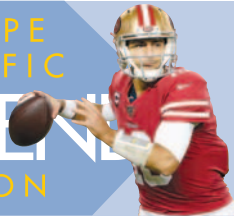


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AFGHANISTAN

Turning back to peace talks

Taliban ready to reduce violence in exchange for deal, Pakistan says

By SUSANNAH GEORGE
The Washington Post

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — American and Taliban negotiators appear to be making progress in Qatar, where the two sides are meeting to see about restarting peace negotiations, Pakistan's foreign minister said Thursday.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi said "a good development" occurred Thursday and that the "Taliban have showed their readiness to accept the demand for reduction in violence." Speaking in a video statement released by the Foreign Ministry, Qureshi added, "I believe that this is a step forward towards the peace agreement."

Separately, The Associated Press re-

ported that Taliban officials said the group gave the U.S. envoy in the talks "a document outlining their offer for a temporary ceasefire in Afghanistan that would last between seven and 10 days."

The U.S. demand for a reduction in violence had stalled the resumption of formal peace talks for months. Both sides had appeared just days away from signing a peace deal in September before the nearly year-long diplomatic effort was called off

by President Donald Trump in a surprise tweet.

Trump said he made the decision following a Taliban attack that killed a U.S. service member.

Since then, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, has been looking for a way to restart negotiations, first by facilitating a prisoner exchange and now by demanding a reduction in violence.

Talks restarted in November after a surprise Trump visit to Afghanistan on Thanksgiving, but they were "paused" in December following a brazen Taliban attack on a highly fortified U.S. base.

SEE TALKS ON PAGE 7

Paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division ensure the area is secure during a fly-to-advise mission in southeastern Afghanistan on Dec. 29.

ALEJANDRO LICEA/U.S. Army

IRAQ

US resumes operations against ISIS

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military is resuming operations against Islamic State militants in Iraq and is working to restart its training of Iraqi forces soon, U.S. officials said Wednesday, despite deep divisions over the American drone strike that killed a senior Iranian commander in Baghdad and the resulting missile attacks by Iran on Iraqi bases.

One official said some joint operations between U.S. and Iraqi forces already have begun, but there are not yet as many as before. The official said details are being worked out to restore the training of Iraqi forces, but that could happen relatively soon.

Relations with Iraq were fractured after the U.S. launched a drone strike near Baghdad's international airport on Jan. 3 that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani. The Parliament later voted to expel U.S. forces from the country and Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi asked Washington to work out a road map for troop withdrawal. The U.S. flatly rejected that request and has not

SEE OPERATIONS ON PAGE 5



QASSEM ABDUL-ZAHRA/AP

A bulldozer clears rubble and debris at al-Asad Air Base in Iraq's western Anbar province on Monday. The base was struck by a barrage of Iranian missiles in retaliation for the U.S. drone strike that killed top Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani.



MILITARY

S. Korea envoy: Clock ticking for deal with US

By KIM GAMEL
AND YOO KYONG CHANG
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Time is running short for the United States and South Korea to reach a defense cost-sharing deal, Ambassador Harry Harris said Thursday, a day after the latest round of talks failed to produce an agreement.

The issue has taken on urgency as the current contract, known as the Special Measures Agreement, expired at the end of the year, leaving the U.S. military operating with residual funds from the South Koreans.

The two sides "broadened their mutual understanding" but gaps remained following a two-day meeting that ended Wednesday in Washington, D.C., according to South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

Harris said he remains optimistic, and the U.S. military is doing its best to manage operations with residual funds.

"We did not reach a conclusion in Washington," he told a group of reporters at his residence in Seoul. "There will be further discussions. We have some time left — not a lot of time — and I'm sure that negotiators will use that time wisely to come to a conclusion."

South Korea has balked at U.S. demands to increase fivefold to nearly \$5 billion its annual contribution to offset the costs of housing some 28,500 American troops on the divided peninsula.

Washington also reportedly is seeking to expand the scope of

the agreement to include other categories such as the cost of rotational troops brought from other countries for training.

South Korea has helped pay for nonpersonnel costs for U.S. troops under the agreement since 1991, with most of the funds used for some 9,000 South Korean employees who provide food, administrative and logistical support, as well as construction costs.

Harris didn't give specific time frames but said South Korean employees could face furloughs if an agreement isn't reached soon. He also noted that lead U.S. negotiator James DeHart has lowered the initial figure, although Harris didn't specify what that was.

"He's adjusted the top-line number," Harris said, reiterating the U.S. stance that South Korea is a prosperous country and should pay more. "We are listening, but we are still apart."

"I believe that the number we're asking for, even though I won't say the number, that number is justified through analytics," Harris said. "I remain optimistic that we'll reach an agreement. The United States has compromised on our position and hopefully, Korea will do so also."

"The long-term implications of not reaching an agreement are unknown, but the near-term things will begin to happen soon so there is a time pressure," he said.

South Korea said it stuck to its position that the sum should be within the framework of the agreement and should be "fair



KIM GAMEL/Stars and Stripes

U.S. Ambassador to South Korea Harry Harris said he expects more discussion on a new defense cost-sharing deal between South Korea and the U.S. after meetings in Washington this week ended without an agreement.

and reasonable," apparently referring to U.S. demands that new categories be added including funding for rotational troops deployed to the divided peninsula.

"Both sides agreed to minimize the gap through a speedy settlement ... so they can contribute to the [South Korean]-U.S. alliance and joint defense posture," the Foreign Ministry said in a statement, adding that more discussions would be held. No date was announced.

The disagreement, which comes amid a growing nuclear threat from North Korea, is a test for President Donald Trump's "America First" policies calling for U.S. allies including NATO to pay more for their own defense.

"Korea just happens to be the first country whose SMA expires. Japan is next and then we go on," Harris said.

Previous contracts have lasted for five years, but the two sides agreed to a retroactive, one-

year stopgap measure increasing South Korea's contribution by 8.2% to about \$870 million for 2019 after failing to meet the end-of-year deadline.

The ambassador also dismissed speculation that the U.S. killing of Iranian military commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani earlier this year could reinforce North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's belief that he needs nuclear weapons as a deterrent.

"There's a world of difference between North Korea and Iran, and we treat each country differently," he said. "There is a personal relationship between President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un, and President Trump has placed a lot of stock in that personal relationship, which doesn't exist in Iran."

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Green Beret dies in Ariz. free-fall drill

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Military officials are investigating a free-fall training incident that left an experienced parachute jumper dead Tuesday.

Army Green Beret Master Sgt. Nathan Goodman died in the incident, which occurred during routine training near Eloy, Ariz., U.S. Army Special Operations Command spokesman Lt. Col. Loren Byrner said in a statement. A member of 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), Goodman had deployed four times to Afghanistan, once to Iraq, twice to Africa and once to Kyrgyzstan since enlisting in the Army in July 2002, Byrner's statement said.

The 36-year-old was "an exceptional leader in the Special Operations community," said Col. Nathan Prunson, 3rd Group commander, as quoted in the statement.

Goodman's awards and decorations include the Bronze Star with two oak leaf clusters, Meritorious Service medal, Army Commendation medal with three oak leaf clusters and Army Achievement medal.

He had graduated from basic, jumpmaster and advanced tactical infiltration military free-fall courses, among many other schools.

Located between Phoenix and Tucson, Eloy is frequently used as a military jump site and is about 15 miles from the Military Freefall School at the Army's Yuma Proving Grounds, which is part of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.

Members of all services go for training at the free-fall school to improve various jump skills, including in high altitude-low opening and high altitude-high opening parachuting, the school's website states.

It's not clear what type of training was underway during the fatal incident Tuesday.

"No additional information can be provided as this incident is under investigation," Byrner said.

His wife, Kelly, seemed to suggest in Facebook posts that it may have been a mishap with a high altitude-low opening jump — a jump she said he'd done hundreds of times.

"He is such a skilled jumper," she wrote.

"There's no reason this should have happened! I'm just out of words."

Born in Pasadena, Calif., Nathan Goodman grew up near Chicago, Ill., before joining the Army more than 17 years ago.

"Our heartfelt condolences go out to his family during this difficult time and our priority now rests with taking care of them and our Soldiers," Prunson said.

His wife was praying "his soul is resting in Heaven," she said.

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3 detained for taking mortar from Hawaii base

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — Three civilian men were taken into custody Tuesday evening after security personnel at the main gate of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam discovered a training mortar round in their car, base officials said.

The mortar had a live fuse but contained no explosive, they said. The men, who did not have authorized access to the base, attempted to enter the Nimitz gate at about 10:30 p.m., according to a base statement released Wednesday.

After ordering the vehicle to turn around and leave, the gate guard noticed the smell of marijuana coming from the vehicle and what appeared to be possible ordnance inside the car, accord-



CALVIN JONES/AP

Three civilians were detained Tuesday at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii after gate guards noticed a live mortar round in their vehicle.

ing to the release.

Base security forces responded immediately and an explosive ordnance disposal team was called to the scene.

No ordnance detonated during the encounter and there were no injuries, according to the release.

Base spokesman Chuck Anthony said Wednesday that he had no

further information on the three men involved.

"I just know the three occupants were taken into custody by [the Naval Criminal Investigative Service] for questioning," he said. "I don't know where they are yet at this point. I only know that overnight they were still being questioned by NCIS."

All gates on the joint base were closed for about two hours, during which time no inbound or outbound traffic was allowed. The Nimitz gate remained closed through the night.

All gates were open as of Wednesday morning.

The joint base has been under heightened security since a sailor killed two civilian workers and himself at the base's shipyard on Dec. 4.

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MILITARY

Cadet seeks donations for date with porn star

By MICHAEL HILL

Associated Press

A West Point cadet briefly tried to raise money online to cover travel and lodging costs for an adult film star to be his date for a formal banquet at the storied academy.

The GoFundMe page was offline Wednesday, but the military news website Task & Purpose said the page titled "Help Me Bring Diamond Foxxx To YWW" was launched this past weekend and had listed \$370 in donations. Foxxx is a veteran adult movie actress and "YWW" refers to the upcoming Yearling Winter Weekend. West

Point sophomores are called yearlings.

The cadet wrote that he had no money and asked: "Please help a young boy's dream come true."

The U.S. Military Academy said Wednesday that it had removed the page from the site.

"Federal law prohibits members of the military from using their official positions for personal gain," the academy said in a prepared statement. "This prohibition extends to using or appearing to use ones military status to solicit gifts of money."

Foxxx, replying to questions from The Associated Press on her Instagram ac-

count, said the cadet was "very polite and respectful" and that she was "honored" by the invitation as someone from a military family. She had told him she would attend if he covered the bill for her hotel and a flight from Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

She would not identify the cadet, nor did West Point.

"My only concern is that he doesn't get in trouble," she wrote.

There was no additional comment from West Point, which has been stressing a culture of dignity and respect as the military tackles the persistent problems of sexual assault and harassment.

It was not clear if the cadet, who used a pseudonym on the GoFundMe page, will face any discipline.

Cadets have attracted critical attention on the web and social media for their behavior several times in recent years.

Last month, some West Point cadets and U.S. Naval Academy midshipmen were scrutinized for flashing what looked like a sideways OK finger gesture during a live television broadcast of the Army-Navy football game. Military investigators concluded the gestures were part of a game and not a "white power" sign, as some people suggested online.

Navy review backs expansion of bombing range in Nevada

By SCOTT SONNER

Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — The U.S. Navy has concluded no significant environmental harm would come from its proposed tripling of the size of a Nevada bombing training range, a massive expansion opposed by neighboring tribes, conservationists and at least one Democratic presidential candidate.

Adding more than 1,000 square miles would have no significant impact on the range at Naval Air Station Fallon 65 miles east of Reno is critical to meeting combat training needs for modern aircraft and weapons systems that have outgrown training capabilities over the past two decades, the Navy says.

Critics say that in addition to adversely impacting fish and wildlife, the expansion would restrict access to public land for hunters, ATV riders and back-country explorers, including at a national wildlife refuge.

The expanded range would cover an area half the size of the state of Delaware.

The Navy's final environmental impact statement issued Friday says the preferred alternative would have no significant impacts on cultural or biological resources, including only "minimal" impacts on the imperiled greater sage grouse.

However, it acknowledged the Nevada Department of Wildlife's concerns about potential impacts of increased low-level overflights on grouse, so it's proposing to fund a study by the department to monitor the bird's mating behavior during flights.

The Navy scheduled an informational meeting on the plans Jan. 28 at the Fallon Convention Center. A formal record of decision is expected later this year.

An earlier Navy analysis concluded its ability to train with newer weapons systems is severely restricted by the range's current size, which hasn't changed substantially since the 1990s when older aircraft tended to fly missions at altitudes of about 10,000 feet and approach targets from within 5 miles.



DARIN RUSSELL, U.S. NAVY/AP

F-35C Lightning IIs and F/A-18E/F Super Hornets fly over Naval Air Station Fallon's range training complex near Fallon, Nev., in 2015.

Modern aircraft fly at about 30,000 feet, approaching from as far out as 12 miles.

"Expanding the (range) for the first time in two generations is absolutely essential to our national security, enabling our country's sailors and Marines to prepare for today's threats," said Lucien Niemeyer, the Navy's acting secretary of energy, installations and environment.

"Our war-fighters must be ready at a moment's notice to effectively respond to more advanced aircraft and weaponry to defeat all potential adversaries," he said in a statement Friday.

Patrick Donnelly, Nevada state director at the Center for Biological Diversity, said the Trump administration "is trying to turn Nevada's precious public lands into a bombing range to expand the military-industrial complex."

"The Navy's planned land seizure threatens to devastate greater sage grouse breeding areas and migratory bird habitat at Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge," he said.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., who has campaigned for president multiple times in Nevada, said the Navy has failed to meaningfully consult with the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe

about expansion concerns.

"That's unacceptable. As president, I'll seek Tribal Nations' free, prior, informed consent for decisions affecting their lands," Warren tweeted Wednesday with a link to a tribal resolution condemning the expansion.

The tribe says "since time immemorial" it has engaged in religious and cultural ceremonies on the ancestral lands that have been harmed by bombing, munitions, sonic booms and low-altitude flyovers.

The Navy "is proposing to expand these horrible activities four-fold," the National Congress of American Indians said in the resolution approved in October.

The Navy's preferred alternative would ask Congress to renew the withdrawal of 316 square miles of public land that make up the current range, withdraw an additional 940 square miles of federal land for 25 years and acquire 102 square miles of private or state-owned land.

The Fallon training complex is the Navy's premier aviation training range, supporting aviation and ground training, including live-fire training. All naval strike aviation units and some Navy SEALs train at Fallon before deployment.

Senators demand probe of Army Reserve sexual assault allegations

By TODD RICHMOND

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Two Democratic senators demanded Wednesday that Army officials open an investigation into allegations that commanders of an Illinois-based reserve unit mishandled sexual assault complaints and protocols.

Illinois Sens. Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth sent a letter to Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy citing an Associated Press story last week about allegations that leaders in the 416th Theater Engineer Command had improperly opened internal investigations into at least two complaints, suspended a victim advocate after she alerted Army criminal investigators of the probes and placed a victim on a firing range with someone she had accused of sexual harassment, causing her to fear for her life.

"We urge you to pursue a comprehensive review of the troubling charges brought to light by this article and provide clarity on any ongoing Army investigation into handling of sexual assault claims by the 416th," the senators wrote.

They also immediately responded to an email seeking comment that was sent to the Secretary of the Army's general media inbox. The 416th's spokesman, Jason Proseus, referred a request for comment to Army Reserve Headquarters spokesmen at Fort Bragg in North Carolina. None of the spokesmen immediately responded to email and voice-mail messages late Wednesday afternoon.

The 416th provides technical and engineering support for U.S. military forces. It serves as the headquarters for nearly 11,000 soldiers at 26 states west of the Mississippi River.

Amey Bracey Franck, a civilian victim advocate with the 416th, provided the AP with documents that show the command launched internal investigations into at least two sexual assault cases, one in 2018 and another last year. Federal law and Department of

Defense policy require that commanders refer sexual assault complaints to criminal investigators in their respective branches in an effort to ensure unbiased investigations.

Commanders who don't follow proper channels can face reprimand, removal from command or a court martial. Internal sexual assault investigations cost the Wisconsin National Guard's top commander, Adj. Gen. Donald Dunbar, his job in December. He resigned that month at Gov. Tony Evers' request after a federal probe determined that he had been launching internal investigations rather than forwarding complaints to the National Guard Bureau.

Bracey Franck also provided documents that show she took a call from a female private in November. The woman was concerned that she was being sent to the range for a live-fire exercise alongside the subject of her sexual harassment complaint and she feared for her safety.

Bracey Franck said she relayed the woman's concerns to the 416th's sexual assault response coordinator, Regina Taylor, who responded by saying "Hmmm hmmm, well, I guess we will just wait and see and hope for the best" before hanging up.

Bracey Franck also alleged the 416th went months without holding a sexual assault management meeting, even though the Defense Department requires such meetings every month to ensure that victims are protected and can access services. And she said the unit operated for 10 months without a sexual assault response coordinator.

Bracey Franck referred both of the 416th's internal investigations to the Army's Criminal Investigations Division in June. Her commanders suspended her in November in what Bracey Franck said was retaliation for reporting the internal probes.

The senators asked McCarthy to look closely at any allegations of reprisal as part of the Army's review.

MILITARY

Air Force general relieved of command

By STEVE BEYNON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Maj. Gen. William Cooley, the two-star commander of the Air Force Research Lab at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio, was relieved of command Wednesday over allegations of misconduct.

Gen. Arnold W. Bunch Jr., who leads Air Force Materiel Command, also based at Wright-Patterson, said he fired Cooley due to “a loss of confidence in his ability

to lead, related to alleged misconduct.” He also said “new leadership” was necessary to ensure “good order and discipline.”

“The Air Force takes any misconduct allegation seriously,” Bunch said in a prepared statement. “I expect our leadership to uphold the highest standards and live up to the Air Force’s core values.”

Derek Kaufman, an Air Force spokesman, declined to characterize the nature of the allega-

tions against Cooley, but he said the Air Force Office of Special Investigations was conducting the probe.

Cooley entered the Air Force in 1988 through the ROTC program after graduating from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., with a degree in mechanical engineering, according to military records. Some of his awards include the Legion of Merit, the Bronze Star and the Air Force Commendation Medal.

He has been temporarily assigned as a special assistant to Bunch until the investigation is complete, Kaufman said.

Brig. Gen. Evan Dertien has been appointed as the commander of the Air Force’s \$7.5 billion research arm. He most recently served as director of air, space and cyberspace operations for Air Force Materiel Command headquarters.

Dertien received his commission from the U.S. Air Force

Academy in 1993, according to military records. He served as an operational F-15 pilot and completed three combat deployments. He also worked as an F-15, F-16 and F-22 test pilot in various assignments. He was also assigned as an initial cadre instructor pilot for the first operational F-22 unit at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia.

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Lakenheath F-15s deployed to air base in Saudi Arabia

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

Air Force F-15E Strike Eagles deployed to Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia earlier this month as part of a U.S. buildup of forces in the region to counter Iran.

The 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron’s jets arrived just hours after a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad killed a top Iranian general in early January, escalating already high tensions even further.

Nicknamed the “Mighty Black Panthers,” the squadron deployed on Jan. 4 from RAF Lak-

enheath, England. Its crews will be “sharpening our collective claws” working with the Royal Saudi Air Force, squadron commander Lt. Col. Jaina Donberg, said in a statement last week.

The jets arrived as the Pentagon sped more troops to the region in response to an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

The only U.S. fighter squadron currently deployed to the base about 90 miles southeast of Riyadh, the F-15Es bring added deterrence and defensive capabilities to the region, said spokesman Maj. Joshua Daniels, via email.

Tensions between Washington

and Tehran appear to have eased for now.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper had authorized sending two fighter squadrons, an air wing, four Patriot missile batteries and a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system to the kingdom to bolster security last fall after Iran-backed Houthi rebels attacked two Saudi oil facilities.

Last month, the 378th Expeditionary Air Wing officially activated at the base, which an Air Force statement said “grows daily.” The deployments mark a return for what had been a major air base for the U.S. forces in the region before operations were



MICHAEL CHARLES/U.S. Air Force

U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Emily Kline, a crew chief with the 378th Expeditionary Maintenance Squadron, salutes an F-15E pilot before a sortie at Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, on Jan. 8.

relocated to Qatar some 15 years ago.

“We turned what was just a patch in the desert to a full-up op-

erating location,” said Col. Robert Raymond, head of the wing’s operations group.

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Operations: Americans, Iraqis discuss resumption of joint operations against ISIS militants

FROM FRONT PAGE

moved to pull out the more than 5,000 troops.

Officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss decisions not yet made public.

One official said military leaders have discussed the resumption of operations with the Iraqis, but it’s not clear who was involved in those talks or whether Iraqi government leaders are publicly endorsing the move.

Iraqi leaders were angry about the American drone strike and the retaliatory attacks by Iran. Iranian missiles struck Al-Asad Air Base last week and hit near another base, but warnings sounded and no one was killed or injured.

Iraq officials, however, called the U.S. strike that killed Soleimani an unacceptable breach of Iraqi sovereignty. That strike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iran-backed militias known as the Popular Mobilization Forces. And thousands of anti-government protesters turned out in Baghdad and southern Iraq, with

many calling for the U.S. and Iran to leave their country.

U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, dismissed the calls for American troops to leave, saying the forces are critical to the fight against ISIS.

“We are happy to continue the conversation with the Iraqis about what the right structure is,” Pompeo said during a White House appearance last week.

Tensions in Iraq had been spiking since late December when a rocket attack at a base in northern Iraq killed one American contractor. The U.S. blamed Iran-backed fighters and quickly struck back. American airstrikes targeted Iranian-backed militia at five sites in Iraq and Syria, including weapons depots and command and control bases.

U.S. officials have said they believe Iraq is also interested in resuming the training, which has been going on since 2015 after ISIS began taking control of large swaths of Iraq and Syria.

CHOOSE YOUR PATH TO EXCELLENCE



MIDEAST

Soldiers replacing some Marines at embassy

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Troops from the 82nd Airborne Division who deployed to the Middle East amid escalating tensions between the United States and Iran will deploy soon to Baghdad, U.S. Central Command said Wednesday.

Paratroopers from the Immediate Response Force of the 82nd's 1st Brigade Combat Team will replace about 100 Marines from the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, a CENTCOM spokesperson said.

The Marines were spied from Kuwait as enraged Iraqi-Shiite militiamen attempted to storm the American compound on Dec. 31 following a series of U.S. airstrikes. The strikes were prompted by a rocket attack attributed to an Iran-backed Shiite militia, which killed an American civilian and wounded four American troops and two Iraqis on an Iraqi base.

The spokesperson would not say when the 82nd Airborne sol-

diers would be sent to Iraq or how many troops would be in that element, citing security concerns.

The bulk of the brigade, which is made up of nearly 4,000 soldiers, is expected to remain in Kuwait, at least for the time being, defense officials said. The brigade, which is trained to deploy on short notice, was rushed into the Middle East during the first week of 2020 as tensions increased with Iran.

The standoff reached its apex with a drone strike Jan. 3 that killed top Iranian general Qasem Soleimani at Baghdad's international airport. Iran retaliated Jan. 8 with a barrage of ballistic missiles, striking primarily at al Asad Air Base in Iraq's Anbar province, which hosts some 1,500 troops of the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition.

CENTCOM officials, as well as defense officials in Iraq and at the Pentagon, declined to comment on how long that deployment could stretch.

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HUBERT DELANY III, U.S. ARMY/AP

Paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, N.C., prepare to board aircraft bound the Mideast on Jan. 4. The troops will replace Marines at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

Troops deployed amid tensions with Iran get special pay

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

Troops sped to the Middle East amid recent tensions with Iran could be entitled to several forms of special pay, defense officials said.

The pay for being separated from their families, sent to dangerous places or subjected to poor living conditions could potentially exceed \$575 per month, depending on where the troops are located and how long they are deployed, the officials said. Troops will also receive a federal tax break for their service in the Middle East.

Troops who are deployed away from their families or other dependents for at least 30 days receive a \$250 monthly Family Separation Allowance payment, meant to pay for the "reasonable amount of extra expenses that result from such separation," said Army Lt. Col. Junel Jeffrey, a service

spokesman.

Soldiers who are deployed for more than 30 days at a time receive the money dating back to when they first left their families until they return home.

