 13,000 cases of “clinical diagnosis” as well as those approved to include those based on a doctors’ analysis combined with lung imaging, as opposed to waiting for laboratory test results.

In breaking down the large number of new cases in China, National Health Commission spokesman Mi Feng said Hubei had adopted a revised diagnosis and treatment protocol aimed at accelerating the identification and treatment of patients.

That adds a “clinical diagnosis” classification to identify suspected cases who appear to have pneumonia so that patients can be accommodated as soon as possible and treated as confirmed cases, Mi said, adding that should “reduce severe illness and mortality.”

One expert said the changed case definition in Hubei likely speaks to the crush of patients the health system is experiencing and the backlog of untested samples.

“Clearly in Wuhan, the health system is under extreme pressure and so the first priority has to be the patient,” said Mark Woolhouse, a professor of infectious disease epidemiology at the University of Edinburgh.

He said it wasn’t unprecedented for case definitions to rely on doctors’ diagnoses rather than wait for laboratory confirmation, and that these kinds of changes usually happen when there are simply too many patients to process in a fast-moving outbreak.

“I’m not surprised that this has happened given the way the outbreak has been going in China,” Woolhouse said. “You have to be pragmatic and take the concerns of the patient first and treat them as if they already have the disease, even the absence of lab confirmation.”

China also appointed new high-level officials in Hubei and Wuhan.

Former Shanghai Mayor Ying Yong succeeded Jiang Chaoliang as the ruling Communist Party’s chief in the beleaguered province, the Xinhua state news agency reported. While in Wuhan, Jinlin took over from Ma Guoqiang as the party secretary in Wuhan.

The appointments follow the sacking earlier this week of two leaders of the provincial health commission. State media also reported that a slew of others were expelled from the party for transgressions related to the epidemic.

The public has widely criticized local officials for failing to respond quickly and decisively to the new virus. Authorities initially assured people that there was little to no risk of human-to-human transmission, a statement that was later retracted. Wuhan residents said hospitals were overcrowded and lacked sufficient medical supplies. Doctors who tried to share information early on were reprimanded by police for “spreading rumors.”

In all, Japan has 250 confirmed cases of the new disease that apparently started in Wuhan, a city in central China’s Hubei province, in December.

Earlier Thursday, he announced 44 new cases on the Diamond Princess, which is still carrying nearly 3,500 passengers and crew members. The ship has been in quarantine since Feb. 5 and is expected to leave sometime later this week.

The jump in cases today reflects the broader definition, he said.

An advance team of WHO experts has been in China since Monday. The team is here to “discuss specific arrangements for the China-WHO joint mission with the Chinese side,” Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said at a daily online briefing.

“The purpose of the joint mission is that experts of both sides can have in-depth communication on the situation and efforts of prevention and control, and come up with advice for China and other affected countries,” Geng said.

In Vietnam, official media reported that a village of 10,000 northwest of the capital, Hanoi, was put in lockdown due to a cluster of cases there.

The online newspaper VN Express cited a senior official of Vinh Phuc province as reporting an increase in cases in Son Loi. Vietnam has confirmed 16 cases, most of them in the province.

Another cruise ship, the Westerdam, finally docked Thursday in Cambodia after being turned away by several Asian and Pacific governments. No cases of the viral illness have been confirmed among its 1,455 passengers and 802 crew members, according to operator Holland America Line.

Japan reports its 1st death from virus and 44 more cases on ship

BY MARI YAMAGUCHI
Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan announced Thursday its first death from a new virus from China, hours after confirming 44 more cases on a cruise ship quarantined near Tokyo as fears of the spreading disease mount in the country.

Health Minister Katsunobu Kato said the first fatality is a woman in her 80s who had been hospitalized since Feb. 1 when she was diagnosed with pneumonia. Her confirmed diagnosis came after her death, he said. The woman, a resident of Kanagawa prefecture near Tokyo, had no record of traveling to China or contacts with Chinese visitors, and health officials are investigating how she contracted the virus.

Kato also confirmed two other cases of the virus, a Tokyo taxi driver in his 70s and a doctor in his 50s who works at a hospital in western Japan.

Earlier Thursday, he announced 44 new cases on the Diamond Princess, which is still carrying nearly 3,500 passengers and crew members. The ship has been in quarantine since Feb. 5 and is expected to leave sometime later this week.

In all, Japan has 250 confirmed cases of the new virus, which the World Health Organization has declared a public health emergency of international concern. The virus was first identified in Wuhan, a city in central China’s Hubei province, in December.

On the ship, infections are getting very dense,” said Shigeru Omi, an infectious disease prevention expert and former regional director for the World Health Organization. “It’s like we are seeing a very condensed version of what could happen in a local community.”

Later Thursday, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced a $139 million economic package to fight the virus, including funding for the development of vaccines and virus test kits, support for hundreds of returnees from Wuhan and measures to strengthen border controls to minimize the spread of the virus in the country.
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**Connecticut raptor rehabilitated.**

A bald eagle missing from a Connecticut raptor rehabilitation center and feared stolen was found.

The Horizon Wings Raptor rehabilitation and education center announced Tuesday on Facebook that Atka, a 10-year-old male eagle that cannot fly because of a permanent shoulder injury, was returned safe and sound.

No additional details were disclosed.

Mary-Beth Kaeser, owner and founder of the nonprofit, found the door to Atka's aviary open and the lock on the ground when she went to feed him Monday.

Atka came to the center about nine years ago and is used in its education programs.

**City's last call might be a little earlier**

**MIAMI BEACH** — The mayor of Miami Beach wants the last call for alcohol to be a little bit earlier for spring break.

Mayor Dan Gelber wants alcohol sales to end at 2 a.m. in the South Beach entertainment district for 17 days in March. It’s 5 a.m. now across the city.

The Miami Herald reported the proposal was to come before the city commission for a preliminary vote. It could then be finalized at a Feb. 26 commission meeting.

The rollback would begin March 6 and continue for 17 days. It would affect the sale of alcohol for on-site consumption, like at bars and restaurants.

**Dead birds disguised as cat food confiscated**

**VA CHANTILLY** — A package of tiny dead birds passed off as pet food was confiscated by Customs agents at a Virginia airport.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection said the package came in to Dulles International Airport on a flight from Beijing on Jan. 27.

Agents discovered the bag of dead birds in the baggage of a passenger who was on their way to Prince George’s County, Md.

The passenger said the package contained a list of other places he had been to.

The birds were barred from importation to prevent the spread of avian flu.

**Man posed as deputy to undercover cop**

**NM ALBUQUERQUE** — A New Mexico man is facing charges after authorities say he tried to impersonate a sheriff’s deputy to an undercover police officer.

A criminal complaint said Daniel Mitchem was arrested following a high-speed chase in Albuquerque.

According to police, Mitchem, 46, had approached an undercover detective during an auto theft operation and told the officer he was a sheriff's deputy and showed a gun.

When the detective said he was an officer, Mitchem fled in his Chevy Tahoe, according to the complaint. Mitchem was eventually arrested and charged with impersonating a police officer and felon in possession of a firearm, police said.

**Meteorologists: 209 mph gust likely a mistake**

**CA SOUTH LAKE TAHOE** — A gust of 209 mph recorded atop a California peak recently was likely not a new state wind record but a mistake resulting from a faulty sensor, meteorologists said.

The wind recording was made by an instrument at 9,186 feet on Kirkwood Mountain south of Lake Tahoe. If accurate, it would have broken the previous wind record of 199 mph at Ward Mountain west of Lake Tahoe in 2017.

But forecasters now suspect the sensor wasn’t working properly, said Cory Mueller, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Sacramento.

**Man accused of paying addicts to shoplift**

**WV CHARLESTON** — A West Virginia man is accused of organizing a network of shoplifters, many of them drug addicts, to steal hundreds of thousands of dollars in store merchandise that he then resold on the internet.

Nedeltcho Vladimirov of Cross Street was arrested following a break-in that contained a list of other places he planned to target.

Robert Shull Goddard, 49, is accused of smashing a glass door and breaking into a Nashville area home, stealing a TV and a gun from the residents, according to records filed in Davidson County court.

But prosecutors said Goddard left something behind that allowed authorities to solve the case — a notebook that listed multiple addresses, including one for another home a few miles away that had been burglarized that same day, The Tennessean reported.

Investigators were able to identify the suspect, in part, through notes his daughter left in the journal, along with her address.

Goddard was shot in the back and another house the next day, court records state.

**Spirits sales soar, but beer buying sinks**

**ID BOISE** — Idaho residents are buying less beer and more liquor, according to the state Liquor Division.

Director Jeff Anderson told the legislature's budget-writing committee that the Liquor Division returned a record dividend of more than $85 million in fiscal year 2019, the Idaho Press reported. That’s about $6.8 million more than the previous year.

Idaho resident’s purchases mirrored a national trend, Anderson said, with consumption of spirits increasing at the expense of beer.

But Idahoans still consume less liquor overall compared to national averages.

**Man gets trampled by deer in parking lot**

**NC LOCUST** — A suspect escaped from a hit and run in a North Carolina McDonald’s parking lot last month. But police aren’t looking for who’s responsible.

Ken Worthy was leaving the restaurant in Locust with his wife and a Diet Coke in hand, when he saw something approaching him, the victim told news outlets.

What he saw coming wasn’t a car, but a frenzied deer that had run startled, likely from woods nearby, and was stopping for nothing in its way. Security video taken from the store showed the animal barreling toward Worthy before plopping over him and continuing on.

Worthy and his wife were surprised, but not hurt during the incident, he told the station. In fact, he didn’t even spill his Diet Coke.
Climate change makes its mark on Alpine skiing

Bloomberg

At the northern edge of the Alps, ski runs near the foot of Germany’s highest mountain snake down the greenish-brown slopes in narrow white ribbons of artificial snow.

Like other resorts at relatively low altitude, global warming has left its mark on Garmisch-Partenkirchen — the site of the 1936 Winter Olympics — putting the area’s identity and appeal at risk. It’s January, and there’s so little natural snow that anxiety is building whether upcoming ski races can go ahead.

In Garmisch and across the Alps, tourism is a key support for local economies. In neighboring Austria, it makes up just over 6% of economic output, while in the mountains near Tyrol the share is more like 18%. The ratio is similar for the Swiss canton of Graub thanks to resorts like St. Moritz, Klosters and Davos.

In France’s Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes region, home to Courchevel and Val d’Isere, tourist spending totaled $23 billion in 2018, generating nearly a 10th of gross domestic product and 171,000 jobs.

That source of income is under genuine threat. Climate change is expected to cost Austrian tourism 300 million euros a year, according to one of the country’s leading environmental protection organizations. In France, authorities in Tignes delayed the start of the ski season by several weeks, citing the effects of global warming on the Grande Motte glacier.

“If greenhouse-gas emissions continue at the same level, snow will almost disappear at lower levels by the end of the century,” said Marc Olefs, head of department for climate research at Vienna’s Central Institute for Meteorology and Geodynamics.

At an elevation of 800 meters, Garmisch — known for its landmark ski jump — has little prospect of maintaining its status as a winter-sports mecca.

Among visitors, the changing conditions are accepted with quiet resignation.

Jürgen Hilla, a school teacher from near Frankfurt, predicted that skiing and other winter sports may not be viable in Garmisch in the longer term and that he and his wife may have to consider alternatives for their ski vacation.

“Probably in 20 or 30 years, it won’t have the same role as it does now,” he added after a day on the slopes. The higher runs were in good shape but the lower ones needed cannons spraying artificial snow to keep them passable, Hilla said.

To make up for a lack of natural snowfall, resorts switch on the cannons, although they’re energy intensive and unpopular with environmentalists. Producing artificial snow will get harder as temperatures rise, Olefs predicted.

The practice didn’t start because of climate change originally but was meant to make ski resorts less dependent on the whims of nature, according to Robert Steiger, an assistant professor at the University of Innsbruck. But it’s become unavoidable to cope with global warming.

“Some regions and areas will lose ski tourism by the mid of the century, or even earlier,” said Steiger, who has studied the impact of climate change on tourism. “Higher areas will survive, but they will have to invest more in snowmaking and to cope with the additional tourist inflow.”

Another option is snow farming, where mounds of the precious white flakes are collected in spring and covered with sawdust for use later in the year.

Areas most affected by warming are on the outskirts of the Alps — in Austria’s east, the foothills in France and Italy and in Germany. They were never as dependent on ski tourism as some regions in the central Alps, and are more attuned to welcoming guests around the year, Steiger said.

Already, the summer generates 60% of the tourism intake, according to Garmisch Mayor Sigrid Meierhofer. That’s a development seen elsewhere. In Switzerland, summer overnight hotel stays were a third higher than the winter of 2018-19.

At Garmisch City Hall, Meierhofer is putting on a brave face, citing the town’s brisk conference business.

“Of course, we have to come up with concepts to maintain the winter tourism that we still have,” she said. “You say it’s brown, I say the skiing paths are open.”

Fire sale: An Iran plant makes the US flags protesters burn

Associated Press

KHOMEIN, Iran — Near the hometown of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, workers at a small Iranian factory diligently add all 50 stars and 13 red-and-white bars to what are supposed to be U.S. flags, and carefully imprint the blue Star of David on Israeli ones.

That’s even as all their work is destined to go up in flames.

The company Diba Parcham Khomein serves as a major producer for the American and Israeli flags that constantly burned at pro-government rallies in the Islamic Republic. Such flag-burnings are a sign of support for Iran’s embattled clerical rulers and a throwback to the iconic images of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that brought President U.S. Iran’s greatest foe and the “Great Satan.”

Another batch of flags was prepared for Tuesday’s celebrations marking the 41st anniversary of the Iranian revolution. The celebrations had special symbolic importance amid renewed tensions with Washington after a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad killed Iran’s top general, Qassem Soleimani, last month.

Yet the factory’s owner, like many middle-class Iranians, still hopes for better relations between Tehran and the U.S.

“I hope there is a day that the flags we produce are presented as a gift,” factory owner Abolfazl Khanjani told The Associated Press.

That day, however, has yet to come to Khomein, a city best known as the birthplace of the Islamic Republic’s founder.

A worker sews a U.S. flag at the Diba Parcham Khomein factory Saturday in Heshmati village, a suburb of Khomein, Iran.

The factory itself is in the nearby suburban village of Heshmati, where staffers first dye the blue canton containing the 50 white stars of the American flag on linen before dyeing its seven red stripes.

The flags then hang to dry in the factory. As Iran does not recognize Israel as a country, the factory adds “Death to Israel,” written in Farsi on those flags, workers said. Iran continues to support anti-Israeli militant groups like Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Diba Parcham Khomein produces 1.5 million flags a year, many bearing Islamic phrases for religious and official occasions across the country. The factory also makes Iranian flags and a small number of Iraqi national flags for export.

But on a recent visit by the AP, the American and Israeli flags stood out, each 59 inches by 39 inches. The factory makes as many as 6,000 American, British and Israeli flags in a year, all destined to be passed onto retailers. Iranian political hard-liners then purchase them for around $2 apiece to be stomped on, torn and ultimately set ablaze.

“In recent years, the production of the U.S. flags has been tripled,” Khanjani said. “What eventually happens to my products is on its end user.”

Khanjani, 36, identifies himself as supporting Iranian reformist groups that want to slowly change, and open up, the Islamic Republic. But he acknowledged the anger hard-liners feel toward the U.S. Tensions have particularly been high since President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran’s nuclear deal with world powers in May 2018.

In the time since, regional tensions across the Mideast have steadily worsened, leading to the Jan. 3 U.S. drone strike in Iraq that killed Soleimani as he was leaving Baghdad’s international airport.

Smiling images of Soleimani and Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appeared on small Iranian flags in the factory, hanging behind women working at sewing machines on American flags.

Khanjani said burning the American flag offered Iranians a direct way to express their anger at U.S. policies, including the economic sanctions now choking the country.

“Does the production of U.S. flags for burning pose any danger to anyone? Does it hurt anyone? My answer is no. It is an insult at worst,” he said. “But what about the production of weapons, bombs and drones for terror that have been used against our people and our country’s general? Has it not harmed my country?”
LLANGANATES, Ecuador — The tiny rider sat — well, was tied — atop the towering steed that would carry him to victory in the annual llama races at Ecuador's Llanganates National Park.

Wellington Barrera, clad in a wool poncho, sheep-leather pants and a cowboy hat, was the only finisher in his under-3 category, bouncing 1,640 feet to victory.

But two dozen children in other age groups also competed in an annual event meant to draw attention to the park's high wetlands and the need to preserve them.

The park, roughly 80 miles east of Quito, is famed for dramatic Andean vistas, and the race took place between the wetlands at altitudes nearing 15,000 feet.

A llama named Rayo McQueen carried Eric Javier Chicaiza, 6, to a win in his category. His mother, Fatima Guanotuna, said the animal was a gift to the family when the boy was born, and the two have always been close.

Ibeth Santafe, 9, three times a winner in past races, was somber after finishing third. But she came out a winner in a llama-training contest, showing mastery over her beast.

Above: Riders race their llamas at the Llanganates National Park, Ecuador, on Saturday. Wooly llamas become the star for a day each year when Ecuadorians dress up their prized animals for children to ride them in 500-meter races.

Right: A child sits on a llama before racing it.

Bottom right: Milena Jani whips her llama to win first place in a race for children ages 7 and 8.

Bottom left: A girl waits for the start of a race.

Photos by Dolores Ochoa/AP
‘III’ TALES
Co-founder of Lumineers shares inspiration behind personal latest album

Page 36
Disney Plus is one of the latest subscription streaming services to offer fantastic new programming, such as the wildly popular Star Wars series “The Mandalorian,” above. If only it consistently worked.

There are no news headlines about a supernova, too. But there’s only so much a person can worry so, cross that one off the list — unless, of course, Google in hopes of seeing what this means. That’s a rather broad statement, isn’t it? It covers “your password has expired” on one end and “an unexpected supernova has destroyed the electrical infrastructure of the West Coast with 350,000 customers losing power” on the other. So you turn to electrical infrastructure with no news headlines as now. Because in those days, all you could do was stand by and wait for someone else to do it’s supposed to be good. Hey, it’s great! It’s so good it makes you angry at the other “Star Wars” movies that now seem like silly kidde-romps. Can’t win with much one another one.

So ... turn on the TV. Go to the TV’s menu. Go to the Input menu. Go to the AppleTV menu. Go to the Disney+ menu. Rub some lignin on your monitor's button finger, which has started to cramp. Ah, there’s the Disney+ options. Select “Star Wars.” Select “The Mandalorian.”

“Ok no!” Really, that’s what the screen said. “Oh no! Something went wrong.” That’s a rather broad statement, isn’t it? It covers “your password has expired” on one end and “an unexpected supernova has destroyed the electrical infrastructure of the West Coast with a gamma-ray burst” on the other. So you turn to Google in hopes of seeing what this means. There are no news headlines about a supernova, so cross that one off the list — unless, of course, the supernova wiped out the news transmissions, too. But there’s only so much a person can worry about at a time, and right now it’s “Star Wars.” I went to a site that troubleshoots Disney+, and there it said that the simplest solution is try again. So I tried again.

“Oh no!” said the screen. What else could I try? The website, which could be accessed only if the internet was working, said: “Make sure your internet is working.”

The next step: Turn the internet off and then back on. This I did, and it worked.

H ave you heard of Disney Plus? It’s a new streaming service that lets you watch, for a monthly fee, the movies and TV shows you saw in theaters, then bought on VHS, then bought on DVD or Blu-ray. But then bought on Blu-ray, then rented because the Blu-ray box was empty and the disk was probably under the sofa but you’ll look later.

I signed up for a seven-day free trial, which is another way of saying I committed to the service for the rest of my life. Yes, the deal said that I can cancel at any time, but we — and by that I mean you and the Disney company — all know that I won’t. Eventually I expect to find myself saying, “Maybe Disney will go out of business and the charges will stop.”

There is plenty of new content I hadn’t seen, though. But first, let’s watch all the “Star Wars” movies again! Now let’s watch “The Mandalorian.” It’s supposed to be good. Hey, it’s great! It’s so good it makes you angry at the other “Star Wars” movies that now seem like silly kidde-romps. Can’t win with much one another one.

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Just kidding. “Oh no!” was the result. I went to the next step: nuking the app, downloading it again and signing back in with my e-mail and password. What was that password? Oh, yeah, it was my address.

“Password not recognized,” the app said. Granted, it was nice to get some other message than “Oh no!” But this wasn’t getting us any-where. Then I realized that I forgot to capitalize one of the letters. Same result. I tried capitaliz-ing a different letter, to no avail. So I tried capitalizing all the letters. Nothing.

Finally it hit me: I had registered this account when we were at the old house. When I used that address, it worked.

Except by this point I was getting tired and wanted to go to bed. Plus, it was depressing. It wasn’t supposed to be like this, was it? The streaming era would liberate us from cable pack cropping for the 122nd time.

It wasn’t supposed to be like this, was it? The streaming era would liberate us from cable pack cropping for the 122nd time. But then, when we finally make an effort to sit and force ourselves to watch “The Mandalorian,” above. If only it consistently worked.

There are no news headlines about a supernova, too. But there’s only so much a person can worry so, cross that one off the list — unless, of course, Google in hopes of seeing what this means. That’s a rather broad statement, isn’t it? It covers “your password has expired” on one end and “an unexpected supernova has destroyed the electrical infrastructure of the West Coast with a gamma-ray burst” on the other. So you turn to Google in hopes of seeing what this means. There are no news headlines about a supernova, so cross that one off the list — unless, of course, the supernova wiped out the news transmissions, too. But there’s only so much a person can worry about at a time, and right now it’s “Star Wars.” I went to a site that troubleshoots Disney+, and there it said that the simplest solution is try again. So I tried again.

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The next step: Turn the internet off and then back on. This I did, and it worked.
Several hours after he left the Oscar stage, “Parasite” director and producer Bong Joon-ho took another stage a few miles west in Beverly Hills, Calif. The man behind the newly minted best-picture winner was introduced by Tom Quinn, the head of the film’s U.S. distributor, Neon, and a key player in its Oscar campaign, at a party celebrating the win.

“Tonight was so unbelievable,” Bong told the invitation-only crowd, to loud cheers.

“Parasite’s” big win turned what had previously been simply a night of outliers — with director, screenplay and international-feature victories for “Parasite” earlier in the evening — into the stuff of history. Screenplay and directing wins for non-English movies are rare, but not unprecedented. Before Feb. 9, however, every best picture in the 91-year history of the Oscars had been predominantly in English. “Parasite” is in Korean.

Quinn added his observation. “Tonight, we put the industry in check,” he said, to another decibel-shattering surge of cheers.

It would be hard to overstate the disruption caused by “Parasite’s” win. Hollywood has exported its product to countries around the globe with increasing vigor in recent years. Overseas box office exceeded $31 billion in 2019, a record, and nearly 2 ½ times the amount the studios generated in the U.S.

Yet importing other countries’ output has been much rarer. Broad hits from outside the English-speaking world until now were almost non-existent; the previous foreign-language best-picture nominee to be released widely in theaters, 2012’s “Amour,” generated $7 million in U.S. receipts.

And the best-picture award was the ultimate sign that the industry club that until relatively recently had ensured that its big prize didn’t go to films made outside the studio system, let alone one made in a country 6,000 miles away, had fractured.

Agents, producers, directors and publicists — but notably no major studio executives — who populated the party wondering if “Parasite,” with $36 million in U.S. box office receipts and likely a bunch more after the Oscar exposure, is a sign that globalism will now cut the other way.

“I think what you’re seeing here is that this isn’t just Hollywood telling people in Europe, Asia and everywhere else what to see,” Celine Sciamma, the French director whose drama “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” was nominated for a Golden Globe this year, said in an interview at the party. “It’s a dialogue, and sometimes the rest of the world might tell America what’s worth seeing, too.”

The Oscars were created for an essentially local industry that now exists in a world that’s gone beyond the local. Sciamma raised the questions that had been percolating even before Oscar voters decided to offer an answer: What are now the responsibilities of an industry that exports so much of its product to the rest of the world to hear what the rest of the world has to say in return? Can it continue looking outward for money but turn inward for glory?

The “Parasite” gathering following the Oscars — essentially a more darkly lighted and well-tailored version of an election-night victory party — was taking place at Soho House, the private club atop a skyscraper that serves as a kind of cultural nerve center for modern Hollywood. It is the space where deals are hashed out over meals during the day and triumphs are celebrated at night; every network or studio in town has hosted an event there.

That it was the place where the night’s best picture was celebrated was not a surprise. That such a celebration was filled with representation of Korean culture was.

A Korean boy band, A.C.E., played, jumped and danced in matching suits as they gave shoutouts to the movie. In one corner sat Miky Lee, the 61-year-old South Korean media magnate who, as vice chair of the country’s CJ Group, financed “Parasite” along with many other shows, movies and K-pop outfits.

She held court, greeting a long line of well-wishers while sitting next to the legendary American music producer Quincy Jones, making literal the transpacific moment that “Parasite’s” win represented.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

Above: South Korean newspapers report on the success of the film “Parasite,” written and directed by Bong Joon-ho, left, which won four Oscars, including best picture.
By Elahe Izadi
The Washington Post

The cast of “Parasite” gasped and jumped from their seats last month when they heard the news: They would be receiving a Screen Actors Guild award for best ensemble, a first for a foreign-language film. Hollywood’s biggest stars gave them a standing ovation as they collected the prize bestowed upon them by their fellow actors.

“Although the title is ‘Parasite,’ I think the thing that is about most is how we can all live together,” lead actor Song Kang-ho said through an interpreter.

“But to be honored with a best ensemble award, it’s like a dream come true,” he added. “It occurs to me that maybe we haven’t created such a bad movie.”

By every metric available, South Korea’s “Parasite” is far from a bad movie. It did well at the box office, earned near-universal praise from critics and won four of the five awards in its genre at this year’s Oscars, including best picture. But despite the accolades for Song Joong-ho’s biting drama, none of the actors received nominations for the top prize of their industry, including best picture. But while the academy has a long history of voting down foreign-language films, all received more than five Oscar nominations, none was for acting.

Other films have racked up at least the same number of nods with no recognition for acting, including this year’s “1917.” But of the 58 movies that reach that threshold, once featuring Asian and Asian Americans are overrepresented, said Ben Zauzmer, author of “Oscarnomics.”

“Historically and to the present day, the academy is more willing to honor films with Asian casts than to honor individual Asian actors,” Zauzmer said.

The history of Asian and Asian Americans in Hollywood has been one of reification or very rarely, as in the case of “Parasite,” a nuanced character, she added. The moviegoing public, including Oscar voters, may therefore be conditioned to seeing Asians as “a type, as opposed to a human being with an individual personality who would be of interest, a nuanced character,” she added.

During the silent-film era, Asian actors were confined to playing stereotypical parts, and soon the movie industry’s depiction of Asians came via white actors with scotchedpate eyes, said Elaine Kim, a professor emerita of Asian American and Asian diaspora studies at the University of California at Berkeley.

They’ve been shown on-screen “as one-dimensional stereotypes,” such as subhuman villains, “a racialized Jap or invasion” or “superhuman” model minority characters, she said. The moviegoing public, including Oscar voters, may therefore be conditioned to seeing Asians as “a type, as opposed to a human being with an individual personality who would be of interest, a nuanced character,” she added.

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While and “yellow face” may no longer be a standard Hollywood practice, “whitewashing” — white actors playing Asian characters — still happens, from Emma Stone’s casting in “Aloha” to Tilda Swinton in “Doctor Strange.”

“And Asian and Asian Americans couldn’t even play themselves, the assumptions being that talented acting belongs to whites, Western actors,” Choy said. “That has also infused the industry’s consciousness, as well as the general public.”

To be considered in the Oscar acting categories, Asian and Asian American actors often have to compete with their better-known white counterparts, who are more likely to have star power and a history of appearing in top films. “To even be put in the dialogue about who gets to deserve an award, do we even exist as a person?” said culture critic and “They Call Us Bruce” podcast co-host Jeff Yang. “We have a self-fulfilling prophecy of people who have already gotten visibility getting more visibility.”

The conversation around representation has become more prominent in the wake of the #OscarsSoWhite campaign. The academy made pledges to diversify its membership and, since 2016, the share of voting members who are people of color has doubled — to 16 percent.

The lack of acting nods for “Parasite,” as well as “The Farewell,” another critically acclaimed film with Asian and Asian American actors, speaks “to the membership of the academy and who is actually doing the voting,” said #OscarsSoWhite founder April Reign.

Because nonmembers are being added to an Oscars voting body that was overwhelmingly white, the Academy Awards does not have an ensemble category.

“Parasite” actor Jeong Hyeonjun, left, and his mother, Lee Min Jae, who spoke on condition of anonymity, who received the award for best original screenplay, in Seoul, South Korea, on Feb. 10.

“Parasite” was to seed the grassroots first. Werner and his team courted “film Twitter” out of the movie’s Cannes premiere last May and then in the second-season months that followed in the fall.

The idea was that the group had become institutional enough to basically send the buzz the other way — from its own digital wilds up to mainstream media outlets, then on to younger academy members and ultimately to an older academy guard that is still required to secure the best-picture vote. Far from just measuring the buzz, “film Twitter” propelled it.

“You need the right movie, the right moment — all of that,” said an executive at a rival company who spoke on condition of anonymity. “But does anyone doubt these champions online played a big role in this win?” The executive said he believed it would be a playbook others would follow.

Many awards experts said the win showed that, foreign-language or not, the academy has now become the place that sees no distinction between studios and independent companies, and in fact sometimes prefers the latter. This marks the third time in five years the top prize has gone to an independent studio. Neon is particularly true in the case of Universal, which had one of the year’s biggest bombs in “Cats” but an apparent surefire best-picture winner in 1917.”

The profrident frontrunner. That the movie has passed $288 million around the world might help ease the sting.

One sales agent said he was certain that, in a culture of global franchises, the academy might swing more toward foreign-language films but that studies were unlikely to take the plunge. Even if they don’t, companies with the “Parasite” mindset might carry the baton. Imperial has recently financed “Mosul,” a new dramatic thriller about an Iraqi police force directed by a Hollywood filmmaker. Its primary language? Arabic.
Ben Schwartz voices excitement over ‘Sonic’ role

By Peter Sblendorio
New York Daily News

B en Schwartz was up to speed on Sonic the Hedgehog long before he voiced the lightning-quick character in a new movie. The comedian grew up playing the Sonic video games on SEGA Genesis with friends in the Bronx during the early 1990s, so it was all fun and games when the chance to star in the upcoming “Sonic the Hedgehog” flick presented itself.

“We would go after school, we would watch ‘Disney Afternoon,’” then when that was over, we would play Genesis,” Schwartz, 36, recalled recently. “We would play Sonic. We would play Sonic 2. I remember the thing that made it so exciting is that you could play a board at a certain speed, and then you could play the same board trying to go as fast as you can, and you could have a totally different experience. I have incredibly fond memories of it.”

Fast-forward to present day, and Schwartz is still making fond memories with the rapid-running Sonic. The actor, who played Jean-Ralphio on “Parks and Recreation,” initially became attached to the new film when director Jeff Fowler and producer Tim Miller asked him to lend his voice to Sonic in a test reading as they pitched the movie to studios.

“It was the quintessential ‘yes’ in the universe,” Schwartz said. “Then I got lucky enough that they loved my voice so much that I guess it didn’t matter that there were probably more famous people out there that wanted to play the role. They just liked my performance so much that they let me keep doing it.”

“One of the things I always stick out to me in the games, and in the movies, was the fact that Sonic can, and you could have a totally different experience. I have incredibly fond memories of it.”

‘Sonic’ is swift, smart and brings back the Jim Carrey we missed

By Kristen Page-Kirby
Special to The Washington Post

Ah, the joy of a kids’ movie that doesn’t have any fart jokes. Or at least one that comes close. “Sonic the Hedgehog” may have one moment of flatulence, but this hybrid of live-action and CGI animation gets away with it, otherwise bypassing the all-too-common cheap laughs for a story that’s loaded with smart humor, snappy dialogue and the big blue heart beating at its center.

Inspired by the popular series of video games, “Sonic” tells the eternal tale of a blue hedgehog from another planet who runs at near-warp speed. After a relatively pointless exposition — there are a lot of plot elements audiences will just have to roll with — Sonic (voiced by Ben Schwartz) arrives in a small Montana town where he has to hide his speed, because otherwise people will want to steal it. There, he lives a solitary existence, peering into the lives of the townspeople in an attempt to assuage his loneliness.

During a one-on-one baseball game, Sonic runs fast enough to produce an electronic pulse that not only knocks out the town’s power, but causes satellites to go wonky, attracting the attention of some vaguely menacing government figures. Along with said government figures arrives Dr. Ivo Robotnik, a brilliant, slightly bent scientist now fixated on tracking said government figures. Along with attracting the attention of some vaguely powerful, but causes satellites to go wonky, following feedback from fans.

The eagerness for excellence from the fans left Schwartz feeling excited.

“I love this character,” Schwartz told The News. “I love people cared. Then the trailer came out, and you saw that there were millions of people that cared. This fan base, which is so passionate, came out and really showed itself and showed how much they care about this thing. So it just made me feel like they really cared.”

Sonic is hopeful the movie introduces the franchise to new fans as well. He credits the writers for including references to the Sonic and Super Smash Bros. video games that audiences can look for as they watch.

Schwartz says Sonic’s attitude and speed always stuck out to him in the games, and after the actor read the movie’s script, he found other attributes he wanted to bring to the character, too.

“It’s like this little kid that’s filled with energy and positivity and wants to get out and just, like, do everything he could to do that,” Schwartz said. “It’s like, ‘I want to live life for the first time and not be in the shadows.’ It’s this great story of an outsider that finally gets to live his life.”

‘Sonic the Hedgehog’ is rated PG for action, some violence, rude humor and brief mild language.

also playing

‘The Photograph’

When famed photographer Christina Eames unexpectedly dies, she leaves her estranged daughter Mae Morton (Issa Rae) full of questions. When a photograph tucked away in a safe-deposit box is found, Mae finds herself on a journey delving into her mother’s early life and ignites an unexpected romance with a rising-star journalist, Michael Block (Lakeith Stanfield).

A review of “The Photograph” was not available at press time. The romantic drama is rated PG-13 for sexuality and brief strong language. Running time: 106 minutes.

‘Fantasy Island’

The enigmatic Mr. Roarke makes the secret dreams of his guests come true at a remote tropical resort. But when the fantasies turn into nightmares, the guests have to solve the island’s mystery in order to escape with their lives. A review of “Fantasy Island” was not available at press time. The horror film stars Michael Pena and Maggie Q, and is rated PG-13 for violence, terror, drug content, suggestive material and brief strong language. Running time: 156 minutes.
Despite glitches, VR lifts Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners above zombie clichés

BY CHRISTOPHER BYRD
Special to The Washington Post

In the decrepit blue mansion, I waited behind the doorway of one of the upstairs bedrooms for the zombie to approach. Its monosyllabic grumblings gave it away. I raised a shiv above my head. The blade extended from the bottom of my fist, as Norman Bates did in the famous shower scene from "Psycho."

Then, as the lumbering zombie reached the threshold of the room, I stepped into its view. Before it could react, I plunged the shiv into its skull and gave the knife an extra push to sink the blade in up to its hilt. The action is one of the most visceral I have performed in any video game and, generally speaking, I could not care less about zombies.

In virtual reality, visual clichés are reinvigorated. Though I can’t count the number of times I've seen a variation of the scene in which someone stands around a corner, clutching a weapon, waiting for their mortal enemy to pass to catch them unaware, I'd never, until recently, acted out such a scenario with all of its accompanying physical fanfare.

It's for reasons like these that I found The Walking Dead: Saints & Sinners to be a captivating survivor horror game, regardless of the technical and design issues that marred my enjoyment.

Set in New Orleans, Saints & Sinners casts the player as the Tourist, a person trying to make their way to the Reserve, which is a place reputed to be rich in the sort of supplies one would want in a zombie apocalypse. (The devastated landscapes of the city evoke the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.) Aside from being overrun by zombies, the streets are a place for armed combat between two large groups of survivors, the Tower and the Reclaimed. The Tower prides itself on order and community while the Reclaimed are more anarchic. The former is led by an authoritarian leader, the latter by a charismatic one; you can choose to help, harm or ignore either faction.

Your base in Saints & Sinners is a weathered school bus hidden away by a cemetery. Nearby is a skiff — your portal for fast travel. There is a recycle bin in the bus. Items found in the world can be placed into the bin to be converted into parts for crafting weapons, food, medical supplies, etc. The items you find while out and about are generally banged-up, soiled, or of otherwise cheap quality; thus, it’s practical to use one of the crafting tables next to the bus to create better supplies. This emphasis on crafting, coupled with the scarce number of checkpoints in the game, makes Saints & Sinners feel a bit grindy.

Reaching over the left side of my shoulder, with an Oculus Touch controller, takes out a knapsack. An item found in the world can be placed in it by using one of the controllers, which doubles as my hands in the game. Reaching across my right shoulder I pull out and replace a shotgun. On the left side of my chest is my flashlight; on my right is my notebook where I can find information about my current tasks. On either side of my unseen hips are holsters that I can place weapons into. Rarely has inventory management felt so tactile.

Playing the game on an i5-4690K computer with a second-generation Nvidia Titan X graphics card, I encountered plenty of framerate hiccups as well as audio glitches where the sound dropped in or out. Frame-rate hitches in VR are immersion-shattering. Although I rarely get motion sickness from VR, there were times where technical issues prompted me to close my eyes for a moment or take off the headset. Of particular annoyance is the fact that to crouch in the game you must press a button on the controller rather than simply crouching down. To ward off (relatively light) vertigo as best I could, I found myself haphazardly trying to synchronize button presses with crouching down in my living room so that the shift in scale wouldn’t bother me as it would if I remained standing up.

I hardly thought of the Saints & Sinners storyline because I was more focused on the game’s performance issues. If you have a PC capable of running the game smoothly, congrats — you’ll certainly have a more comfortable experience than I did.

Platforms: Cosmos, HTC Vive, Oculus Rift, Oculus Rift S, Oculus Quest (via Link cable), and Valve Index

Online: wrwalkingdead.com

The game takes place in a New Orleans reminiscent of the city in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.
More than golden, light beer

Historic 16th-century architecture surrounds Pilsner Urquell brewery

BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

You may know Pilsen in the Czech Republic as the birthplace of light, golden pils beer and the home of the Pilsner Urquell brewery, but there are other things to do in this town than just drink a good brew.

For a start, you could visit Republic Square, one of the largest squares in Europe. There, you’ll find the cathedral of St. Bartholomew, Pilsen’s 16th-century city hall, and, at the right time during winter, a Christmas market.

The cathedral dominates the landscape in Pilsen with its 337-foot spire, the tallest in the Czech Republic. Inside, the Pilsen Madonna graces the main altar, while outside, there’s a statue depicting Jesus on the Mount of Olives, protected by angels who, local legend has it, will grant you one wish.

Near the cathedral is City Hall, a renaissance jewel built between 1554 and 1559. Special exhibitions are held in the lobby, and in a room behind that, there’s a scale model of Pilsen center as it was in days of yore. Both are open and accessible free of charge from 8 a.m. to 6.p.m. daily.

Also in the square is the Plague Column, by local sculptor Kristian Widman. The column dates back to 1681, when it was erected to give thanks for the fact that the plague didn’t come to the city.

But even with all that history and architecture to marvel at, the jewel in the crown of this city is, to my mind, the Pilsner Urquell brewery.

Tours of the brewery are offered in Czech, English, German and Russian and last around two hours. The brewery also offers workshops — there’s currently one on how to correctly pull a draft pils. Many, if not all, of the tours include tastings at the end for those 18 and older.

Tour sizes are limited, so it’s best to make reservations in advance.

Johnson.Immanuel@stripes.com
Twitter: Manny_Stripes

PHOTOS BY IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes

ON THE QT

DIRECTIONS
Pilsen is about 90 minutes east of Grafenwoehr. To get to the brewery, put Plzensky Prazdroj in your GPS. The brewery is also a five-minute walk from the main train station.

TIMES
The brewery is open daily from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. from April to September, and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. from October to March.

COSTS
The cost of tours varies. To reserve a spot on a tour, email reservations@asahibeer.cz. (Yes, that’s the Japanese Asahi Breweries. They bought Pilsner Urquell in 2016.)

INFORMATION
More information about Pilsen in general is online atpilsen.eu/tourist. For brewery tours and information, go to prazdrojvisit.cz/en.

— Immanuel Johnson
Britain still a great destination post-Brexit

Britain, even while engulfed in Brexit politics, is constantly innovating in restorations and first-class exhibits to share its heritage — and, in so many ways, Britain's heritage is linked to ours.