Troops who are deployed to areas designated by the Pentagon as places where hostilities could break out soon also receive Imminent Danger Pay, Jeffrey said. Troops sent into Iraq would receive that pay, which is paid out at \$7.50 per day in the imminent danger zone up to \$225 per month. Kuwait is not designated now an imminent danger zone, according to Pentagon policy.

The troops who are in Kuwait — as well as any other troops in the Middle East — could potentially receive Hostile Fire Pay, which pays troops who are subjected to hostile fire or explosions while deployed. Troops who face such events receive the full monthly payment of \$225. Troops can-

not receive Imminent Danger Pay and Hostile Fire Pay in the same month, Jeffrey said.

Deployed service members can also receive Hardship Duty Pay based on their location, according to Jeffrey. That payment, up to \$100 per month, is meant to compensate troops for having to live in "areas where the quality of life is substantially below that which most military members in the United States generally experience." Troops serving in Iraq would receive the maximum amount of \$100 per month, while the Pentagon pays troops in Kuwait \$50 per month for hardship duty.

The Marines deployed as part of a Marine Expeditionary Unit to support contingency operations in the region could additionally receive Hardship Duty Pay based on the deployment tempo, if it lasts more than 220 days, said Marine Maj. Craig Thomas, a service spokesman. Marines who qualify

for that pay — potentially including the Marines deployed to Baghdad as well as the troops with 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit sent to the Middle East in recent weeks aboard the USS Bataan amphibious assault ship — receive \$495 per month, prorated at a daily rate of \$16.50, Thomas said.

All of the troops deployed to the Middle East in recent weeks should be eligible for the Combat Zone Tax Exclusion program, which exempts service members from federal taxes while they serve in a designated combat zone or combat zone support area. Iraq, Kuwait and the greater Arabian Peninsula area are all such designated zones, as are most of the border bodies of water, meaning troops aboard ships in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf qualify, according to Pentagon documents.

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ALI ABDUL HASSAN/AP

U.S. soldiers clear rubble from a site of Iranian bombing at al Asad Air Base in Iraq on Monday. Iran's outgoing prime minister has said it was up to the next government to oust U.S. troops.

Iraq PM: Status of US troops up to next regime

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's outgoing prime minister said Wednesday it was up to the next government to see through parliament's decision to oust U.S. troops.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi's comments came ahead of planned protests against the American military presence in Iraq called for by an influential Shiite cleric.

Washington has responded to Iraq's requests to initiate troop withdrawals with blunt refusal. And on Wednesday, U.S. officials said the U.S. military is resuming operations against Islamic State militants in Iraq and is working to soon restart training Iraqi forces.

Meanwhile, Qatar said it was seeking to play a mediating role amid escalating tensions following a U.S. drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad.

Abdul-Mahdi's government is in caretaker status following his resignation in December under pressure from mass demonstrations.

"I request that the president, parliament and political parties nominate a new prime minister, a new government that has full authority because these difficult, complicated circumstances, especially with pulling of the troops ... that needs a government with full authority so it can go forward," Abdul-Mahdi said in comments aired Wednesday from a Cabinet session the previous day.

The U.S. strike prompted Iraq's parliament to pass a nonbinding resolution requesting the government end the presence of American troops in the country. Abdul-Mahdi has stood by the resolution despite signs of de-escalating tensions between Washington and Tehran. Iran retali-

ated for the killing by hitting two military bases hosting U.S. troops but did not cause casualties.

Last week, Abdul-Mahdi asked U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to work out a road map for an American troop withdrawal, but Washington responded saying the two sides should instead discuss how to "recommit" to their partnership.

Abdul-Mahdi's recent remarks suggest he is keen on maintaining good relations with Washington yet firm that U.S. troops must leave. "I am determined to keep our friendships with all. They all helped us, they all sacrificed for us, some with blood, some with financial aid in fighting (ISIS)," he said.

"We also respect the parliament's decision and we are working on implementing it in the right manner that guarantees Iraq's sovereignty."

WAR ON TERRORISM

Afghanistan War
plagued by lies,
IG tells Congress

By CRAIG WHITLOCK
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction told Congress on Wednesday that U.S. officials have routinely lied to the public during the 18-year war by exaggerating progress reports and inflating statistics to create a false appearance of success.

"There's an odor of mendacity throughout the Afghanistan issue ... mendacity and hubris," John Sopko said in testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "The problem is there is a disincentive, really, to tell the truth. We have created an incentive to almost require people to lie."

As an example, Sopko said U.S. officials have lied in the past about the number of Afghan children enrolled in schools — a key marker of progress touted by the Obama administration — even though they "knew the data was bad." He also said U.S. officials falsely claimed major gains in Afghan life expectancy that were statistically impossible to achieve.

In addition, Sopko criticized the Trump administration for classifying information that shows the war is going bad, including data on Afghan troop casualties and assessments of the Taliban's strength.

"When we talk about mendacity, when we talk about lying, it's not just lying about a particular program. It's lying by omission," he said. "It turns out that everything that is bad news has been classified for the last few years."

Congress created the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, known as SIGAR, in 2008 to investigate contractual fraud and waste in the war zone. Since 2001, the United States has spent more than \$132 billion to modernize the country — more than it spent, adjusted for inflation, to rebuild Europe after World War II.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee summoned Sopko to testify in response to a series of articles published last month in The Washington Post that revealed how senior U.S. officials did not tell the truth about the war, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the conflict had become unwinnable.

Known as The Afghanistan Papers, The Post's series was based on hundreds of confidential interviews that SIGAR conducted with key figures in the war. The inspector general had drawn on the documents to publish seven reports — called "Lessons

'It turns out that everything that is bad news has been classified for the last few years.'

John Sopko
special inspector general for
Afghanistan reconstruction

Learned" — about policy failures in Afghanistan. But the reports left out the harshest and most frank criticisms and omitted the names of more than 90% of the people who were interviewed for the project.

The Post obtained about 2,000 pages of unpublished notes and transcripts from the interviews under the Freedom of Information Act, but it had to sue SIGAR in federal court — twice — to force it to release the records.

Several lawmakers said they were shocked by revelations in The Afghanistan Papers, including blunt admissions from generals, ambassadors and White House officials that they didn't know what they were doing in Afghanistan and that the war strategy was fundamentally flawed.

"The documents, and The Post's excellent reporting, helped fill in some significant gaps in our understanding of the U.S. war in Afghanistan," said Rep. Eliot Engel, D-N.Y., the committee chairman. "It's a damning record. It underscores the lack of honest public conversation between the American people and their leaders about what we were doing in Afghanistan."

Rep. Michael McCaul, of Texas, the ranking Republican on the panel, said The Afghanistan Papers served "a sober reminder of our past mistakes and underscores the importance of the Trump administration's efforts to end the war."

Sopko defended his agency's attempts to withhold the documents, saying he had an obligation to protect the identities of people who criticized the war and wanted to remain anonymous.

"These people who spoke to us risked a lot," he said. "You know what this town is like, you know what it's like if somebody bad-mouths their old boss or whatever."

At the same time, under questioning from lawmakers, Sopko acknowledged that there was no evidence that anyone had faced retribution since The Post published its series last month. "There is no retaliation that we know of," he said.



MATT ROURKE/AP

Dignified transfer

A U.S. Army carry team moves a transfer case containing the remains of Pfc. Miguel A. Villalon past Vice President Mike Pence, center right, and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. John Hyten, center left, on Tuesday at Dover Air Force Base, Del. According to the Department of Defense, Villalon, of Joliet, Ill., was one of two U.S. service members killed by a roadside bomb Saturday in Afghanistan.

Bomb kills 5 in government car

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A roadside bombing struck an Afghan government car in southern Zabul province Thursday, killing the driver and four passengers inside the vehicle, officials said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. The provincial police spokesman,

Mohammadullah Amiri, accused the Taliban of placing a mine on the road that hit the car, which was completely destroyed in the explosion.

The driver and one of the passengers in the car were employees of the Afghan ministry for energy and water resources. The other three passengers killed in

the bombing, two Afghans and a Pakistani, were employees of the private Netrokon KEC engineering company.

Talks: Ex-Afghan intel chief
criticizes Taliban's terminology

FROM FRONT PAGE

Another Taliban attack this month claimed the lives of two U.S. service members when their vehicle hit a roadside bomb. A Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, topped the attack on Twitter, saying the blast shredded the vehicle and killed the "invaders."

The office of Afghanistan's president has demanded that the Taliban agree to a cease-fire and described the announced "reduction in violence" as inadequate, according to presidential spokesman Sediq Sediqi.

Former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh, a close ally of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, criticized the terminology "reduction in violence" as too vague. "We don't have [reduction in violence] in the dictionary of war & peace," he said in a Twitter post Thursday.

"Here is how the Talibs interpret it," he wrote. "We kill some

people instead of more people. We do one urban bombing per week instead of several." CEASE-FIRE exists in all cultures. STOP KILLING HUMANS. Simple."

A peace agreement between the U.S. and the Taliban would pave the way for the withdrawal of thousands of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, a key campaign promise that Trump wants to keep. But drawing down the troops also will increase pressure on Afghan government forces, who continue to struggle to carry out operations without close U.S. support.

The U.S. military command in Kabul has already begun reducing troops despite the stalled peace efforts. In October, Gen. Austin "Scott" Miller, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, said the number of troops in the country had been reduced by 2,000, calling the move "part of our optimization." His spokesman said it was not part of any drawdown.

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MILITARY

US troops lauded for Kenya attack response

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany—A small team of U.S. troops demonstrating “incredible heroism and courage” were responsible for fighting off militants who stormed a base in Kenya early this month in a raid that killed three Americans, a top U.S. Africa Command general said Thursday.

An investigation is underway into events surrounding the Jan. 5 attack at Manda Bay Airfield in coastal Kenya, but an initial assessment credited quick action by U.S. forces for repelling al-Shabab fighters who swarmed the base, AFRICOM’s Maj. Gen. William Gayler said.

“We had a very small U.S. force following the initial attack absolutely repel the al-Shabab attackers away from the airfield. And they did that under fire,” said Gayler, AFRICOM’s director of operations. “A very small group of U.S. and Kenyans cleared every single building out at the airfield.”

AFRICOM’s probe into the circumstances surrounding the attack comes as the Pentagon reviews how the missions of different commands operating in Africa align with a strategy that is increasingly focused on countering Russia and China. The Pentagon considering reducing AFRICOM’s troops on the continent.

But AFRICOM officials say the U.S. has an interest in keeping pressure on terrorist and extremist groups such as al-Shabab.



SEAN CARNES/U.S. Air Force

U.S. Army soldiers assigned exit a C-130J Super Hercules at Manda Bay Airfield, Kenya, earlier this month. The EARF deployed to help secure the airfield after an attack by al-Shabab terrorists.

There are roughly 6,000 U.S. military personnel across the continent, including about 700 in Somalia, where al-Shabab is based.

Countering al-Shabab is currently AFR-

ICOM’s main focus.

“We know they possess the intent to attack the United States, even in the homeland,” Gayler said.

So far, al-Shabab lacks the capacity

to strike outside of Africa, but that could change if pressure on the group is lifted, AFRICOM has warned.

AFRICOM boss Gen. Stephen Townsend is likely to face questions when he testifies before Congress this month about the attacks in Kenya and whether any threat on the continent merits putting American troops in harm’s way. Similar questions were raised after four soldiers were killed in a 2017 ambush in Niger. A special operations mission has since been scaled back.

U.S. troops in Somalia are major targets for al-Shabab, which uses high-profile attacks as a recruiting tool and to rally its force of roughly 6,000 fighters, AFRICOM said.

“They continue to look for soft spots.

Anything they can find,” Gayler said. Like the Taliban in Afghanistan, al-Shabab frequently makes exaggerated claims on social media about the damage it inflicts. Over the years, the group has gotten more aggressive in getting its message out and making false claims, AFRICOM said.

Brig. Gen. Gregory Hadfield, AFRICOM’s deputy director of intelligence, said the group’s ultimate goal is to pressure and force foreign supporters of the Somali government out of the country.

“Al-Shabab wants U.S. and other forces out of Somalia,” Hadfield said.

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Veterans group’s ad blitz urges end to war in Afghanistan

By STEVE BEYNON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON—A conservative veterans group launched a \$1.5 million advertisement campaign Thursday that urges a full withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, where U.S. forces have been fighting since 2001.

“Americans have grown tired of our involvement in ‘endless wars,’” said Nate Anderson, executive director of Concerned Veterans for America, a group backed by the Koch family. “They feel betrayed by those trusted to do what is best for our country. As we hear of more lives lost and more tax dollars wasted, we frequently find ourselves asking ‘why?’”

The ad blitz, which targets some key states in the upcoming presidential election, comes days after two soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division were killed by a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan, marking the first American fatalities overseas of the new decade. More than 2,400 troops have been killed in Afghanistan since the U.S.-led invasion in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The ad campaign will run nationwide on digital platforms, mostly on Facebook, for three months and cable spots will air for two weeks in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and for a single week in Washington, D.C., starting next week.

“In that 2016 conversation leading up to the general election, voters responded positively to the message that broke from the status quo, that the endless war in Afghanistan isn’t doing us good and we have to bring the troops home,” Anderson said. “I think what candidate Trump promised resonated with a lot of Americans. But I think that we still have a long way to go ... We want to encourage the president and Congress to do something about that.”

Anderson said the states where the ad will run have been particularly affected by the war, with Michigan and Pennsylvania suffering some of the highest troop fatality rates, with 163 and 198 service members killed in Afghanistan, respectively, according to Defense Department data.

“This is a topic that real Americans deal with,” he said. “We are still seeing the casualties of the war in Afghanistan in the headlines. While not everyone is affected

by it, those that are affected are affected deeply by it.”

All the presidential candidates in the Democratic primary promised a withdrawal of conventional forces from Afghanistan, where roughly 14,000 are still deployed.

President Donald Trump has promised repeatedly to end the war in Afghanistan, a key talking point during his 2016 presidential campaign. Yet, more troops have been sent to the region during his administration.

A PEW Research study from the summer found the public largely objects to the war in Afghanistan and veterans who served in combat are no more supportive of the conflicts than civilians, with 58% of veterans and 59% of the public saying it was “not worth fighting.”

Views do differ significantly by party, according to the study — with 46% of Republican veterans and only 26% of Democratic veterans saying the war in Afghanistan was worth fighting. The party gaps are almost identical among civilians.

However, the global policy think tank Rand Corp. published a study last week

that stated a withdrawal from Afghanistan could have severe consequences for the region. The study concluded the Afghanistan government would be at risk of losing legitimacy and the Taliban would exert dominance in the country and likely plunge it into a costly civil war.

In December, The Washington Post published The Afghanistan Papers, which offered shocking details and vivid accounts that America’s two decade war has become unwinnable and White House administrations and U.S. military leaders have been misrepresenting the conflict, sometimes painting a rosy picture of a conflict with no clear goals or plan.

Anderson said Concerned Veterans for America will continue to push for an end to the war in Afghanistan as the 2020 presidential race continues to the general election in November.

“We’re doubling down in 2020,” he said. “This is an important year for obvious reasons, we’re reaching an inflection point and we think this is a difficult conversation that needs to happen in our society.”

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Airman gets 40-year prison sentence for sexually assaulting child

By NORMAN LLAMAS
Stars and Stripes

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — An airman found guilty of sexually assaulting a child multiple times over a 17-month period while stationed at Aviano received a 40-year prison sentence, an Air Force official said this week.

Airman Alexander L. Driskill was found guilty by a military jury of

sexually assaulting a child under the age of 12, 31st Fighter Wing spokeswoman Maj. Sarah Babcock said in a statement.

Driskill had earlier pleaded guilty to charges related to possessing and viewing pornographic animation that depicted underage girls.

Driskill, an air crew flight equipment technician formerly assigned to the 31st Operations Support Squadron, 31st Fighter Wing, was also dis-

honorably discharged and reduced in rank to airman basic during a seven-day court-martial in Colorado in November.

Driskill was originally arrested and charged for viewing the obscene images. The sexual assault charge was added last year after a dentist found that Driskill’s victim had a sexually transmitted infection that Driskill also had, according to testimony. A therapist confirmed that the

child had been sexually abused.

Witnesses at his court-martial said Driskill told them that his obsession with the animation led him to fantasize about and objectify very young girls. His case, which began in Aviano with just the pornography charges, was moved to Buckley Air Force Base, Colo., last year at the request of Driskill’s legal team.

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Driskill

NATION

Impeachment trial opens in Senate

By LISA MASCARO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate opened the impeachment trial of President Donald Trump on Thursday, with House Democrats reading the formal charges in the chamber ahead of the swearing-in of all 100 senators as jurors for only the third trial to remove a president in U.S. history.

"Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye!" said the Senate's sergeant at arms, calling the proceedings to order.

Seven lawmakers prosecuting the charges, led by Rep. Adam Schiff of the Intelligence Committee and Rep. Jerrold Nadler of the Judiciary Committee, made the solemn walk across the Capitol for a second day.

Senators filled the chamber, sitting silently at their seats under strict trial rules that prohibit talking or cellphones, as the ceremonial protocol shifted the proceedings out of Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Democratic-run House to the Republican-majority Senate.

"With the permission of the Senate, I will now read the articles of impeachment," said Schiff,

standing at a lectern in the well of the chamber, a space usually reserved for senators.

"House Resolution 755 Impeaching Donald John Trump, president of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors," he began, reading the nine pages.

The other House prosecutors stood in a row to his side.

Later in the afternoon, Chief Justice John Roberts was to administer the jurors' oath to senators who swear to deliver "impartial justice." An escort committee of senators was assigned to meet him at the Capitol.

The events, unfolding during an election year as Trump seeks another term, will be a test not only of his presidency but also of the nation's three branches of power and its system of checks and balances.

Several senators are running for the Democratic party's nomination to challenge Trump in November.

The president calls the impeachment a "hoax," even as new information emerges about his actions toward Ukraine that led to the charges against him.

Pelosi said new allegations from an indicted associate of Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, Lev Parnas, only reinforces the need for the Senate to consider further testimony about the president's actions toward Ukraine.

Pelosi noted that typically a special prosecutor would investigate but she doubted that would happen.

"This is an example of all of the president's henchmen," Pelosi said, "and I hope that the senators do not become part of the president's henchmen."

Trump faces a charge that he abused his presidential power by pressuring Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden, using military aid to the country as leverage. Trump was also charged with obstructing Congress' ensuing probe.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell opened the chamber Thursday decrying Pelosi's decision to hand out "souvenir pens" after she signed the resolution to transmit the charges to the Senate the day before.

Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer renewed his party's request that the trial include



SUSAN WALSH/AP

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., second right, hands out pens Wednesday after signing the resolution to transmit the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump to the Senate for trial.

new witnesses and documents not available for the House impeachment proceedings.

On Wednesday, in a dramatic procession across the U.S. Capitol, House Democrats carried the charges to the Senate.

"Today we will make history,"

Pelosi said as she signed the documents, using multiple pens to hand out and mark the moment.

"This president will be held accountable."

Opening arguments are to begin next Tuesday after the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Giuliani associate: President had knowledge of Ukraine dealings

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A close associate of President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, is claiming that Trump was directly involved in the effort to pressure Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival Joe Biden.

Lev Parnas says he delivered an ultimatum in May, at Giuliani's behest, to the incoming president of Ukraine that no senior U.S. officials would attend his inauguration and vital American security aid would be withheld if an investigation into Biden wasn't announced.

He said Trump was aware of Giuliani's efforts to secure an investigation and the president was briefed regularly.

If true, Parnas' account undercuts a key Republican defense of Trump during the impeachment investigation — that Trump's withholding of vital military aid to Ukraine last summer wasn't a quid pro quo for Biden investigations.

"President Trump knew exactly what was going on," said Parnas, a Soviet-born Florida businessman facing a raft of criminal charges related to campaign finance violations. "He was aware of all my movements. I wouldn't do anything without the consent of Rudy Giuliani or the president."

Parnas made several potentially explosive claims in a televised interview on Wednesday night with MSNBC's Rachel Maddow.

The day after Parnas said he delivered the message, the State Department announced that Vice President Mike Pence would no longer be attending the inauguration of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Giuliani called Parnas' statements "sad."

"I feel sorry for him," Giuliani said Wednesday in a text message to an AP reporter. "I thought he was an honorable man. I was wrong."

Asked directly if Parnas was lying, Trump's lawyer replied, "I'm not responding yet."

The new accusations came as House Democrats made public a trove of documents, text messages and photos from Parnas' smartphones that appear to verify parts of his account.

A House committee chairman said Wednesday his panel will investigate what he says are "profoundly alarming" text messages among the newly disclosed materials that have raised questions about the possible surveillance of former Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch before she was ousted by the Trump administration last spring.

The messages show that a Robert F. Hyde, a Republican candidate for Congress from Connecticut, disparaged Yovanovitch in messages to Parnas and gave him updates on her location and cellphone use.

Among the documents is a screenshot of a previously un-

disclosed letter from Giuliani to Zelenskyy dated May 10, 2019, which was shortly after Zelenskyy was elected but before he took office. In the letter, Giuliani requests a meeting with Zelenskyy "as personal contact to President Trump and with his knowledge and consent."

The documents were sent to the House Judiciary Committee by three other House panels "to be included as part of the official record that will be transmitted to the Senate along with the Articles of Impeachment," according to a statement. Some of the materials were made public while others were blacked out and marked as sensitive.

Trump has repeatedly denied knowing Parnas, despite numerous photos that have emerged of the men together. Among the materials released from Parnas' phone this week were more photos of him with Trump, as well as the president's son, Donald Trump Jr., first daughter, Ivanka Trump, and her husband, Jared Kushner.

Asked by Maddow about Trump's denials of knowing him, Parnas said he had spoken one-on-one with the president numerous times.

"He lied," Parnas said of the president. "I mean, we're not friends. Me and him didn't watch football games together, we didn't eat hot dogs. But he knew exactly who we were, who I was especially."

GAO: White House broke federal law with aid hold

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House violated federal law in withholding security assistance to Ukraine, an action at the center of President Donald Trump's impeachment, a federal watchdog agency said Thursday.

The Government Accountability Office said in a report that the Office of Management and Budget violated the law in holding up the aid, saying "the President is not vested with the power to ignore or amend any such duly enacted law."

The aid in question was held up last summer on orders from Trump, but was released in September after a push from Congress and a whistleblower's complaint about Trump's July call with the Ukrainian leader became public.

The independent agency said OMB violated the Impoundment Control Act in delaying the security assistance Congress authorized for Ukraine for "policy reasons," rather than technical budgetary needs.

"Faithful execution of the law does not permit the President to substitute his own policy priorities for those that Congress has enacted into law," wrote the agency's general counsel, Thomas Armstrong, in the report.

Capitol Hill Democrats seized on the report as evidence of a lawless White House led by Acting Chief of Staff and OMB director Mick Mulvaney, who is a key fig-

ure in the impeachment investigation of Trump.

"The OMB, the White House, the administration broke — I'm saying this — broke the law," said House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

"Congress makes funding decisions, and the Trump Administration's illegal impoundment of these vital national security funds was a brazen assault on the checks and balances inherent to our democracy," said House Appropriations Committee Chairman Nita Lowey, D-N.Y. "Given that this illegal conduct threatened our security and undermined our elections, I feel even more strongly that the House has chosen the right course by impeaching President Trump. No one is above the law."

OMB has argued the hold was appropriate and necessary.

"We disagree with GAO's opinion. OMB uses its apportionment authority to ensure taxpayer dollars are properly spent consistent with the president's priorities and with the law," said OMB spokeswoman Rachel Semmel.

The GAO finding concludes that the White House budget office "withheld the funds for an unauthorized reason in violation" of the Impoundment Control Act, a federal law that requires the executive branch to spend money that is appropriated by Congress.

NATION

Warren to Sanders: 'You called me a liar'

By WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Elizabeth Warren accused Bernie Sanders of calling her a liar before a national television audience during a tense, post-debate exchange in which she refused to shake his outstretched hand, according to audio released by CNN.

The Democratic presidential rivals are strong progressives who had steadfastly refused to attack each other for more than a year on the campaign trail. But that changed Monday, when Warren said that, during a private meeting between the two in 2018, he disagreed with her that a woman could win the presidency.

Sanders, a senator from Vermont, has denied that, and did so again during Tuesday night's presidential debate, which was hosted by CNN and the Des Moines Register and held in Iowa, whose first-in-the-nation caucuses are Feb. 3.

Warren stood by her account and said it was time to confront the larger exchange of sexism in politics.

That exchange lasted only a few minutes. But after the debate was over, Warren, a Massachusetts senator, approached Sanders, who put out his hand for her



Democratic presidential candidates Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., left and Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., talk Tuesday after a debate in Des Moines, Iowa, as businessman Tom Steyer looks on.

to shake. Instead, she confronted him, and the two talked briefly in tense tones.