While many travel writers are understandably curious about how Brexit is affecting tourists, from my experience it isn't, at least not yet — happily if Britain ends up taking an abrupt exit from the EU, I don't expect American travelers to face any significant disruptions. The only impact I've found is that the country is cheaper for visitors (with the pound weaker than it's been in a while), and that the tourism industry seems to appreciate visitors even more than usual. (And, for those who like to talk politics, the topic is a fascinating conversation starter.)

Here's a rundown on the latest for travelers going to Britain in 2020.

Timed-entry tickets and advance reservations are becoming increasingly popular throughout Europe, as popular sights grapple with growing crowds. More than ever, it's worth considering booking advance tickets — especially in peak season — for some of London's top sights: the Churchill War Rooms, Houses of Parliament, St. Paul's Cathedral, Tower of London, London Eye, any West End play you're set on seeing, and the new-of-London, London Eye, any West End play you're set on seeing, and the new... (to be continued)

TOP TRAVEL PICKS

Kew Gardens celebrates orchids

As most of Europe eagerly awaits the coming of spring, London's Kew Gardens fast-forwards into the positively balmy weather that characterizes Indonesia, an equator-straddling land of 17,000 islands known for its tremendous biodiversity in terms of both plants and animals.

Through March 8, an exhibition simply titled “Orchids” transports nature lovers into the heart of the rain forest and onto the slopes of volcanoes, where brightly-hued displays of exotic orchids can't fail to delight the eye. Organizers promise an immersive journey through several zones displaying the myriad facets of Indonesia's nature. Life-size models of an orangutan, a tiger and a rhinoceros are decked with hundreds of tropical blooms, and cleverly arranged orchids evoke the image of an erupting volcano. An archway crafted of carnivorous pitcher plants is likely to raise a squirmish form of delight.

On the evenings of Feb. 27-28 and March 7-8, separate timed-entry tickets for After Hours events will offer cultural immersion through ensembles playing traditional gamelan music, traditional dancing and cooking demos. The gardens are located just west of London in Rich mond and can be reached from central London by bus, rail or river within just half an hour or thereabouts. They're open from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. Owing to its popularity, booking a specific time slot for a visit to the exhibition is essential. This can be done upon purchase of an online ticket at a cost of 16.50 pounds, or about $21.45. Entry to Orchids is included in the regular price of entry to the gardens. First-time visitors will want plenty of time to explore other parts of the expansive grounds. Online: kew.org

Cocoa and a warm glow in Brussels

Brussels promises to be sweet by day and bright by night through the weekend.

Bright Brussels is a light festival best experienced by means of a walking tour leading past some 20 playful and interactive light installations. Along a route stretching through the city's historical center, installations display the journey of light through space, a painting of Claude Monet, luminous lanterns and other visual delights. The lights can be experienced from 7 p.m.-11 p.m. nightly through Feb. 16. Entry is free. Online: bright.brussels

The Salon du Chocolat is a traveling fair that makes its rounds through some of the world's major cities. This edition unites some of Belgium's biggest names in chocolate and pastry under one roof. Attendees can enjoy perusing the stands, workshops, tastings and a demo stage with a lineup of top chefs. Chocolate sculptures and a fashion show in which models wear creations made of chocolate are always event highlights.

The salon takes place at the Tour & Taxis. Entry goes for 10 euros adults and 5 euros for those aged 6-12. Online: brussels.salon-du-chocolat.com

Ghent celebrates Jan Van Eyck

Lovely Ghent, perhaps one of Belgium’s lesser-known gems, has gained mention in the art and travel press of late for an unusual reason: the restoration of a painting unveiled in December features a disconcerting rendering of a lamb’s face.

The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb forms the center panel of the Ghent Altarpiece, a work by the artists Hubert and Jan Van Eyck dating back to 1432. Restorers, having discovered the artwork had been painted over sometime in the 16th century, stripped away the old paint to reveal a lamb with an intense gaze and front-facing eyes. Smithsonian Magazine deemed it “alarmingly humanoid,” and social media users were quick to chime in with similar opinions.

The confrontational, controversial lamb and the Ghent Altarpiece are just one of the city’s attractions. Throughout 2020, Ghent celebrates the great Flemish Master Jan Van Eyck with a year of events and exhibitions.

In addition to calling in to the new visitor’s center at St. Bavo’s Cathedral to see the altar, art aficionados won’t want to miss “Van Eyck. An optical revolution,” featuring 13 of the 22 works by Van Eyck to have survived into the present era. These will remain on display alongside works by Van Eyck’s contemporaries at the Museum of Fine Arts through April 30. “Lights on Van Eyck,” a multimedia spectacle at the St. Nicholas Church, runs from March 28-Nov. 1. “Van Eyck in Depth” is the title of a pop-up exhibition on perspective and geometry, using Van Eyck’s famous masterpiece Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele as its focus. This show begins March 21-Dec. 30 in the Ghent University Museum, a science museum slated to open next month.

For Ghent’s offerings online: visit.gent.be/en/omg-van-eyck-was-here

CTE WEEKEND: TRAVEL

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For Ghent's offerings online: visit.gent.be/en/omg-van-eyck-was-here
Bratwursthausle or Roeslein: Who will win between these Nuremberg bratwurst kings?

BY ERIK SLAVIN Stars and Stripes

Nuremberg’s bratwurst is a pretty big deal in Germany’s vast pantheon of sausages. They’re emulated all around the country, but often lack the nuance and preparation that sets them apart in this Bavarian city, where historians say they were first served more than 700 years ago.

The links don’t look at all like hefty Milwaukee ballpark brats in buns or the footlong-plus brats at Germany’s seasonal carnivals. They’re tinier, golden brown, seasoned with marjoram and seared over beechwood. They were the first sausages granted protected geographic status by the European Union, and like beer and many other things German, regulations govern everything about them.

Nuremberg bratwurst are often eaten as street food with an order of “drei im wegla,” local slang for “three in a bun.” But if I’m going to eat sausages backed by this much hype, I’m going to do it right.

Bratwurstgloecklein and its sister restaurant, Bratwursthausle (pronounced hoyss-leh), originated the full bratwurst meal in its current form in the 19th century, complete with an even number of links, sauerkraut, potato salad and horsedradish as a condiment.

Roeslein, near the St. Lorenz church in the city center, bills itself as the largest bratwurst restaurant in the world. I figured the differences between the two would be the twists typically found among restaurants that aim to turn the mundane into the sublime — a German version of the Pat’s vs. Geno’s cheesesteak rivalry in Philly, or Chick-fil-A against Popeye’s. Alas, I was mistaken.

The Bratwursthausle’s terrace was closed for the winter, but we were immediately seated inside at a small communal table surrounded by rustic wood and hanging copper kettles. Two older women at the table from Stuttgart somehow learned everything about the past 10 years of my life from my family during the five minutes I was using the bathroom. The beers were already on the table and the servers were ready to take our order, which is astonishingly quick service for Germany.

While we waited for our bratwurst dinners, we munched on an array of large pretzels and bread — they’ll ask what you ate at the end of the meal and charge accordingly.

The bratwurst came out quickly, considering the crowd, and it was everything it’s cracked up to be. The aged wood and spice blend gave the tender sausages something I’ve never associated with German food — subtlety. The sauerkraut accented with juniper had a soft texture that reminded me of the version found across Germany’s western border in Alsace. The potato salad wasn’t the chunky, mayonnaise-dominant stuff of childhood picnics, but an artfully sliced side dish with a vinegar base that served as a counterpoint to the bratwurst. I spent about 16 euros on dinner, drinks and service with a smile. Roeslein was going to have to be pretty spectacular on our visit the next day for lunch to top that.

We walked into Roeslein and were told to take any seats we liked inside the beer hall-style restaurant that can accommodate hundreds, but which was about a third full.

We were able to flag down a waiter after 15 minutes. I ordered a rotbier, which is also an old city specialty. The waiter came back with two beers and left quickly.

The most noticeable thing about my rotbier — which is German for “red beer” — was that it was yellow. The less noticeable but more serious problem was that one in our party ordered a nonalcoholic beer and her face began turning red as she drank, a pretty solid cue that it was a regular beer.

When the waiter came back with the food, he insisted that we had a rothier and a nonalcoholic beer on the table. We were somewhat surprised, but tried to forget about it and dig in.

The bratwurst was just ... fine. They tasted like sausage, without the beguiling spice or the beechwood aroma. The sauerkraut was also respectable but unnoteworthy. One member of our party did think the similarly vinegar-based potato salad here outdid the one at our dinner.

When the bill came, it clearly showed that my rotbier was actually a nonalcoholic beer and what should have been a nonalcoholic beer was a radler, a mixture of beer and lemonade.

The waiter walked away, pretending not to hear when we asked to see the manager. So if you like combative service, potentially dangerous alcohol mix-ups and above-average beer, Roeslein is the one in our party ordered a rotbier, which is also an old city specialty.

PHOTOS BY ERIK SLAVIN/Stars and Stripes

A few people relax with beer and bratwurst on Dec. 21 outside Roeslein in Nuremberg, Germany.

The smoky, marjoram-laced links at Bratwursthausle pair very well with sauerkraut and a vinegar-based potato salad.

AFTER HOURS GERMANY

Bratwurst and sauerkraut, a Nuremberg specialty, are served at the restaurant Roeslein in the city’s center.

Bratwursthausle’s “three in a bun” brats taste good outside or inside.

The Battle of the Brats

ROESLEIN

Address: Rathausplatz 6, 90402 Nuremberg
Hours: 11 a.m. daily; grill closes at 9 p.m.
Prices and menu: Between six and 15 euros, depending on number of bratwurst; more extensive list of Bavarian-Franconian dishes, including duck, liver dumplings, pork knuckle, sauerbratert.
Information: 0911-214-860; Online: bratwurst-roeslein.de

BEI ST. SEBALD

Bratwursthausle

Address: Rathausplatz 1, 90403 Nuremberg
Hours: 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily; grill closes at 11 p.m.
Prices and menu: Eight bratwursts with sides, 10.70 euros; smaller and larger sizes available. Menu also has pork knuckle, tongue and heart.
Information: 0911-227-695; Online: die-nuernberger-bratwurst.de
Chefs in Sweden’s Malmo make exquisite dishes out of what’s locally available

By Liza Weisstuch
Special to The Washington Post

Most days, chefs around the world call their distributors to order food items for the days ahead. They might order seasonal produce, or a standby ingredient for a signature dish. Not so for Erik Andersson Mohlin. He’s at the whim of his distributors. Regular menu items are as relevant as the ever-changing form of prime rib in smoked-tomato, chile, pickled chef’s treasure.

Not so for Erik Andersson Mohlin. He’s at the whim of his distributors. Regular menu items are as relevant as the ever-changing form of prime rib in smoked-tomato, chile, pickled chef’s treasure. But here in Malmo, a port city in Skane, Sweden’s southesternmost province, one distributor’s trash is a visionary chef’s treasure.

On a weeknight this past September, that treasure took the form of prime rib in smoked-tomato, chile, pickled cabbage and carrot. My skepticism quickly vaporized. As flavorful as it was colorful, it was the kind of meal you mourn when it’s gone.

This city of 344,000 is about 30 minutes by train from Copenhagen Airport over the Oresund Bridge, a five-mile marvel completed in 2000, and three-ish hours south of Copenhagen, along Sweden’s western coast. Yet despite its accessibility, it gets far fewer visitors than those popular destinations. Over the past few years, however, in part as a result of the increased access the bridge provides, construction has boomed and an urban renaissance has outdone by the centrally located Gothic-style St. Peter’s Church, completed in the 14th century near one of the town’s canals. The western harbor, a short walk away, has seen a construction boom in the past 20 years. Once a gritty center of herring fishing, now it’s the site of sleek new hotels and Malmo Live, an event center that opened in 2015 and serves as home to Malmo Symphony Orchestra. Stroll another 20 minutes and you end up in an ultramodern neighborhood anchored by the neo-futuristic Turning Torso, a mesmerizing skyscraper that twists a full 90 degrees from base to roof. Completed in 2005, it’s Scandinavia’s tallest building.

But despite these symbols of modernity, an Old World, locally focused sensibility defines how many restaurants operate. In countless cities, restaurants brandish “local” ingredients as a badge of honor, but in Malmo they are de rigueur. At Lyran, a compact neighborhood restaurant with an open kitchen, rustic decor and a humble brick exterior that belies its posh yet relaxed elegance, the local ingredients dictate the menu. It’s presented as a simple list of ingredients, with entries such as “Chanterelles from Mushroom-Mike” and “Yogurt from our neighbor.”

Chef Jorgen Lloyd carries out what he calls “instinctive cooking,” a practice that’s partially improvisational and entirely focused on low-impact dining.

One thing that stood out over the few days I spent exploring Malmo’s restaurants and bars is the way large and small food and drink businesses work together to spotlight one another. It’s a practice evident at Bishops Arms, a Swedish chain with more than 40 outposts around the country. It has all the trappings of a classic English pub, but the beer on tap veers wildly from the typical English ales and lagers one expects at a pub chain. I was stunned to spot an IPA from Alewife Brewing Company, a brewpub just a few miles from my apartment in Queens. But more intriguing were the hyperlocal beers. Sure, brewpubs serving beers made in-house proliferate in most cities. But this particular Bishops Arms locale has exclusive rights to the beers produced at Minus-1, a brewing cooperative located downstairs from the bar.

Eight brands brew at the facility on a revolving schedule, much like a commissary for food start-ups. And the beers are excellent. Four of the eight producers, including the women-run Secret Sisters, make beer that landed them one of the 30 coveted spots on a “best of” list from Untappd, a popular beer app.

But long before Minus-1, there was Malmo Brewing Co. and Taproom. The colorful, high-ceilinged space was a brewery when it opened in the late 1800s and after housing other operations, it’s a brewery again. The owner is Anders Hansson, a warm host with an epic beard and a burly stature that suggests he can trace his lineage back to the Vikings. Anders, a creative type whose Technicolor Pop Art-style prints adorn the walls on the second floor,
started brewing in 1983. He was 12. The beers he makes today occupy at least 15 of the 42 taps at the bar on any given night.

Scandinavia has become known for its molecular gastronomy, but before spherification or foams there were just the unique, fragrant fruits themselves.

Sweden’s native berries and lush orchard fruits are being made the most of these days by drink producers like Anders. At MJ’s, an airy bistro with a vibe that blends Victorian grandma and Fort Lauderdale patio-chic, there are several Fruktstereo cider options on the menu, all listed along with the sparkling wines, not with the beer, as is typical for ciders. A long-standing barrier, broken.

Each of the two I tried takes the base fruit — pears or apples or berries or some combination thereof — and amplifies the flavor. It’s delivered with an understated carbonation that evokes twinkles of light in the night sky. If traditional Norman—dy ciders — dry and only subtly sweet — are acoustic, these are surround sound. Stereo, indeed.

Karl Sjostrom, Fruktstereo’s co-founder, is a lanky man of muted intensity with a shoulder-length ginger mane and a full beard to match. He makes his ciders using an ancient method of bottle-fermentation long practiced in winemaking. But don’t let the esoteric technicalities scare you. In fact, the company’s primary goal is to eradicate snobbishness. To that end, each cider has a winking music-related name (see: Ciderday Night Fever, Britney’s Pears).

Karl made his first batches about 25 miles east of Malmo at Hallakra Vineyard. He quickly outgrew the winery’s space and moved to a facility next to Malmo’s central train station. But his ciders are still offered at Meeting Place, the vineyard’s restaurant.

The farmhouse dining room is a portrait of nature-inspired, stripped-down glamour, the kind Williams-Sonoma catalogues aim to emulate.

Hallakra, a small family farm, was transformed into a vineyard in 2003 by Hakan Hansson, a fifth-generation family member and reformed banker. Sweden isn’t a globally noted wine country, but the sandy soil here is chalky and packed with minerals like many European wine-producing regions. Unlike many European nations, however, there are no established rules for Swedish wine production, so Hakan is pioneering the style.

His natural wines, most notably a sparkling and rose, are dry, light, fresh and floral.

All this was explained to me by Michael and Joanna Daly, newlyweds who run the kitchen here — he as a manager and she, a trained sommelier, as the chef. On this night in September, she prepared an exquisite meal that started with a medley of salmon, burned butter, lime and sea-rocket, a whimsically named relative of wild radish.

The Swedes are not a flashy or dramatic people. There is no pomp or pretense in the serene landscapes, either, be it the seaside villages or fields anchored by ancient castles. The region’s food and drink are an extension of that, an articulation of the earth, the place. Like everything else in Malmo.
Japan Olympic Museum highlights significance of the Olympic Games

By Hana Kusumoto
Stars and Stripes

With the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics just around the corner, get pumped up for the games with a trip to the newly opened Japan Olympic Museum.

Just across the street from New National Stadium in central Tokyo’s Gaien area, this museum offers history and insight into the Olympics and Paralympics.

Visitors are first welcomed by a large Olympic rings statue outside of the museum. Even on a cold winter day, visitors lined up to take photos by the rings with the new stadium in the background.

The small, two-story museum opened in September to promote the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics and illuminate the history and significance of the games.

The first floor is free to enter, with a small museum shop, café and a big-screen TV showing memorable moments of past Olympics. Visitors may browse a small library of books on the Olympics and Paralympics.

At a table holding paper for origami, visitors are encouraged to fold the paper according to instructions and write messages for the Japanese athletes participating in the Summer Games.

On the day I visited, a small display highlighted the role of Pierre de Coubertin, father of the modern Olympics.

The second floor, which costs 500 yen for adults, offers a detailed history of the Olympics and of Japan’s participation in the games. The history starts with the ancient Greek Olympics and continues into the beginning of the modern Olympics and how wars had affected countries’ participation.

A discus made from stone to show what the Olympians in the ancient Olympics were using is on display. I was surprised how heavy it was as I was unable to lift it with one hand.

Also on display were torches used in past Olympic opening ceremonies going back to the 1936 Berlin Games, which inaugurated the torch relay. A costume worn by a performer during the closing ceremony at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics is part of the collection.

One section is devoted to Japan’s participation in the Olympics. In it, visitors will find posters and tickets from Olympics held in Tokyo, Sapporo and Nagano. There is also a display on the 1940 Tokyo Olympics, which was canceled due to war. The exhibit features posters and tickets meant for those events.

In another section, visitors using simulators can compare themselves with Olympians’ physical ability. Using interactive screens, visitors can experience shooting, ski jumping and pairs figure skating and compare their results with Olympians.

At one section, visitors imitate a ski jumper and jump onto a cushion to measure their balance and then compare the result to how an Olympic athlete would perform. There were also videos on the Paralympic Games and interviews of Olympic athletes.

Although the museum is small, it’s an in-depth learning experience that’s definitely worth a visit if you’re in the area.

Twitter: @HanaKusumoto

ON THE QT

DIRECTIONS
First and second floors of Japan Sport Olympic Square at 4-2 Kasumigaoka-machi, Shinjuku Ward, Tokyo.

A 5-minute walk from exit 3 at Gaienmae Station on Tokyo Metro’s Ginza line; 10 minutes from exit 2 at Kokuritsu Kyogijo Station on the Toei Oedo line; 12 minutes from Sendagaya or Shinanomachi stations on the Chuo and Sobu lines.

TIMES
Open daily (except Mondays), 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Must enter before 4:30 p.m. If a Japanese holiday falls on a Monday, it is open on that day but will be closed on the following day. Also closed during the end of the year and New Year holidays. Could be closed on an irregular basis. Check the website for closing dates.

COSTS
Admission is free for the first-floor exhibits. 500 yen for adults and 400 yen for those 65 years or older for the second-floor exhibit. High school students and younger enter for free.

FOOD
A small café within the museum sells beverages. There are a variety of restaurants around the nearby train stations.

INFORMATION
Online: japan-olympic-museum.jp/en
— Hana Kusumoto

PHOTOS BY HANA KUSUMOTO/Stars and Stripes

Visitors to the Japan Olympics Museum in Tokyo check out steps representing the stride of Jamaican gold medalist Usain Bolt.

A visitor tries a shooting simulator that allows people to compare their aim to an Olympic athlete.

A visitor poses with the Olympic rings near the National Stadium.

A woman points to the name of a past Japanese Olympian etched in a glass wall at the museum.
Unleashing the food influencer within

With a little research, anyone can find social media-worthy places to dine

BY NEVIN MARTELL
Special to The Washington Post

I had to stop looking at your Instagram posts, because they were making me hungry and jealous,” a friend half-told, half-accused me after I returned from a trip to Tulum, Mexico, last year. “Sorry, sorry, I replied good-naturedly. After all, I was just doing my job as a food and travel writer-photographer.

“So how do you figure out where you’re going to eat?” she asked.