Neither campaign would con-

firm what was said Tuesday night, but CNN released the audio Wednesday. As she is refusing his extended hand, Warren repeats,

"I think you called me a liar on national TV." Sanders gently brushes her with his hand, then says, "Let's not do it right now."

"You want to have that discussion?" he continues. "We'll have that discussion." Warren replies, "Anytime."

Sanders then adds, "You called me a liar," before concluding, "All right, let's not do it now."

The exchange was interrupted by fellow candidate and environmentalist Tom Steyer, who said, "I don't want to get in the middle of it" and greeted Sanders as the senator walked away. In Las Vegas on Wednesday, Steyer said his attempt to offer a greeting and thanks to both senators turned awkward.

"Look, what goes on between those two senators is between them. You know, that's really a private matter, which is why I honestly think it's between them," he said.

Warren's and Sanders' aides have for days attempted to de-escalate the feud as some progressives worry that ill will between the cause's two leading voices will ultimately hurt both of them and could benefit more moderate Democratic presidential hopefuls like former Vice President Joe Biden and former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

Release of the audio is likely to ensure the political fight continues — at least for now.

New Iowa caucus rules could spark clashing claims of victory

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE
Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — The Iowa caucuses are never simple. Voters spend hours in high school gymnasiums or public libraries, starting their night by declaring support for their preferred presidential candidate. That's followed by a feverish round of lobbying in which supporters of eliminated candidates are pressed to make a new pick by the evening's end.

This year, the caucuses could be even more chaotic.

New rules that will be implemented for the Feb. 3 contest could give presidential candidates an unprecedented opportunity to spin the results. In previous years, the Iowa Democratic Party reported just one number: the number of state delegates won by each candidate. For the first time, the party will this year report two other numbers — who had the most votes at the beginning and at the end of the night.

The additional data is a nod to Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and his supporters, who argue the previous rules essentially robbed him of victory in his 2016 race against Hillary Clinton. That contest ended in a narrow delegate victory for Clinton in Iowa.

Party officials in Iowa and at the national level argue the new process will enhance transpar-

cy. But as the caucuses approach in less than three weeks, there's a growing sense that the new information will breed confusion by giving multiple candidates the chance to claim victory.

The Iowa caucuses are supposed to set the tone for the contests that follow, ultimately helping winnow the field. If multiple candidates can claim success in Iowa, it could prolong the fight for the Democratic nomination.

"Adding additional numbers is going to make it more confusing for news organizations and people watching the caucuses," said Derek Eadon, who worked as Julian Castro's deputy campaign manager, was a top Iowa aide to Barack Obama in 2008 and is now supporting Sanders. "People are going to want to know who won, and I don't know if there's consensus on one number that people will use to declare that."

What's happening in Iowa will also play out in other states that hold caucuses, including in Nevada on Feb. 22. Three numbers will be reported: the first round of votes, the final vote total after low polling candidates are eliminated and what are called state delegate equivalents. They represent the number of delegates each candidate will have at the party's state convention in June. That, in turn, determines how many national convention delegates each

candidate receives.

The Associated Press said Thursday it will base its race call of the winner on state delegate equivalents, because delegates are the metric used to decide the eventual winner of the nomination. Iowa and national Democratic Party figures emphasize this is the number to watch.

"This is a contest for delegates," Iowa Democratic Party Chairman Troy Price said. "Campaigns will highlight whatever number is the most advantageous for them. But in the end, what matters is the delegates that come out of Iowa to the national convention, and (state delegates) will remain the best indicator of that."

David Bergstein, a spokesman for the Democratic National Committee, echoed that.

"The only way to become the Democratic Party's presidential nominee is by winning a majority of national convention delegates," he said. "We strongly encourage anyone who wants to understand who is winning the race for the nomination to pay attention to those results."

The question is whether candidates will follow their lead.

Sanders' chief adviser, Jeff Weaver, said his team is "trying to win all three" categories of results. But he also suggested the campaign will emphasize the raw totals from the first round of votes



Democratic presidential candidate and former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg campaigns Wednesday in Newton, Iowa.

no matter the eventual outcome.

"At the end of the day, the first impression is probably the most accurate portrayal of who won the night," Weaver said.

There's a chance a candidate might win the most support during the first vote but lose out on the final alignment — and ultimately the delegate count — after supporters for candidates who are not viable realign after the first round of counting. This is a scenario that could play out for a candidate like Sanders or former Vice President Joe Biden, both of whom are expected to be viable in the largest number of precincts statewide.

Michael Halle, a senior adviser to former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, told reporters this

week that the caucus metric that matters for the campaign is ultimately the delegate count. Biden's team expressed the same.

"Delegates are ultimately how the nomination for the Democratic Party will get decided, so delegates are obviously an important part of what comes out of the caucuses," Biden campaign manager Anita Dunn said.

For lower-tier candidates such as Tom Steyer or Andrew Yang, the initial vote numbers could be crucial. If they don't hit the 15% support needed to win any delegates but still turn out more individual caucus-goers than expected, for instance, they could point to their initial support as evidence they remain competitive in the primary.

NATION



BOB BROWN, RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH/AP

Virginia Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, right, greets Equal Rights Amendment supporters, including former first lady Lynda Robb, left, as the Senate prepared to vote on the ERA resolution Wednesday, at the state Capitol in Richmond, Va.

Va. may be 38th state to ratify ERA

By SARAH RANKIN
Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Virginia on Wednesday moved to the brink of becoming the crucial 38th state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in what was seen as a momentous victory for the women's rights movement even though it is far from certain the measure will ever be added to the U.S. Constitution.

The state House and Senate approved the proposed amendment with bipartisan support, well over a generation after Congress sent the ERA to the states for ratification in 1972. Each chamber now must pass the other's resolution, but final passage is considered all but certain.

Amendments to the Constitution must be ratified by three-quarters of the states, or 38. But whether this one will go on to become the 28th Amendment may have to be decided in court because the deadline set by Congress for ratification of the ERA ran out in 1982 and because five states that approved it in the 1970s have since rescinded their support.

Still, the twin votes carried symbolic weight and showed how much once-solidly conservative Virginia, a place that defeated the ERA time and again, has changed.

Del. Jennifer Carroll Foy, a sponsor of the House ERA measure, told her colleagues they were taking "the vote of a lifetime."

"One hundred and sixty million women and girls across this country are waiting and will forever be changed by what happens in this body here today," she said.

ERA supporters had lined up hours in advance to get seats in the gallery. Among those who

‘We feel like we are marching up to the peak of the mountain.’

Donna Granski
ERA supporter

crowded in was Donna Granski, 73, who wore a purple, white and yellow sash covered in ERA buttons, some from her "antique" collection. Granski said she was shocked when she moved to Virginia in the late '70s and learned it hadn't ratified the ERA. She had been pushing for it ever since.

"We feel like we are marching up to the peak of the mountain," she said.

ERA advocates say it would enshrine equality for women in the Constitution, offering stronger protections in sex discrimination cases. They also argue the ERA would give Congress firmer ground to pass anti-discrimination laws.

Opponents warn it would erode commonsense protections for women, such as workplace accommodations during pregnancy. They also worry it could be used by abortion-rights supporters to quash abortion restrictions on the grounds they discriminate against women.

Virginia has undergone seismic political shifts in recent years because of increasing diversity and the growing activism and political power of women. Democrats retook control of the legislature in November's elections and made passing the ERA a top priority after Republicans blocked it for years.

The ERA had passed the Virginia Senate in previous years with bipartisan support but had never before made it to the House

for a floor vote.

It passed there on a 59-41 vote presided over by Del. Eileen Filler-Corn, the first female House speaker in the chamber's 400-year history. Spectators in the gallery erupted in the cheers as she announced the outcome. The Senate then passed it 28-12.

Republican Del. Margaret Ransone, who voted against the ERA, emphasized the missed deadline and said: "I wish I could say that this dedication and hard work has not all been for nothing."

Last week, the U.S. Justice Department issued a legal memo contending that because the deadline has expired, it is too late for states to ratify the ERA now. The only option now for ERA supporters is to try to begin the ratification process all over again in Congress, according to the memo.

The National Archives, which certifies the ratification of constitutional amendments, said it will abide by that opinion "unless otherwise directed by a final court order."

At least two lawsuits have already been filed, one of them brought last month by Alabama, Louisiana and South Dakota to block the amendment and another filed last week to clear a path for its adoption. In the meantime, congressional Democrats are working to pass a measure removing the deadline.

Teen in ROTC mistakenly shot friend, cops say

By JUAN A. LOZANO
AND JAKE BLEIBERG
Associated Press

HOUSTON — A 16-year-old student mistakenly shot his friend in their Houston-area high school's ROTC room before fleeing and being arrested several hours later, officials said Wednesday.

The two were in a room at Bellaire High School with four other students but no adult Tuesday afternoon when the 16-year-old took a semi-automatic pistol out of his waistband and pulled the trigger, killing Cesar Cortes, 19, said Lt. Greg Bartlett.

The suspect, whose name wasn't released, fled the scene after the shooting and was arrested about 3½ hours later, authorities said. He was charged as a minor with manslaughter, according to the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

District Attorney Kim Ogg said that based on evidence gathered so far, the shooting does not appear to have been intentional. She said the students were part of the school's ROTC program and that there's no indication that they'd been fighting before the shooting.

"They were friendly. They were

friends," Ogg said. "Pulling a trigger on a gun, whether you know if it's loaded or not, is an intentional act. But he did not, based on the evidence we have right now, intend to kill his friend."

Bartlett said that the shooter confessed to other students but has not admitted guilt to the police nor helped in their investigation.

Authorities are still looking for the gun, which Bartlett said the student brought from home. It was not school property nor issued by the ROTC, he said.

"This is a regular kid, evidently, who is now a violent offender," Ogg said of the shooter. "Whether he meant to be violent or not, he killed somebody. And that somebody was a son, and a student, and a friend, and it's our community's collective loss."

Police said they received a call about the shooting at around 4 p.m. and that the victim died later at a hospital.

The district canceled classes Wednesday, but they will resume Thursday with additional police officers patrolling campus, Grenita Lathan, the interim superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, said in a statement.

2 ex-officers indicted in deadly Houston drug raid

By JUAN A. LOZANO
Associated Press

HOUSTON — A grand jury has indicted two former Houston police officers — including one who is facing murder counts — for their roles in a deadly January 2019 drug raid that killed a couple, prosecutors announced Wednesday.

The indictments follow similar charges that were filed in August by the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

Ex-officer Gerald Goines was indicted on two counts of felony murder.

The grand jury also indicted Goines and his former partner, Steven Bryant, on charges of tampering with a government record.

The Jan. 28, 2019, raid came

under scrutiny after police alleged Goines, 55, who was shot during the raid, lied in a search warrant that a confidential informant had bought heroin at the home. Goines later acknowledged there was no informant and that he bought the drugs himself, authorities said.



Goines



Bryant

Bryant, 46, is accused of providing false information in a report after the raid that supported Goines' story about a confidential informant. Killed in the shooting were Rhenea Nicholas, 58, and Dennis Tuttle, 59. Their family and friends have continuously dismissed allegations that the couple sold drugs. Police found small amounts of marijuana and cocaine in the home but no heroin. During the raid, four officers were shot and wounded.

NATION

Judge rules Mass. city can't deny refugees

By PHILIP MARCELO
Associated Press

BOSTON — Refugees will continue to be placed in a Massachusetts city where the mayor is strongly opposed to the newcomers after a federal judge ruled Wednesday that local governments can't be granted "veto power" over the resettlement process, a refugee resettlement agency said Wednesday.

Maxine Stein, president of Jewish Family Service of Western Massachusetts, one of the state's largest refugee service providers,

said her agency will also continue to seek an audience with Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno to try and address his concerns.

The Democrat, a longtime critic of refugee resettlement, publicly declared that his city of roughly 155,000 residents located near the Connecticut state line would no longer accept refugees as part of President Donald Trump's executive order giving state and local governments a say in whether refugees could be resettled in their communities.

On Wednesday, U.S. District Judge Peter Mesquite in Mary-

land temporarily blocked the order, which required resettlement agencies get written consent from officials in any jurisdiction where they want to resettle refugees beyond June 2020.

"We're looking at this as an opportunity to re-establish relations and find a way to work better together," Stein said. "We don't know how this story will end, so we're taking this time to educate people. We don't think it hurts to do that."

Sarno's office didn't respond to an email seeking comment Wednesday.

His rejection of refugees sparked outcry from local faith leaders and other city officials in recent weeks. It also came in contrast to Republican Gov. Charlie Baker, who said in a letter to federal officials last month that Massachusetts would continue to welcome refugees.

Sarno argued in a letter to the editor last month that Springfield has done its "fair share" supporting refugees over the years, and suggested the newcomers are straining the city's resources.

Sarno wrote in his letter that "this issue taxes our city and

school services."

"It's time for other much more affluent communities to take on their fair share," the letter reads.

Springfield has a long history of immigration and is now majority Latino and black. More than 20 refugees have been placed there in the current federal fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, according to Stein.

About 90 refugees were placed in the city last fiscal year, up from 66 the prior fiscal year but down from more than 150 in fiscal 2017, she said.

3 crab fishermen survive capsized off Oregon coast

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Three men were in good condition early Wednesday after being cut from inside the hull of a capsized crab boat off the Oregon coast. Their harrowing rescue was caught on video the night before.

The 38-foot Pacific Miner was flipped upside-down by large waves in the middle of the harbor and then got caught on rocks in a jetty in Coos Bay, Ore., as the tide went out. A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter on a routine training mission spotted the vessel and launched a rescue, the agency said.

Rescuers could not see the men inside the capsized boat and given the ship's condition, rescuers searched for bodies in the water for more than an hour before a firefighter checked the boat itself. He heard survivors pounding on the hull from the inside, said Rob Gensorek, the owner of a local bait shop called Basin Tackle who posted video of the rescue on Facebook Live.

It was a miracle the boat didn't

wash out to sea and that all the men were saved, he said in a phone interview Wednesday.

"If you were to write a game plan for how this thing should have played out to have a perfect ending, this was it. You usually don't look for survivors in these cases, you look for victims," he said.

Firefighters tied ropes to their waists for safety and used electric saws to carve away the hull and pull the men out.

"We got three guys. Three guys saved. That's everybody, folks. The entire crew's been saved," Gensorek can be heard saying on the video.

"Amazing! God bless each one of these men that came out here. Everybody's out. Everybody's safe. It's the most amazing rescue story."

Coos Bay is about 220 miles south of Portland along Oregon's rugged southwestern coast.

The Coast Guard reported breaking waves of eight to 12 feet on the Coos Bay bar when the boat capsized.

The accident comes during the height of the season for harvest-



ROB GENSOREK OF BASIN TACKLE CHARLESTON/AP

Firefighters assist the crew from a capsized crab boat in the harbor at Coos Bay, Ore., late Tuesday. The men were in good condition early Wednesday after their boat was flipped upside-down by large waves late Tuesday and then got caught on rocks in a jetty in Coos Bay as the tide went out.

ing Dungeness crab, a winter delicacy in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska that is in high demand. The Pacific Miner had 300 crabs on board, the Coast Guard said.

The crab fishery helps keep many fishermen afloat financial-

ly, but it is also perilous. Winter storms can create huge waves and vessels periodically capsize, sometimes with deadly results.

Earlier this month, five fishermen on the crabbing boat Scandies Rose died when their vessel

capsized in waters off Alaska, where dangerous conditions have been portrayed in the television program "Deadliest Catch." And three men died last year when the boat they were on capsized off Newport, Ore., last year.

Texas school district apologizes for assignment with question on rape

By HANNAH KNOWLES
The Washington Post

The fifth question on a Texas school's biology assignment presented a violent scenario with little elaboration: "Suzy was assaulted in an alley and is a victim of rape."

Police collected a sperm sample from the crime scene, students at a high school north of Houston were told. Three people were in custody. Then came the challenge, avoid profiles of several possible culprits: "Which of the suspects raped Suzy?"

The exercise that officials say went home with about 90 freshmen last Friday drew swift concern, astonishing parents

as it made the rounds on social media and then spawned headlines. The school district soon apologized for the "inappropriate" question given out by a teacher at Klein Collins High School in Spring, about 30 miles north of Houston.

"The assignment is not part of the District's approved curriculum and is by no means representative of the District's instructional philosophy," the Klein Independent School District said in a statement. It added that it investigated the homework's source and that "appropriate corrective action has been taken."

A district spokesman, Justin Elbert, declined to elaborate Thursday morning on steps taken.

He said officials worked to address the issue "immediately" after seeing it on social media.

Parents shared their dismay at the assignment in interviews with a local news station.

"It's upsetting, and I know girls this age, just the thought ... they know that rape is forced nonconsensual sex, and that upsets them," Cookie VonHaven, whose daughter is a 10th-grader, told KPRC 2. "That's why I can't fathom a teacher putting that on a test."

The shocked reactions kept unfolding in comments online even after the school district responded as people said there were myriad other ways to test students' skills

and wondered about the judgment that let question No. 5 through.

"I'm still flabbergasted that this even made it onto a child's homework in the first place," one person wrote on Facebook.

The biology question was one of many school assignments that have been panned online and led officials to apologize. Last month, a Missouri school came under fire for a work sheet that asked fifth-graders to "set your price for a slave" — drawing similar worries about careless use of potentially traumatic material.

The assignment "does not speak to us taking care of each other as human beings," the president of the NAACP's local branch told FOX 2.

NATION

After 100 years, Prohibition's legacy remains

By DAVID CRARY
Associated Press

NEW YORK — In this era of bottomless mimosas, craft beers and ever-present happy hours, it's striking to recall that 100 years ago, the United States imposed a nationwide ban on the production and sale of all types of alcohol.

The Prohibition Era, which lasted from Jan. 17, 1920 until December 1933, is now viewed as a failed experiment that glamorized illegal drinking, but there are several intriguing parallels in current times.

Americans are consuming more alcohol per capita now than in the time leading up to Prohibition, when alcohol opponents successfully made the case that excessive drinking was ruining family life. More states are also moving to decriminalize marijuana, with legalization backers frequently citing Prohibition's failures. Many of the same speakeasy locations operating in the 1920s are flourishing in a culture that romanticizes the era.

And in a time of heightened racial divisions, Prohibition offers a poignant history lesson on how the restrictions targeted blacks and recent immigrants more harshly than other communities. That treatment eventually propelled many of those marginalized Americans into the Democratic Party, which engineered Prohibition's repeal.

"Prohibition had a lot of unintended consequences that backfired on the people who worked so hard to establish the law," said Harvard history professor Lisa McGirr, whose 2015 book "The War on Alcohol" examines Prohibition's political and social repercussions.

"It helped to activate and enfranchise men and women who had not been part of the political process earlier," she said. "That was not the intention of Prohibition supporters."

Ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1919 set the stage for Prohibition's launch a year later, culminated a century of advocacy by the temperance movement. Leading forces included the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Anti-Saloon League and many Prohibitionist organizations. Prohibition supporters assailed the impact of booze on families and the prominent role that saloons played in immigrant communities.

Prohibition greatly expanded federal law enforcement powers and turned millions of Americans into scofflaws. It provided a new revenue stream for organized crime.

By the time the constitutional amendment was ratified in January 1919, many states had enacted their own prohibition laws. That October, Congress passed a law detailing how the federal government would enforce Prohibition. It was known as the Volstead Act in recognition of its foremost champion, Rep. Andrew Volstead of Minnesota. The law banned the manufacture and transportation of any "intoxicating liquor"



Photos by AP

Beer barrels are destroyed by prohibition agents in 1931 at a dump in New York City.

— beverages with an alcohol content of more than 0.5%, including beer and wine.

Statistically, Prohibition was not an utter failure. Deaths from alcohol-related cirrhosis declined, as did arrests for public drunkenness.

What the statistics don't measure is how extensively Prohibition was flouted.

Bootleggers established vast distribution networks. Makers of moonshine and "bathtub gin" proliferated, sometimes producing fatally tainted liquor. Determined drinkers concealed their contraband in hip flasks or hollowed-out canes. Maryland refused to pass a law enforcing the Volstead Act.

McSorley's Old Ale House, established in New York in 1854 and still flourishing as one of the city's oldest bars, never closed during Prohibition. Ostensibly, it served "near beer" with permissibly low alcohol content, but in fact produced a strong ale from a makeshift brewery erected in the basement.

"It wasn't a near beer. It was McSorley's ale," said the pub's manager, Gregory de la Haba. "At least once a week, people ask, 'What did we do during Prohibition?' And my reply, 'We made a ton of money.'"

The federal government, as well as state and local authorities, spent huge sums on enforcement, yet never allocated sufficient resources to do the job effectively. Bootleggers awash in cash bribed judges, politicians and law enforcement officers to let their operations continue.

Newly hired and poorly trained Prohibition agents, along with local and state police, targeted violators at the margins," McGirr wrote in a recent article. "But they lacked the capacity and, at times, the will, to go after powerful crime kingpins."

It's simplistic to say Prohibition created organized crime in Amer-



A patrol wagon filled with confiscated moonshine sits next to a wrecked car of bootleggers in Washington in 1922.

ica, but it fueled a huge expansion as local crime gangs collaborated with those from other regions to establish shipping systems and set prices for bootlegged alcohol.

Beneficiaries included Chicago-based gangster Al Capone, who earned tens of millions of dollars annually from bootlegging and speakeasies. In the infamous St. Valentine's Day Massacre of 1929, gunmen disguised as police officers killed seven men from a gang that sought to compete with Capone's empire.

Beyond the ranks of gangsters, legions of Americans were committing or abetting crime.

Michael Lerner, in his book "Dry Manhattan: Prohibition in New York City," says courtrooms and jails were so overwhelmed that judges began accepting plea bargains, "making it a common practice in American jurisprudence for the first time."

Anti-immigrant sentiment was a key factor behind Prohibition, partly because of record-high immigration in the preceding decades.

Saloons in immigrant neighborhoods were prime targets, says Slippery Rock University history professor Aaron Cowan, because

middle-class white Protestants viewed them as political and social danger zones.

"Often the political machines run by the bosses were based in these saloons, or they were used as a conduit for extending favors," Cowan said. "So there was concern about political corruption, changing social values and immigrants learning radical politics."

Prohibition's start in 1920 coincided with a major expansion of the Ku Klux Klan, which supported the ban on alcohol as it waged its anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic and racist activities.

The Volstead Act "provided a way for the Klan to legitimize its 100% Americanist mission — it could target the drinking of those they perceived to be their enemies," McGirr said.

One notorious example occurred in 1923-24 in southern Illinois' Williamson County, where the Klan mobilized hundreds of volunteers to raid saloons and roadhouses. Hundreds of people were arrested and more than a dozen were killed.

That kind of social friction helped spur efforts to repeal Prohibition. Economics also played a



Rae Samuels holds the last bottle of beer that was distilled before prohibition went into effect in Chicago in 1930. The bottle of Schlitz was insured for \$25,000.



Temperance movement leader Carrie Nation wields her hatchet and Bible in 1910, Nation destroyed more than a few saloons with her hatchet.

role.

While some Prohibition supporters predicted it would boost the economy, it instead proved to be harmful.

Thousands of jobs were lost due to closures of distilleries, breweries and saloons. Federal, state and local governments lost billions in revenue as liquor taxes disappeared. One major consequence was an increasing reliance on income taxes to sustain government spending.

The onset of the Great Depression hastened Prohibition's demise, as the need for more jobs and tax revenue became acute. The Democratic Party called for repeal of Prohibition in its 1932 platform; its presidential nominee, Franklin D. Roosevelt, embraced that cause as he rolled to a landslide victory over incumbent Republican Herbert Hoover.

In March 1933, soon after taking office, Roosevelt signed a law legalizing the sale of wine and 3.2% beer. Congress also proposed a 21st Amendment that would repeal the 18th Amendment. Prohibition formally ended that December when Utah provided the final vote needed to ratify the new amendment.

NATION

Compassion
for crittersMinn. animal control center
collaborates to save animals

By FREDERICK MELO

St. Paul (Minn.) Pioneer Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Molly Lunarís faced a cat crisis: 84 felines, most of them less than a year old, roaming largely unattended in a St. Paul home.

In a different era, the intense animal hoarding might have been handled with back-to-back euthanasias rather than rehousing the cats.

Lunarís, however, approaches her job with a different mindset.

As the director of the St. Paul Animal Control Center by McMurray Fields, the former schoolteacher has cultivated a network of animal-rescue operations she can lean on in a pinch.