It’s a question I get asked a lot. People seem to think I have access to secret information otherwise unavailable to the public. Don’t get me wrong, I have an edge thanks to more than two decades of experience and my industry connections, but I ferret out many of my favorite meals on the road through thorough research that people could do themselves. Frankly, I’m glad most travelers don’t bother, because I make a living from it. But by following a few simple tips, anyone can dine around the world like a food writer.

These days, I start my exploratory process on social media, usually months before a trip. On Facebook and Twitter, I’ll ask my friends and followers to chime in with suggestions on where to eat — no boundaries. It’s immensely significant components that go into creating a next-level dining experience, such as service elements, the minutiae of the beverage program or rarer culinary techniques.

You can’t just rely on the web to guide your decisions. I personally ask anyone I know who might have been to the region — passionate travelers, die-hard foodies, hospitality professionals, and people with familial or cultural roots there. If you know the Italian chef at your favorite trattoria, by all means ask her where to eat before you go to Umbria. And don’t forget to reach out to the local visitors’ bureau, as it can offer a wealth of information, including news about restaurants that are on the verge of opening.

It’s helpful to read up on the culinary traditions and history of the region to ascertain what you should expect and what specialties to seek out, so pick up a few relevant guidebooks, cookbooks, travelogues or memoirs before you go. They will help you give you a richer sense of a place and may push you to explore unexpected activities. Before departing for Tulum, I flipped through Moon’s Tulum guidebook and “Yucatan: Recipes From a Culinary Expedition” by David Sterling. The latter inspired me to seek out a cooking class at Riviera Maya Kitchen, where I made tortillas from scratch while learning about the foundational role corn plays in Mexican cuisine.

As I’m doing my online and offline survey, I compile a digital list of all the potential spots to visit, making sure to tally multiple mentions of a place. Ultimately, I save those that pique my interest most on Google Maps, so I can get an overview of the map. The map also makes it easier to decide where to eat if I suddenly have a break in my schedule or if an establishment is unexpectedly closed.

Before leaving home, I’ll trace out a tentative itinerary and make any reservations necessary, especially at any hard-to-access restaurants. If you have personal connections to any of the places you’re dining, let your contact know when you plan on stopping by. It can be helpful to have a friendly face guiding you through the experience — and maybe offer you VIP perks, like a kitchen tour or an introduction to the chef.

Don’t think your work has ended once your travel begins. Keep your eyes open, quiz everyone you meet — cabdrivers, concierges, bartenders, chefs and fellow travelers can be particularly helpful — and adjust your itinerary accordingly. I often find a natural flow develops. Tulum was no different. Because it was the most recommended place on my list, I made a point of dining twice at Arca, an exceptionally executed, modernist-minded venture from Mexican American chef Jose Luis Hinostroza, an alumn of Noma and Alinea. I had a chance to chat with him, so I asked him about his favorite taquerias. He turned me on to the cochinita pibil stuffed ones at Honorio Taqueria and the al pastor tacos at La Chispacena, which were some of my favorite bites of the trip. While I was walking to the latter, I discovered Ki bok Coffee, which serves excellent espresso and notable handmade pastries, including a jammy blackberry bar.

Other highlights included Safari, which I first saw on Instagram, a charmingly bohemian taqueria crafting unconventional options (the highlight was one packed with roasted octopus) out of an Airstream-turned-kitchen with an open fire out front. A rep from the visitor’s bureau mentioned NU, which specializes in picture-ready contemporary Mexican fare. And there were several outstanding breakfasts at Casa Malca — suggested by several friends on Facebook — a chic beachfront hotel populated by contemporary artworks selected by its gallery owner and designed to look good from every angle, so it was impossible to go more than a few minutes without seeing someone take a selfie in front of something.

All in all, my two weeks in Tulum were packed solid with memorable meals, many of which I documented in envy-inducing pictures I posted on Instagram. It was a trip worthy of a food writer — or anyone willing to do the research.

*STARS AND STRIPES*

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7 travel destinations around the world to avoid after a breakup

By Natalie B. Compton
The Washington Post

There are a lot of reasons to travel after your heart gets broken. All of the new sights, sounds and smells you encounter on a trip can distract you from the dizzying, all-encompassing pain throbbing in your chest. Traveling can boost your confidence at a time when you’re feeling broken and vulnerable. But traveling post-split can be a terrible idea at the wrong destination. Going full "Eat Pray Love" in Tel Aviv, where you can eat and surf just steps from the modern conveniences known to man against a backdrop of tropical jungles and mesmerizing ocean views, or the more remote Gili Islands, where the roads are rough but the natural beauty is just as stunning, won’t help you rebound when your heart feels as though it’s been ripped out of your chest

Paris
It’s perfectly possible to have a fantastic time alone in Paris, but it’s referred to as the City of Love for a reason. The city oozes romance from every cobblestone corner, there are lovers drinking wine everywhere you look, and even the architecture manages to look romantic. If the sight of beautiful, scarf-wearing people kissing each other’s necks might send you into a grief-wracked downward spiral, skip Paris. A better alternative for brokenhearted fans of European food and architecture is Lisbon.

Venice
You don’t have to skip Italy completely. There are other cities there that will, yes, be full of lovers, but have lower potential for sending you into a wallowing fit in a canal. Like Florence. The Renaissance city has so much to offer besides a fact that your heart was shattered into a billion pieces: Dance until dawn, thanks to the Israeli city’s world-famous nightlife.

Hawaiian resorts
Hawaii is a spectacular place to visit for people who love the outdoors, tropical weather, incredible food, culture and surfing. However, Hawaii is also a destination-wedding and honeymoon magnet. The islands are teeming with couples. Skip the islands altogether while you’re mourning your relationship. Instead, try Tel Aviv, where you can eat and surf just aswell, plus distract yourself from the fact that your heart was shattered into a billion pieces: Dance until dawn, thanks to the Israeli city’s world-famous nightlife.

Certain islands
Do not, under any circumstances, plan a post-breakup trip to the Maldives or a comparable far-flung island nation such as Fiji or Bora Bora where you’re stranded on a resort with nothing but honeymooners and couples celebrating big anniversaries. Sure, you could hole up in your overwater villa and bawl your eyes out. But if you plan to eat dinner outside your quarters, you’re going to be surrounded, perhaps exclusively, by tables of two. Escape to our planet’s other beach destinations, like Indonesia, where you can pour your heart out to friendly backpackers who might be on the road for the same reason. A few options include Bali, where you’ll find all of the modern conveniences known to man against a backdrop of tropical jungles and mesmerizing ocean views, or the more remote Gili Islands, where the roads are rough but the natural beauty is just as stunning.

Any Sandals resort
Have you ever seen a commercial for Sandals Resorts? They’re composed of scene after scene of couples walking down the beach holding hands, couples laughing in hot tubs, couples eating dinner alone under the stars. These commercials should serve as a signal that adults-only all-inclusive resorts, like Sandals, are made for pairs. And you want to suffer at a couples’ paradise in the wake of a broken heart? No. No, you do not. Save Sandals for your next big relationship, and get swept up in the magic of Mexico’s culture this time around. Choices abound for the despondent to find solace south of the border. For beaches and mezcal, there’s Oaxaca. For endless art and fine dining, there’s Mexico City. For architecture and your Instagram clout, there’s San Miguel de Allende.

Las Vegas
Las Vegas may sound like a great place to rebound when your heart feels as though it’s been ripped out of your chest, then lit on fire, and even though it’s out of your chest you can still feel it being burned alive — but beware. Even if you’re with friends, Vegas can be incredibly lonely. Although there’s something for everyone here, you’ll find yourself surrounded by a lot of couples and a lot of sad distractions. If you’re still hellbent on going to Vegas, don’t end up sobbing on the Strip guzzling down yardsticks of Long Island iced tea. Instead, try seeing Vegas like a local. You can eat, drink and attempt to be merry in neighborhoods like Chinatown, Fremont East and the Arts District.

Santorini, Greece
Couples from across the world are pulled to the Greek island of Santorini like moths to a flame. Maybe it’s the twinkling Aegean Sea that shines beyond the cliff-perched towns, or the spectacular sunsets that dazzle. Regardless of the romantic reason, the happy couples are all over. Dodge the hordes of Instagram hounds dutifully photographing their beaming brides, and opt for a trip elsewhere in Greece. Start with a few days in Athens, nursing your wounds in its relaxing hammam baths and sampling cocktails and fantastic meals. Then get your sun-and-sea fix with a few days in the other Cyclades.
A GOOD FIT?

Traditional retailers aim to boost profits by offering clothing rental but face challenges

BY ANNE D’INNOCENZIO
Associated Press

Renting clothes could be the future of fashion — or it could just be a fad.
But traditional retailers can no longer afford to wait on the sidelines to find out. That’s why a growing number are now offering customers the option to rent clothes for a monthly fee instead of buying them. Bloomingdale’s, Banana Republic and Urban Outfitters are the latest to offer the services. Even footwear chain Designer Brands says it’s considering launching a rental service for shoes.

Now a booming $1 billion business, the clothing rental sector is expected to reach $2.5 billion by 2023, according to research firm GlobalData. When combined with resale, it will account for 13% of the total $360 billion U.S. clothing market within the decade, up from 7.3% today.

Clothing rentals are one more piece of the sharing economy, where customers — particularly those in their 20s and 30s — are less interested in owning or making big investments but still want access to different brands and services, says Steve Barr, consumer markets leader at PwC.

“You no longer have to buy into the myth of continuous consumption and that there’s pride in wearing something as opposed to pride in owning something,” said Jennifer Hyman, CEO and co-founder of Rent the Runway, which in 2009 pioneered the business model that many retailers are now trying to replicate.

For clothing retailers, rentals offer a glimmer of hope at a time when they are dealing with mounds of unsold goods that often need to be deeply discounted. Several have already gotten into the secondhand business — another popular trend in the sharing economy led by companies like The Real Real and ThredUp. J.C. Penney and Macy’s, for instance, have partnered with ThredUp to sell gently worn clothes in a couple dozen locations. Nordstrom is testing resale at its women’s flagship store in Manhattan and online.

Many in the industry consider these necessary steps as clothing retailers watch their fortunes erode. They, along with department stores, are expected to see their fourth-quarter earnings sink 11.3% compared with a 5.7% drop for the overall retail sector, according to research firm Retail Metrics LLC. Last year, clothing retailers accounted for an outsized share of retail bankruptcies, according to a recent report by consulting firm AlixPartners.

“Clothing retailers are dealing with pressures on multiple fronts,” said Ken Perkins, president of Retail Metrics. “Heavy promotions, chronic traffic declines, e-commerce investment. And now they’ve got rental and resale services as well. The rental model is small, but it’s going to grow, and they have to invest in it.”

Christine Hunsicker, CEO and founder of CaaStle, a startup that manages inventory and shipping for retailers, says rental services have anywhere from a 20% to 25% operating profit compared with only 5% for traditional retailers. Last year, Hunsicker’s startup saw total spending for both renting and buying increase two-fold on average for each customer.

But unlike Rent the Runway, a dedicated rental service for high-end designer clothing, the economics for traditional retailers — from marketing to dry cleaning and shipping, on top of running their normal day-to-day operations — pose significant challenges.

About a dozen retailers, including Banana Republic and Bloomingdale’s, have left it to CaaStle to handle the logistics. But Urban Outfitters, which lets shoppers rent their brands as well as outside labels like Reebok and Levi’s, is doing it all on its own — a formidable task.

“(Retailers) are very used to marketing products, not services, so it’s challenging knowing which customers to message, and how often,” Hunsicker said.

Some experts wonder whether it even makes sense for lower-priced clothing chains to get into the rental business since customers could just buy the clothes used, or get them at a deep discount. Also, the clothes may be dealing with mounds of unsold goods that often need to be deeply discounted.

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Elizabeth Kashin, 53, of Indianapolis, says she tried Urban Outfitter’s Nuuly rental service last month. She never received her package of six items but was charged anyway. After contacting customer service via social media, she got another package but said the clothes didn’t look clean.

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Retailers also face the same challenges that still dog Rent the Runway. Consumers complain about spotty customer service and a slew of added fees. For example, Rent the Runway charges $50 for every day that a customer is late in returning an item, up to double the retail value of that item.

There is also the issue of too few locations to return rented items. Retail expert Melissa Gonzalez says retailers should have kiosks in their stores in key cities but right now, most don’t have any and shoppers must drop off their garment bags at a UPS or the post office. Rent the Runway has five stores and nearly 50 drop-off locations.

Rent the Runway itself has had to adapt to an increasingly demanding customer. It started out with special occasion dresses but its customers now rent on average more than 120 days per year. The New York-based company launched children’s wear last year and later unveiled pillows and other home decor items through a partnership with home furnishings retailer West Elm.

Vara Pikor, 26, an insurance broker from Manhattan who’s been using Rent the Runway for many of her clothing needs, says she is hooked.

“This could be my forever habit,” she said.

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Honest and unflinching

The Lumineers don’t mince words about addiction on latest album

BY ERICA THOMPSON
The Columbus Dispatch, Ohio

Released last September, the Lumineers’ album “III” tells the story of the fictional Sparks family in three chapters. (There are three bonus tracks on the album that aren’t part of the narrative.)

The listener is wrapped in a saga that spans three generations, each touched by a common problem: addiction.

“There’s been so much feedback or outpouring of emotion, meeting people around talking about these songs on this album in a way that was pretty unexpected,” said Lumineers co-founder and singer Wesley Schultz.

Listeners can glean more from the story by watching accompanying videos on the Lumineers’ website (thelimineers.com); seen together, they create a short film.

Schultz, 37, also gave more insight into “III.”

Would you cautious about the way you wanted to portray addiction?
I think the thing you want to avoid as a writer is trying to make too much of a caricature of something. And so in order to avoid that, I was trying to say things in an unflinching or honest way. And I think that when you do that, even though some of the things that are said are harsh, like, “Maybe when she’s dead and gone, I’ll get some sleep” (in “Leader of the Landslide”) or “There’s easier ways to die” (in “Gloria”).”

I think there’s a lot of compassion in those moments, even though some people hearing that would say, “Wow, that’s really cold” or “that’s really cruel.”

When you love an addict and you’re going on the ride with them emotionally, I think that there’s a lot of confusion and there’s a lot of resentment mixed with that love, and there’s a lot of anger. There’s so much dissonance there. And I think trying to capture that in a song, you can’t just sing and say there’s dissonance. I think you have to tell stories to display that.

You portray three generations of one family struggling with some of the same problems. Were you trying to explore the idea of generational curses or patterns?
We talked a lot about the sins of the father, the sins of the mother and what is passed down. My dad was a psychologist, and I wanted to work for him. I admired my dad a lot, and I was naturally interested in people and psychology. So I’m looking at, if addiction is a social disease, how does that work? Or is it genetics or a mixture of the two?

I’m realizing that it’s definitely not only your willpower at play here. And I think as a musician, as a person who tries to be driven and motivated, you trick yourself into believing that you could do just about anything with that attitude, (but) it’s not so simple as that.

How has revisiting these topics impacted you personally night after night?
You think I’d be a depressed person because I’m singing about these things that can be kind of heavy, but I think to express those things publicly like that with a group of people has been quite cathartic, and it’s a good reason to sing. You don’t really feel like you’re performing. It’s not like a Broadway show where you’re putting on a face every night.

Speaking of performing, how will you present this concept album at the show?
It’s a lot of (video) footage and sometimes unseen b-roll or archival footage that we shot while on set. And so it’s kind of like you’re transported into that world. If you’ve never seen the videos, I think people are a little bit caught off guard by some of the imagery. Bringing that to the live show has been really dynamic (and helps) tell the story. We’re trying to be entertaining up there, but also it’s really focused on the music. We just want the music to stand up for itself.

How have you and Jeremiah Fraites kept your bond and your songwriting strong during the past 15 years?
We’re just each trying to search for the best idea, and may the best idea win. That’s what kept us trusting each other all this time. We weren’t like, “Well, why do you want that idea on the song?” It was always, “I know you’re doing that for the right reasons.” And I think that’s kept us really honest. I think it was way easier to be in a band when there were those lean years. In 2011, we were in (Los Angeles) and we got robbed of almost all of our instruments. And we ended up playing a show that night with borrowed instruments and kept going on the tour. And that was a galvanizing experience that brought us together. And then a year later, you had a massive hit with “Ho Hey”! How do you handle being defined by that song?
If I thought that was what we were defined by, I would feel defeated. That song was a huge shot in the arm or a kind of icebreaker. It got us known to a lot of people. But there are a lot of bands that have a big song and kind of quickly burn out or go away. And I think we were really interested in writing music, and we’ve been doing that ever since.

‘When you love an addict and you’re going on the ride with them emotionally, I think that there’s a lot of confusion and there’s a lot of resentment mixed with that love, and there’s a lot of anger.’

Wesley Schultz
Lumineers co-founder and vocalist

Columbus Dispatch: What inspired you to tackle addiction as subject matter for the album?
Schultz: My wife and I have been caring for a loved one for about 10 years, and that person has been in and out of rehab. And then for (Lumineers co-founder Jeremiah Fraites), he lost his brother (to) a heroin overdose. I think we thought, “Well, we went through these things as individuals, but we’re probably pretty unique in that way or alone.” But I realized that addiction has touched many more lives than I could have imagined.
Age hasn’t mellowed Green Day

‘Father of All...’ as urgent and angry and anti-establishment as previous albums

By Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

Green Day recently caught some people unaware. The trio performed at the NHL’s All-Star Game in St. Louis, and singer Billie Joe Armstrong dropped some swear words into the mix. NBC had to bleep the band. What did everyone expect? Age hasn’t blunted the band’s urgency. Green Day come out of the gate, as always, snarling on its latest release, "Father of All..." They may have pulled as always, snarling on its latest release, "Father of All..." as urgent and angry and anti-establishment voice has been missed. "What a mess because there's no one to trust," Armstrong screams in the title track. On "Sugar Youth," he warns: "All hell is breaking loose."

It's a very lean album, clocking in at just over 26 minutes. Two of the 10 songs don’t even hit the 2-minute mark. Alienation and drug use run through the album, as do violence and aggressive language. But the vocals sound more distant than when we last heard a crisp urgency to Armstrong delivering such songs as "Bang Bang" in 2016.

The '50s-ish sock hop of "Stab You in the Heart" is undercut by murderous lyrics, while the band even approaches doo-wop in "Meet Me on the Roof." (By the way, maybe skip the date with Armstrong on the roof. "How high is your low gonna go, girl?")

On the glam rocker "Oh Yeah," which is as close to Bruce Springsteen as Green Day can get.

Various Artists

Birds of Prey: The Album
(Atlantic Records and Warner Bros.)

The all-female roster assembled for "Birds of Prey: The Album" represent uniquely different worlds, and a variety of music styles, but their message on the movie soundtrack is singular: DON’TMESSWITHUS.

It’s a perfectly on-brand message from the girl gang, as they channel the explosiveness, unpredictability and banter of Harley Quinn, the unhinged DC character, whose romance with the Joker has ended just as "Birds of Prey," the film, begins. Naturally there’s a breakup anthem ("Everybody is a star") and how we’re failing our kids ("Burnings books in a bulletproof backpack.") Bassist Mike Dirnt shines on "Junkies on a High" and drummer Tre Cool propels "Graffiti," a song that is as close to Bruce Springsteen as Green Day can get.

Perhaps the best song, "Fire, Ready, Aim," sounds a little like the Hives, and it’s a driving scream about daily outrage. The NFL has bought the song and seems to want it to be their equivalent to the NFL’s "Are You Ready for Some Football." One wonders if they really spent time with the lyrics. "Knock your teeth out / To the ground / You’re a liar," Armstrong sings. Watching this corporate tie between hockey and punk will be interesting. Someone’s teeth are going to end up on the ground indeed.

Stone Temple Pilots

Perdida (Rhino)

What a strange trip it’s been for fans of Stone Temple Pilots. Two decades ago, they gave us the grunge masterpiece "Purple." Now they are offering folk songs of the band and its members’ versatility, sounding organically acoustic, not reverse-engineered.

The songwriters — Gutt, DeLeo, and DeLeo’s bass-playing brother Robert — even offer the wordless “I Once Sat at Your Table.” An acoustic instrumental! That wasn’t what many were likely expecting from Stone Temple Pilots. You’ll get used to it.

— Mark Kennedy
Associated Press

The in-your-face energy of the 15-song soundtrack doesn’t stop, making it just the companion piece that “Birds of Prey” calls for.