While sitting at lunch at Key's Cafe in Roseville on a recent Friday, a text message made her all but jump for joy in her seat. Over the course of a little more than an hour, a series of nonprofits stopped by to quickly pick up scores of kittens.

"We're six-and-a-half years into really building up a rescue network and transferring animals to partners, and it's been really successful for St. Paul," said Lunarís, who turned a summer job as an animal-control dispatcher in Washington, D.C., into an 18-year career.

Sitting across from her at lunch, Astrid Kammüller beamed with pride.

Kammüller is a site manager with the Golden Valley-based Animal Humane Society, one of the nonprofits funded by donors that is helping support the taxpayer-funded work of SPAC on multiple levels, including handling its surgeries and adoptions.

In St. Paul, the Humane Society staffs an adoption site and surgical truck directly next door to SPAC.

In fact, unlike the city of Minneapolis, St. Paul does not run a public adoption program of its own. Instead, the cash-strapped agency relies entirely on private placements and nonprofit partners.

"Adoption programs just take a lot of resources — financial resources, human resources, and you have to market the program," Lunarís told the St. Paul Pioneer Press. "Sitting next to an Animal Humane Society, it just made sense to join them rather than fight them."

Phil Manz, executive director of the St. Paul-based Feline Rescue, hasn't had a chance for a face-to-face with Lunarís since he began his position in October, but "I kind of feel like I know her even though I've never met her."

That's because his nonprofit receives three or four emails from Lunarís each week alerting them of current and future needs.

"All of my communications with her have been unbelievably positive," said Manz, who runs a no-kill cat facility. "She sent one out on Christmas Eve at 5 p.m. saying they're working on a large multicat residence in the next week."

SPAC is a public, taxpayer-funded part of the city's Department of Safety and Inspections.

By city ordinance, if their owners don't come forward, SPAC must hold wayward animals for at least five business days before putting them down — attempting to find them new homes, though many animals that Lunarís feels are adoptable stick



PHOTOS BY SCOTT TARUSHI, (ST. PAUL, MINN.) PIONEER PRESS/AP

Molly Lunarís, the director of the St. Paul Animal Control Center, plays with Seniorita Beans at the center's facility in St. Paul, Minn.



Gabriel is an Australian Shepherd mix at the Animal Humane Society in St. Paul.

around longer.

Under Lunarís, and then officially under the city ordinance changes adopted by the St. Paul City Council in 2014, the culture has shifted away from euthanasia unless absolutely necessary.

Still, about 5% of animals that were not already dying when they arrived at SPAC are euthanized, mostly because of intense behavior problems and overcrowding.

On Nov. 18, the message from Animal Control to its nonprofit partners was particularly dire: "We are at 100% cat capacity.

If we take in one more cat without clearing a cage first, I will have to select a cat for immediate euthanasia to make space."

Lunarís and Kammüller are of a like mind when it comes to cats.

Abandoned ones tend to be easy to place, but housed cats are far too easy to abandon. Roughly 60% of the dogs that Animal Control picks up will be returned to an owner who come looking for them. For cats? The return rate sits around 3%.

That's because many owners don't go searching for a cat unless it's been gone for

'When we have a cat returned to an owner, we're dancing through the shelter.'

Molly Lunarís

director of the St. Paul Animal Control Center

days, and they have few ways of identifying their lost kitties once they do go looking.

Calling up Animal Control in hopes of finding "a black cat" a month after the fact is of limited usefulness, Lunarís said.

Then there's the \$19-per-day boarding fee, the cost of a mandatory rabies vaccination, optional spay or neutering — many owners just don't bother.

"When we have a cat returned to an owner, we're dancing through the shelter," Lunarís said.

Her solution? Don't let cats outside at all — let them live out their natural lives indoors.

SPAC doesn't just take in dogs and cats. Not long ago, they found themselves in possession of a marmoset — a chattering, long-tailed South American pygmy monkey — which are illegal in Minnesota. Lunarís eventually found a home for the marmoset in Florida.

"We almost always have stray chickens walk through our door," Lunarís said. "We have a snake right now ... We've had alligators in the shelter."

NATION



Boys walk through a dried patch of Chandola Lake in Ahmedabad, India, in 2016. The decade that just ended was by far the hottest ever measured on Earth, capped off by the second warmest year on record, NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported Wednesday.

Fever chart: Earth just had hottest decade on record

By SETH BORENSTEIN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The decade that just ended was by far the hottest ever measured on Earth, capped off by the second warmest year on record, two U.S. agencies reported Wednesday. And scientists said they see no end to the way man-made climate change keeps shattering records.

"This is real. This is happening," Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, said at the close of a decade plagued by raging wildfires, melting ice and extreme weather that researchers have repeatedly tied to human activity.

The 2010s averaged 58.4 degrees Fahrenheit worldwide, or 1.4 degrees higher than the 20th-century average and more than one-third of a degree warmer than the previous decade, which had been the hottest on record, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The decade had eight of the 10 hottest years on record. The only other years in the top 10 were 2005 and 1998.

NASA and NOAA also calculated that 2019 was the second-hottest year in the 140 years of record-keeping. Five other global teams of monitoring scientists agreed, based on temperature readings taken on Earth's surface, while various satellite-based measurements said it was anywhere from the hottest year on record to the third-hottest.

Several scientists said the coming years will be even hotter, knocking these years out of the record books.

"If you think you've heard this story before, you haven't seen anything yet. This is going to be part of what we see every year until we stabilize greenhouse gases"

'2020 is off to a horrifying climate start, and I fear what the rest of the year will bring to our doorsteps.'

Kim Cobb
Georgia Tech climate scientist

from the burning of coal, oil and gas, said Schmidt, who was at the American Meteorological Society convention in Boston, where last weekend it was so warm he went jogging in shorts and a T-shirt. Boston had its hottest January day on Sunday, at 74 degrees, which is 2 degrees warmer than the old record.

"It's sobering to think that we might be breaking global temperature records in quick succession," said Georgia Tech climate scientist Kim Cobb. "2020 is off to a horrifying climate start, and I fear what the rest of the year will bring to our doorsteps."

Schmidt said that overall, Earth is now nearly 2.2 degrees hotter since the beginning of the industrial age, a number that is important because in 2015 global leaders adopted a goal of preventing 2.2 degrees of warming since the rise of big industry in the mid-to late 1800s. He said that shows the global goal can't be achieved. (NOAA and the World Meteorological Organization put the warming since the dawn of industry slightly lower.)

"We have strong human-induced global warming," said Friederike Otto, a climate scientist at the University of Oxford. "What we observe here is exactly what our physical understanding

tells us to expect and there is no other explanation."

Other explanations that rely on natural causes — extra heat from the sun, more reflection of sunlight because of volcanic particles in atmosphere, and just random climate variations — "are all much too small to explain the long-term trend," Princeton University climate scientist Michael Oppenheimer said.

Scientists said the decade-long data is more telling than the year-to-year measurements, where natural variations like El Nino, the periodic warming of the Pacific Ocean, come into play.

"Human-caused climate change is responsible for the long-term warming — it's responsible for why the 2010s were warmer than 2000s, which were warmer than the 1990s, etc.," Texas A&M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler said in an email. "But humans are not responsible for why 2016 was warmer than 2015 or why 2019 was warmer than 2018."

NOAA said the average global temperature in 2019 was 58.7 degrees, or just a few hundredths of a degree behind 2016, when the world got extra heat from El Nino. That's 1.71 degrees higher than the 20th-century average and 2.08 degrees warmer than the late 19th century. The last year Earth was cooler than the 20th-century average was 1976.

Dr. Renee Salas, a Boston emergency room physician and Harvard professor who studies climate change's effects on health, said "these temperatures are not just statistics but have names and stories," mentioning a construction worker and an elderly man with no air conditioning who were her patients this winter.

"The planet has a fever," Salas said, "and that's its symptom."

Fix issued after NSA finds security flaw in Windows 10 system

By MATT O'BRIEN
Associated Press

The National Security Agency has discovered a major security flaw in Microsoft's Windows 10 operating system that could let hackers intercept seemingly secure communications.

But rather than exploit the flaw for its own intelligence needs, the NSA tipped off Microsoft so that it can fix the system for everyone.

Microsoft released a free software patch to fix the flaw Tuesday and credited the intelligence agency for discovering it. The company said it has not seen any evidence that hackers have used the technique.

Amit Yoran, CEO of security firm Tenable, said it is "exceptionally rare if not unprecedented" for the U.S. government to share its discovery of such a critical vulnerability with a company. Yoran, who was a founding director of the Department of Homeland Security's computer emergency readiness team, urged all organizations to prioritize patching their systems quickly.

An advisory sent by the NSA on Tuesday said "the consequences of not patching the vulnerability are severe and widespread."

Microsoft said an attacker could exploit the vulnerability by spoofing a code-signing certificate so it looked like a file came from a trusted source.

"The user would have no way of knowing the file was malicious, because the digital signature would appear to be from a trusted provider," the company said.

If successfully exploited, attackers would have been able to conduct "man-in-the-middle attacks" and decrypt confidential information they intercept on user connections, the company said.

"The biggest risk is to se-

cure communications," said Adam Meyers, vice president of intelligence for security firm CrowdStrike.

Some computers will get the fix automatically, if they have the automatic update option turned on. Others can get it manually by going to Windows Update in the computer's settings.

Microsoft typically releases security and other updates once a month and waited until Tuesday to disclose the flaw and the NSA's involvement.

The agency shared the vulnerability with Microsoft "quickly and responsibly," Neal Ziring, technical director of the NSA's cybersecurity directorate, said in a blog post Tuesday.

Priscilla Moriuchi, who retired from the NSA in 2017 after running its East Asia and Pacific operations, said this is a good example of the "constructive role" that the NSA can play in improving global information security. Moriuchi, now an analyst at the U.S. cybersecurity firm Recorded Future, said it's likely a reflection of changes made in 2017 to how the U.S. determines whether to disclose a major vulnerability or exploit it for intelligence.

The revamping of what's known as the "Vulnerability Equities Process" put more emphasis on disclosing vulnerabilities whenever possible to protect core internet systems and the U.S. economy and general public.

Those changes happened after a mysterious group calling itself the "Shadow Brokers" released a trove of high-level hacking tools stolen from the NSA, forcing companies including Microsoft to repair their systems. The U.S. believes that North Korea and Russia were able to capitalize on those stolen hacking tools to unleash devastating global cyberattacks.

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EUROPE

‘It’s all music’

DODEA-Europe students immerse themselves in jazz

By JENNIFER H. SVAN
Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — Students from across Europe transported their trombones, trumpets and other instruments to Kaiserslautern this week for a long-standing tradition that aims to give the military school system's youth an appreciation for an American art form.

The 37th annual Department of Defense Education Activity-Europe Jazz festival started Sunday with rehearsals, giving students just a few days to prepare for a concert Wednesday night in Ramstein's city hall and a performance Thursday at the Ramstein base mall.

Guest clinician Darmon Meader, a world-renowned jazz vocalist, saxophonist, arranger and educator with the vocal ensemble New York Voices, taught the students for the seventh consecutive year.

Learning their parts in complex pieces by jazz giants such as John Coltrane and Chick Corea requires “an immersion,” said Jeff Pellaton, a retired DODEA teacher and former Ramstein band director, who is instructing at the festival.

“From the time they get up in the morning to the time they go to bed, it’s all music,” he said. “We think this is the best way (for them) to learn a true American art form. They get to be musicians and find out how far they want to take this.”

Vocalist Jordan Woods, a junior from Naples, Italy, said she wants to be a jazz musician. Jazz, she said, is funky and “lets you do all of these crazy chords and basically break all the rules of classical music.”

“It’s all about being more involved with the music versus just playing something in front of you,” said senior Tobi Faltynski, a baritone saxophone player from Wiesbaden.

Woods and Faltynski were part of the jazz workshop, newly added to the festival to complement the big band and vocal ensemble. The workshop hones jazz skills and technique and has boosted festival participation to 51 students this year, up from 28 a year ago, said Ann Engels, the festival's project officer and a fine arts instructional specialist.

Only a few of the larger schools in DODEA Europe have a jazz band as an elective, and the composition of the big band reflects that: Of the 19 students in the band, all but two are from Ramstein or Stuttgart.

“We don’t have jazz in a lot of our schools but it’s important as part of our history,” Engels said. “We want to build jazz knowledge across Europe in our students.”

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Above: The big band trombone section practices a song at the 2020 DODEA-Europe Jazz Festival in Kaiserslautern, Germany, on Tuesday. Left: Guest conductor Darmon Meader leads the big band through a rehearsal. Below right: The vocal jazz ensemble rehearses with Meader. Below left: Vilseck's Erin Walden sings with the vocal jazz ensemble.

PHOTOS BY
MICHAEL ABRAMS
Stars and Stripes



WORLD



AARON FAVILA/AP

Evacuees receive a meal at an evacuation center at Santa Teresita, Batangas province, in the southern Philippines on Thursday.

Philippine volcano's quakes, cracks send people fleeing

BY AARON FAVILA
AND JIM GOMEZ
Associated Press

LEMERY, Philippines — A Philippine volcano that erupted last weekend belched smaller plumes of ash and shuddered continuously with earthquakes on Thursday, prompting authorities to block access to nearby towns due to fears of a bigger eruption.

A crater lake and nearby river on the Taal volcano dried up in signs of its continued restiveness, and officials have warned people against speculating the five-day eruption is waning.

Soldiers and police blocked villagers from going back to the island volcano and nearby towns to retrieve belongings, poultry and cattle.

"Activity in the past 24 hours has generally waned to weak emission of steam-laden plumes," the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said. But the region remained just a notch down from the highest level of

alert the agency could issue if the volcano erupts more violently.

Many houses and farms have been damaged by volcanic ash since the eruption started Sunday, though no deaths or major injuries have been reported after tens of thousands of people evacuated.

A 65-year-old woman died of a heart attack while being moved out of Taal town in Batangas province, but officials said she had been ill and may have been stressed by the calamity. Batangas province lies more than 40 miles south of the capital, Manila.

Amid warnings of an imminent and more dangerous eruption, police cordoned off at least four towns near shores of a lake that surrounds the volcano. The move sparked arguments with villagers.

"We've lost everything," Erlinda Landicho, 59, told The Associated Press. "Our house got damaged, but I need to retrieve my pots and cooking wares and other things. They should not be

very, very strict."

Landicho, who fled with her son from Lemery municipality as the volcano erupted, was among a throng of villagers stopped by police from reentering the ash-blanketed town.

A firetruck blocked a key access road and police set up checkpoints. Beyond the barricade, Lemery looked like a ghost town partly shrouded in swirling ash.

More than 125,000 people fled their homes just in Batangas, which has declared a state of calamity to allow the faster release of emergency funds. At least 373 evacuation sites were crammed with displaced villagers and needed more ash masks, portable toilets, bottled water and sleeping mats, according to a provincial disaster response office.

The government's main disaster agency reported that a little over 68,000 people were displaced by the eruption in Batangas and Cavite provinces. The reason for the discrepancy was not immediately clear.

Putin secures power as Duma votes for new PM

BY DARIA LITVINOVA
Associated Press

MOSCOW — Mikhail Mishustin never had any political ambitions as a career bureaucrat and his name didn't come up as a top candidate to become Russia's next prime minister.

But Mishustin, 53, the longtime chief of Russia's tax service, was tapped for the post by President Vladimir Putin. The lower house of Russia's parliament, the Duma, quickly appointed Mishustin as prime minister on Thursday.

Putin put Mishustin's candidacy forward on Wednesday night, several hours after Dmitry Medvedev resigned along with the whole Cabinet. Just before that, Putin proposed sweeping changes to the constitution that could keep him in power well past the end of his term in 2024.

Mishustin, who has been in charge of Russia's taxes for the past 10 years, has always kept a low profile and stayed away from politics. He doesn't belong to a political party and in rare interviews prefers to talk about innovations in tax administration.

The move sent shockwaves through Russia's political elite and left them pondering about future Cabinet appointments.

Mishustin has been hailed for modernizing Russia's rigid tax administration system and boosting tax collection rates. Government officials and businessmen describe him as a professional and effective manager who understands the economy well, which makes him a good fit for the Cabinet during a time when Russia's economy is weakened.

"The main tasks for the new prime minister will come from the necessity to modernize the economy," Abbas Gallyamov, a former Kremlin speech writer



Mishustin

turned independent political analyst, wrote in a Facebook post. "Mishustin has a reputation of a person who has this experience."

Mishustin's lack of political ambition or any political experience indicates that he is likely to dutifully carry out the Kremlin's wishes as the head of the Cabinet — which some commentators point out is especially important in the "transition period" of constitutional reforms proposed by Putin.

Mishustin, who has a degree in information technology, has been a state official for the past two decades. His career kicked off in 1998, when he became deputy head of the State Tax Service.

Although not active in politics, he has rubbed shoulders or even collided with politicians as a player in the amateur Night Hockey League, in which Putin also plays. Mishustin also is a board member of Moscow's CSKA hockey team.

In 2010, after a two-year stint at a private investment firm, Mishustin returned to the tax service, this time as its chief and handpicked by Putin, then himself a prime minister. He earned around \$2.6 million in 2009, Mishustin was the third-richest state official in Russia at the time.

Over the years, Mishustin "has created a cutting-edge tax service from the ground up, using modern technologies and (means of) digital economy," said Vyacheslav Volodin, the speaker of Russia's lower house of parliament.

Iran's president says there is 'no limit' to country's nuclear enrichment

BY NASSER KARIMI
AND JOSEPH KRAUSS
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's president said Thursday that there is "no limit" to the country's enrichment of uranium following its decision to abandon its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal in response to the killing of its top general in a U.S. airstrike.

In a speech before the heads of banks, President Hassan Rouhani said the nuclear program is in a "better situation" than it was before the nuclear agreement with world powers.

President Donald Trump with-

drew from the nuclear agreement in May 2018, in part because it did not address Iran's support for armed groups across the region and its ballistic missile program. The U.S. has since imposed "maximum" sanctions on Iran's economy.

Iran continued to abide by the agreement until last summer, when it began openly breaching some of its limits, saying it would not be bound by the deal if it saw none of its promised economic benefits. After the Jan. 3 airstrike that killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the architect of Iran's regional military operations, it said it would abandon all restrictions

in the nuclear deal.

Thus far, however, it has only modestly increased its nuclear activity. In recent months, it has boosted its enrichment of uranium to 4.5% — higher than the 3.67% limit set by the agreement but far from the 20% enrichment it was engaged in before the deal. Uranium must be enriched to 90% to be used in a nuclear weapon.

Britain, France and Germany have spent months trying to salvage the deal, but have not found a way to continue trading with Iran amid the tightened U.S. sanctions. Earlier this week, they triggered a dispute mechanism in the nuclear deal to try to bring

Iran back into compliance. That process could lead to the snapback of international sanctions.

Under the nuclear deal, Iran was promised relief from international sanctions and re-integration with the world economy in exchange for curbing its nuclear activities.

Instead, the renewed U.S. sanctions have cratered its economy. The value of the local currency has plunged, wiping out many people's life savings, and prices have steadily risen. Protests erupted in November over an increase in gasoline prices, with more than 300 people reportedly killed. Iranian authorities have

not released an official death toll.

In his speech before the bankers, Rouhani acknowledged that the sanctions had caused economic pain. But he said economic considerations could not be separate from foreign policy and national security, indicating that Iran will not give in to sweeping demands by the United States.

He also acknowledged the rising tensions with the U.S.

"A single bullet can cause a war, and not shooting a single bullet can lead to peace," he said, adding that his administration is seeking greater security.

WIRED WORLD

Facebook navigates tricky policy on nudity

By BARBARA ORTUTAY
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — When is a photograph of nude bodies artistic or titillating? A woman's exposed nipple a political statement or erotica?

A video of childbirth might show genitalia. Should what someone considers a celebration of life be censored?

In 1964, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously wrote in a case about obscene material that he could tell the difference when he saw it.

In the 21st century, can Facebook?

The social media behemoth is in a well-publicized struggle to address hate speech, extremism, abuse and misinformation on its services — which together serve nearly 3 billion people worldwide.

At the same time, it's been retooling its policies on nudity. It's tweaking its original heavy-handed policies to account for modern nuances around gender identity, political speech and self-expression, employing thousands of people and quickly evolving artificial intelligence for the task.

But some of its users — including activists, sex therapists, abuse survivors, artists and sex educators — say policies at Facebook and its Instagram app are still too vague and unevenly enforced. They say their work is being unfairly censored, condemning them to "Facebook jail" with no warning and little, if any recourse.

And it's no small matter for them. Artists can be suddenly left without their audience, businesses without access to their customers and vulnerable people without a support network. And it means that a company in Silicon Valley, whose online platforms have become not only our town squares but diaries, magazines, art galleries and protest platforms, gets final say on matters of free speech and self-expression. It's deciding what "community standards" should be for billions of people around the world.

"Instagram really is the magazine of the world right now. And if artists are being censored on Instagram it's really dangerous for freedom of speech and openness when it comes to the body and art," said Spencer Tunick, a pho-



ROLAND JOERG, FLATZ MUSEUM/AP

Artist Spencer Tunick, a photographer known internationally for his shoots assembling masses of nude people, is seen at the FLATZ Museum in Dornbirn, Austria, in October.

tographer known internationally for his shoots assembling masses of nude people.

Tunick says that more recently he's found his work "shadow banned" by Instagram, which has become a crucial tool for artists to showcase their work. His posts weren't removed but aren't readily visible to users.

Of course, there's near-universal agreement that child exploitation and nonconsensual images don't belong on social networks. Pornography probably doesn't either.

Facebook's monitoring systems do a better job with nudity than with hate speech, extremism and misinformation. After all, a butt is a butt and a nipple is a nipple. But deciding when a nipple is art, porn or protest gets murky even when humans are doing the deciding. Teaching AI software about human sexual desire is a whole other ballgame.

From its start as a college photo directory and social network, Facebook banned nudity. Over the years, as Facebook's audience grew bigger and more diverse, the ban loosened. The company instituted exceptions for breastfeeding women, for images of post-mastectomy scars. Birthing

photos of post-gender reassignment surgery.

"We had this policy that said no genitals on the platform," said Kim Malfacini, the Facebook product policy manager who oversees how the company's community standards are developed. "Until two years ago there were no exceptions to that."

But the reviewers began seeing photos and videos women shared about their childbirth, she said. Based on the letter of the policy, those had to be removed. Malfacini said she joined Facebook around this time and began speaking with midwives, doulas, birthing photographers and others to carve out an exception for images of childbirth even though they show genitalia. Now, the images come with a warning screen that users can click through if they want to.

Most of the photos of unclothed children on Facebook are posted innocently by parents sharing vacation photos on the beach or kids in a bath. Sometimes these parents get a warning, Malfacini sometimes speaks to them.

"They have no idea that those photos could be abused," she said.

With child nudity, Facebook is more conservative. Over the age

of 3, girls can't be topless. Boys can.

It may be that, the way some bars ask anyone who looks under 40 for ID, Facebook is being extra conservative in setting the line so there won't be any gray areas. For parents of girls, though, this can feel sexist. Should Facebook ban all photos, then, of children without a shirt? Until what age? How will it verify when the kids turn 18?

"It's a challenge," Malfacini said.

Even with carefully thought-out policies, enforcement can feel arbitrary and the consequences lasting.

Dawn Robertson started her women-empowerment campaign, "Grab Them by the Ballot," before the 2018 U.S. midterm elections. She wanted to inspire women to vote, especially in light of the #MeToo movement and growing restrictions on abortion. She organized women to pose nude, covered only by strategically placed ballots, props and hashtags.

The photos catch the eye, not just because the women are naked but because we are still unaccustomed to seeing images of flawed, untouchable bodies. These are women with wrinkles and fat and tattoos and untouchable skin, a

wheelchair here, pregnant belly there — photos not meant to attract our gaze or sell a product but to defy.

Then, she posted them on Facebook and Instagram. Suddenly, the campaign took off, though much of the attention was from right-wing publications such as Breitbart, Robertson said.

"All of a sudden, it was just insane, the negative feedback we got," she said. "Facebook banned my personal account."

Robertson said her ban meant she couldn't delete racist and sexist comments that were posted on her group's page. She got no warning, or reason why she was banned, though she figured it was for nudity. That is even though Facebook allows nudity in some cases, including for political activism.

Other services are dealing with the issue in their own way. Twitter is generally more freewheeling and Tumblr only recently banned adult content — but none have the heft and size of Facebook's family of services.

Lori Handler, who works as a "sex and happiness coach," first found herself in Facebook jail two years ago, when she posted a photo of someone doing naked yoga on her page. She couldn't comment on anything or send private messages.

"I have four business pages and a personal page," she said. "And when something goes down and I can't post, I am out of business for a month."

Artists have staged protests and pleaded with Facebook. Some have found other platforms to show their work, but they say the company's sheer dominance in online communications makes it difficult to have the same reach.

"What we are trying to do is open the gate somewhat," said Svetlana Mintcheva, director of programs at the National Coalition Against Censorship, which has asked Facebook to reconsider its ban on photographic nudity. "The human body is not this horrible, scary, traumatizing thing. It's a beautiful thing."

But beauty has been historically a tricky thing to define. Which means Facebook's stance on nudity will likely continue to shift.

"No policy is set in stone," Malfacini said. "On any given policy, we are in some process of revisiting some part of it."

Google follows Apple in ending third-party 'cookies' in ad-tracking

By NAOMI NIX and GERRIT DE VYNCK
Bloomberg News

Google is planning to "render obsolete" a key tool advertisers use to track people around the web, increasing user privacy but also disrupting the marketers and publishers who rely on the search giant's ad products.

Over the next two years the Alphabet Inc. unit intends to stop supporting third-party cookies in its Chrome browser, Google said in a blog post Tuesday. Cookies are little

bits of code that stick in peoples' browsers and follow them around the web and are a core part of the online advertising landscape. They allow advertisers to target people with ads for websites they previously visited and make it easier to determine how effective certain ads were in getting internet surfers to buy something.

Apple Inc.'s Safari and Mozilla Corp.'s Firefox browsers already block third-party cookies, but Google has argued in the past those approaches are too heavy-handed and risk cutting into vital revenue for in-

ternet publishers. In the blog post, Chrome Engineering Director Justin Schuh said blocking third-party cookies could have "unintended consequences that can negatively impact both users and the web ecosystem." The company is seeking input from advertisers, publishers and Chrome users as it works to find ways to help support advertising online while still preserving privacy.

"Users are demanding greater privacy — including transparency, choice and control over how their data is used — and it's

clear the web ecosystem needs to evolve to meet these increasing demands," Schuh said.

Google has talked about this approach before. While Apple and Mozilla don't derive much money from advertising, the vast majority of Google's revenue comes from digital ads.

It's in the company's interest to keep advertisers spending more money on its websites and ad products. Google's empire was built on its ability to provide targeted advertising.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Park where homeless camp closed due to rats

CO DENVER — A park across from the state Capitol where homeless people have been camping was shut down because officials say it has become infested with rats.

Over 30 tents lined the edge of the park. Footage from KPDV-TV showed police officers going from tent to tent to let people know they need to leave.

Hundreds of rats are living in Liberty Park and could spread diseases, Tammy Vigil, a spokeswoman for the Denver Department of Public Health and Environment told The Denver Post.

Woman admits driving through state with meth

KS WICHITA — A 46-year-old woman from Los Angeles is awaiting sentencing after she admitted that she drove 60 pounds of methamphetamine through Kansas.

Maria Alvarez-Buenrostro pleaded guilty in federal court to one count of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine.

A Kansas Highway Patrol trooper stopped her on Feb. 12, 2019, in Ellis County for a lane violation. The trooper found the methamphetamine in 33 heat-sealed bags in a rear quarter panel and in both rear doors, according to the plea agreement.

She admitted she was taking the drugs to a dealer to sell, according to the agreement.

Worker finds woman in trash compactor

SC ROCK HILL — A sanitation worker's routine trash pickup in South Carolina turned into an investigation when he heard screaming coming from the compactor.

A city worker collecting trash from outside an elementary school found a woman inside the garbage truck's compactor. The Rock Hill Herald reported.

Rock Hill police said the man activated the compactor, heard screams and stopped. Police Lt. Michael Chavis said the woman freed herself from the compactor and fled on foot.

It's unclear if the woman was injured.

Woman tried to light explosive device in store

FL TAMPA — A woman tried to build an explosive device inside a Walmart store in Florida, authorities said.

Emily Stallard was charged with attempted arson of a structure, fire bombing, contributing to the delinquency of a minor, child abuse and battery on an officer, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's office said.

A security guard at the store noticed Stallard opening unpaid items including flammable materials, projectiles and matches as she roamed the store for more than an hour, according to an arrest report. She had a child with her in the store, police said.



RANDY HOEFT, THE YUMA (ARIZ.) SUN/AP

Senior moment

Wes Walch, right, 91, makes a forehand return as his partner, John Chorm, 87, watches during the Yuma Parks and Recreation Department's 2020 Senior Games, men's doubles tennis event Tuesday at the Desert Sun Stadium Courts in Yuma, Ariz. The Senior Games began on Jan. 7 and will continue until the closing ceremony on Feb. 19.

The security guard called the sheriff's office and also notified a Florida Fish and Wildlife officer who happened to be in the store at the time. The two men stopped Stallard just before she lit a wick, according to the report.

Authorities probe razor blades affixed to cars

CA TEMECULA — Authorities in southern California have started an investigation into multiple reports of razor blades being found on cars in Temecula, including blades affixed to vehicle door handles.

Resident Kristen Dalton reported the first incident to the Temecula Sheriff's Department after she discovered multiple razor blades on her car door handle, KCBS-TV reported.

The razor blades were placed in a manner likely to cause injury with two blades pointed up and two pointed down, investigators said.

Man asks for OK for sword battle with ex-wife

IA HARLAN — A Kansas man asked an Iowa judge to let him engage in a sword fight with his ex-wife and her attorney so that he can "rend their souls" from their bodies.

David Ostrom, 40, of Paola, Kan., said in a Jan. 3 court filing that his former wife, Bridgette

THE CENSUS

\$300K

including lip kits falsely presented as part of the Kylie Jenner, authorities said. Police distributed cease-and-desist warnings instead of making arrests.

Ostrom, 38, of Harlan and her attorney, Matthew Hudson, had "destroyed (him) legally."

The judge has the power to let the parties "resolve our disputes on the field of battle, legally," David Ostrom said, adding in his filing that trial by combat "has never been explicitly banned or restricted as a right in these United States."

He also asked the judge for 12 months' time so he could secure Japanese samurai swords.

Judge Craig Dreisemeier said in his filing that he won't be issuing a decision anytime soon, citing irregularities with both sides' motions and responses.

Hay tainted by toxic beetles kills 14 horses

WI MAUSTON — Hay tainted by a toxic beetle is blamed for the deaths of 14 horses and illnesses to dozens of others on a Wisconsin ranch.

Steady rain and flooding this

past summer left the hay in fields at Red Ridge Riding Stable in Mauston unusable. So, the owners, Cindy Kanarowski-Peterson and her husband, Lyle Peterson, purchased six semi loads of hay and alfalfa from farms in South Dakota and Wyoming to feed their horses.

A blister beetle that releases a toxin when crushed during harvest is blamed for the horses' deaths and for sickening another 100 horses on the ranch. Veterinarian Dave Kolb said the toxin irritates the linings of the horses' stomachs and intestines.

Firefighters to get \$1.7M for holiday pay error

WV CHARLESTON — Union firefighters in Charleston will receive \$1.7 million in back pay for being incorrectly compensated for holiday work since 2012, officials announced.

Charleston Mayor Amy Shuler

Goodwin said the settlement with firefighters Local 317 comes after a conflict between state and city law that caused incorrect payments.

The city council must still approve the settlement at their next set meeting Tuesday, with the payments scheduled to go out by the end of the month.

Audit leads to changes at Metro garages

DC WASHINGTON — Unsafe and filthy conditions at Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority parking garages have prompted changes in how the structures are cleaned.

Feces, bottles of urine, used condoms, overflowing trash and other unsanitary conditions were found at several Metrolink station garages, the transit authority's Office of the Inspector General said in a summary of its report.

The transit authority spent \$2.2 million on contracted cleaning services, according to the inspector general. The audit found that the employees weren't doing their job properly 84% of the time.

The transit authority plans to phase out contractors in favor of hiring custodial workers in-house, in order to better oversee the cleaning of the garages, according to the statement.

From wire reports



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WEEKEND



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Travel, Page 27

DE-AGING
gracefully

Filmmakers' digital effects work is on display in several current movies

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WEEKEND: GADGETS

Safe at home

Protecting your smart devices from hackers

BY MARCIA HEROUX POUNDS
Sun Sentinel

So your holiday gift was a new smart-home device. It could be Amazon's Echo, often called "Alexa," or Google Home using "Siri," which provide music, news updates and other information features; iRobot Roomba to clean your floors; the Ring doorbell; or a smart TV for voice-command video.

Maybe you're thrilled with your gift, or maybe you're a bit wary, given recent reports of cyberhacking of some devices. Internet-oriented devices can make life simpler, through voice-activated commands and remote operation, but they also can allow access to cyberhackers looking to steal your personal information.

"Everything is hackable. If you can access it, others can access it," said Yair Levy, director of the Center for E-learning Security Research at Nova Southeastern University in Davie. "Any new device you add, you add another (security) hole."

Still, billions of smart-home devices have been sold.

"Some people are saying, 'I don't care,'" said Levy, who teaches his students about the hacking dangers of smart-home devices.

If you're still sold on the convenience of using an Alexa or a Roomba, here are some expert recommendations for setting up and operating the device:

Read the manual

Don't skip over the instruction manual for your smart-home device, which has important information that could affect you down the road.

"You're so excited to play with the new device that you go 'yes,' 'yes,' 'yes' while setting up the device," observed Tim Rader, director of product development for security company ADT. The Boca Raton, Fla.-based company developed the Alexa Guard app to integrate its security product with smart-home devices.

"Don't be in too much of a rush," he said, saying that there may be options that could have an impact on privacy and security.

Change the device's password

Many smart-home devices come with a manufacturer's password to set them up. Don't use the device with this password because it's easily found online. Create a unique password for the device, and not one you've used for another account.

Reza Azarderakhsh, associate professor of computer science at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, said that while changing the password for your device is always a good idea, it shouldn't give you a false sense of security. "It doesn't make you secure against a serious cyber-attack," he said.

So step it up by changing your password every 90 days, another expert says.

Rader recommends consumers find a "scheme" that will help them remember a password, such as the words from a song you like. Then mix the



iStock

words with lower- and upper-case letters, numbers that are not repetitive, and special characters, such as &, * or \$.

Use two-factor authentication

Better yet, more smart-home devices are adding two-factor authentication, which means you're providing another piece of information beyond a password. Often it's a randomly generated code.

After some reports of login information being exposed on the Ring doorbell device, more than 3,000 users were urged by Ring to change their passwords and use two-factor authentication. That followed reports of both police and hackers gaining access to Ring video footage. Some lawsuits have been filed against Ring and Amazon, now Ring's owner.

Rader said ADT's doorbell video product also uses two-factor authentication. But consumers must choose that option when setting up the product. "Pay attention and go the extra step," he said.

Consumers should know that ADT has no access to a customer's doorbell video, Rader said. Police could only have access with a subpoena, he added.

Azarderakhsh said while two-factor authentication is better than just a password, consumers have to keep using the two factors to be effective. He said a preferable way to thwart hacking is to disconnect your smart-home devices from your internet network when not in use.

Rader said concerned consumers might consider unplugging their device at night, or when on vacation.

Manage listening

Much has been written about the Alexa device's recording capabilities. Is Alexa listening to you? Yes, because that's how the device works.

But Alexa's recordings and information requests can be deleted, Rader said.

Here are Amazon's instructions: go to "Manage Your Alexa Data" on the app. Then to "automatically delete recordings," where you can select "off." Then choose a time period to keep your voice recordings and select "confirm."

Check other devices

Rader operates his Roomba through ADT's app, which he says provides a "higher level" of security, but he said the robotic vacuum doesn't have to be connected to the internet to operate. "To turn off the Wi-Fi on Roomba, do a 'reset' by depressing all three buttons on the vacuum cleaner — clean, spot clean and home — at once and holding them down until you hear a tone, according to owner iRobot.

The smart TV you may have bought over the holidays also can connect to the internet, which allows streaming services such as Netflix.

But smart TVs may have microphones that allow users to change the channel by voice and turn up the volume, and some have built-in cameras used for facial recognition to suggest programming, according to a recent FBI public service announcement.

GADGET WATCH

CES picks for day-to-day use

BY GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service

More often than not, must-see gadgets at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas aren't something you'll use in your daily life. So I typically set my sights trolling the reported 2.9-million square feet of floor space looking for gadgets that will make anyone's digital life more efficient. With that in mind, here are a few that caught my attention to whet your appetite since you can't buy them just yet.

The Matrixx Juno, a counter-top appliance rapid beverage chiller, showed off some cold power in impressive fashion. It uses proprietary thermoelectric cooling technology to rapidly and precisely chill any beverage in lighting-fast time. A demonstration showed a 12-ounce can of beer brought to ice-cold in less than two minutes. Once plugged in, it's simple to use. Insert a canned or bottled drink and push a button, which has preset favorite temperature settings. If you want it colder, keep it in longer. Juno gets your room-temperature beverage chilled so fast using precise temperature control by integrating a cutting-edge thermoelectric cooling engine with a proprietary mixing mechanism in a liquid bath with a 2300 ml capacity. When activated, the TEC engine uses the Peltier effect to quickly cool the beverage, creating a super-fast chilling system without the need for dangerous chemicals or environmentally harmful refrigerants.

Online: junochiller.com; due out in the third quarter of 2020 with an MSRP of \$299, but available for preorder now at \$199

I can vouch for how well products by Scosche work. So when I saw the new phone mounts for vehicles, home and office, I knew I had to check them out. In all, Scosche has nine new Extendo Telescoping mounts. Since everyone sits differently, is different sized and needs a phone at a different angle, the Extendo is useful wherever it needs to be seen. Scosche has models with an arm to adjust from over 5 feet to just over 8.5 feet and has a 220-degree angle of adjustment. When mounted, your smartphone will have a 360-degree angle enabling almost any angle in landscape and portrait mode. The Extendo attaches to a window, dashboard, countertop, backslash or most any flat surface. The Extendo



Scosche/TNS

The Extendo Telescoping mount from Scosche is adjustable to suit any driver's needs.

wireless charging mounts are Qi-certified for wireless charging so if you have a wireless charging-enabled smartphone, you'll have the safest and fastest wireless charge it can handle.

Online: scosche.com; available in the spring of 2020 from \$24.99 to \$69.99

I've written previously about PhoneSoap's Pro device, which sanitizes and destroys 99.99% of bacteria on your smartphone in just five minutes. Phone-

Soap has announced its latest venture into the health tech space — **AirSoap air purifier system**. With it, you get a unique approach to air purification, utilizing adapted ionic wind technology, termed Electric Wind. According to PhoneSoap, this generates a high-energy plasma field that kills bacteria and polarizes airborne particles.

Bacteria are collected in a filter-less graphene system, resulting in cleaner and healthier air than traditional filter-based air purifiers. AirSoap uses dishwasher-safe, reusable, graphene collecting plates to efficiently reduce and eliminate invisible particulates like pet dander, pollen and dust mites, thereby reducing allergy symptoms and improving sleep quality. AirSoaps also claims that its advanced air purification system traps and kills even the smallest viruses, down to 14.6 nanometers, due to its efficient airflow design, which is much more effective than even the best disposable HEPA filters, which can only filter down to 300.

Online: phonesoap.com; \$299, available in Q2 2020



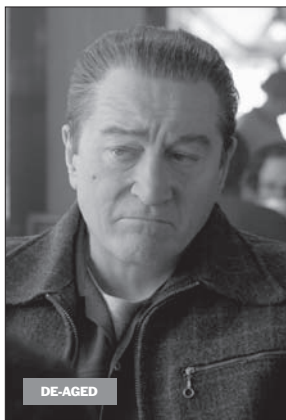
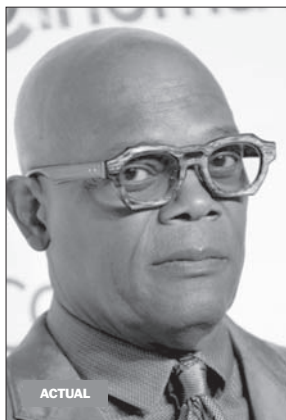
The Matrixx Juno

TNS

ON THE COVER: Actor Robert De Niro is shown before and after special effects techniques were applied to make him appear younger for the movie "The Irishman."

NETFLIX/AP

WEEKEND: MOVIES



This combination of photos shows Samuel L. Jackson, from top, Robert De Niro and Joe Pesci, stars of "Captain Marvel" and "The Irishman," respectively, during filming, left, and following digital de-aging techniques that shaved years off their faces, right.

Youthful transitions

'Holy Grail' digital effects rewinding the clock for aging Hollywood actors

By MATT KEMP
Associated Press

With Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman" expected to battle "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" and "1917" for the best picture Oscar in February, all eyes are on the special effects team that made the sprawling crime epic possible.

"The Irishman" unfolds over decades, with the 76-year-old Robert De Niro and his co-stars playing their characters from their 30s into retirement age, a feat that's made the film one of 2019's most acclaimed movies.

It's all possible through new digital de-aging techniques that in the past year in cinemas have shaved decades from Samuel L. Jackson's face in "Captain Marvel" and turned back the clock to the 1990s for Will Smith in "Gemini Man."

Each film has arrived at its reverse aging trick through a different technique, leading some to call 2019 a monumental year for de-aging in film. To many, "The Irishman" stands out from the field, thanks to its complete avoidance of "tracking markers" — dots painted onto actors' faces which allow computers to mathematically replicate facial movements and manipulate them as the director sees fit.

The youthful transitions of "The Irishman" are the work of Pablo Helman, visual effects supervisor at Industrial Light and Magic, who's an Oscar nominee for his work on "Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones" and "War of the Worlds."

Helman says the decision to forgo tracking markers came directly from Scorsese and De Niro.

"He's not going to wear a helmet with little cameras in there," says Helman. "He's going to want to be in the moment with Joe Pesci and Al Pacino on set, with no markers on him. So, if you're going to capture the performance, how are you going to do that?"

Enter the "three-headed monster," a unique camera rig that has a director camera in the center and two "witness" cameras on either side shooting infrared footage. That allowed Helman to eliminate shadows created by on-set lighting. The shadows could potentially interfere with the geometric facial shapes constructed by de-aging software.

"You're not interrupting the director's thread of thinking," explains Helman. "You're not changing the light on set, but the computer can see in a different spectrum."

While the team at Industrial Light and Magic was working on "The Irishman," another group of technical wizards was experimenting with de-aging at director Peter Jackson's Weta Workshop in New Zealand, creating an entirely digital, 23-year-old version of Smith for "Gemini Man."

"Since I started visual FX 25 years ago it's been the Holy Grail," says Bill

Westenhofer, one of the film's VFX supervisors.

"You have that many years of expertise of looking at a human face and knowing what's wrong. So, to try and get all the different things together and get it to pull off right, that's been the challenge."

To create the character of Junior — a younger clone of Smith's assassin Henry Brogan — the superstar wore the traditional gray tracksuit, complemented by a head rig with two cameras capturing his facial expressions via tracking markers.

Before filming commenced on both "Gemini Man" and "The Irishman," the teams at ILM and Weta drew up test footage to show the films' directors that what they were suggesting was possible.

For "Gemini Man," it was a clip from the 1995 movie "Bad Boys" into which they inserted two shots of their new, digital Will Smith and asked Ang Lee to spot the "fake."

For "The Irishman," De Niro also returned to the 1990s, performing the pink Cadillac scene from "Goodfellas" before being de-aged in post-production — convincing an initially skeptical Scorsese that he could bring the long-gestating project to life.

Helman and his team then spent two years looking through old movies and cataloging the targeted ages that De Niro, Pacino and Pesci would appear in "The Irishman." They created a program — similar to that used to create online "deepfake" videos where one actor's face is swapped for another's — which would check that their work on the movie was heading in the right direction.

In "Captain Marvel," a young Nick Fury was created by comparing footage from old Jackson movies with the work the actor did on set — again, using tracking markers.

"I looked at that face as, you know, maybe 'The Negotiator' face," says Jackson, referring to his 1998 movie of the same name. "Fortunately for them and for me, I had enough stuff from that period in my life that they could use a bunch of different facial expressions and films to put that face together that made sense to people who knew me from that time."

Darren Hendler, director of the Digital Human Group at Digital Domain and the man responsible for turning Josh Brolin into "Avengers" supervillain Thanos, was impressed by Jackson's appearance in the movie.

"That's more of a 2D-image-based approach where they're taking the actor's performance and then they're painting and tracking certain frames. They're still using some of the actor's performance directly, but they're modifying it. It was very believable. It may not have been exactly what the young Samuel Jackson looked like, but it definitely looked de-aged."

"Different approaches suit different requirements," says Weta's Guy Williams. "It's not a one-size-fits-all kind of situation."

AP photos

WEEKEND: MOVIES

No love from the golden statue

Female directors, supposed contenders snubbed for Oscar nominations this year

BY ELAHE IZADI, SONIA RAO,
BETHONIE BUTLER AND EMILY YAHN

The Washington Post

What a time to be alive: 2020 is the year that Adam Sandler and Jennifer Lopez didn't receive Oscar nominations, and it was considered a snub.

The academy announced nominations on Monday, which included few surprises but plenty of such omissions. Predictably, "Joker," "The Irishman," "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" and "1917" led the pack with the most nods. But other films like "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," "The Farewell" and "Uncut Gems" received little to no love from the academy.

With so many contenders who had hovered around the cusp completely out of the running, let's break down which exclusions are most glaring.

Female directors

After presenting the best director category, Issa Rae quipped, "Congratulations to those men," recalling Natalie Portman's oft-referenced introduction while presenting the "all-male nominees" at the Golden Globes ceremony two years ago.

Four names were more or less cemented ahead of Monday morning's nominations: Martin Scorsese for "The Irishman," Quentin Tarantino for "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood," Bong Joon-ho for "Parasite" and Sam Mendes for "1917." Many had hoped Greta Gerwig, who earned a directing nomination two years ago for her solo debut "Lady Bird," would again appear for her critically acclaimed adaptation of "Little Women." But the fifth slot went to Todd Phillips, whose box-office juggernaut "Joker" landed the most nominations of any project despite being one of the year's most divisive films.

There weren't too many other women who stood a chance in this arena, though it's worth noting that Marielle Heller, who has delivered two Oscar-caliber films with this season's "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" and last year's "Can You Ever Forgive Me?," is consistently snubbed. Tom Hanks, who was nominated for his supporting role as Mister Rogers in the former film, told

the New York Times he wanted to work with Heller after reading a story that inspired him to work with more female directors and then seeing her debut film, "The Diary of a Teenage Girl."

Supporting actress
Jennifer Lopez

Was J-Lo ever really going to win an Oscar? Well, no, probably not. But that didn't stop the hype machine from going into overdrive over her captivating role in "Hustlers" as Ramona, the ringleader of a group of strippers who start drugging wealthy clients to steal their credit cards. (Her pole-dancing scene instantly became legendary and probably caused a spike in moviegoers Googling her age. She's 50, for the record.) Alas, despite earning nods for a Golden Globe and Critics' Choice Award, an Academy Award nomination was not in the cards — and the writing seemed to be on the wall as the buzz for other actresses grew louder throughout award season. Still, quite a few people were very angry.

Lead actors Eddie Murphy
and Adam Sandler

This past year saw two comedic icons — both with track records of making films torn apart by critics — give away-worthy performances. And they were totally snubbed by the voting academy.

Eddie Murphy was literally and metaphorically hanging out on his couch the past few years, but decided to return to the spotlight for what he has called his "book-end" period. "I don't want to sit on the couch after 'Mr. Church,'" he told the New York Times, referring to the 2016 drama. And while Murphy received a best actor nod at the Globes for playing blaxploitation star Rudy Ray Moore in "Dolemite Is My Name," he got no love from the



NETFLIX/AP

Murphy failed to receive an Oscar nomination for his role in the "Dolemite Is My Name," his first film since "Mr. Church" in 2016.



A24/AP

Adam Sandler failed to get an Oscar nomination for best lead actor for his role in "Uncut Gems."

academy.

Sandler, who previously offered nuanced performances in "Punch-Drunk Love" and "The Meyerowitz Stories," joked that if he didn't get awards consideration for "Uncut Gems," he would return to making terrible movies "on purpose just to make you all pay." So expect that.