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— Melanie J. Sims
Associated Press
Juicy details are only part of Jessica Simpson’s story

Singer, actress and fashion designer shares her inner monologue and most intimate struggles in ‘Open Book’

BY EMILY YAHR
The Washington Post

E ven casual readers of celebrity news have prob-
ably seen the headlines over the last few weeks as excerpts from pop star-turned-fashion mogul Jessica Simpson’s new memoir, “Open Book,” leaked to the internet.

“Jessica Simpson Details the Last Time She Slept With Ex Nick Lachey: ‘I Could Feel His Hate’”

“Jessica Simpson Had An ‘Emotional Affair’ with Johnny Knoxville While Married”

“Jessica Simpson Revealed Justin Timberlake Kissed Her to Win a Bet with Ryan Gosling”

“Jessica Simpson Takes the Narrative Back From John Mayer, Who Seems To Be Even Worse Than We All Thought”

Websites also published the more serious revelations: When Simpson was young, she was sexually abused by the daughter of a family friend. Several years ago, she got sober; at the time, she was drinking so much that her friends, who feared for her life, had started planning an intervention.

But taking in each anecdote individually is a disservice to someone who has a truly unique story of fame to tell — particularly because Simpson was one of our first reality TV stars, before anyone could absorb the psychological trauma it could cause. At one point, she writes about the disorienting experience of going home to Texas for Christmas with the camera crew from “Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica” in tow and being forced to act like everything was fine, even as her marriage to Lachey was crumbling.

“Nowadays, I see so many people performing their identities on social media, but I feel like I was a guinea pig for that,” Simpson, now 39, writes. “How was I supposed to live a normal life when the whole world was watching my every move? It was as if he tied my value as an artist to my weight right then, like a rock, and then threw it out the window of the thirty-second floor of the Sony building,” she writes. When her first single, “I Wanna Love You Forever,” became a huge hit, she says Mottola’s reaction was, “‘This video is great. But you can do better. I want a six-pack for the next video.’”

It kick-started her lifelong body-image issues and adds more upsetting context to the conversation around Simpson’s infamous “mom jeans” incident in 2009, when she wore high-waisted jeans to perform at a chili cook-off and the internet exploded with mockery about her weight. She was devastated. “I had always been in on the joke, and that gave me power,” she writes.

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“Now that it was everybody else making it, I didn’t think it was funny.”

“In on the joke” alludes to her performance as Lachey’s ditsy wife on “Newlyweds,” MTV’s popular early 2000s reality show that followed Simpson and Lachey, the 98 Degrees boy-band star, through their first years of marriage.

In one of the most notorious “Newlyweds” episodes, Simpson held a can of Chicken of the Sea tuna and said: “Is this chicken that I have, or is this fish? I know it’s tuna, but it says ‘Chicken by the Sea.’” That line cemented Simpson’s pop culture image as she and Lachey became international stars and paparazzi obsessions. She emphasizes that she played up her mistakes for the cameras, and it worked: Her album sales skyrocketed as people thought they were seeing the “real” Jessica Simpson. “Being the butt of the jokeironically gave my music credibility,” she writes.

She spends time detailing her toxic relationships. She met Lachey when she was 18 and he was 25, and she turned to him for guidance for almost everything. But their relationship soured soon after the wedding. If you want more proof of the drawbacks of fame, she admits that she was terrified to go to couples counseling because she thought a therapist might sell them out to the tabloids.

One person who comes off terribly is musician John Mayer, whom Simpson describes as obsessed with her, “sexually and emotionally,” in their on-and-off relationship. He would suddenly break up with her only to show up and want to get back together. During that time, her self-esteem plummeted, and her drinking increased. He also drove a wedge between her and Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo, whom she dated after Mayer.

Although Simpson’s alcohol consumption reached frightening levels after years of anxiety, in 2017, she got sober. To support her, her husband, Eric Johnson (with whom she has three children), also stopped drinking.

In the book, she makes a point of reflecting on her mistakes but is cognizant of the pressures and expectations that others put on her. She’s most proud of what she’s achieved individually is a disservice to someone

“Fame and money are great distractions.”

Many of Simpson’s issues stemmed from the fact that for many years, she was defined by the men in her life. The first was her father, a former Baptist minister who encouraged Simpson’s career after she was nearly cast on “The All-New Mickey Mouse Club” in middle school: Producers “told him his daughter was a star, and it was his responsibility to make that happen for me.” He eventually became her manager, and she felt increasing pressure to be her family’s breadwinner.

( Years later, she fired him.)

Then there was record executive Tommy Mottola, who took a keen interest in Simpson when she signed with Sony’s Columbia Records in 1997; she was their blond response to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera. One of the first things he said to her: “You’ve got to lose 15 pounds.”

“It was as if he tied my value as an artist to my weight right there, like a rock, and then threw it out the window of the thirty-second floor of the Sony building,” she writes. When her first single, “I Wanna Love You Forever,” became a huge hit, she says Mottola’s reaction was, “This video is great. But you can do better. I want a six-pack for the next video.”

It kick-started her lifelong body-image issues and adds more upsetting context to the conversation around Simpson’s infamous “mom jeans” incident in 2009, when she wore high-waisted jeans to perform at a chili cook-off and the internet exploded with mockery about her weight. She was devastated. “I had always been in on the joke, and that gave me power,” she writes.

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Crystal Clarke could imagine herself playing the heroine of a period costume drama, a genre that regularly makes its way to TV and film screens with potential breakout roles for young actresses. But the African American tempered her expectations: “I had hope for myself and I knew what I could do. But the sad part comes in: ‘Oh, other people around me would never see me that way,’” said the New Jersey-born Clarke, a graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland whose credits include “Black Mirror” and two Star Wars films.

Then Jane Austen came to the rescue. When the novelist died in the summer of 1817, she left behind an unfinished draft that served as source material for PBS’ “Masterpiece” drama series “Sanditon” and offered Clarke an unexpected opportunity: Miss Lambe, the sole character of color in Austen’s works.

When the script first came to her, Clarke, 26, approached it with understandable reservation. What would such a woman be if not in the background and servile? “It’s just going to be another (expletive) maid,” she recalled thinking. “When I was reading it, I was like, ‘Wait a minute, there’s actually a lot to it.’ I was really surprised at what kind of character this was they were trying to create.”

Lambe is a historically credible figure, not modern wish fulfillment for diversity, according to an expert on Austen and her times. “Race relations were a real thing and very complex in 18th-century Britain,” said Devoney Looser, author of “The Making of Jane Austen” and an Arizona State University professor. There were an estimated 10,000 people of African or Afro-Caribbean descent in London as the 19th century approached, she said, about 1% of the city’s population of around 1 million.

Austen, who famously referred to the little bit (2 inches wide) of ivory” as her artistic canvas and “four or five families in a county village” its contained focus, should not be viewed as uninformed or indifferent to the outside world, Looser said.

“This idea that she wasn’t paying attention to history or politics is false. I think she was very keyed into history and politics,” she said, which in Austen’s time would have required an understanding of the anti-slavery movement. Two Austen works, “Mansfield Park” and “Emma,” mention slavery, with one character defending another as “always rather a friend to the abolition.”

Wherever Austen intended to take her incomplete novel, the task of developing it for “Sanditon” fell to screenwriter Andrew Davies, whose Austen adaptations include 1995’s “Pride and Prejudice” mini-series. The characters he inherited this time around included the briefly sketched Lambe, a young, biracial heiress from the West Indies — the center of the British slave trade that was part of her heritage.

“There were only two words used by Jane Austen to describe Miss Lambe, ‘chilly’ and ‘tender.’ And I took ‘chilly’ very literally to mean that she found the climate very unpleasant,” Davies said. “‘Tender’ is ambiguous. It took it to mean vulnerable, quick to see slights and prejudice in others, which she does find, of course.”

She became a more spirited character in Davies’ hands. Georgiana Lambe and the drama’s central female character, Charlotte (Rose Williams), meet and bond as visitors to the seaside village of Sanditon. Charlotte’s love interest, Sidney (Theo James), is the orphaned Lambe’s guardian on the series airing state-side through Feb. 23 and available online at PBS.org.

“It would seem quite natural that Charlotte would befriend her, because Charlotte is a very open-minded sort of character and quick to see injustice and call it out,” Davies said. “They’d be natural companions, and I thought it would be fun to give Miss Lambe quite a playful and rebellious sort of character, so as to give Sidney a hard time.”

From the start, Clarke refused to approach the role passively. “I was very wary because the writers are white, producers are white, director is white,” she said. “There were some things that, through nobody’s fault except not knowing, didn’t sit well with me and that I would want to change to suit the perspective of a character who’s supposed to be so much in her power, or trying to find her power.”

Among her concerns: story lines that suggested Lambe’s wealth would have protected her from racism, and a scene in which she laments that a man’s anti-slavery efforts were being undermined by her mother.

“She would never say that. She grew up on a plantation, and she understands the horrors of it,” Clarke said. “It’s very much of an important thing to her.”

It was at the first cast dinner that Clarke realized that she and Lambe were in good hands. The producers assured her that “we don’t want to just have you here. We want to make sure that it’s done right,” she recalled.
Mark Meier knows there’s only one thing tougher than getting a man into therapy — and that’s keeping him in therapy. Meier is a licensed clinical social worker and co-founder of the Face It Foundation (faceitfoundation.org), whose mission is to help men understand and recover from depression. Face It, founded in 2009, offers individual and group support, community events and training for mental health professionals in the Minneapolis area. In 2019, the nonprofit launched an unusual program pairing traditional therapy with peer support to see if that combination improved outcomes for men. Early results look promising. Meier talks about the program and what men need most to get and stay mentally healthy.

(Star Tribune) You’ve said that men will go to therapy, but they tend to only stay with it for a session or two. Why?

The literature is clear that men stop going to psychotherapy after one or two visits. For a number of reasons, it hasn’t served them well. Sitting down for 50 minutes of talking is counterintuitive for most men. These guys never got Emotion 101. Guys need the cover of the group.

So you provided that cover while still requiring that they see a therapist. And they were good with that?

These are all men who have already participated in Face It support groups. Many have been coming to us for years and have built friendships. But we’re not a therapy organization. I wanted them to also go to therapy and have it be more effective. We kind of promised these guys that we could help them in a new way. I sent out an email about this new program, and it was like I was selling tickets to the seventh game of the World Series. In other words, they’re hungry for professional help, but in a way they can best receive it.

The men who come in this door are starved to get better. They’re experiencing depression, anxiety, a lot of hospitalizations and suicide attempts. They’re 40, 50, 60 years old, finally revealing their whole lives, including sexual and physical abuse. They’ve been medicating with alcohol, drugs, gambling. Many no longer have relationships with their partners or kids. They’re alone.

How many men participated in the initiative in 2019?

We had three groups of nine men each. Each group met for about eight weeks, seeing the therapist individually five times. Then they came back to Face It for four peer-led sessions where they could discuss and reinforce the skills they were learning in the professional therapy sessions with a clinical psychologist.

What did they say helped most in those therapy sessions?

The guys loved the psychologist because he’s direct. Some attended sessions with their wives. The psychologist shared real-life stories and did skills-based therapy with these guys, such as guided imagery, breathing techniques, (the eye movement approach) EMDR—not just talk therapy.

What did you and Face It co-founder Bill Dehkes hear in your group sessions while the men were also seeing the psychologist? Sometimes it was funny. When we’d gather in our friendly group environment, they’d say, “What just happened?” Or, “I don’t understand how that tapping works.” But they also said they had started sitting at work listening to his guided meditations and they’d feel less anxious. Their confidence was going up. We started seeing optimism in them.

What were some measurable outcomes?

Ninety-eight percent of the men completed all five therapy sessions. Fifty-one percent strongly agreed, and 39% agreed that having a peer support group to attend was an important component in helping them complete the five therapy sessions. And, most important, they showed significant improvement on the depression and anxiety rating scales they were provided in therapy. Twenty-five of the 27 men said they strongly agreed or agreed that their depression improved because of the combination of peer support and five therapy sessions. A few of the men are still seeing the psychologist.

Is this a pricey proposition?

It was actually very cost-effective. We negotiated a substantially reduced hourly rate with the psychologist to maximize the number of therapy sessions the men could attend. And I facilitated all 15 peer support groups. Based on market rates, we accomplished our goal at half the cost and achieved better outcomes because of our coordinated efforts.

Where did funding come from?

The O’Gara Family Foundation has been instrumental in helping Face It grow and in supporting this project. Richard and Deborah O’Gara connected us to the Katherine B. Andersen Fund of the St. Paul Foundation, which has also helped to fund this project. Thanks to individual and family foundation funding, we can serve more than 200 men, ranging in age from 32 to 70, and we don’t charge them a nickel.

This is tough work. Why do you do it? Bill (Dehkes) and I started it because of our own desire to help ourselves. In turn, we’ve helped a lot of people.

Will you offer this combination program again?

If we can get funding, we’ll do more. It’s a no-brainer. I’d do five cohorts if we could get the dollars. It works.
Take a bite out of picky eating
To break through food aversions, try therapy

BY JOSH SCHONWALD
Chicago Tribune

The breakthrough bite took place about 30 minutes into treatment. My daughter Kate bravely reached a cracker to her mouth, and with little hesitation, took a bite. She had never had cinnamon in a cracker — it was尝试ing and unique. She had never tried it before — so she was trying it for the first time.

Kate's newfound power also came with new roles. Under the new order, she would play a bigger role in shopping, preparing and serving meals. Under the new order, she would play a bigger role in shopping, preparing and serving meals. Even if she didn't like a food, Dilfer encouraged us to give her a role, such as serving the salad.

Decades of research on children and feeding has found that pressuring children to “clean their plate” is bad for kids. Dilfer, who trained with Marsha Dunn Klein, food therapist and author of “Anxious Eaters, Anxious Meals,” uses an approach that focuses on reducing anxiety around mealtimes by building trusting relationships and making mealtimes a “safe place.”

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THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE
Lisa Smith Molinari

A day set aside for torture, tenderness

As much as I’d like to blame Hallmark, FTD, Whitman’s Sampler, Russell Stover, Brach’s and the rest, in the end, it’s the food industry that benefits the blood-sucking consumer industry, unfortunately I can’t. The fact is, February 14th has communicated Saint Valentine, the patron saint of romantic love, since A.D. 269.

However, that day was not a happy one with chocolates and lace doilies. It was the time in history that Valentine, a holy presbyter, was thrown to the lions of the Roman Emperor “Claudius the Cruel” for refusing to deny Christ. He was sentenced to death — imprisoned, beaten with clubs, and then decapitated. He died on Feb. 14. Romantic, huh? Believe it or not, it gets worse.

A couple hundred years later, in A.D. 496, Pope Gelasius wanted to put an end to an ancient pagan fertility festival called Lupercalia, celebrated annually on Feb. 15 in Rome, involving a brutal matchmaking lottery, the colors red (blood) and white (milk), and drunken naked men whipping women with strips of sacrificed goat skin. Understandably, the Pope wasn’t thrilled by Lupercalia, so he banned it, and declared the Feast of Saint Valentine and Valentine’s Day an insult.

Although there was no real evidence connecting St. Valentine to the patronage of romantic love, myths and legends cropped up over time. One story was that Valentine was martyred because he was defying Claudius the Cruel’s order banning marriages, performing secret ceremonies for couples in wider and tenderness tale told of unprisoned Valentine curing his jailor’s daughter of blindness, and having grown fond of her, writing her a letter signed, “From your Valentine.” But it wasn’t until Chaucer wrote poems inspired by mating birds in the fourteenth century that Feb. 14 was finally able to shed its dark history and take on the sweet sensibility that it encompasses today.

Undoubtedly, today’s Valentine’s Day has questionable origins and costs consumers nearly $2 billion per year, but is there anything wrong with reserving one day a year for a little love and a little sex? As a child, I clipped construction-paper hearts, opened cards emblazoned with Ziggy and Snoopy, and crunched Nutter Butters stuffed with “Cutie Pie” or “I Love My Valentine.” But it wasn’t until Chaucer wrote poems inspired by mating birds in the fourteenth century that Feb. 14 was finally able to shed its dark history and take on the sweet sensibility that it encompasses today.

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NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

**AUDIORMON SOCIETY**

BY BRIAN HERRICK AND CHRISTOPHER ADAMS / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ.

Brian Herrick of Brooklyn does communications work for a neurologist that funds diabetes research. Christopher Adams of Iowa City is a puzzle maker and crossword connoisseur. (Guess who wrote the clue for “T. Arno?”) They test their work for the Crossword Puzzles Collaboration Directory on Facebook. The idea for this puzzle’s theme was Brian’s. Chris added to Brian’s example. They spent an afternoon filling the grid together by email. — W. S.

**ACROSS**

1. Part of L.G.B.T., for short.  
6. Like wine, but not grape juice.  
10. Chances.  
20. Part of a theater?  
21. Do for a few months.  
22. “Lorax” singer.  
25. Fictional protagonist who attends elementary school in Maycomb County.  
27. Smooth over.  
29. Tolkien trilogy, for short.  
30. Hawk.  
31. Pick up from school.  
33. [Clue] documentary channel, for short.  
35. Gentle attention-getter.  
36. Divert.  
38. Access in “Alien” and “Avatar.”  
41. Farthest orbital point from the moon.  
44. Smear.

**DOWN**

45. Patios.  
46. Steak-chain partner.  
47. Symbolic item.  
48. Avoids attention for now.  
49. Ingredient in bananas.  
50. Cesar.  
51. Completely lost.  
52. Speak in lies.  
53. Ivanovic who won the 2008 French Open.  
54. A hand when one shouldn’t.  
55. “Cool your jets!”  
56. Really, really hope.  
57. Ashley ____. Oyez! Pro Bowl comeback.  
58. Kitchen timer sound.  
59. Iowa college city that isn’t Iowa City.  
60. Samsung.  
61. Swedish vodka brand.  
62. Texas relentlessly.  
63. “Nice job, dude!”  
64. Poker-faced.  
65. You might gain knowledge through this.  
66. Direction from Tampa to Orlando, for short.  
67. “Don’t include me in this!”  
68. Diphtheria.  
69. Bronze.  
70. Costco competitor, informally.  
71. Italian wine region.  
72. Bottom of Britain.  
73. Some screech owl dancers.  
74. Bill passes, briefly.  
75. Some woolen blankets.  
76. Peter or Paul (but not Mary).  
77. Ballerina’s balancing aid.  
78. Exhibition mount.  
79. Anne with the Film-Wiz Award-winning novel “Breathing Lessons.”  
81. Urn, in ancient Egypt.  
82. 2017 film nominated for Best Picture ... or a hint to the answers to the right stared clues.  
83. Northern race.  
84. President whose vp was Dick.  
85. “Eventually ...”  
86. Vittles.  
87. Sick.  
88. Island whose name rhymes with a popular thing to do there.  
89. Portrait of Fallen Carrington Colony on “Doomsday.”  
90. The Science of the Limits” protagonist.  
91. Like the Vietnamese language.  
92. Liver locale.  
93. Singer with the most American Music Awards of all time.  
94. Janet Leigh played her in “Psycho.”  
95. How, with “the.”  
96. Asian island divided between two countries.  
97. One on a bender, perhaps.  
98. Young _____.  
99. Across companion, often.  
100. In the bold.  
101. Keynote, say.  
103. Certain clouds.  
104. Stone Wall Inn, e.g.  
105. Makes it to the podium.  
106. App with an envelope icon.  
107. Kind of voice or dog.  
108. Wood that’s good for matchmaking.  
110. Money in the Midwest.  
111. 1040 forms, for short.  
112. Gawked.  
114. Certain clouds.  
115. Stone Wall Inn, e.g.  
116. Makes it to the podium.  
117. App with an envelope icon.  
118. Kind of voice or dog.  
119. Wood that’s good for matchmaking.  
120. Mob hounds.  
121. Money in the Midwest.  
122. 1040 forms, for short.  
123. Gawked.  
125. Certain clouds.  
126. Stone Wall Inn, e.g.  
127. Makes it to the podium.  
128. App with an envelope icon.  
129. Kind of voice or dog.  
130. Wood that’s good for matchmaking.

**GUNSTON STREET**

“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and visit gunstonstreet.com.

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'Wagon Wheel' rolling

Darius Rucker song certified 8 times platinum, making it one of the top 5 country singles ever

BY KRISTIN M. HALL
Associated Press

Country singer Darius Rucker couldn’t quite believe it when he was surprised this week with the news that his song “Wagon Wheel” was certified eight times platinum, making it one of the top five most popular country singles ever.

On Wednesday, Rucker stopped by the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum to see his items in an exhibit, but his label, Universal Music Group Nashville, surprised him with a plaque featuring eight platinum-colored records.

After repeating the word “Wow!” over and over, Rucker turned to himself, “That can’t be true,” as he inspected the plaque in his hands.