'The Farewell' and star Awkwafina

Though industry awards tend to more reliably predict Oscar nominations than the Golden Globes, it's still worth noting that Awkwafina, who took home a Globe for her lead performance in "The Farewell," was snubbed in the Oscars' best actress category. As Billi, an American woman who travels to China to say goodbye to her ailing grandmother, Awkwafina left her comedy roots behind to try her hand at a dramatic role — a successful effort, according to critics.

"The Farewell" has earned a number of acting, writing and best picture nominations at other ceremonies, but wasn't at all embraced by the academy. Writer-director Lulu Wang stood a decent chance of landing an original screenplay nomination, while Shuzhen Zhao, who plays Billi's grandmother, has been recognized by a slew of critics awards. In a Laura Dern-dominated supporting actress category, however, Zhao's chances were slim.

Lupita Nyong'o in 'Us'

Horror movies notoriously have a difficult time at the Oscars, but it was hard to stop thinking about Lupita Nyong'o's double roles in the psychological thriller "Us," including the unsettling portrayal of her own doppelganger. But even though plenty of critics felt that Nyong'o deserved the nomination alongside front-runners such as Scarlett Johansson ("Marriage Story") and Renee Zellweger ("Judy"), it unfortunately wasn't a huge surprise when she was left off the list — although it certainly angered plenty of fans, particularly because Johansson got two separate nods (the other for "Jojo Rabbit").

CONTINUED ON PAGE 25



A24/AP

Awkwafina, right, won a Golden Globe this month for "The Farewell." It was a proud moment for Asian Americans in Hollywood: the first win by an actress of Asian descent in the lead category. There was much hope for an Oscar nod, but that did not happen.

WEEKEND: MOVIES

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People of color

The Oscar nominations weren't as devoid of diversity as the recent backlash-inducing BAFTA nominations, which included not a single actor of color. But people of color are still overwhelmingly underrepresented among this year's slate of nominees. One of the more glaring omissions—aside from Awkwafina and J.Lo—is the academy's failure to nominate renowned costume designer Ruth E. Carter for "Dolemite Is My Name." Carter made history last year as the first black costume designer to win her craft's most prestigious award for "Black Panther." (Her long-time collaborator Spike Lee is probably not very happy right now.)

The lead and supporting actor categories are dominated by white men. The lead acting category, meanwhile, includes a nod for Cynthia Erivo, the British actress who somewhat controversially portrayed Harriet Tubman in a long-awaited biopic. But Erivo's nod underscores the idea that actors of color only win praise for playing certain types of roles. (Remember how Jadakiss pointed this out back in 2004?) Nyong'o, whose devilishly dual role was left out of the running this year, famously won an Oscar in 2014 for portraying a slave owner in Mel Queen's period drama "12 Years a Slave."

"Y'all love your black women in the key of slave narrative over there in Hollywood," one social media user tweeted Monday, noting that Nyong'o technically played two roles in one film.

The academy could have surprised Oscar viewers by honoring bolder choices—the polarizing romantic drama "Queen and Slim" or Jamie Foxx's SAG-nominated performance in "Just Mercy"—for example. But that seems too much to ask for a ceremony that gave its top honor last year to "Green Book."

A few good men

It would have been a shock at this point if Joaquin Phoenix, Adam Driver and Leonardo DiCaprio were referenced for their performances in "Joker," "Marriage Story" and "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood," respectively, making the last two best actor slots all the more interesting. Antonio Banderas has consistently been in the mix for roles in Pedro Almodóvar's "Pain and Glory," a Spanish film nominated in the international feature category; "The Two Popes" actor Jonathan Pryce has been as well, nominated alongside scribe Anthony McCarten and supporting actor Anthony Hopkins.

Two big-name actors nominated elsewhere but snubbed by the academy include Robert De Niro, the anchor of Martin Scorsese's crime drama "The Irishman," and Christian Bale, who played a racer driver in James Mangold's "Ford v. Ferrar," which fared quite well in the technical categories. Taron Egerton, who campaigned like crazy for his performance as Elton John in "Rocketman," won a Golden Globe, but, alas, isn't in contention for an Oscar.

'Apollo 11'

The best feature documentary category may have given some predictable love to "American Factory," the Netflix documentary produced by the Obamas' production company, but nothing for the one documentary considered the front-runner to win: "Apollo 11." Todd Douglas Miller used archival footage, including images never seen before by the public, to depict the Apollo 11 moon landing. It had an impressive haul for a documentary, earning \$15 million worldwide at the box office, and won the Sundance Film Festival's U.S. documentary grand jury prize.

But this category can be wild. Last year, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?" was thought to be the movie to beat. The critically acclaimed feature about Fred Rogers earned \$2.2 million at the box office, the most of any documentary in 2018, showing that there is still a strong appetite for heartwarming stories about real people who are actually kind. But, stunningly, it didn't receive an Oscar nomination.

Earworm supplier 'Frozen II'

The sequel to Disney's beloved, Oscar-winning 2013 film about a princess trying to reunite with her estranged ice crystal-wielding sister has received mixed reviews, but we still expected to see it, among the indies and Pixar's "Toy Story 4," on the best animated films list. In the end, "Frozen II" managed only to get nominated in the best original song category (for "Into the Unknown"). That's no small feat, considering Beyoncé failed to get a nod for "Spirit," her rousing gospel-infused track from "The Lion King."

Beyonce

Does the academy want to make a powerful enemy of the Beyhive? The superstar's fans weren't thrilled when her ballad from the "Lion King" remake was left off the list for best original song. While she would have been a shoo-in to replace Elton John's ("I'm Gonna) Love Me Again" from "Rocketman" and Cynthia Erivo's "Stand Up" from "Harriet," it's still surprising that Beyoncé's star power couldn't at least edge out "I Can't Let You Throw Yourself Away" from "Toy Story 4."

'A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood'

A movie about America's hero, Mister Rogers, played by America's actually-good-person-actor, Tom Hanks, sounds like it was tailor-made for some Oscars love, right? Nope. The nihilistic and dark "Joker" led the pack with 11 nominations, while only one nomination went for the movie about a cynical journalist's friendship with the beloved children's TV host. "A Beautiful Day" is a feel-good-yet-grounded narrative depicting transformation and how to face one's demons in an actually healthy manner (the opposite of "Joker"). Call this a snub for non-toxic masculinity.



Dean-Charles Chapman, left, and George MacKay in a scene from "1917" directed by Sam Mendes. The film may defeat "Joker" for best picture — not because it's better, but because it's less disliked.

Going with their guts

Voters rely on preference for best picture

By GLENN WHIPP
Los Angeles Times

Talk about a contracted awards season: The Oscar nominations have just arrived, and the best picture race may be all but over.

Congratulations to Sam Mendes and the "1917" team. Don't forget to thank the Hollywood Foreign Press Assn., again when you accept the Oscar.

Maybe I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Maybe in my haste to wash away the sins from an awards season that roundly ignored movies made by women about women in favor of, oh, two more popes than should have been nominated, I'm anxious to roll up the red carpet, watch "Parasite" win its one measly Oscar and finally get around to binge-watching "Dickinson."

But if Monday's nominations didn't settle the Oscar best picture race, the Producers Guild Awards on Jan. 18 could squash the suspense entirely. And after winning the Golden Globe for best picture drama and over-performing at the box office the following weekend (\$36.5 million, thanks in part to that Globes bounce), "1917" probably will be celebrating again when the PGA Awards reveal its final winner.

Mendes' war movie has accrued unstoppable momentum in a brief window of time.

The biggest Oscar nomination on Monday wasn't Todd Phillips' nod for directing "Joker" or Kathy Bates slipping in ahead of Jennifer Lopez in the supporting actress category. (Did you not cry along with Bates in "Richard Jewell" when the FBI returned her Tupperware and it was ruined?)

No, the most significant nomination was "1917" earning a spot in the original screenplay category, making Mendes a triple nominee (he produced, directed and co-wrote, with Krysty Wilson-Cairns, the script) and keeping the film safe from some daunting Oscar history.

A movie can win the best picture Oscar without earning any acting nominations. (The list includes "Slumdog Millionaire," "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" and another war film, "Braveheart.") A movie can win without a screenplay nod. (Remember when "Titanic" was king of the world?) But if it's shut out in both areas, you can forget about writing that acceptance speech. You won't need it.

So "1917" bagged that screenplay nomination. And it doesn't really need the acting noms because everyone loves George MacKay and Dean-Charles Chapman playing the two British soldiers on a mission to deliver a crucial warning message to comrades about to fall into a trap set

COMMENTARY

by the Germans. Not enough to nominate them, no, but they arrived late to stacked acting categories that didn't even have room for Robert De Niro ("The Irishman"), Christian Bale ("Ford v. Ferrar"), Taron Egerton ("Rocketman"), Eddie Murphy ("Dolemite Is My Name") and (hold on, I'm wiping away a tear) Adam Sandler's live-wire turn in "Uncut Gems."

"Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" earned 10 nominations, just like "1917" and Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman," a mob epic that feels fated to repeat the 0-for-10 Oscar run of the filmmaker's 2002 period drama "Gangs of New York." "Joker" led the field with 11.

But unlike the other 23 categories in which a popular vote determines the winners, the best picture Oscar is decided on a preferential ballot. Voters will rank the nine nominated movies and then PricewaterhouseCoopers accountants will count the votes and, if one film has more than 50% of the first-place votes, it will win best picture.

If that doesn't happen (and it probably won't), the movie with the fewest first-place votes will be eliminated, with its votes given to that ballot's second-ranked film. The process continues—lowest-ranked movie eliminated, votes redistributed to the next choice down—until one film has more than 50% of the vote.

This means that a divisive movie like "Joker," a bleak and disquieting film that a lot of academy members tell me they won't even watch ("I don't want to invite that character into my life," one tells me), can't win. The system is geared to reward not the "best" picture, but the least disliked. "Green Book," last year's winner, embodies this winner-most-people-can-live-with ethos. Who hates "Green Book" other than the internet?

"Joker" and "1917" are both impeccably crafted, reflected in the nominations for production design, cinematography, makeup and hair and sound. But the former wallows in nihilism while the latter offers a moving portrait of bravery, fortitude and friendship. Which movie will be the least disliked?

Maybe neither. Maybe the Oscar will go to "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood," a wistful ode to ... Hollywood and its past. But, making these decisions, voters don't reflect on questions like: Would it be fair and right if Sam Mendes has two Oscars for directing and Quentin Tarantino has none? Voters go with their guts. Voters also like to back a winner. And with a soaring box office and honors piling up, "1917" has the look of a movie about to own the awards season.

WEEKEND: MOVIE REVIEWS

‘Bad Boys for Life’

A refreshing tribute to '90s action cinema

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

After turning in the first two greatly beloved, operatically souped-up action opuses in the *Bad Boys* franchise, everyone's favorite gearhead maximalist auteur Michael Bay is no longer behind the camera for the third, “*Bad Boys for Life*” (though he is in front of it, briefly). Not to worry, though, as Belgian filmmaking duo Adil El Arbi and Bilal Fallah, clearly devoted students of Bay's style, craft a wonderful facsimile of his greatest hits, from his swirling low-angle dolly shots to capturing the glorious clash of sunset and neon that screams Miami. From the very first sequence of a screeching Porsche burning up the streets of South Beach, El Arbi and Fallah prove that as directors, they have the horsepower to match Bay, if not yet the grace. Nevertheless, their first major American feature outing is a loving and skillful tribute to pure '90s action cinema, and it's a hoot for fans of the franchise.

That's largely because Martin Lawrence is back, baby! After popping up in a small but memorable role in Harmony Korine's “*The Beach Bum*” last year, Lawrence reunites with blown movie stardom and walks away with “*Bad Boys for Life*,” reminding audiences what a crucial element he is to the unique



Sony Pictures

Will Smith, left, and Martin Lawrence reunite for another go-round as Miami narcotics detectives in “*Bad Boys for Life*,” the third installment of the *Bad Boys* franchise.

mix of action and comedy that makes the *Bad Boys* films work. The yin and yang, push and pull of the soft globball Marcus (Lawrence) and his partner, the hardened Mike (Will Smith), is thrown into even starker relief when Marcus becomes a grandfather. His desire to retire clashes with Mike's quest for vengeance after being shot by a mysterious motorcyclist, testing the whole “for life” part of the

pals' mantra. Forget boyhood; Marcus just wants to see them become a few “good men.” Longtime Miami cop Mike has a few South American drug cartel enemies who might want to see him dead. But for this particular assassin, it's personal, and after facing death, Mike loses his already tenuous grasp on his own cool. In the process, the bad boys have to learn a few new tricks from some younger,

high-tech, less lethal new dogs (Vanessa Hudgens, Charles Melton, Alexander Ludwig). The script, by Chris Bremmer, Peter Craig and Joe Carnahan, relies on a few too many twists and bait-and-switches that don't even feel manipulative, just unearned. Probe its depths and politically it's a bit problematic, but El Arbi and Fallah throw enough surface pleasures like gorgeous Miami time-lapses, rosy vistas and bon-

kers action sequences at the audience to distract from inspecting anything below.

The film is lensed beautifully by their longtime cinematographer Robrecht Heyvaert, who also shot the insanely stunning French feminist revenge horror flick “*Revenge*.” “*Bad Boys for Life*” delivers the kind of richly textured visual eye candy that expresses a hyperreal sense of place and a tone. It's an aesthetic all too often lost in the gray blur of CGI that passes for action filmmaking these days. That's why the '90s throwback vibe of “*Bad Boys for Life*” is so refreshing: El Arbi and Fallah predominantly use practical stunts, sets and effects; the action is plotted crisply and carefully. One night sequence featuring a motorcycle and sidecar, helicopter and rocket launcher rivals even Bay's jaw-dropping bridge car chase from “*Bad Boys II*.”

El Arbi and Fallah have done seemingly the impossible. They've taken over an action franchise 17 years after the last installment and made a film that's a delightfully dizzying love letter to action filmmaking of yore, while respectfully preserving the franchise's best elements. It really makes you believe that these bad boys just might actually be for life.

“*Bad Boys for Life*” is rated R for strong bloody violence, language throughout, sexual references and brief drug use. Running time: 124 minutes.

In cursed ‘Dolittle,’ they could not have done less

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service

In 1967, Twentieth Century Fox undertook an expensive and complicated production of “*Doctor Dolittle*,” based on a series of children's books by Hugh Lofting, about a doctor in Victorian England who talks to animals. Starring Rex Harrison, “*Doctor Dolittle*” was a notoriously doomed production, troubled by quarantined animals, Harrison's behavior and a budget that ballooned to three times its size. “*Doctor Dolittle*” received terrible reviews and tanked at the box office, though Fox was able to buy off a few Oscar trophies for special effects and song.

Refusing to learn from the past some five decades later, Universal is condemned to repeat it with their own “*Dolittle*,” starring Robert Downey Jr. in the title role, boasting a cool \$175 million budget (or maybe more?), plus rumors of production woes and multiple reshoots. And after getting a gander at the at-best mediocre, at-worst deeply upsetting drack that “*Dolittle*” director Stephen Gaghan managed to get on screen, it's official. With the exception of the successful Eddie Murphy film series that borrowed the name and concept faithfully, adapting *Dolittle* is simply a cursed endeavor.

Do little? They could not have done less. The only appropriate adjective for this “*Dolittle*” is “hasty.” Everything feels slapdash and half-rendered; the plot proceeds in a fashion that could only be described as perfunctory. One hopes this is actually the third time they shot it, as everyone on screen seems to be in a stumbling daze, especially Downey Jr. as the frazzled-dazzled doctor. You'll spend most of the movie wondering about the mysterious provenance of his half-Irish, half-Scottish accent and the rest of the time wondering if they actually dubbed his voice along with the rest of the animals.

The story finds Dolittle a hermit, shut up in his estate, grieving the loss of his wife, who disappeared on one of her adventures. One day, an intrepid young man, Stubbins (Harry Collett), and an annoying young girl, Lady Rose (Carmel Laniado), crash his pity party. Stubbins wants to help save animals and Lady Rose wants Dolittle to save the young Queen Victoria (Jessie Buckley), who has taken to her bed with a mysterious illness. Dolittle only rushes to her bedside because his land, deeded as a nature preserve, will be signed off to the treasury upon the queen's death. Nothing like a real estate quibble to get the blood pumping.

Dolittle determines the queen's been poisoned and sets off on an oceanic



UNIVERSAL PICTURES/AP

Dr. John Dolittle (Robert Downey Jr.), has a moment with Jip the dog (voiced by Tom Holland) in the talking animal adventure “*Dolittle*.”

journey to acquire the necessary antidote, which is also a journey into his past and back to himself. He encounters the dread pirate ex-father-in-law King Rassoul (Antonio Banderas), outsmarts the sniveling Mudfly (Michael Sheen) and, distressingly, extracts a wind instrument from a reptile's “impacted colon,” learning that when he helps others, he's truly helping himself.

One of the worst tones a film can strike is “hectic” (unless that film is “*Uncut Gems*”). Not only is “*Dolittle*” hasty, hectic and harried, but worse, it is ut-

terly halfhearted. Written by Gaghan, Dan Gregor, Doug Mand and Thomas Shephard, the character development is negligible, the jokes unoriginal, lowest-common denominator fare. Transitions have been lost along the way, so we're thrown from location to location with no context or any reason to care about the half-baked adventure. The only thing “*Dolittle*” does well is out-bomb the infamous bomb “*Doctor Dolittle*,” and that is one for the history books.

“*Dolittle*” is rated PG for some action, rude humor and brief language. Running time: 106 minutes.

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Europe



Guardians of the forest

Search for the faces in the trees at Steckeschlaafer gorge

By BRIAN FERGUSON
Stars and Stripes

Like something out of “Game of Thrones,” the faces carved in the trees at Steckeschlaafer gorge bring the forest to life — although I didn’t see any of them crying blood.

Located in the Morgenbach valley, a nature preserve on the Rhine River about 40 minutes west of Wiesbaden, the trail boasts 15 small wooden bridges that take hikers over and around the Haselbach stream.

Having hiked a few trails in Germany, I know that hiking can get boring. I like to hike, I just want to be entertained at the same time. On most hikes, all the trees look alike and the trail seems to never end.

But not in the Steckeschlaafer gorge. Franz Kellermeier decorated the gorge with 46 carvings starting in 1971, a sign posted at the entrance of the trail explains.

Faces are at every turn as you walk down the path at Steckeschlaafer. Some you have to look for,

while others are elaborate and jump out at you. Many of the carvings look as though the trees are consuming them.

Although this hike is only about $\frac{2}{3}$ of a mile long, it took us about an hour to complete. Much of our time was spent searching for “face trees” and taking pictures. I suspect there are more than 46 faces. It’s a beautiful place to visit.

The trail is not difficult and should be ideal for children. It’s also great for easily bored grown-ups like me: it held my attention all the way through.

For those looking for a longer trip, many other trails lead through the forest. Hikers and cyclists can take the long journey to Rheinstein or Reichenstein Castle, for instance. We didn’t go that route as the weather turned wet, and our feet and hands got cold. But I vowed to return to Steckeschlaafer gorge for a longer hike once it stops raining in Germany.

A good time to go might be in May, when there’s an annual gorge festival. The proceeds of the festival help to preserve the path and the tree spirits.

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ON THE QT

DIRECTIONS

About an hour north of Ramstein, an hour east of Spangdahlem or 40 minutes west of Wiesbaden. Enter “Steckeschlaafer-Klamm im Morgenbachtal” in Google maps. There is a parking area right across the street from the trail entrance. Visitors can hike, trail run and/or mountain bike.

COSTS

Free

— Brian Ferguson

PHOTOS BY BRIAN FERGUSON/Stars and Stripes

Steckeschlaafer gorge boasts more than 46 tree carvings, some harder to find than others. The carvings are the work of Franz Kellermeier and began appearing in 1971.

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Europe

Make tracks for boyant, booming Belfast

Belfast, Northern Ireland's capital city, is perhaps best known for the sectarian strife that took place here during the era of the "Troubles," and as the birthplace of the Titanic (and many other ships that didn't sink). While these two claims to fame aren't too uplifting, Belfast's story is hardly a downer. This unsinkable city, just two hours away from Dublin by train, makes for a fascinating day trip.

Wandering through cheery downtown modern-day Belfast, it's hard to believe that the bright and bustling pedestrian center had been a subdued, traffic-free security zone not long ago. While Belfast has the rough edges of any industrial big city, you have to look for trouble to find it. The city is bristling with cranes and busy with tourists. Aggressive sectarian murals are being repainted with scenes celebrating heritage ... less carnage, more culture.

These days, Unionists (those who feel they're primarily British; most are Protestant) and Nationalists (those who feel they're Irish first, most Catholic) still typically live in segregated zones. But they are now totally integrated in the workplace — and they all root for the Belfast Giants hockey team together.

Relations between Belfast's sectarian neighborhoods remain strained, however. To get the full story, it's important to visit the working-class neighborhoods of both sides: the Shankill Road and Sandy Row areas (Protestant) and the Falls Road district (Catholic). To me, they're best seen with a private taxi tour. The cabbies who offer tours of these neighborhoods grew up here and know their city well, offering honest (if biased) viewpoints on

the Troubles, political murals and local culture. My time with them is always the most interesting 90 minutes of any visit to Belfast.

I once had a guide who was particularly determined to make his country's struggles vivid. He introduced me to Belfast's "Felon's Club," run by former



Rick Steves

IRA prisoners. Hearing heroic stories of Irish resistance while sharing a Guinness with a celebrity felon gave me an affinity for their struggles. The next day at Milltown Cemetery, I walked through the green-trimmed gravesites of his prison-mates

— some of whom starved themselves to death for the cause of Irish independence.

The easiest way to get a dose of the Unionist/Protestant side is to walk Sandy Row, the namesake street of Belfast's oldest residential neighborhood. Stop at a Unionist memorabilia shop or pub and ask a local to explain the Unionist symbolism that fills colorful murals here.

Across the River Lagan, east of the center, the historic Titanic Quarter — the former shipbuilding district now filled with museums, entertainment and posh condos — symbolizes the rise of Belfast. Next to the original slipways where the Titanic was built, the massive Titanic Belfast museum commemorates Belfast's prolific shipbuilding industry. Six stories tall, the striking museum is clad with more than 3,000 sun-reflecting aluminum panels. Inside, the tale of the famous cruise liner



Rick Steves

Belfast's City Hall, topped by a 173-foot-tall copper dome, is a polished and majestic celebration of Victorian-era pride built with industrial wealth.

is told with creative displays — beginning with a short gondola ride through ship-building vignettes.

At the heart of town is another impressive landmark: Belfast's City Hall. This grand structure's 173-foot-tall, green copper dome dominates the city center. Its worthwhile Belfast History and Culture exhibit does an especially good job covering the city's industry, its World War II bombings and the Troubles. City Hall faces the commercial hub of Belfast, Donegal Place. Queen Victoria would recognize the fine 19th-century brick buildings here — built in the Scottish Baronial style when the Scots dominated Belfast. But she'd be amazed by the

changes since then. Belfast was bombed by the Germans in World War II, and, with the Troubles killing the economy at the end of the 20th century, for decades afterward, little was built. But with peace in 1998 — and government investing to subsidize that peace — the 21st century has been one big building boom.

Ireland isn't just Blarney Stones and leprechauns, and Belfast's troubled history is a key part of the story. A visit here offers a chance to balance your Irish vacation — and witness a city's powerful rebound.

Rick Steves (ricksteves.com) writes European travel guidebooks and hosts travel shows on public television and public radio. Email him at rick@ricksteves.com and follow his blog on Facebook.

TOP TRAVEL PICKS

Having a ball in Vienna

Attending a ball in palatial surroundings sounds like something straight out of a fairy tale, but in Vienna, it's an experience accessible to those born and bred in Austria's capital, transplants, exp-pats and yes, even tourists.

Although balls take place year round, the time period between New Year's Eve and late February is considered prime season for these elegant outings. Organized by various clubs, professional organizations, schools, charities and other groups year upon year, tickets to the most prestigious events such as the Opera Ball go like hotcakes, whereas for others, getting your white-gloved hands on some is a dreamable dream.

As for any outing so steeped in tradition, certain do's and don'ts apply. Appropriate dress is a must; for the ladies, this entails a floor-length gown; for men, a tux and bow tie is generally, but not always, the order of the day. Some balls, such as the Hunter's Ball, see guests turn up in traditional Trachtenanzug and Dirndl. Those reluctant to spring for evening wear can rent the appropriate attire.

It's considered good form to master a few dance steps. The Elmayer Dance School is one of the city's best-known places to go for a crash course in Viennese waltz, with group lessons offered in English from 4 p.m.-5



Karen Bradbury

Read more about things to do in the Europe Traveler blog: [strides.com/blogs/europe-traveler](https://stripes.com/blogs/europe-traveler)

p.m. for 50 euros per couple on most Saturdays. Online: elmayer.at/en

No date? Like tux or gown, these are available for hire as well. A "taxitaenzer" is a skilled and dance-loving lady or gent who'll serve as your date for a price. Online: wien.taxi.dance and the Bonbon Ball on Feb. 21. No date? Like tux or gown, these are available for hire as well. A "taxitaenzer" is a skilled and dance-loving lady or gent who'll serve as your date for a price. Online: wien.taxi.dance and the Bonbon Ball on Feb. 21. Online: tinyurl.com/yjpy5ky6

Belgium fetes its gypsy jazz icon

Django Reinhardt, a Belgian-born guitarist of Roma parentage, is widely considered one of Europe's greatest jazz musicians. Despite losing the use of two fingers in a fire as a teenager, his skill with his instrument and his ability to forge a new genre of music, Gypsy swing, ensure him an enduring place in jazz history.

To celebrate his Jan. 23 birthday, the cold winter month of his birth is lit up with a party that honors his legacy. Through Jan. 31, DjangoFollies celebrates what would have been his 110th year with more than 20 performances in venues across Belgium.

Some of Brussels' best-known clubs, including the Ancienne Belgique, Flagey and Jazz Station, host the concerts. Aalst, Antwerp, Charleroi, Mol and several other cities stage events as well. This year's selection of artists includes the Dan Ghabrián Trio, Dario Napoli Modern Manouche Project, Fapy Lafertin New Quartet, the Kamau Quartet featuring Tcha Limberger and many others, with groups performing a number of times at different venues. Event tickets can be purchased through the location hosting the show, and prices start at around 14 euros and up. Online: djangofoillies.be

DjangoFollies is just one of many of Europe's winter jazz festivals. Other events highlight-



tulpenrijd.nl

Amsterdam's Dam Square becomes a tulip-picking garden on Jan. 8. Visitors can select up to 20 flowers to take home for free.

ing quite different subgenres of jazz include the Sons d'Hiver in Paris (through Feb. 8); Northern Lights Festival in Tromsø, Norway (Jan. 23-Feb. 2); and Winter Jazz in Copenhagen (Feb. 6-29).

In Amsterdam, please do pick the flowers

Amsterdam's ever-lively Dam Square pushes the fast-forward button on spring come Jan. 18, if only for the day.

The centrally located square overlooked by grandiose buildings takes on the guise of a vast garden in honor of National Tulip Day, the day that marks the start of the tulip season. From 1 p.m., locals and visitors can stroll through the raised beds with a

special bag in hand and choose up to 20 tulips to bring home with them. As the pluck-your-own garden is always a big hit, be prepared to wait in line for a half-hour or more. To make the wait more pleasant, roaming musicians play upbeat tunes. Entry is free. Online: tulpenrijd.nl

Should the riotous color of all those tulips leave you longing for more, it's never too early to start planning a trip to Keukenhof. One of the biggest gardens in Europe is found in the town of Lisse, about 30 miles southwest of Amsterdam. Its run for the 2020 season lasts March 21 to May 10, and this year's theme is "A World of Colors." Online: keukenhof.nl/en

WEEKEND: FOOD & DINING

Europe



SLOBODAN LEKIC/Stars and Stripes

A Balkan Platter for two, a tray with various grilled meats and salad, is garnished with djuvec, a flavorful rice and vegetable stew, at Balkan Grill in downtown Kaiserslautern.

Time-tested heartiness

The Balkan Grill still going strong after 50 years

By SLOBODAN LEKIC
Stars and Stripes

Located on the geographical crossroads between eastern and central Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the Balkans are renowned for the variety of the local cuisine, which incorporates influences from all of these regions.

The Balkan Grill in downtown Kaiserslautern, Germany, offers some of the region's typically hearty meals, consisting of lots of grilled meats, seasonal produce and side dishes such as ayvar, a spicy pepper-based relish.

When the restaurant — run by three generations of the Petrovic family from southern Serbia — opened in the early 1960s, it was the first foray for many GIs into the exotic dishes of south-eastern Europe.

It also attracted a dedicated following among the locals in Kaiserslautern, with its large portions of tasty food at reasonable prices. Today, many of the regular clientele are children and grandkids of people who started frequenting it 50 years ago.

The restaurant also offers some German favorites, including the best jaegerschnitzel I've ever eaten, as well as more exotic dishes such as the Peruvian Carapulca, a stew of pork and rice, almonds, mushrooms, eggs, ham, curry and other spices.

My own favorite Balkan dish is the spicy pljeskavica (plyeskah-vee-tsa), a hamburger-like patty made of a mixture of beef, pork or veal, with a feta-like cheese in the middle.



**AFTER
HOURS
GERMANY**



Ayvar and sopska are typical Balkan salads.

BALKAN GRILL

Location: Muhlstrasse 18, 67659 Kaiserslautern
Hours: Noon-2 p.m. and 6-11 p.m.; closed Mondays
Prices: Starters from 6 euros, soups from 4 euros, entrees from about 8 euros, nonalcoholic drinks about 2 to 3 euros, wine and beer from 3 to 5 euros. Portions are hefty. Special lunchtime menu every day except Sundays and German

Another ubiquitous grilled meat dish is cevapcici (che-vahp-chi-chi), finger-sized skinless sausages served in bunches of five to 10, served inside flatbread. Cevapcici are a variation of the Middle Eastern kebab, which arrived in the Balkans via the medieval Ottoman empire. Also popular is the Veseli Bosanac (Merry Bosnian), a rolled steak served with djuvec (jov-vech), a flavorful rice and vegetable stew used in many local dishes.

— A Balkan Platter for two — a tray with various grilled meat and salads — is garnished with djuvec, but if you want

holidays with dishes available from 6 euros to 8 euros.
Menu: English menus are available.

Information: Seating is limited and the restaurant is frequently packed, so make reservations on weekends and holidays. Weekday lunches can get crowded. For reservations, call (+49) (0)631-70786.

— Slobodan Lekic

something guaranteed to draw attention, order the king prawns flambéed with brandy.

The atmosphere is very friendly and English is spoken. The interior is very pleasant and during the summer, they have outdoor seating.

An important note: although the Petrovics hail from southern Serbia where the food tends to be very spicy, they have adapted their dishes to the blander tastes of their German clientele. So if you like your fare hot, make sure to mention it when placing the order.

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Salt and time make at-home fermentation simple, reliable

KATHERINE HARMON
COURAGE
The Washington Post

The proposition sounds a little dubious: Leave some vegetables in a jar on your counter. For weeks. Then eat them.

It's perfectly safe, say the pickling enthusiasts. They're great for you. You'll love them! they say.

Not convinced? Science is here to explain why fermenting vegetables is not only perfectly safe but also surprisingly easy and rewarding. Spoiler: Microbes do most of the work.

In our hyper-Pasteurian, expiration date-driven era, it might be difficult to relinquish control over our food to these mysterious forces. But a small measure of understanding yields rich rewards: crisp classic sauerkraut, warmly tart beets, bright preserved lemons and just about anything else.

These classically preserved foods and so many others have been expanding their presence on cooler shelves in supermarkets and even on some restaurant menus. In part, we have to thank for this the proliferation of new research on gut health and the outside role beneficial microbes (which are bountiful in fermented foods) play in helping our gut, immune and overall health.

The process is quite simple: Salt, submerge, wait. And eat. Why does this method work



STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG
For The Washington Post

Fermenting adds depth to fruits and vegetables.

so reliably? Salt kills harmful microbes and encourages beneficial ones, such as those that produce lactic acid, which are similar to many found in the gut microbiome. Similarly, submerging the produce in liquid (whether added or extracted from the food itself) protects it from the less-desirables.

As fermentation gets underway, the ascendant bacteria begin to alter the overall environment. They consume some of the carbohydrates from the produce, creating carbon dioxide (which appears as bubbles) and, more important for our purposes, lactic acid (which lowers the pH).

Food regulations deem fermented food safe at or below a pH of 4.6. For comparison, a lemon has a pH of 2 to 3.

CLASSIC SAUERKRAUT

Versatile sauerkraut is easy to make and can stand as a condiment, snack or a side dish. While this recipe calls for caraway seeds, you can opt for other seasonings to flavor your kraut, such as dill or juniper berries.

The sauerkraut needs to be made at least 2 weeks ahead of when you plan on eating it.

The sauerkraut can be stored, covered and refrigerated for up to 6 months.

Ingredients

1 small head green cabbage (about 2½ pounds), wilted or damaged leaves discarded
1 tablespoon kosher salt, or more as needed
½ teaspoon caraway seeds

Directions

Using a chef's knife, cut the cabbage into quarters.

Cut away the core from each quarter and discard. Place a cabbage quarter on the cutting board, flat-side down and slice across into ¼-inch strips. Repeat with the remaining wedges. Place the shredded cabbage in a large bowl and sprinkle with the salt.

Using your fingers, massage the cabbage forcefully for 5 to 10 minutes until it sheds enough liquid to submerge all pieces. Take a break every few minutes as needed; the salt will keep working while the brine. (If after about 10 minutes you

still don't have enough liquid to submerge the cabbage, mix 1 teaspoon of salt per 1 cup of water and add as needed.)

Add the caraway seeds and, using your hands, mix into the cabbage until combined.

Pack the cabbage into a 6-cup clean, wide-mouth jar or crock.

Using a stone or water-filled plastic bag, weigh the cabbage down so it is submerged in the brine. Cover with a lid, cheesecloth or an airtight fermenting lid (which allows building gases to escape without allowing new air — and microbes — in).

If using a plain lid, be sure to "burp" the jar regularly — ideally before you notice it bulging — to release gas. Alternately, you can cover with cheesecloth.

Place in a moderately cool location. A temperature range of 65 to 70 degrees will yield sauerkraut within 2 to 3 weeks.

Taste weekly to determine when the sauerkraut meets your preferred taste and texture. Some people prefer their kraut crunchy and light, while others enjoy a softer, more sour kraut that has been fermenting longer.

Store in a sealed jar in the refrigerator for up to 6 months. The sauerkraut will continue to slowly ferment over time. It will maintain its texture best when submerged in the brine.

Makes 24 servings (6 cups)

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Europe



PHOTOS BY DAVID HAGE/Minneapolis Star Tribune

Naples' waterfront isn't always easy to reach, but it remains a busy and picturesque harbor.

Baroque, but fixed anyway

Naples restored from dangerous afterthought to tourist-worthy hub of history, art and street life

BY DAVE HAGE
Star Tribune (Minneapolis)

On a trip to this thrumming city about 15 years ago, art historian Michael Stoughton hoped to visit a famous Baroque church in the Sanità neighborhood. An Italian friend said no — the area was too dangerous. If you must, the friend added, then take a taxi and make the driver wait for you.

Today that same neighborhood attracts thousands of tourists every year, drawn by the lovely basilica, the Santa Maria della Sanità, and two nearby catacombs that are among the most remarkable in Europe.

Sanità's evolution is just one measure of the way Naples has transformed itself in the past decade, from a grimy and dangerous city to a destination that is worthy of travelers who are serious about European history, Baroque art and Italian street life.

For years, this southern Italian capital was a tourist afterthought. Venice had canals. Rome had the Vatican. Naples had smog, litter, street crime, flies, graffiti and crazed Vespa drivers.

That began to change in 2013, when Neapolitans staged a series of street demonstrations to demand a crackdown on organized crime and pollution. Since then, Naples authorities have scrubbed the Centro Storico, flooded the sidewalks with police and Carabinieri and converted some of the hectic streets to placid pedestrian zones.

Tourism is on the rebound, and it's easy to understand why. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Naples was a cultural powerhouse. It was the third largest city in Europe, after London and Paris, and served as a second capital for mighty families such as the Hapsburgs and the Bourbons. Late Renaissance artists drifted down from Florence and Rome, seeking commissions from its wealthy bankers and merchants. Together, they left behind a remarkable collection of palaces, castles, churches, frescos, sculptures and paintings, including three masterpieces by the late Renaissance genius Caravaggio.

And did I mention pizzerias? We had the best pizza of our lives. Three days in a row. Without trying hard.

To be sure, Naples is still crowded and gritty. If you've been to Rome and found it overwhelming, you probably shouldn't venture farther south where, as one writer put it, Italy only gets more Italian.

But we came away from a five-day visit intoxicated by Naples' vibrant street life, charmed by its garrulous people and dazzled by masterpieces from the early Baroque.

And if you do begin to feel that Naples is crowding you, it's easy to escape for day trips to Pompeii, the breathtaking Amalfi Coast or the Reggia Caserta, a rural Bourbon palace that is even bigger than Versailles.

Toro Farnese

Naples' cultural pearls are small and scattered, but mainly located in the city's old section, so it's easy to string them together in a one-day or two-day walking tour.

A day might start at the Museo Archeologico, one of the great archaeological museums of Europe. It occupies a magnificent 17th century palazzo in the center of town and houses artifacts from Pompeii and Herculaneum, including some extraordinary mosaics and the monumental sculptures Toro Farnese and the Farnese Hercules.

From there, it's a short stroll to Naples' cathedral, the Duomo, a breathtaking Baroque church; to the Sansevero Chapel, with the extraordinary sculpture Veiled Christ; and finally to Santa Chiara, where you can catch your breath and relax in the large, lovely garden cloisters.

Break up the day at whatever point you like with lunch at any one of several simple but outstanding wood-fire pizzerias along Via Tribunali. (Our favorite: Pizzeria de Matteo.) Follow that with gelato, espresso and people-watching on the Spaccanapoli — the longest, straightest street in Naples and the perfect place to rub shoulders, literally, with Neapolitans out for a stroll.

A second day might start at the Capodimonte, a palatial Bourbon hunting lodge that sits on a hilltop above Naples and houses the finest art collection in southern Italy, including stupendous works by Titian, Raphael and Caravaggio.



The working-class Sanità neighborhood, once considered too dangerous to visit, now attracts tourists to its stunning churches and catacombs.



Legends say the Castel dell'Ovo was built on top of an egg placed by the poet Virgil, who said the city would never fall as long as the egg was preserved.

The aforementioned Naples catacombs are down the hill not far away. The most famous of the two, the Catacombs of San Gennaro, was founded to house the relics of Gennaro, the city's patron saint, but soon became the favored burial place of Neapolitans who wanted to rest in eternity alongside the holy items. It is vast and more than a little creepy. A newer discovery, but in some ways more interesting, is the Catacombs of San Gaudioso, where the city honored deceased worthies by placing their skulls in wall niches atop frescoed bodies that represent civic virtues — justice, valor, piety and so forth. San Gaudioso is now maintained by an ambitious social justice nonprofit that uses tourism dollars to sponsor youth sports and train young volunteers.

The Naples waterfront is also an essential stop, although — par for Italy — reaching it from the city center can mean fighting your way through a tangle of busy streets and fenced-off construction sites. You'll be rewarded by two magnificent sights — the Castel dell'Ovo (the "castle of the egg") and Castel Nuovo (the "new castle," built in the 13th century). They make lovely visits, especially the stretch west of Castel dell'Ovo, a lovely waterfront promenade with great views and numerous sidewalk cafes.

Lost In Pompeii

Travelers who want to see Naples but can't handle the urban scrum should consider staying in Sorrento, a town of 30,000 residents just across the bay. Sorrento sits atop a beautiful sun-drenched cliff and is the opposite of Naples: relaxed, spotless and designed for tourists. Its attractive marina has frequent ferries to Naples and its small, central train depot has regular rail service to Pompeii (a 30-minute ride).

In Sorrento you can also catch a bus or hire a taxi for a drive down the Amalfi Coast, often described as one of the most beautiful landscapes on Earth. Don't worry which town you visit (Amalfi? Positano?) — the whole point is the hair-raising ride. Each hairpin turn reveals

CONTINUED ON PAGE 31

FROM PAGE 30

one amazing view after another of blessed cliffside villas and the blue Mediterranean below.

Although Naples was the core of our visit, perhaps the single greatest excursion was an afternoon trip to Pompeii. We had read up on this famous site, a Roman town destroyed and at the same time preserved when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 A.D. But we weren't prepared for the scale and detail: It sprawls across a large site and is worth several hours. You can lose yourself in the grid of alleyways, courtyards, temples and half-preserved houses, but you'll learn how Roman citizens actually lived day to day, right down to swabbing their streets and taking a bath.

A second day-trip destination, less known than Pompeii but arguably as great, is Paestum, an abandoned city from the 6th century B.C. with three of the greatest preserved Greek temples in the world. The Doric masterpieces loom over a grassy plain, each offering a stately study in the Classical aesthetics of order and balance. Do not miss the adjacent museum, which contains a 5th century B.C. Greek burial chamber known as the Tomb of the Diver. Its astonishing frescoes show you in vivid detail how the Greeks thought about life and afterlife.

If Sorrento itself doesn't bathe you in sufficient beauty, take a 30-minute ferry ride to Capri. This vertiginous island with vertiginous views has attracted the rich and famous from Emperor Tiberius to Oscar Wilde, and looking down from the beautiful cliffs, it's easy to imagine Beyoncé or Mick Jagger sunning on the deck of a bobbing yacht. A funicular railway takes you from the marina to the hilltop town of Capri, and if those views aren't breathtaking enough, you can catch a bus to a higher town, Anacapri, and take a chairlift to the summit of Monte Solaro. The town of Capri is packed with touristy shops, high-end and low; a better bet might be a boat tour around the island or a stroll through Giardini di Augusto, with spectacular views of the sea.

You won't come home from Naples raving about romantic canals or the imperial Vatican, but spend a few days there and you'll be able to repeat the lines that Goethe found so memorable: Vedi Napoli e poi muori. ("See Naples, and then you can die.")



DAVID HAGE/Minnapolis Star Tribune

Even amid Naples' bustle, it's possible to find quiet streets lined with cute shops and cafes.

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WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Pacific



WALTER NICKLIN/Washington Post

Palm trees and pristine beaches abound on Rarotonga's sparsely populated south shore.

Fall in love again with tropical beaches

Why the Cook Islands should be included on everyone's vacation bucket list

By WALTER NICKLIN

Special to The Washington Post

The Cook Islands — a cluster of very tiny atolls and reefs in the vast expanse of the South Pacific — have never been on my bucket list of travel destinations. Their image as a tropical island paradise conjures up endless (and therefore boring) white sandy, palm-lined beaches with nothing to do but soak up the sun.

Yet here I am now — sipping coconut juice in a lounge chair overlooking a pristine aquamarine lagoon. How did this happen? And why am I now so happy here that I've extended my stay to almost a full week?

The answer to the first question — I must admit — is fear. I so dreaded the prospect of a 13-hour flight to New Zealand (my ultimate destination) that I sought solace in breaking the flying time up into more manageable segments. The

Cook Islands would be my lily pad: 10 hours from Los Angeles to Rarotonga (the largest of the 15 Cook Islands) and then, after a couple of relaxing days recovering from jet lag, four more hours to Auckland. For the first leg, Air New Zealand offers the only direct flight linking the U.S. mainland to the Cook Islands — departing LAX every Saturday a bit before midnight.

When dawn breaks through the airplane window over Rarotonga's volcanic

mountains rising spectacularly out of the surrounding sea — to answer my second question — I sense immediately that I won't be bored here. It's my kind of place: There are no stoplights or fast-food joints, and no building is taller than the tallest palm tree.

Waiting patiently at the tiny airport for the roughly 250 passengers are rows of friendly taxi drivers sent by the respective lodgings we have booked. One driver holds a sign that reads "Wallace," and I rightly guess that must be me. The three-mile ride to my Airbnb, a cottage just outside the town of Avarua, comes to 15 New Zealand dollars (\$11 U.S.). The nightly rate at the Airbnb is not much more (\$50 U.S.).

Compared with the wailing baby on the plane, the crowing roosters and clucking hens outside my window are like a lullaby as I get some needed rest before setting out to explore the contours of what to me is a genuinely newfound land. Not unlike

Columbus' arrival in the Americas, my landing here is serendipitous, on my way to somewhere else — confirming that the "final destination" is seldom travel's most valuable reward.

Until now mapped on my consciousness hardly at all, the 15 volcanic islands and coral atolls of the Cook Islands meant idealized images of noble savages and tropical Eden-like paradise as portrayed by Paul Gauguin and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The geographic facts on the ground are thus. Located near the Tropic of Capricorn, the Cook Islands are on about the same latitude as Australia's Northern Territory and Chile's Antofagasta region. Though less than 100 square miles in land area, the tiny islands are spread out over an area of roughly 700,000 square miles in the South Pacific. Tonga, French Polynesia and American Samoa are the some of the nearest neighbors.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33

WEEKEND: TRAVEL

Pacific



The customs office in the port of Avarua on Rarotonga, the largest of the Cook Islands, is suggestive of the small-is-beautiful way of life that welcomes and enchants visitors.



Low-hanging clouds and lush vegetation frame Rarotonga's mountainous interior; a cross-country trail takes hikers to the needlelike rock rising on the horizon known as Mount Te Rua Manga and offers a bird's-eye view of the entire island.

FROM PAGE 32

The resident population, mostly native Maori, numbers about 9,000. Tourism, with annual visitors numbering more than 150,000, drives the economy. The islands are a self-governing parliamentary democracy but coordinate with New Zealand in international affairs. The New Zealand dollar is the islands' currency.

It's easy to find an ATM to withdraw some of that currency, but finding a place to eat is another matter. It's Sunday, and Cook Islanders, having been converted to Christianity by 19th-century missionaries, are especially observant. It apparently blended well with traditional faith; one islander tells me that the lineage of Maori chiefs can be traced directly to the Bible's Adam and Eve.

When I finally find a cafe that loudly proclaims it indeed is open on Sundays, I learn the meaning of a "Long Black." I also learn to love it: a double shot of espresso poured over 3 to 5 ounces of hot water. But most especially I get a taste of the islanders' well-earned reputation for genuine friendliness and warm hospitality.

The next morning I rent a bicycle to explore the rest of the island. Had I booked a motor scooter or a car, I would have had to get a special license from the local police. The procedure is cheap and easy, everyone tells me, but to offset sedentary air travel I want some good, hard exercise.

The very hardest part, however, is getting used to riding on the left side of the road, as in New Zealand or Britain. No one yells at me when I get confused at roundabouts and almost cause a couple of accidents. Instead of road rage, I'm met with sympathetic smiles. "Please join us!"

A woman's voice, in the island's distinct Maori-tinted English accent, calls from beyond the hedgerow. Amid what looks to be a garden party, she's waving and smiling at me as I'm pedaling back to my Airbnb. How can I say no? She explains she's hosting the first course of a progressive dinner, wherein guests move (or progress) from house to house for successive courses. This particular dinner has been organized by local tourism authorities. (Her husband is a former member of the Cook Islands parliament.) So I join perhaps two dozen others in the first course featuring coconut yogurt mixed with one's choice of locally grown Lady Finger bananas, star fruit (carambola), dragon fruit (pitaya), pawpaw, papayas and mangoes.

The guests, all couples, express surprise (tinged with undisguised concern?) that I'm traveling alone. After all, the Cook Islands



PHOTOS BY WALTER NICKLIN/Washington Post

According to Maori legend, it is here on Rarotonga's west shore at Turou (Black Rock) that spirits of the dead commence their voyage to the afterworld.

— especially the Aitutaki atoll — are a favorite honeymoon destination. Without my wife, there's no way I'll take the 45-minute flight from Rarotonga that makes romantic Aitutaki accessible.

But if I weren't alone, would I have been invited to join their party? Traveling solo, I tell myself, can pierce the married couple "bubble" that often insulates foreign visitors from natives. Or other travelers during my island stay, as I strike up delightful conversations with a retired French admiral sailing around the world, a German backpacker as well as a New Zealand sheep farmer vacationing with his wife.

Still, I miss my wife and — for a wedding anniversary celebration when we rendezvous next week in New Zealand — I buy her one of the legendary black pearls for which the islands are known. I can hear her laughter when one evening I found a sushi-like dish and don't realize it. She loves sushi. I've never liked the idea of it. The elaborate menu at a resort restaurant on Muri Beach includes

tuna, which I just assume is grilled. After a few bites, I realize it's raw — marinated in lemon and coconut juice, then garnished with diced vegetables. Called Ika Mata, it's a tradition: Cook Island dish, and I must confess it isn't bad.

The resort is one of many located on Rarotonga's southeast coast at Muri Beach, where four coral islets form an idyllic lagoon for swimmers, snorkelers, kayakers and paddle-boarders. Or you can just lie on the uncrowded, sandy beach, sunbathe, sip a coconut smoothie and watch. That's what I do, harnessing my energy for a cross-island hike the next day.