According to the Recording Industry Association of America, “Wagon Wheel” now joins other platinum hitters among country music’s biggest songs in RIAA’s 60-year history, including Taylor Swift’s “Love Story,” Lady Antebellum’s “Need You Now,” Florida Georgia Line’s “Cruise,” and Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road.”

It’s another interesting chapter in a song with a unique history. Ketch Secor, lead singer of string band Old Crow Medicine Show, first encountered the song when he heard a Bob Dylan bootleg that contained an outtake of a song called “Rock Me, Mama” that was mostly just a chorus and a muddled verse. Secor wrote verses about being homesick for the South and made it a signature song for the popular folk band in the early 2000s.

For years, the foot-stomping banjo and fiddle song “Wagon Wheel” was popular on the live circuits. Then Rucker heard a country style cover version at his child’s school.

Rucker’s version, released in 2013 and featuring backing vocals from Lady Antebellum, went to the top of the country chart for multiple weeks, earned him a Grammy for best country solo performance.

These days, he can barely get past the first chord of the song before fans start cheering.

“Yo hit that first chord and people just lose their minds, cause by the time we get to the third chord they know exactly what it is,” Rucker said.

Snoop apologizes to Gayle King for rant over Bryant

BY NERKESA MUNI MOODY
Associated Press

After days of blistering criticism, Snoop Dogg has finally apologized to Gayle King for attacking her over an interview with former basketball star Lisa Leslie about the late Kobe Bryant.

“Two wrongs don’t make no right when you’re wrong, you gotta fix it,” he said in an Instagram post on Wednesday.

“So with that being said, Gayle King, I publicly and personally apologize for my comments made towards you as a deranged person at a question you asked over the phone. I should have handled it way different than that, I was raised way better than that, so I would like to apologize publicly for the language that I used and calling you out your name and just being disrespectful,” Snoop Dogg said.

Snoop Dogg was furious that the “CBS This Morning” anchor brought up rape allegations from Bryant’s past in her interview with Leslie, a friend of Bryant. The retired Lakers star was killed in a helicopter crash last month along with his young daughter and seven others.

Snoop Dogg called King a crude name on Instagram. He also said she had back back off “before we come get you,” and posted a slew of insulting photos and memes about her.

King herself was angry at CBS News for promoting a snippet of what was a wide-ranging interview on social media, which drew sharp reaction and accusations from some that she crossed the line. King, in her own Instagram message last week, said she could see why people might be upset if they only saw a brief portion of what was discussed.

Snoop Dogg, a friend of Bryant and ardent Lakers fan, was hurt by what he perceived as King for her questioning — LeBron James and even Bill Cosby were among her critics — but his the radio,” said Rucker, who had already had a highly successful rock career as lead singer of Hootie and the Blowfish.

He joked about seeing his CMA new artist of the year trophy behind glass, noting it happened for him when he was in his 40s. The South Carolina native also represents the changing face of country music, as one of two black artists among the RIAA’s top country singles. Nas X being up there, it just shows that country music is starting to open its doors and broaden its horizons and realize there’s a lot of different faces, a lot of different colors and a lot of different things to country music,” Rucker said.

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Bieber says he let fear keep him from music

Justin Bieber admits getting back in the studio to record his first album in five years wasn’t easy.

“I was dealing with a lot of fear,” the singer told Zane Lowe on Apple Music’s Beats 1 Radio on Thursday. “Just was afraid of, at that point, just even the process; what am I going to talk about, is it gonna be received. I’m starting to compare with other artists.”

Bieber has talked about enduring severe challenges in the past few years, including dealing with depression, recovering from past drug use and contracting Lyme disease, which he says seriously affected his health.

Bieber says it wasn’t until he performed on stage with Ariana Grande last year at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and received an ovation that he got a “boost of confidence.”

Valley Music and Arts Festival

Grande last year at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival and received an ovation that he got a “boost of confidence.”

“Wimpy Kid” Greg Heffley’s best friend, is the book’s narrator. He will tell the story of “Roland the Kind” and “Gary the Barbarian” and their quest to vanquish the evil White Warlock.

Kinney also plans an unusual promotional tour this spring. There is no advance itinerary, not even for Kinney. Every day a new destination, decided upon by his publisher and various booksellers, will be announced. Kinney will “surprise children at under-served schools and meet his fans at independent bookstores, all without knowing where he will be heading next.”

Kinney said in a statement that he’s “thrilled for the adventure that awaits, and I’m looking forward to epic moments with my fans along the way.”

From The Associated Press

Kinney writes another ‘Wimpy Kid’ spinoff

The “Wimpy Kid” and author Jeff Kinney are both embarking on new paths.

Amulet Books announced Thursday that Kinney’s latest novel is called “Rowley Jefferson’s Awesome Friendly Adventure” and comes out April 7 with an announced first printing of 3 million copies, among the highest for any fiction writer. Rowley Jefferson, “Wimpy Kid” Greg Heffley’s best friend, is the book’s narrator. He will tell the story of “Roland the Kind” and “Gary the Barbarian” and their quest to vanquish the evil White Warlock.

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From The Associated Press
OPINION

Trump just pretending to tackle deficit

BY DOYLE MCMUS

Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON

Promises made, promises kept has been one of President Donald Trump's campaign boondoggles in his campaign for a second term.

So it was a slight awkwardness this week when his own proposed budget acknowledged, in the fine print, that several of his key promises haven't been kept at all.

With his 2018 budget, Trump had promised that if Congress enacted big tax cuts for corporations, economic growth would soar to 4% or more. "We actually think we can go higher," he said.

He promised to balance the federal budget in just four years. "We're going to do it," he said.

That's not going to happen. Obama, as well as reduced unemployment and raised wages — all good things. But it's far from Trump's promise. And if it's anything, it's done to balance the federal budget. Quite the contrary; Trump's tax cut ballooned the deficit by about 3 trillion dollars in 2018 and has new budget forecasts that pace to continue.

To which Trump's budget chief said as he released the new budget this week: "Never mind."

"This president is a "promises made, promises kept" kind of president," Russell Vought, the acting director of the Office of Management and Budget, told reporters. The promises are still there, he said. They've just been scaled back.

But his budget is wildly unrealistic. Trump's proposed budget forecasts 2.8% growth this year, growing to a steady 3% for the next 10 years, which is way above reputable economists' estimates.

With 3% growth, Vought said, the federal budget deficit is growing from $1 trillion this year, to $1.8 trillion by 2029. Then Trump is going to throw budgetters a "magic asterisk" — a statistical device that allows a president to claim that he's meeting his goals even when he's not. Obama and earlier presidents used them too.

Trump's election-year budget plan uses a second magic asterisk to make the deficit look better. It assumes that the Federal Reserve will keep interest rates low for the next 10 years, which will reduce the cost of interest on the national debt. That's a wish more than a forecast.

And a third magic asterisk, maybe the biggest: It assumes Congress will enact all of Trump's proposed cuts in domestic spending, from Obamacare and Medicaid to environmental protection and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

That's not going to happen. Republicans in Congress have rejected many of Trump's proposals, too, including cuts for food stamps and SNAP.

Many of his domestic spending proposals represent other broken promises. Trump has already run like he promised a decade ago, not once but twice. He would not touch Medicaid. He promised to replace Obamacare with a cheaper, better health insurance plan. He vowed to protect clean air and clean water. He's done none of those things.

Presidents' budgets are often little more than a wish list that Congress politely ignores. They're also their own budget, to the extent a president is an exits of mountain of magic asterisks, is wholly un tethered from reality. In the past, these budget promises were always unrealistic. You can't cut taxes and balance the budget at the same time without getting something so deeply that even Republicans will blink.

So Trump blames Democrats for failing to embrace the Republican agenda of gut domestic programs.

"We have not been able to make progress... because Democrats in Congress have opted for a second budget," Trump said. "We hope that changes. We probably need to have a national election before it does." Translation: If Trump wins a second term, the GOP will control the House, those budget cuts will begin to look possible.

Many moderate Democrats want to be fiscally responsible, just as Republicans once were (and still might be), under a different president. Donald Trump wins the White House, the first thing GOP leaders in Congress will do is demand a balanced budget and claim that Democrats are responsible for the $1 trillion deficit Trump bequeathed them.

All the Democratic presidential candidates are trying to promise the biggest tax cuts. Republicans will say it's bad for growth and unfair to hardworking corpora tions. They'll claim the only way to reduce the deficit is to cut domestic spending.

Don't listen. Trump's fantasy budget proposal shows how cynical that argument is.

Doyle McManus is a Washington columnist for the Los Angeles Times and director of the journalism program at Georgetown University.
Sanders benefits from splintered Democratic vote

The Wall Street Journal

The second Democratic Party primary Tuesday was that in New Hampshire they know how to count votes. That’s especially good news for Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. His election night TV time in Iowa last week but not this time as he narrowly won the Granite State. But for the Democratic Party is another story.

The socialist from next-door Vermont repeated his triumph from 2016, albeit with a smaller vote overall and in a much larger field. The result showed the long history of Sanders’ millennial and left-wing support after eight years as the Democratic Party. Sanders has retained that plurality base of more than 20%.

After New Hampshire win his after his ties in giving considerable momentum going into Nevada, then onto South Carolina, and the Super Tuesday states on March 3. He is already leading in California, the March 3 state with the biggest delegate count. That plurality if it holds it will keep him from losing the nomination race. The field contains multiple Democratic aspirants.

But as long as the field contains multiple Democratic aspirants and his ability to speak in Barack Obama-style aspirational tones , the campaign implosion of Joe Biden, as she picked up his theme of electability and the administration is this budget, which serves but one useful purpose: to record the budget proposal were to become operative.

Nor is he the first to engage in rosy forecasting — but in this case, the exaggeration is especially hurt. Trump misleadingly projects a future of declining federal deficits in part by claiming economic growth ever exceeding consensus forecasts. The Trump budget predicts the Trump tax cuts would boost the Office's projection for the annual growth rate a decade hence by more than a percentage point, the underlying assumption of the budget, which is that the country’s structural fiscal deficits can be addressed almost entirely through cuts to nondefense discretionary spending. In fact, commonwealths, too, is necessary, yet Trump’s budget adds 5.0 trillion to the next 10 years’ debt by assuming that the individual income tax cut he and a GOP Congress enacted in December 2017 will be extended beyond their scheduled December 2025 sunset.

Inevitably, perhaps, this much dishonesty leads to what can only be called cruel inequities. Upper-income tax cuts are preserved, so Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits must be denied to those who cannot meet tightened work requirements, and redefined to include boxes of presold foods rather than spendable funds. The last vestiges of federal cash anti-poverty benefits, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant, would get cumulative cuts totaling $14.2 billion by 2030.

This country badly needs an honest debate about equitable tax and spending reforms. What we are getting instead from the administration is this budget, which serves but one useful purpose: to record the warped priorities upon which Trump is willing to campaign for a second term.

What newspapers are saying at home

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

Opinion

Sanders benefits from splintered Democratic vote

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Closer to ensuring candidate with most overall votes wins

Los Angeles Times

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear two cases involving the Electoral College, the antiquated system that twice in recent history has installed the loser of the popular vote in the White House and once that has resulted in the candidate with the most overall votes winning. But in 2016, as in previous elections, some electors decided to support people other than the candidate who carried the states they voted for. The two cases the court will review — one from Washington state, the other from Colorado — raise the question of whether states can penalize electors if they vote for someone other than the candidate who carried the state, but former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who wasn’t even on the ballot. They were fined $1,000 each for violating a state law binding electors to vote for the popular-vote winner. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor, holding that “the Constitution provides no express role for the states after appointment of its presidential electors.” The court also said that the definition of the words “elector,” “vote” and “ballot” — all occurring in the Constitution — imply “the right to make a choice or voice an individual opinion.” That’s a close approximation, but the court should uphold the laws against faithless electors, for two reasons.

First, states have a overriding goal of the framers of the Constitution was to give states authority over the selection of electors. While it’s true that early in American history, electors were chosen by state legislatures, states long ago decided that the better approach was to award electoral votes on the basis of the popular vote. Second, ensuring that voters have the final say in the selection of electors is consistent with a trend toward participatory democracy that is also reflected in changes in the Constitution, especially the 17th Amendment ratified in 1913, which took the choice of U.S. senators away from state legislatures and provided for popular election for the Senate.

The court’s rationalization of that democratizing trend would be a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College, a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College, a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College, a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College, a constitutional amendment to abolish the Electoral College.

What was a public-relations headache for the NFL became a full-blown crisis when President Donald Trump began tweeting about it in September 2017, twisting the protest against police brutality into an attack on patriotism and the U.S. armed forces. The controversy soon consumed the whole country. As more players joined the protest, the league’s offer as hush money. NFL’s offer as hush money. NFL’s offer as hush money.

Kaepernick was, remember, who started it all by refusing to stand for the national anthem during the 2016 preseason.

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Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 Fussies
6 6e’s mate
9 Win — nose
12 Prepared to propose
13 Clean air org.
14 Rule, for short
15 Orange variety
16 Sweetheart
18 “Jurassic Park” bird
20 Con
21 Yon maiden
23 Fall from grace
24 “Skyfall” singer
25 Walrus tooth
27 Abe Lincoln feature
29 Women’s clothing size
31 Frozen spike
35 Slogan
37 Lighten
38 Relay stick
41 — — de-France
43 Wish undone
44 Ms. Brockovich
45 Japanese entertainer
47 Cherished one
49 Dominica
52 Toronto’s prov.
53 Actress Adams
54 Beethoven’s “Für —
55 Mas’ mates
56 Mao — -tung
57 Trite

DOWN
1 Ring decision
2 Switch positions
3 Most loved
4 Gymnast Korbut
5 Dance moves
6 Made over
7 On — with
8 Scratch the surface
9 Pickle juice
10 Streisand title role
11 Texas A&M student
12 Colorado
13 Park
14 Sentry’s cry
15 Nepal’s neighbor
16 21 NASCAR advertiser
17 Observe

Answer to Previous Puzzle

CRYPTOQUIP

IZYR FMAQYPP VFQQNDEQY
MELXJ QYFXXN LPY F MFWWYGRY
VEEPA, G AZGRU PZY JQGRUP F
DELRAFGR QJOYI.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: SPECIAL ORGANS FOUND THROUGHOUT THE BODIES OF BEAUTIFUL MYTHICAL MAIDENS: NYMPH NODES.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals R
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 Ice bucket accessory
6 Secret rendezvous
11 One way to serve café
12 Downy ducks
14 Non-chalant
15 Have at
16 Notable time
17 Author Walker
19 Code-breaking gp.
20 Shore bird
22 Punk rock offshoot
23 Needing a massage
24 Eyelid woes
26 Flowering shrubs
28 Heart chart (Abbr.)
49 Companion of Grumpy
51 Sea of —
52 Pueblo structures
53 Lustrous white
54 Unit

DOWN
1 Castle tower
2 Kevin of “Shark Tank”
3 Scot’s refusal
4 Sphinx site
5 Fashion
6 Cover for a chai brewer
7 Ascend
8 QB’s gains
9 Spooky gathering
10 Singer Yearwood
11 Helps crooks
13 Dispatches, as a dragon
18 “—” Believer
21 Essentials
22 Hilo hello
25 Enjoy Aspen
27 MSN alternative
29 Flip out
31 Unemotional
32 Ballroom dances
33 Rising trend
34 HBO competitor
35 One-called creature
37 Took by force
38 Warhol and
39 Murray
40 Indian tea region
41 From the start
45 Within (Pref.)
48 From — Z
50 Very long time

Answer to Previous Puzzle

CRYPTOQUIP

V B Q Z P N B D C G F S O D S V
U V C O S P V E G S Q M Q L S P I
M S F Q E G K Z K K V G M D Y N
E V S S G Y M V L V B G F G D
K G S S V Y C U D Y.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: WHEN ACTRESS BARRYMORE COULD REALLY USE A COFFEE BOOST, I THINK SHE DRINKS A MOUNTAIN DREW.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: P equals L
VEHICLE SHIPPING SERVICES

- International Shipping
- Import & Export
- Inland trucking (U.S. & Europe)
- Door to door pick-up/delivery service
- Customs clearance
- All Risk Marine Insurance
- Auto Insurance (Germany only)

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WEB: www.tgal.us

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stripes.com/newsletters
Ethan Westbrooks to a one-year contract.

Goodwin to a multi-year contract.

Schuck and Mac Williamson on minor league contracts.

Garrett from indefinite suspension.

Signed RHP Trevor Cahill to terms with INF Brad Miller on a one-year contract.

with INF/OF Derek Dietrich on a minor league contract.

with LHP Aaron Loup on a minor league contract.

Castro on loan from Club Estudiantes (Argentina) for the 2020 season.

Schoenfeld from Maccabi Tel Aviv (Pre-season) for the 2020 season.

足球 coach.

Saying through the 2026 season.


coaches of the DSL Orioles.

MICHIGAN STATE —

BALTIMORE ORIOLES —

Wednesday's transactions

BASEBALL

American League

Baltimore Orioles — Agreed to terms with RHP Jordan Montgomery, RHP Richard Bleier and Gabe Speier; CS Gal Mahtook.

St. Louis Cardinals — Placed RHP Jordan Hicks on the 60-day IL.

San Francisco Giants — Agreed to terms with RHP Tarafo Wang on a minor league contract.

New York Yankees — Agreed to terms with LHP Aaron Louron on a minor league contract.

Seattle Mariners — Agreed to terms with RHP Taijuan Walker on a one-year contract.

New York Yankees — Agreed to terms to terms with INF/OF Derek Dietrich on a minor league contract.

Tampa Bay Rays — Agreed to terms with INF Josh Ockimey on a one-year contract.

CINCINNATI REDS — Agreed to terms with INF/OF Derek Dietrich on a minor league contract.

Philadelphia Phillies — Agreed to terms with OF/1B Taylor Trammell, OF Adam Haseley, INF/OF Cesar Contreras, OF Lisa Garcia, RHP Zach Lechlich and INF/OF Bryson Brigman.

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National baseball Association

Atlantic League

Atlantic League

F-MEETINGS AND MEASURES

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National baseball Association

Atlantic League

Atlantic League

F-MEETINGS AND MEASURES

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By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press
Kobe Bryant will be announced Friday at All-Star Weekend in Chicago as one of the finalists for this year’s Basketball Hall of Fame induction class, which isn’t a secret and never was.
Bryant always was a lock to be a first-ballot pick. Fellow first-time nominees Tim Duncan and Kevin Garnett will almost certainly also be among those announced Friday as finalists. The complete class that will be enshrined at Springfield, Mass., in August will be announced on April 4 at the Final Four in Atlanta.

But Friday’s announcement of the finalists in Chicago will be largely about the memory of Bryant, and rightly so. This All-Star weekend is the first huge gathering of the NBA family since Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven others were killed in a helicopter crash in Southern California on Jan. 26. They’ll be remembered and honored throughout the weekend.

Giannis Antetokounmpo’s team will play Sunday’s All-Star Game wearing the No. 24 on their jerseys, in tribute to the number Bryant wore in the second half of his career with the Lakers. LeBron James’ team will wear No. 2 that night, in tribute to Gianna Bryant and her jersey number. Everyone in the Rising Stars game Friday, the All-Star Saturday events and then the game itself will also wear a patch with nine stars, one for each of the victims of the crash.
A week after everyone leaves Chicago, the NBA will gather again in Los Angeles for the memorial for Bryant and his daughter. It’s on Feb. 24 — 2/24, which is not a coincidence. The numbers on the calendar made it seem like the appropriate day, so that’s what Vanessa Bryant, Kobe’s wife and Gianna’s mom, ultimately chose.

That’s not the end, of course. The emptiness that the league is feeling without Bryant will come up again in April, when the Hall of Fame officially says he’s going to be enshrined. Then in June, when someone wins a championship. Then in July, when someone on the U.S. men’s national team wears No. 10 — Bryant’s Olympic number — at the Tokyo Games.

When in August, at the Hall of Fame ceremony. Then in January, the anniversary of the crash. And so on.

“What I’m looking forward to is the time of healing,” USA Basketball managing director Jerry Colangelo said. “It’ll give us a chance to kind of focus on the entire class because everyone is entitled to their due.”

Mourning continues for Kobe
Lakers great’s tragic death hangs over Hall of Fame announcement
By Doug Ferguson
Associated Press
LOS ANGELES — There is no better place for Tiger Woods to set the PGA Tour record for most career victories than at Riviera.

Because this is where he played his first PGA Tour event as a 16-year-old amateur?
No.

Because he now is tournament host of the Genesis Invitational, giving the it the kind of elevated status — smaller fields, bigger purses — enjoyed only by Jack Nicklaus at the Memorial and the late Arnold Palmer at Bay Hill?
Not necessarily.

Because it’s the course Woods has played the most times — 10 as a professional — without ever having won and he’s due?
Not at all.

What makes Riviera ideal is because it’s the next one on his schedule. And the sooner Woods can win No. 83 to break the record he shares with Sam Snead, the sooner everyone can stop speculating about the inevitable.

The question came up Tuesday — how could it not? — about how special it would be for Woods to set the record at Riviera. He interjected by saying with a smile, “Yes, that’s been mentioned.”

It was mentioned three weeks ago at Torrey Pines when he started the new year, and that made just as much sense. Torrey Pines was the first PGA Tour event he attended with his father, the course where he won eight times, including that 2008 U.S. Open that he played with a double stress fracture and shredded knee ligaments.

Then again, Woods has left such an enormous trail in golf that winning anywhere would have some historical perspective.
It could be Bay Hill, where he has won eight times. Maybe the Masters, where he could set the record and tie Jack Nicklaus with a sixth green jacket. The U.S. Open is at Winged Foot, the first major he played after his father died and the first cut he ever missed in a major.

It’s a long list. Woods hasn’t decided where he is playing or even how much this year — even the Mexico Championship began two weeks ago in the air — but odds are he will have won every tournament on his schedule except L.A.

Oddly enough, what made the career record feel so inevitable was a tournament he had never played.

Winning the Tour Championship (for the third time) at the end of the 2018 season was the first stop in his comeback from four back surgeries. Winning the Masters (for the fifth time) made the comeback complete, for it was his first major after a drought of nearly 11 years.

But it was when he returned from a fifth knee surgery — this one of the maintenance variety — and played the ZoZo Championship in Japan where he showed such a comfort level with his swing and with his game that more victories seemed certain to follow.

So how about now?
“I’ve played in a number of events over the years, and for me not to win an event that has meant so much to me in my hometown … I’ve done well in San Diego, I’ve done well at Sherwood, just haven’t done well here,” Woods said. “So hopefully, I can put it together this week and we’ll have a great conversation on Sunday.”

A young fan roots for the Lakers’ LeBron James during Wednesday’s game against the Nuggets in Denver. With James’ 16th All-Star Game start on Sunday in Chicago, he will break the record of 15 starts with Kobe Bryant.

LeBron watch: Assuming he starts on Sunday as planned, LeBron James will become the first player in NBA history to start 16 All-Star Games.
He currently shares the record of 15 starts with Bryant. James’ 16th All-Star appearance will be second-most in NBA history, two shy of matching the mark of 18 set by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. If he wins MVP, James would tie the record of four such All-Star trophies — matching Bob Pettit and, again, Bryant.

James is the All-Star all-time leader in points, field goals and three-pointers made, plus field goals and three-pointers attempted. If he plays 10 minutes, he’ll pass Abdul-Jabbar (449) for most All-Star minutes in a career.

All-Star weekend
Friday, Rising Stars game in Chicago: The U.S. vs. the World format remains in play this year.
Saturday, All-Star Saturday in Chicago: A newly tweaked three-point contest, plus the dunk and skills events.
Sunday, All-Star Game in Chicago: $500,000 at stake for Chicago-area charities, and an untimed fourth quarter with a target score.

Tiger’s pursuit of 83 resumes at Riviera

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

The jerseys of the late Los Angeles Lakers Kobe Bryant, right, and his daughter Gianna are draped on the seats the two last sat on at Staples Center, prior to the Lakers’ game against the Portland Trail Blazers in Los Angeles on Jan. 31. Bryant will be announced Friday at All-Star Weekend in Chicago as one of the finalists for this year’s Basketball Hall of Fame induction class.

Lakers great’s tragic death hangs over Hall of Fame announcement

Photos by Kelvin Kuo, above, and David Zalubowski, below

DENIS POROY

DENIS POROY/AP

DENIS POROY/AP

DENIS POROY/AP
Louisville, Vandy well armed for national title runs

**By Eric Olson**
Associated Press

With almost all of its pitching staff back from the team that made the program’s deepest post-season run, Louisville begins the season Friday ranked No. 1 in three of the six major polls.

Defending national champion Vanderbilt lost six everyday players but is stop the other polls largely because it returns possible No. 1 draft pick Austin Martin and postseason pitching sensation Kumar Rocker.

Louisville coach Dan McDonnell embraces the high expectations.

“When six of your top eight arms come back and you finish third in the country, and with good position players, you feel like, ‘OK, we’re probably going to be ranked pretty high this year,’” McDonnell said. “We tried to prepare for the kids before Christmas as to what the rest of the country will think about you. You have to be mature in how you handle that.”

Reid Detmers, the 2019 Atlantic Coast Conference pitcher of the year, Bobby Miller and Luke Smith make up the weekend rotation. Each started games in the College World Series. The Cardinals also have a proven closer in Michael Kirian.

Third baseman Alex Binelas, a freshman All-American last year, is among five position players who are back from a 51-18 team.

The last was in a bracket final for a 3-2 win with the Commodores scoring twice in the ninth inning for a 3-2 win.

The teams have a regular-season game scheduled May 5 in Nashville, Tenn.

Vanderbilt has two of the college game’s biggest names in Martin and Rocker.

The Commodores are back from a 51-18 team.

Vanderbilt’s Kumar Rocker, a 6-4, 255-pound right-hander, was the talk of the NCAA Tournament after throwing a 10-strikeout no-hitter against Duke in super regionals and going 2-0 with a 1.46 ERA to earn Most Outstanding Player at the College World Series.

“You put this ‘V’ star on your chest, you’re going to have a target on your back. That’s a given. Everybody wants to beat Vanderbilt regardless of what happened last year. That’s just the mentality everybody has.”

Vanderbilt’s 9-0, 2.05 ERA and 167 strikeouts in 113.1 innings. He set the school record twice in the ninth inning for a 3-2 win.

Martin played mostly third base last year but is able to play shortstop or even in the outfield. He flirted with .400 last year, finishing at .392, and is in line to join Atlanta Braves shortstop and ex-Vandy star Dansby Swanson as a No. 1 draft pick.

The 6-foot-4, 255-pound Rocker won 12 games as a freshman, struck out 19 while throwing the first no-hitter in the NCAA super regionals and was the CWS Most Outstanding Player. Rocker probably will remain the No. 2 starter, with Mason Hickman (9-0, 2.05 ERA) moving from Sunday to the Friday spot.

Vanderbilt went 59-12, setting a Southeastern Conference record for wins, and tied the league record with 15 players taken in the draft. Even with a revamped outfield and new starters at first base and shortstop, the Commodores remain the team to beat. They open Friday with a rematch against CWS finals opponent Michigan in Scottsdale, Ariz.

“You put this ‘V’ star on your chest,” Martin said, “you’re going to have a target on your back. That’s a given. Everybody wants to beat Vanderbilt regardless of what happened last year. That’s just the mentality everybody has.”

No drop-off is expected by one of the top offensive teams in the nation. The Sun Devils batted .310, hit 94 homers and averaged better than eight runs a game. Spencer Torkelson has gone deep 48 times the past two years and has a strong supporting cast. The Pac-12 favorites brought in a top-10 recruiting class.

**Cal St. Fullerton (27-26)**

The Titans locked up coach Rick Vanderhook through 2024 before last season and then missed the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1992 and failed to win 30 games for the first time in the program’s 45-year history. Vanderhook has reconfigured his coaching staff to lead what will be a young team. Cal State Fullerton is the preseason Big West favorite.

**Florida State (42-23)**

Mike Martin Jr. takes over for his father, the all-time wins leader in college baseball, and will field a team that brings back five position players, two starting pitchers and three relievers who appeared in the CWS. Reese Albert, who hit nine homers despite missing 18 games because of injury, will be counted on to bolster the offense. Ten-game winner CJ Van Eyk is the ace of a strong pitching staff.

**Florida (34-26)**

The Gators won their fewest games since 2013 and didn’t make the CWS for the first time since 2014. SEC coaches nonetheless picked the Gators to finish second in the conference. The spotlight will be on starters Tommy Mac and Jack Leftwich — poster boys for Florida’s struggles on the mound (5.37 ERA) — and prized freshman left-hander Hunter Barco. Six starters are back from an offense that has pop.

**Georgia (46-17)**

The Bulldogs will go as far as their starting pitchers take them. Emerson Hancock’s 1.99 ERA was the best by a Georgia starter since 1977. Cole Wilcox got better as his freshman season progressed. In SEC play, he went 11-2 with a 1.25 ERA and 188 strikeout bating average. With the top three hitters gone, offense is the biggest question.

**Miami (41-20)**

The Hurricanes made an NCAA regional for the first time since 2016 and are looking to go farther in Gino DiMarco’s second year. The main contributors from a potent offense are back. Alex Toral hit 24 of Miami’s 85 homers. Fifth-year senior Brian Van Belle won 10 games and anchors the pitching staff. The Canes also are excited about No. 2 starter Chris McMahon.

**Texas Tech (46-20)**

Tim Tadlock has coached four of his past six teams to the College World Series, with the 2019 Red Raiders making it to the final four. Tech is ranked as high as No. 3 and favored to win the Big 12. Dylan Neuse, Brian Klein and Braxton Fulford are the core of an everyday lineup that should be potent again despite losing a couple of sluggers. John McMillon, Micah Dallas and Clayton Boeter headline the pitching staff.

**UCLA (52-11)**

The defending Pac-12 champion Bruins set school records with 52 wins overall and 24 conference wins. They also were the No. 1 national seed in the NCAA Tournament, losing a thrilling super regional at home to CWS runner-up Michigan. There’s plenty of returning talent, led by All-American Garrett Mitchell and the nation’s top closer in Holden Powell, and a recruiting class ranked among the top five.
10 players worth watching this season

By Eric Olson
Associated Press

Ten players to watch in college baseball this season:

OF-LHP Alec Burleson, East Carolina

Burleson could be the best two-way player in the country as the Pirates’ starting right fielder and closer. He also could play first base or, if needed, be a weekend starter on the mound. Last season he batted .370 with nine homers and 61 RBIs and posted a 6-2 record and five saves with 68 strikeouts in 60 1⁄3 innings.

LHP Reid Detmers, Louisville

The Louisville ace with a devastating curveball made a huge jump from his freshman season. He was 2019 ACC pitcher of the year after going 13-4 with a 2.78 ERA and 167 strikeouts in 113 1⁄3 innings. He set the school record for strikeouts and tied the mark for wins.

2B Nick Gonzales, New Mexico State

Gonzales’ .432 batting average led the nation, and he had 16 home runs, 80 RBIs, 19 doubles and four triples. He hit 11 homers in his first 14 games last season and reached base in all 55 games. He ended the season on a 66-game on-base streak dating to 2018, the longest in the country. He showed what he can do with a wood bat in the Cape Cod League, batting .351 with seven homers.

RHP Emerson Hancock, Georgia

Hancock is in line to be the first player taken in the Major League Baseball draft in June. He had a team-high 90 1⁄3 innings despite a lat injury, went 8-3 and posted a 1.99 ERA that was lowest by a Georgia starter since 1977. He allowed zero or one run in nine of 14 starts and had 97 strikeouts against 18 walks.

LHP Asa Lacy, Texas A&M

Lacy is the best left-hander in the country and could overtake Jeff Granger, the No. 5 overall pick in 1993, as the Aggies’ highest-drafted player. He moves to No. 1 in the rotation after going 8-4 with a 2.13 ERA and 130 strikeouts in 88 2⁄3 innings. His career 5.41 hits allowed per nine innings ranks fourth among active players.

3B Austin Martin, Vanderbilt

Martin is widely considered the best pure hitter in the nation and is in contention to be the No. 1 overall draft pick. His SEC-leading .392 batting average was the highest by a Vandy player since 2004. He went from one homer as a freshman to 10 last season, with two in the super regional-clinching win over Duke and two more in the College World Series opener against Louisville.

OF Garrett Mitchell, UCLA

Mitchell led the nation and set a school record with 12 triples, with 10 of them coming over the last 22 games. He batted .420 over that final stretch and .349 for the season. He started 48 games in right field and 14 in center and committed no errors in 124 chances.

OF Dylan Neuse, Texas Tech

Neuse played a major role in the Red Raiders making the College World Series for the fourth time in six years. He led the Big 12 with six triples and also had 12 doubles and eight homers, including two grand slams. He started every game in the outfield and made only two errors.

RHP Kumar Rocker, Vanderbilt

The 6-4, 255-pound Rocker was the talk of the NCAA Tournament after throwing a 19-strikeout no-hitter against Duke in the super regionals and going 2-0 with a 1.46 ERA to earn Most Outstanding Player at the College World Series. He was just a freshman. Rocker enters this season after closing 2019 at 10-1 in his last 11 starts.

1B Spencer Torkelson, Arizona State

He’s only the third player in Pac-12 history to hit 20 homers in back-to-back seasons and is a projected top-three pick in the draft. With 48 homers in two seasons, he’s 25 away from cracking the NCAA top-10 list and nine from breaking Bob Horn’s school record. Torkelson went deep 23 times last season to become the first player since Oregon State’s Michael Conforto to lead the Pac-12 in homers in consecutive seasons.
Far East wrestling

Upsets in semis

Several reigning champs fall, showing past accomplishments mean little at Far East

BY DAVE ORNAUER Stars and Stripes
OSAN AIR BASE, South Korea — Austin Fisher wasn’t expecting to be in this position.

Despite pinning defending Far East champion Haydn Peterson of Kubasaki in last year’s “Beast of the Far East” Tournament final, the Yokota senior was considered an underdog as the 42nd Far East High School Wrestling Tournament got started on Thursday.

But Fisher showed that victory in 31 seconds wasn’t a fluke. He pinned Peterson again in the semifinals of the 215-pound weight class on Thursday.

Fisher said he was prepared for anything the second time around.

“I knew he was going to be at his best for this one,” Fisher said.

Upsets ruled the semifinal round of individual-freestyle competition. The fifth-place, third-place and championship matches are set for Friday, followed by the dual-meet competition, which runs through Saturday.

Caleb Heino learned a lesson similar to Peterson’s last year. The Yokota senior won the 101-pound title in 2017-18 as a sophomore, but fell short of a repeat, losing 11-1 to his season-long nemesis, Jordan Van Druff of Christian Academy Japan in the 108 final.

Heino says being unable to beat Van Druff all of last season motivated him to end his career back on top, this season at 122 pounds.

“I’m fairly optimistic. With us only being one weight short, we’re not worried that the spread of the influenza virus. The virus is susceptible to humidity and heat. In Japan, we have the rainy season which could defeat the virus.”

By STEPHEN WADE
Associated Press

TOKYO — Tokyo Olympic organizers reiterated their message on Thursday at the start of two days of meetings with the International Olympic Committee: The 2020 Games will not be waylaid by the virus that is spreading from neighboring China.

“I would like to make it clear again that we are not considering a cancellation or postponement of the games. Let me make that clear,” organizing committee president Yoshiro Mori said, speaking through an interpreter to dozens of top IOC officials gathered in Tokyo.

The Olympics open in just more than five months, and the torch relay begins next month in Japan — a clear signal the games are getting close.

Although there have been no deaths in Japan attributed to the coronavirus, Tokyo and IOC officials are clearly jittery. Sitting among the officials this time was Dr. Richard Bougut, the IOC’s medical and scientific director.

Last week, Toshio Muto, the CEO of the Tokyo organizing committee, said he was “seriously worried that the spread of the infectious disease could throw cold water on the momentum toward the games.”

By JOHN COATES

A tourist wearing a mask poses for a photo with the Olympic rings in the background on Jan. 29 at Tokyo’s Odaiba district.

While Osan seeks its first title since 2009, Perry has yet to win one, something the Samurai are trying to change.

The DODA Japan title “was definitely a nice thing to accomplish; any history we can set is great,” coach Chris Munseil said.

“But obviously, our eyes are on the biggest prize. We’ve been close before. We’re just hoping that this is our year.”

BY DAVE ORNAUER
Stars and Stripes

Yokota’s Caleb Heino locks in a cradle on Kubasaki’s Jaylan Mayers en route to a semifinal pin at 122 pounds.

BY DAVE ORNAUER
Stars and Stripes

Perry’s Nemo Matthews pins Osan’s Marcus Inthavixay in Thursday’s Far East 168-pound semifinal.

“They’re on: IOC reiterates virus will not stop Games

A tourist wearing a mask poses for a photo with the Olympic rings in the background on Jan. 29 at Tokyo’s Odaiba district.

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Last week, Toshio Muto, the CEO of the Tokyo organizing committee, said he was “seriously worried that the spread of the infectious disease could throw cold water on the momentum toward the games.”

He backed down a day later and said he was confident the games would go forward, which is the message this time.

On Wednesday, the virus forced the cancellation of a Formula One race set for April in Shanghai, which draws more than 100,000 over a race weekend.

The Hong Kong and Singapore rounds of the World Rugby Sevens Series were rescheduled from April to October on Thursday, with organizers saying the decision was taken “in response to continued health concerns relating to the outbreak of the virus. Also, the SportAccord conference, an event with close ties to the Olympic movement, will not take place in Beijing in April as scheduled, organizers said Thursday.

The virus has also wiped out the indoor world track and field championships in Nanning, golf tournaments, soccer matches, and almost all sports in China, including Olympic qualifying events. It is also keeping Chinese athletes from traveling to qualify, which could put their presence in Tokyo in jeopardy.

Saburo Kawabuchi, a former Olympian and the so-called mayor of the Olympic Village that will house 11,000 athletes and thousands more staff members, suggested Tokyo’s hot and humid summer would stop the virus.

“The biggest concern is the coronavirus and the infection,” he said, speaking in Japanese.

“Currently we don’t have any clue when this issue will be resolved. Based on various pieces of information we receive, it seems that this virus is not as strong as the influenza virus. The virus is susceptible to humidity and heat. In Japan, we have the rainy season which could defeat the virus.”

John Coates, an IOC member who heads the regular inspection visits to Tokyo, said he expected to receive reports on the virus from the Japanese government, the Tokyo city government and local organizers in order to see the “necessary precautions that are being taken.”
150 contenders go for 14 individual titles

6-time defending champ Stuttgart may face challenge from Ramstein

BY GREGORY BROOME
Stars and Stripes

The main event of the 2019-20 DODEA Europe wrestling season arrives this weekend as close to 150 contenders take to the mats of Wiesbaden's Clay Fitness Center on Friday and Saturday.

The six-time defending champion Stuttgart Panthers remain the team to beat until an opponent officially ends their grappling dynasty. The Ramstein Royals, the Panthers' perennial challenger, will try again this year armed with an edge in both raw numbers and championship pedigree.

Individual titles in 14 weight classes are at stake over the two days as the teams also compile points in pursuit of divisional team championships.

The event starts Friday with four preliminary rounds. Saturday holds a fifth and final preliminary round, followed by semifinals and third-place bouts and, finally, a slate of 14 European championship matches.

106 pounds: Stuttgart co-captain McKinley Fielding returns for another shot at history this season. The junior has finished second in this class in the last two European tournaments, falling just short of becoming the first female wrestler to win a DODEA Europe individual championship.

Fielding is facing as tough a bracket as she's seen over her three-year run. Among her rivals are sectional champions Jacob Riveria of Rota, Ethan Bell of Brussels and Skyler Hickman of Spangdahlem, the latter of whom edged Fielding for first place in last weekend's central sectional qualifier.

113: This 11-wrestler bracket might be the first to produce a head-to-head showdown between the Royals and Panthers in Saturday's elimination rounds. And there's a narrow margin separating the two: Ramstein has 24 wrestlers in the tournament to Stuttgart's 22.

Ramstein's Brandon Lapitan and Stuttgart's Connor Swaim will seek to swing those valuable points in their respective school's favor, while Rota entry Evan Gant attempts to aid the Admirals' chase for a repeat Division II championship.

120: Spangdahlem sophomore Carson Hicks is coming off a dazzling, undefeated debut as a 133-pound freshman champion and looking for an equally dominant run to another title this weekend. Fellow sectional champions Ethan Gumabon of Naples and John Odom of Ramstein join Hicks as top seeds in the bracket, while Stuttgart's Brogan Fielding, the latest entry in the remarkable family wrestling dynasty, lurks as a contender.

126: Ramstein senior Conner Mackie is back to defend his crown in this class as one of two reigning European champs for the Royals. The younger Panthers enter the tournament without an incumbent champion.

Mackie will be challenged by fellow sectional winners Brandon Castillo of Spangdahlem and Phillip Rivera of Rota.

132: A pair of 2019 runners-up are on the short list of top contenders to win this competitive class.

Atreyu Allen of the hometown Wiesbaden Warriors is eying another gold medal to go with the 113-pound title he won two years ago. Allen lost to Mackie in a 126-pound bout a year ago that was among that tournament's most evenly matched finals.

Ramstein senior Matthew Oreskovich finished second at 113 pounds a year ago.

138: Another Stuttgart-Ramstein showdown is a strong possibility in this class as each school fields wrestlers with elimination-round tournament experience. Ramstein's Christian Griffith lost by decision in the 132-pound championship bout, while Stuttgart counterpart Carter Hanes was a 2019 semifinalist at 126.

Fellow sectional winner Caleb Debelitz of Vilseck ranks among the top candidates to prevent a Royals-Panthers final.

145: Aviano's Michael Hauser headlines a field of 11 in this unpredictable bracket.

Hauser is the most accomplished of the group with a semifinal appearance in this class in 2019 and a southern sectional triumph last weekend.

Fellow sectional winners Jack Engelke of Stuttgart and Philip Severance of Lakenheath Face Hauser as top seeds in the bracket.

152: A well-traveled new contender ranks atop this bracket after an impressive season on the DODEA Europe mats. Jacob Caricato, an American enrolled at Finland's International School of Helsinki, became a mainstay in regular-season meets this winter, won the central sectional last weekend at Stuttgart and is now in line for a European title run.

Caricato will meet resistance from Aviano's Xavier Wells, Ramstein's Tyler Worley and Stuttgart's Noah Moten, among others.

160: Roberts Swart fell just short of delivering a European title to the distant DODEA Europe school of Ankara last year, dropping the 185-pound title bout on a technical fall. Swart is back at a bulkier class this year for another shot at the crown.

This class also contains a Royals-Panthers subplot as Ramstein's Dominic Marts and Stuttgart's Christian Just won their respective sectional brackets and are in position to add valuable points for their squad.

170: A strong defending champion sits atop this bracket in the form of Signorina's Amari Pyatt, who claimed last year's 170-pound crown with a convincing pinfall win in the title bout.

Jimmie Birchfield of Wiesbaden also returns after a strong semifinal showing in this bracket a year ago, while Lakenheath's Nick Scioli, Ramstein's Oliver Seelie, Aviano's Nick Smith and Stuttgart's Tyler Savage try to bring new blood to the finals.

182: Rota expects to further add to its Division II points total based on the efforts of Brenon Colvin, a favorite to claim victory in this 113-pound bracket. Colvin, who finished third in this bracket a year ago, beat Vilseck's Hyrum Draper, last year's 160-pound European runner-up, for the southern sectional's top seed last weekend to claim a top seed.

Wiesbaden's Daniel Iverson, Ramstein's Caleb Hill, Stuttgart's Noah Carges and SHAPE's Samuel Hennig round out the top half of the field.

195: Ramstein's Nick Mooney is the heir apparent to win this weight class after dropping a 7-5 decision in last year's final.

Stuttgart's Cameron Wolfer will look to keep this title on Stuttgart's side of the ledger, while southern sectional Nick Luminarias works to improve on last year's solid showing.

220: Ramstein hopes to finish strong with powerful contenders in the event's two heaviest classes.

Gabe Davis is the favorite to win this bracket after a frustrating loss by default in last year's 182-pound championship match.

Vicenza's Alex Ramos and Alec Meno of the hometown Warriors are among Davis' primary obstacles.

285: Teddy Ward, the 2019 European champion at 220 pounds, will look to add a heavyweight title to his résumé on Saturday. He'll face two other foes in search of important last-minute points in Stuttgart's Danny Rodriguez and Rota's Charlie Everhart.

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No shortage of talent available

Standings have separated out a handful of notable sellers ahead of the trade deadline

By Stephen Whyno
Associated Press

Chris Kreider watched teammates Mats Zuccarello and Kevin Hayes handle all the speculation before getting traded a year ago and saw others do the same in previous seasons.

With the New York Rangers still in the process of transitioning to contender status, it is Kreider's turn, and he's dealing with it his way.

“I think I'd be disinclined to try to embody how someone else went about this situation, so I'm just trying to be myself every day,” Kreider said. “I feel like my name's been out there for the last seven years. It's just the nature of the beast.”

Kreider may be bracing for a trade that seems inevitable. The NHL standings suggest the Rangers, New Jersey Devils, Ottawa Senators, Detroit Red Wings and Los Angeles Kings are clear sellers ahead of the Feb. 24 trade deadline.

While Kreider is the biggest name likely on the move, there is no shortage of talent available. New Jersey’s Sami Vatanen and Wayne Simmonds, Ottawa's Jean-Gabriel Pageau and Ron Hainsey, Detroit’s Mike Green and Trevor Daley, and Los Angeles' Tyler Toffoli and Trevor Lewis are all pending free agents.

There is also Senators forward Anthony Duclair, who can be a restricted free agent, and Kings defensemen Alec Martinez is drawing interest with a year left on his contract. The Kings have already traded goaltender Jack Campbell and forward Kyle Clifford to Toronto and made no secret they are open for business.

“We all signed up for the plan,” first-year Kings coach Todd McLellan said. “We know where we’re going with the team and what we want to do with it. So, none of this approach to the deadline has been a shocker to us as a coaching staff.”

Duclair was traded three times his first five NHL seasons, so his approach hasn’t changed despite being in the midst of an impressive comeback year. “I've been through it for a couple of years in a row now,” Duclair said. “I just try to focus on the team and I just try to win, help the team win as many games as possible and we'll go from there.”

A Massachusetts native who played at Boston College, Kreider has been linked to the Bruins and the Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues, who have more than stayed afloat amid significant forwards injuries.

He said last month at All-Star weekend that the Rangers winning games would go a long way to keeping the group together.

Despite five victories in seven games after the break, New York is still nine points back of a playoff position and Kreider is almost certainly gone unless he signs an extension.

The Rangers' Chris Kreider, left, congratulates goal tender Igor Shesterkin after a win on Sunday. Kreider may be bracing for a trade that seems inevitable.

The same goes for Lewis, who might be the perfect kind of low-risk deadline pickup that has proven to be the blueprint for recent Cup winners. Kings general manager Rob Blake is attempting to quickly rebuild, but players are in wait-and-see mode.

“I talk to my agent quite a bit, but it's kind of up to them with what they want to do,” Lewis said. “Obviously when you play your whole career somewhere, I'm sure they know you'd like to stay. We'll see what happens.”

Giant-killing Flyers

The Flyers are on the playoff bubble and have had their share of inconsistencies. But Philadelphia has shined against the top teams in the Eastern Conference, picking up 12 of a possible 18 points against Boston, Tampa Bay, Washington and Pittsburgh.

“We’re a tough team to play against,” Kreider said. “I feel like my name’s been out there for the last seven years. It’s just the nature of the beast.”

Kreider has been linked to the Bruins, but it’s kind of up to them with what they want to do,” Lewis said. “Obviously when you play your whole career somewhere, I’m sure they know you’d like to stay. We’ll see what happens.”

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

Boston 58 35 11 12 82 192 144
Pittsburgh 58 35 11 12 82 192 144
New Jersey 55 28 23 4 60 181 174
Washington 59 28 23 8 64 165 162
N.Y. Islanders 55 28 23 4 60 181 174

 Metropolitan Division

Toronto 52 24 28 10 68 164 140
New York 55 20 25 10 50 152 195
N.Y. Rangers 55 28 23 4 60 181 174
Philadelphia 57 32 21 3 67 181 157
New Jersey 55 20 25 10 50 152 195

Western Conference

Central Division

Chicago 57 31 19 7 69 184 170
St. Louis 56 32 21 3 67 181 157
Columbus 52 24 28 10 68 164 140
Dallas 55 20 25 10 50 152 195
Nashville 55 20 25 10 50 152 195

 Pacific Division

Los Angeles 58 32 19 5 69 151 142
Vegas 57 32 21 3 67 181 157
Anaheim 56 23 26 7 53 146 173
Edmonton 59 28 23 8 64 165 162
Vancouver 56 23 26 7 53 146 173

NHL standings suggest the Rangers are open for business.

Los Angeles Kings are clear sellers ahead of the Feb. 24 trade deadline.

NHL players on losing teams that could be available at the trade deadline.

Vegas has gotten a boost from DeBoer

By W.G. Ramirez
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Peter DeBoer could have chosen a life inside a courtroom arguing in front of a jury bench, considering he has law degrees from th...
Astros open spring training with apologies from players

BY SAM FORTIER, CINDY BOREN
AND ADAM KILGORE
The Washington Post

Two Houston Astros players expressed shame for the sign-stealing scandal that has engulfed Major League Baseball and owner Jim Crane promised greater control, saying that technology advanced sign-stealing would “never happen again on my watch” as the team opened spring training Thursday in West Palm Beach, Fla.

The remarks came amid calls for the team to be stripped of its World Series victory in 2017 and were the first since the scandal resulted in the firing of General Manager Jeff Luhnow and team manager A.J. Hinch.

Astros star Alex Bregman directly apologized in a brief statement at the beginning of the news conference, which lasted less than 30 minutes. “I am really sorry about the choices that were made by our team, the organization and by me,” he said. “I have learned from this and hope to regain the trust of fans... We as a team are totally focused on moving forward to the 2020 season.”

His teammate, José Altuve, added, “We had a great team meeting last night and the whole organization and the team feels bad about what happened in 2017. We especially feel remorse for our fans and for the game of baseball.”

The players spoke for less than 90 seconds and declined to take questions, with Crane taking the bulk of the questions.

Dusty Baker, the veteran manager brought in to restore honor to the franchise, pointed to the outside role technology played in the scandal.

“I must admit that when technology gets as advanced as it has become, the boundaries seem to change. The guys said what they did was wrong. Hopefully baseball can help clean up the game and control the technology so this doesn’t happen again.”

Crane noted that he’d never been the kind of owner who hung out in the clubhouse and admitted that may have to change.

“We’ll have better controls in place,” he said. “Baseball will have better controls in place,” without specifying what those would be because “this came very close to the dugout.”

Teams who lost to the Astros have called for the team to forfeit wins and the 2017 World Series title.

“Our opinion is this didn’t impact the game,” Crane said. “We had a good team. We won the World Series and we’ll leave it at that.”

Meanwhile, Yankees closer Aroldis Chapman, who surrendered a series-clinching walk-off three-run to José Altuve in the 2019 American League Championship Series, called Altuve’s actions “a little suspicious.”

As Altuve crossed the plate, he told teammates not to rip off his jersey and clutched the buttons with his hands, video of which was widely circulated amid speculation Astros hitters had used buzzers affixed to their bodies to alert them to what pitch may be coming.

Yankees had doubts about Houston last year

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Yankees catcher Gary Sánchez and manager Aaron Boone are not convinced the Houston Astros’ use of electronics did not continue into last year’s AL Championship Series with the Yankees.

Boone had doubts about Houston last year and was convinced the team continued to use electronics during the 2018 regular season. The 2019 Astros were not implicated.

José Altuve sparked speculation of nefarious conduct when he hit a pennant-winning homer off the Yankees’ Aroldis Chapman in Game 6 of the 2019 AL Championship Series, then told teammates not to rip off his jersey as he completed his home-run trot. Some suggested he may have been wearing a buzzer underneath the jersey that could signal anticipated pitches.

“It’s a good question. I’ll tell you that if I hit a homer and I get my team to the World Series, they can rip off my pants,” Sánchez said through a translator Thursday as Yankees pitchers and catchers reported for spring training. “They can rip everything off if I get the team to the World Series hitting a walk-off homer like that. They can rip anything off.”

Boone said he was not sure there was no rules breaking in last year’s playoff against the Astros.

“This certainly one of those great unknowns,” Boone said. “I’ve spent time, as I’m sure a lot of people have, wondering all the things that could have potentially been going on, and we’ll probably never know for sure, frankly.”

Boone still considers the three managers that lost their jobs to be friends: Houston’s AJ Hinch, Boston’s Alex Cora and the New York Mets’ Carlos Beltrán. Boone says he has struggled “making sense of it all.”

“Wrestle with my emotions, in a way get some clarity,” Boone said.
Famous ‘family’

Iceland players connected by hoops

By Eric Olson
Associated Press

Thorir Thorbjarnarson is one of the key pieces in Fred Hoiberg’s building project at Nebraska.

Jon Axel Gudmundsson of Davidson was the Atlantic 10 player of the year last season and has filled up box scores in his career like few players in college basketball history.

Hakon Hjalmarsson is just starting his American basketball experience and trying to find his role at Binghamton.

Though at far-flung schools, the three are connected as the only Division I players from Iceland this season. They talk, text or Snapchat nearly every day and follow each other’s games on television or streaming video.

“I know every basketball player in Iceland, essentially,” Thorbjarnarson said. “It’s a small family. We call ourselves the ‘basketball family.’

Iceland is no basketball hotbed, but college coaches will go most anywhere for talent. The island in the North Atlantic is about the size of Virginia geographically and has a population of 360,000.

Basketball’s popularity in Iceland ranks far behind soccer and is about even with team handball.

There are 6,800 registered male and female basketball players in the country, according to the sport’s national federation.

That includes recreational players. Far fewer are at the elite level.

“When you play with the youth national teams, you’re always practicing in the same gym, you’re always around each other, you take trips together,” Gudmundsson said. “And we played against each other in the adult league in Iceland, so we kind of grew close from there.”

The best basketball players must go to Europe or the United States to test themselves against top competition. Only one Icelandic, Petur Gudmundsson (no relation to Jon Axel), has played in the NBA. He logged 150 games for three teams in the 1980s.

Thorbjarnarson is the only player who suited up for the 2018-19 Nebraska team that Hoiberg kept. He’s shooting 44.6% on three-pointers to rank among the Big Ten leaders.

The junior guard from Reykjavik began drawing recruiting interest in 2016 when he played for Iceland’s under-18 national team.

He scored 30 or more points in four games at the European Championships and was MVP of the Nordic Championships. He first heard from former Nebraska coach Tim Miles in July 2017, visited Lincoln the next month and 10 days later was enrolled.

“I was mesmerized by the facilities, enjoyed the coaching staff, and it’s not a big town. The people are similar to people in Iceland,” he said. “I was, ‘Sure, let’s do this.’ I wanted a challenge, so I decided to come.”

Jon Axel Gudmundsson grew up in a basketball family. His father played on national teams and professionally, and his brother, Ingvi, played one season at Saint Louis.

The senior guard from Grindavik, Iceland, was the Atlantic 10 Player of the Year last season and has hit career marks of 1,500 points, 700 rebounds, 500 assists, 200 made three-pointers and 150 steals. No other Division I player since 1993 has reached those milestones.

Gudmundsson starred on Iceland’s national teams beginning at age 15, and recruiters started showing interest when he went to a boarding school in Philadelphia. He didn’t like the fit, though, and he returned to Iceland after one semester. Davidson coach Bob McKillop kept in touch, made a trip to Iceland to see him play and offered a scholarship.

“I always wanted to play in March Madness and also play in the NBA,” he said. “I felt the best way to do it was coming to the States and proving yourself against the guys who are most likely to go to the NBA.”

Gudmundsson nearly led Davidson to an upset of Kentucky in the 2018 NCAA Tournament, making six three-pointers in the second half and finishing with 21 points in a 78-73 loss.

Hjalmarsson, who turns 21 next month, is an older freshman who played on national age-group teams with Thorbjarnarson. The Reykjavik native started 10 straight games for Binghamton early in the season but his minutes have decreased.

“I think I’m progressing all right but I’m not doing as well as I could. I have to be patient,” he said.

Hjalmarsson said he might not be playing college ball if he hadn’t been selected for an NBA-sponsored Basketball Without Borders camp in Finland four years ago. He met a scout who helps international players connect with college coaches, and Binghamton was among the first to show interest.

“Coming here, I didn’t think I would have to adjust to anything because I just thought it was basketball,” Hjalmarsson said. “After being here a few months, it’s a completely different sport. Not being able to hand check at all. I’m seeing all these illegal screens being called. It’s more physical (in Iceland) but I think guys here are more athletic, they’re faster, they jump higher.”

Above: Davidson guard Jon Axel Gudmundsson, a senior from Grindavik, Iceland, was the Atlantic 10 Player of the Year last season and has hit career marks of 1,500 points, 700 rebounds, 500 assists, 200 made three-pointers and 150 steals. Below: Hakon Hjalmarsson, left, a compatriot of Gudmundsson’s, is just starting his American basketball experience and is trying to find his role at Binghamton.
Road: No pressure in final season

FROM BACK PAGE

thing that helped me with all of it is it didn’t happen at once. I knew in my heart of hearts, it was months prior to that where the real opportunity lied and where we missed it," Johnson said.

Teammate Rick Hendrick hired Chad Knaus in 2001 when he launched the 48 team to be built around Johnson, who was given Cliff Daniels midseason.

Daniels has helped Johnson relax and believes the team is headed in the right direction. In fact, pairing Johnson with Daniels was the catalyst in Johnson deciding to make 2020 his final year. He knew all of last year he’d need to make a decision on contract talks with Hendrick and it weighed on Johnson until Daniels arrived and changed the mindset of a struggling driver.

“I was thinking about it pretty hard through the course of the year knowing I was going to have to talk to Rick about a contract extension. I started feeling less likely to come back when I started working with Cliff,” Johnson said. “When I sat Cliff down to talk to him I wasn’t sure how he was going to react to that. But the peace he brought me and the leadership he has for our race team and where I know our team is going really helped me identify with 2020 as probably my best chance to win a championship.”

Johnson said he is encouraged by an updated Camaro that Chevrolet will use starting this weekend, as well as a second year adapting to NASCAR’s new rules package.

NASCAR next year will move to entirely new car, and Johnson indicated he was weary of going through another overhaul. He wants to enjoy life with his two daughters, pick and choose the kinds of races he competes in moving forward, and he remains adamant he’d like to give IndyCar a try on a road or street course.

“In my own head, I’m not done yet, and I don’t want to get to a point where I’m pissed off going through the contract and moving somewhere else,” Johnson said. “I want to give 100% and through reflection, I know I can do that in 2020, knowing what I can give and what level I want to give it. It just feels right.”

Drivers anticipate changes next year

Speedweeks facing significant shake-up

By Mark Long
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Speedweeks is facing a significant shake-up.

The Daytona 500 is scheduled for Valentine’s Day in 2021, NASCAR’s Speedweeks — the opening stretch of racing at Daytona International Speedway that includes run-up events like Daytona 500 pole qualifying, the exhibition Busch Clash, pictured, and the ARCA Series opener — could shrink from two weeks to one, eliminating two ‘dark days’ at the track between qualifying and Daytona 500 practice.

Drivers anticipate changes next year

Drivers anticipate changes next year
SPORTS

AUTO RACING

One for the road?

7-time champ Johnson just enjoying the ride in 19th – and final – full NASCAR season, but title No. 8 is still in reach

BY JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Jimmie Johnson has been chasing NASCAR history for so long that his relentless pursuit of rewriting the record books has become part of his legacy.

Johnson, tied with Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt with seven Cup Series titles, has been racing for sole possession of the record since 2017. He made a hashtag for his social media posts — #Chasing8 — and his push to make history has never wavered.

As he heads into his 19th and final full season in stock car racing, Johnson has dropped the motto. He’d love to close his full-time career with a record eighth title, but the 44-year-old Californian said he would rather remove self-inflicted pressure and enjoy his final season in the No. 48 Chevrolet.

His new motto will be “One Final Time” and it begins Saturday with practice at Daytona International Speedway. The season-opening Daytona 500, a race Johnson has won twice, is Feb. 16.

“Through reflecting back since I made the (November retirement) announcement it just kind of dawned on me — the more I thought about it, I never chased anything,” Johnson said. “One final time just felt like the correct thing to say and now we’ve struck the chasing eight from everything and one final time just fits well.”

It’s been a bumpy ride for Johnson since winning his seventh title. Hendrick Motorsports stalwarts Jeff Gordon and Dale Earnhardt Jr. retired, leaving Johnson as the veteran on a team of 20-somethings. Chevrolet was not competitive with the Camaro it rolled out two years ago, a setback for Johnson and an organization in a rebuild.

The slide was gradual — Johnson won three races in 2017 — but now the winnigest driver of his era is in a full slump. He has gone two full seasons without a win, missed the playoffs last year for the first time and had a pair of crew chief changes.

“It was definitely frustrating (not making the playoffs), I was angry, embarrassed, all of those things,” Johnson said. “One