The trailhead lies not far from my Airbnb at the end of a country road that cuts through small farms with friendly dogs and grazing goats. Armed with mosquito repellent and two bottles of drinking water, I follow the narrow trail through tropical trees and lush vegetation, junglelike in entangled hues of green. But there's no worry about jungle creatures; for the island is home to neither snakes nor poisonous spiders. Puffs of low-hanging clouds, which might at any moment let loose occasional drops of rain, are visible through the jungle canopy and glide against the island's rugged, volcano-created mountains.

The trail crests at the base of a "volcanic plug" called the Needle, Mount Te Rua Manga, offering a bird's-eye view of the entire island. Then, following a stream called Papa, I head downslope toward Wigmores Waterfall. Hot and sweaty, I'm tempted to jump in the natural pool beneath the falling water but will wait to dip in the ocean. The four-mile, hot and humid trek has taken me almost four hours.

Now on the opposite side of the island from my Airbnb in Avarua, I wait for a bus to take me home. The 20-mile coastal road circling the island is known as the Ara Tapu, and two buses come hourly. But their destination is never Avarua — or any other particular place. Rather, their signage reads either "Clockwise" or "Anti-Clockwise." What a wonderful metaphor, I think, for island — as opposed to linear — time.

On the subject of time, the evening before I'm scheduled to fly away from the Cook Islands, I bike to a place on the island's west side called Turou (Black Rock) for a final swim in the South Pacific. It is here, according to Maori legend, that spirits of the dead commence their voyage to Awaiki (the afterworld). The sun is setting as I plunge into the warm water and rewrite my vision of a tropical island paradise.

KNOW & GO

WHERE TO STAY

Nautilus Resort Rarotonga
Address: Ara Tapu, Ngatangiia, Rarotonga
Phone: 011-682-25-125
Online: nautilusresortrarotonga.com

This epitome of a luxurious, boutique Polynesian resort fronts on the main island's iconic Muri Beach, with lagoon and ocean views, palm trees, saltwater plunge pools and tropical gardens. Rooms and villas start about \$485 per night (three-night minimum), including breakfast.

Atupa Orchid Units
Address: Ara Metua, Avarua, Rarotonga
Phone: 011-682-28-543
Online: atupaorchids.co.ki

Close to the airport on the outskirts of Avarua, Rarotonga's main town, you'll find studio apartments and bungalows in a secluded inland setting of trees, orchids and tropical plants. Pickup service from the airport is offered for about \$10. From about \$50 per night.

WHERE TO EAT

Vaima Polynesian Bar and Restaurant

Address: Ara Tapu, Titikaveka, Rarotonga
Phone: 011-682-26-123
Online: vaimaarestaurant.com

This moderately priced restaurant offers everything from mahi mahi and passion fruit to the catch of the day and tropical cocktails. Seating both inside and outside on a deck or the sand. Open daily noon to 10 p.m.; closed Sundays. Main dishes from about \$20.

Progressive Dining

Address: Harbour House, Avatu, Rarotonga
Phone: 011-682-20-639
Online: cookslandstours.co.nz/experiences/progressive-dinner

Three-course dining experience lasting 4½ hours traveling from house to house experiencing local cuisine, hospitality, culture and lifestyle. Accompanied by ukuleles, guitars and singing. Open Mondays to Fridays 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. From about \$45 per person.

Tuakata Cafe

Address: Tutakimoa, Avarua, Rarotonga
Phone: 011-682-23-205
Online: facebook.com/tuakata01

Open daily for breakfast and lunch, offering local specialties such as fresh Nu (coconut water); eggs on ryu toast with bacon, tomato, spinach; island fries with sauce. Open daily 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Entrees from about \$10.

INFORMATION

Online: cookslands.travel

WEEKEND: QUICK TRIPS

Pacific

Achieve zen for (almost) no yen

Visit Daitoku-ji temple in Kyoto to find tranquility, history

By JOSEPH DITZLER

Stars and Stripes

Drop “Zen” into conversation, and thoughts of one hand clapping or a properly maintained motorcycle may come to mind.

Less popularly understood, however, are the main precepts of Zen Buddhism and the different sects within the practice. One of those branches, Rinzaï, is centered in the ancient, former Japanese capital, Kyoto, 2½ hours by bullet train from Tokyo, in a place called Daitoku-ji. It's well worth a visit, even if you don't know a koan from a kotsu.

Founded in the early 14th century, destroyed in the 16th century and subsequently rebuilt, the temple complex today encompasses 56 acres and nearly two dozen smaller sub-temples. One of them, the Koto-in, is considered an important site in the history of the Japanese tea ceremony. Many threads of Japan's history in the 16th and 17th centuries are woven into the story of this world unto itself.

The entire walled complex is expansive, but only four of the sub-temples are open to the public. Many of the interior gardens of the lesser temples are visible from their gates. The main temple is not open to the public.

These smaller temples — despite their spare furnishings and simple, elegant construction — are intimate spaces. These buildings of wood, paper and tatami mats were meant for greeting guests, meditation and life's everyday activities.

My first stop inside Daitoku-ji was the Ryogen-in temple, famous for its dry gardens and distinct architecture. The Hojo — a meditation hall and the chief priest's quarters — is the oldest of its kind in Japan, according to information at the site. There, wooden floorboards creak underfoot with an antique sound. As you might expect in a Zen precinct, the Hojo is spare, and the artwork on its paper walls is subtly beautiful.

On one side of the Ryogen-in is the Ryogintai, a dry garden built entirely on a large bed of moss. It



The Garden of Solitary Sitting in the Zhuho-in sub-temple at Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, Japan.

is the oldest garden in the complex, dating to the Muromachi era, which ended in 1573. Nearby is the Totekkio, an enclosed rock garden considered the smallest of its kind in Japan.

Most intriguing for me was the Isshidan, a rock garden in the most traditional sense: a raked bed of stones with a teardrop-shaped bed of moss and large rocks positioned elsewhere.

The moss mound represents a tortoise island, a symbol of long life. It's paired with rocks that represent a crane island, symbolic of happiness. Both are common installations in Zen gardens, and both also represent longevity.

In Isshidan, the central, tallest rock in the ensemble represents Mount Horai, a Japanese national, natural monument considered a source of spiritual strength. The group is surrounded by raked gravel representing waves

upon the ocean surface. Visitors are compelled to sit awhile on a wooden porch and take in the scene.

Nearby in the Ryogen-in is a room in which Ieyasu Tokugawa, founder of the 260-year-old shogunate that lasted until the imperial restoration in the mid-1800s, played Go, a Japanese board game, with Hideyoshi Toyotomi, a powerful samurai and feudal lord in his own right. The board on which the two played is on display, along with a firearm that belonged to Tokugawa. He later unseated Hideyoshi's son to unify Japan and rule as shogun.

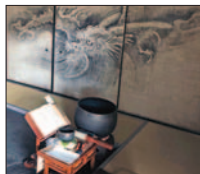
Leaving the Ryogen-in, I moved next to the Koto-in, which includes a tea house called the Shoko-ken built by 16th-century warlord Hosokawa Tadaoki, a student of Sen no Rikyū.

Rikyū, a merchant from Osaka prefecture, devoted himself to the tea ceremony and became a confidant of Hideyoshi's, who eventually ordered Rikyū to commit ritual suicide at his patron's home in Kyoto.

Rikyū taught the ceremony at Daitoku-ji and built tea rooms there. Basic movements that he incorporated into the tea ceremony are still practiced today.

This center of Zen Buddhism has within it two links to Christianity. Hosokawa's wife, Gracia, was a Catholic convert. The two are buried on the grounds of Koto-in. And Otomo Sorin, a feudal lord and the founding patron of the nearby Zuho-in sub-temple, converted to Catholicism in the 16th century.

Otomo became known as the



A dragon unwinds itself on a paper wall inside the meditation hall at Ryogen-in sub-temple at Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, Japan.

“Christian daimyo.” (Daimyo means feudal lord.) The Zuho-in today includes a rock garden created by 20th-century designer Mirei Shigemori and known as the Garden of the Cross. The garden rocks form an asymmetrical cross. A statue of the Virgin Mary is buried in the garden and symbolizes the 200 years when Christianity was banned in Japan.

My Daitoku-ji visit lasted into the early afternoon. Several hours vanished while I paused to contemplate the gardens, inspect the austere but inviting building interiors and walk the grounds.

Afterwards, I was ready to meditate on lunch. Just across the street from the temple's main gate is a small, French-influenced Japanese restaurant, Cafe Du Mon. Reviews on TripAdvisor add up to five stars, with good reason. If there is Zen in cuisine, you'll find it there.

ditzler.joseph@stripes.com
Twitter: @josephditzler

PHOTOS BY JOSEPH DITZLER/Stars and Stripes

ON THE QT

DIRECTIONS

Daitoku-ji is located at 53 Murasakino Daitokuji-cho, Kita-ku, Kyoto-shi, 603-8231. Daitoku-ji is a 15-minute walk in northern Kyoto from Kita-ji Station on the Karasuma subway line. From the station, Katōji dōri street brings you to the temple; the main gate is a bit north of the street. Google Maps took me in zigzag fashion through side streets right to the gate. The Karasuma line connects with Kyoto Station. Alternately, take bus Nos. 205 or 206 from Kyoto Station and get off at the Daitokuji-mae bus stop.

TIMES

Varies, generally from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

COSTS

Admission to the complex is free; the cost to enter the open sub-temples is 400-500 yen (\$4-\$5).

FOOD

You'll find a Starbucks not far from Kita-ji Station en route to the temple. Cafe Du Mon, facing the main temple gate, offers fresh, light and creative lunch specials starting at 1,000 yen (about \$10).

INFORMATION

Phone: 075-491-0019

— Joseph Ditzler



The Isshidan at the Ryogen-in sub-temple at Daitoku-ji, Kyoto, Japan, is a classic example of a Japanese zen garden.

WEEKEND: LIFESTYLE



PHOTOS BY TRACEE HERBAUGH/AP

Some of the china for sale Sept. 7 at a flea market in Brimfield, Mass. China has become a staple at flea markets as younger people opt to sell or donate heirloom dishware.

China's fall from grace

How modern habits are shaping the future of fine dishware

By TRACEE M. HERBAUGH
Associated Press

Last summer, I cleaned out the house where my Grandma lived for 60 years.

Every nook and cranny was filled with something — papers, mugs, old photographs, knickknacks, furniture. There were also two complete sets of Johann Haviland china, from plates and platters to an ornate coffee pot.

What to do with all these fancy dishes? The reasons not to keep Grandma's china were many. My family is casual, not traditional. We live in a small home outside Boston and have moved four times in the last decade. Most importantly, I'm kind of a minimalist. I just don't like having a lot of unnecessary things.

As it turns out, a lot of 30-somethings like me face this quandary.

"Multiple generations of china in one house (or, more specifically, basement) seems to be a common American condition," said Adam Minter, who wrote the new "Secondhand: Travels in the New Global Garage Sale" (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

The book follows what happens to possessions once they're donated. Minter was inspired to write it after dropping off his mother's china at Goodwill. It was the last of his mother's possessions that he and his sister dealt with.

"We put it off, mostly because we knew my mother loved it," Minter said. "But neither of us actually wanted it."

China's waning appeal

The five enormous boxes I filled with Grandma's blue garland china, which she purchased in the 1960s from the grocery store where she worked, sat unopened in my basement months after they arrived.

Acquiring a set of china isn't the rite of passage it was decades ago. Some people still

collect it, but nowadays it might not even end up on a couple's wedding registry.

"More and more, younger people don't see the need to use their space for things that are ceremonial," said Cecilia Jones, a personal organizer and productivity coach in Silver Spring, Md.

Neda Ghaffari, a 37-year-old San Francisco doctor who married last summer, opted to register for modern dinnerware she could use daily or for entertaining. China feels outdated, Ghaffari said, and difficult to maintain, as it normally has to be hand-washed.

"We didn't register for china because we live in a relatively small condo in San Francisco and generally only entertain small groups at a time," she said. "We also have limited storage space in our kitchen."

Moving more frequently and living in tight quarters means people are less likely to accumulate things.

Deidre Bryant, a 32-year-old teacher from Aurora, Colo., registered for off-white plates from Crate and Barrel ahead of her 2017 wedding. As for china, "the thought didn't even cross my mind," she said.

For Maya Brook, a 39-year-old working mother in the Denver area, china just seemed impractical.

"I have three young boys, and the thought of having a bunch of super delicate china in my home just sounds stressful, and like more unneeded clutter," she said.

Brook said that if she inherited a loved one's china, she would probably keep a piece or two to hold on to history and memories.

Many people are donating china sets or selling them online. China is a mainstay at garage sales, secondhand stores or flea markets.

Style has changed, but so have demographics, Minter explained.

"Two very affluent generations, the 'Greatest Generation' and the Boomers, that acquired stuff at historically high rates are now downsizing and dying," Minter said. "So

that's creating a surplus of all kinds of secondhand stuff, heirlooms and otherwise."

In the last few years, Beverly Solomon has been scooping up antique china sets for her business, which provides interior design services to restaurants and other businesses in Dallas.

"I'll find boxes of beautiful sets for next to nothing," Solomon said. "It's quite amazing."

What to do if you inherit

The two organizers with whom I spoke said that what I did with Grandma's china would depend on my priorities and values.

For instance, it is important to me to keep the sets together? It's not. Do I want to save a set for each of my children? I don't.

"If it sits in the basement and gathers dust, it isn't honoring your grandmother," Jones said. "The question becomes how to keep it alive."

MJ Rosenthal, a Newton, Mass., personal organizer, expressed a similar sentiment.

"If I'm saving something, I'll keep it in the condition it deserves," Rosenthal said. She noted there are specialized storage containers to hold china and protect it from things like mold or corrosion.

But I was not about to invest in a new china storage system. For me, it is a priority not to be encumbered by possessions I don't need or use.

Yet the thought of not knowing where it ended up gave me pause.

Both Jones and Rosenthal suggested I keep a few pieces I'd use, and donate the rest.

"In letting it go and knowing you don't have control of it, you are releasing it to the universe," Jones said. "It served its purpose, it had its moment and meaning."

With that bit of wisdom, I pulled out 12 dinner plates, a platter and a few bowls. We used them for our Thanksgiving dinner. The rest of the china is boxed and headed to Goodwill, where I hope another family can love it like we did.



What remains of reporter Tracee Herbaugh's Johann Haviland Blue Garland china set is placed for Thanksgiving. The china belonged to her grandmother.



A plate at the Brimfield flea market bears the Royal Worcester mark. Royal Worcester, founded in 1751, is one of the oldest English porcelain brands still being produced.

WEEKEND: VIDEO GAMES

Play is work

Mosaic makes players endure day after awful day at the office

BY CHRISTOPHER BYRD

Special to The Washington Post

In a recent article in The Atlantic, “Why White-Collar Workers Spend All Day at the Office,” journalist Derek Thompson writes: “imagine a future of work where there is no end to labor and time itself is the office.” Mosaic is a game that imagines such a scenario by addressing the internet’s erosion of the space between office life and home life to a pernicious degree, caused by the tethering of workers to their smartphones or other similar devices. The consequence? Pervasive and continuous employee assessment.

Mosaic tells the story of the dreary life of an office worker who receives, via an app on his phone, productivity breakers that detail his rate of underperformance in relation to other employees and “friendly reminders” that late absences will result in severance of his contract. His phone also tells him how fast he should alter his pace to get to work on time and offers him a discount on a drug to boost his cognitive performance.

The anonymous man in question lives in a small apartment with a kitchen table covered in overdue bills. He has a habit of showing up with his work clothes on and sleeping his face to wake up after his alarm goes off. I found it mildly amusing at first to click on a mouse button and watch him do so. But, upon guiding him to the bathroom and watching him straighten his tie in the mirror and brush his teeth, the ironic distance shrank as I saw him grip the sides of the sink and bob his head, as if about to vomit,

then raise himself up and cover his face with his hand. Those who have coped with depression likely know this pantomime well.

Using a simple point-and-click interface, Mosaic is divided between linear narrative sections and puzzles that represent the man’s work tasks. Essentially, the narrative elements are a series of visual metaphors that underscore the protagonist’s alienation. Many of these scenes are visually striking, if unsubtle, such as when the man imagines his fellow workers being ground up on a conveyor belt and turned into electric impulses that pass through a circuit board; or when walking to work one day he sees a butterfly fluttering in the distance, a luminous creature amid the drab cityscape. A shift in perspective allows the player to guide the butterfly through a construction zone. What happens next struck me as obvious from the get-go. Upon taking control of the butterfly, I simply waited to see how it would die.

Some of the visual metaphors are droll. I gave a little chuckle at one point watching the man stand beneath an advertisement for a sleeping drug on one side and an energy booster on the other. The images neatly summing up the conditions of a society that creates the problems for which it sells the remedies.

The sections of Mosaic that correspond to the young man’s office tasks take the form of puzzles that unfold across a hexagonal grid. Your task is to build a chain of hexagons that stretch from the bottom of the grid upward to a “milestone.” Clicking on individual tiles sends



Raw Fury

Mosaic’s dreary, monotonous hopelessness challenges the notion that work gives meaning to our lives.

resources up to a tile to construct a link. A number of variables determine how the chains can be constructed. For instance, to connect one tile to another, a space must be left between linked units and one must build around shaded tiles that represent rules and regulations. As chains become longer, it takes more time for the resources at the bottom of the screen to reach, and thus construct, a clicked-on tile, which creates an active link.

Complicating matters are roving threats — colored clouds that range over areas of the grid that infect the chain links that they touch. Infected areas must be cleansed by dispatching resources to that area, and threats must be neutralized by figuring out how to marshal enough re-

sources to hem them in. Figuring out how to use things such as “loopholes” to quickly shoot resources from one area to another is essential.

Although these puzzles are not terribly challenging, they may cause a little aggravation at first because you are given very little direction on how to go about them. This is on purpose. Before you tackle the first puzzle, a message box appears on the screen saying, “In our ongoing efforts to optimize your workflow, numerous changes have been made to the OS. Onboarding costs are cut, so if you’re confused, don’t bother your supervisors.” Recognizing how I moved from a state of mild perplexity early on to an ability to handle the later puzzles on autopilot, I noted how

Mosaic’s puzzle mechanics serve to mimic the natural condition of the office worker who struggles with tasks in the beginning that later on become second nature.

Mosaic’s appeal rests upon its aesthetic character rather than its gameplay. If you’re not drawn in by the game’s theme and visual style, then you’ll be let down by the experience. Although I wasn’t overly entranced by Mosaic — its approach is too straightforward for my taste — I tip my hat to the developers for making a game that punctures a hole in the noxious ideology that work, necessarily, gives meaning to our lives.

Platforms: Mac, Nintendo Switch, PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Online: mosaiccorp.biz

A tranquil, exhilarating ride that could be a minor classic

BY CHRISTOPHER BYRD

The Washington Post

As I look at my bicyclist perched atop the third mountain trail on Redmoor Peaks, I’m faced with a decision.

To his left is a steep narrow trail that winds back and forth. The turns aren’t too bad, but there are a few rocks near the edge of the path that can easily throw my rider from his bike if he grazes them. What gives me pause, however, is thought of the narrow, descending path that picks up after the start of the trail. It’s lined with trees that, ever so briefly, obscure the sight of my cyclist. I have a bad habit of tensing up as I pass through them and smacking into a tree or one of the rocks on the ground. So, I consider another way.

By veering off the first sharp curve down the path, I can maneuver the bike along a steep mountain ridge that skirts past the path’s first set of turns and deposits me at the beginning of the section that leads to the tree-lined path that makes me fidgety. In that particular spot, I can veer again off the pathway and plunge along the side of the mountain at a near 90-degree angle, then, assuming I angle the front wheel just right, zip along an ultra-narrow ridge that slices down a corner of the mountain like a thin slice of cheese.

The decision is really no decision; I take the faster,



Thunderful

Lonely Mountains: Downhill has an addictive gameplay and a beautiful aesthetic.

riskier path each time. I’d rather worry about two difficult sections than deal with many potential concerns.

Lonely Mountains: Downhill is both tranquil and challenging. Deciding how to thread your solitary rider down one of the game’s picturesque mountains makes for an entrancing experience. Likely, anyone who has ever ridden a mountain bike will have a visceral response to the

action on screen, which smartly forgoes music for a nature soundtrack. The controls are intuitive (right trigger to accelerate, left to brake), but mastering the subtleties of how to take a particular jump or turn on a given trail, and knowing when to accelerate, drift, brake or speed up, takes practice. With that in mind, your first goal upon unlocking a new trail is to explore it without a care for time or performance. Upon finishing it, you’re then challenged to complete it in a given time limit or with less than a certain number of crashes.

The game is especially beautiful. Your blockhead-looking avatar might recall the blank-faced video game characters of yore, but the vibrant colors, dynamic lighting and abstract forms are expressive. (Indeed, Lonely Mountains looks more refined than many big-budget games.) The mountains are conspicuously well designed. I can’t tell you how many times, while traveling at great speed I hit, say, a tree root and knew that obstacle had been positioned to trip me up. A bloody crash results in a quick restart at a checkpoint. Death feels as light as it does in an arcade — it’s easy to want to have another go, and hard to know when to end.

Lonely Mountains: Downhill is a beautiful marriage of aesthetics and gameplay. It has the makings of a minor classic.

Platforms: PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Online: lonelymountains.com

WEEKEND: MUSIC

APPRECIATION

Exit the warrior

Rush was an easy band to mock. Neil Peart didn't care, and that's why fans loved him



AP

Neil Peart performs with Rush on June 25, 2015, in Philadelphia. Rush's renowned drummer and lyricist died Jan. 7 of glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer, which he fought out of the public eye for 3½ years. Peart was considered one of the greatest of all time by fans, critics and his fellow rock drummers.

By TRAVIS M. ANDREWS
The Washington Post

Whether for 50 years or for the four minutes and 19 seconds it takes for “Limelight” to play, it’s likely that anyone with even the slightest interest in rock music has wanted to be Neil Peart. Anyone who has said otherwise about Rush’s drummer is probably just posturing because it seems like such an embarrassing thing to desire.

Who, after all, hasn’t pulled the car over and emphatically air-drummed the relentless, pounding percussion of the Canadian band’s “Tom Sawyer”? There may be nothing more cathartic in this world.

Just ask Mark Duplass and Steve Zissis, who memorialized this phenomenon in HBO’s “Togetherness.” After a particular trying evening, Zissis’ character is down on himself, but for a brief few moments when he and his best friend (Duplass) slam out Peart’s famous drum line, all is well with the world.

I think about that scene constantly, because I’m not sure I’ve ever so intensely connected with one. It reminds me of the first time I heard Rush, and therefore Peart’s drumming. I remember that, almost as if by reflex, my hands started moving in front of me.

To this day, despite my status as a tax-paying adult male, I’m an unabashed air instrumentalist. Peart bears full responsibility for this affliction, and I suspect I’m not the only one he infected. As Stewart Copeland, the former drummer for the Police, told Rolling Stone, “Neil is the

most air-drummed-to drummer of all time.”

Legions of Rush fans — and rock fans in general — probably spent the past week somberly punching the air to Peart’s most explosive solos. He died Jan. 7 of glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer, which he fought out of the public eye for 3½ years. His bandmates, Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson, announced his death on Jan. 10.

Most people know two things about Peart: For one, until his death, he was considered by many to be the greatest living rock drummer. (Now in his passing, he’ll spend eternity having to compete with the Who’s Keith Moon, Cream’s Ginger Baker and Led Zeppelin’s John Bonham for the distinction.) And two, he had a gargantuan drum kit that consisted of dozens of pieces, each more confounding than the last, and the entire thing rotated

so he could easily access them all.

It wasn’t just fans and critics who considered him the best. When asked by Rolling Stone’s Brian Hiatt if he could ever play drums for Rush if offered the gig, Dave Grohl responded, “I would say, ‘I’m not physically or musically capable, but thanks for the offer.’ Neil Peart, that’s a whole other animal, another species of drummer.”

But his prowess with the sticks only makes up part of the equation. Greatness isn’t what ultimately attracts dedicated fans. Sincerity is.

Rush was not a cool band, like the Rolling Stones, the Clash or the Replacements. Quite the opposite. Rush was easy to mock, and critics did so for years. They poked fun at the self-seriousness of the band, of the literary lyrics (some inspired by Ayn Rand, whose views Peart later denounced). The drummer didn’t care. Instead of toning things down, he wrote lyrics to the album “2112,” almost 21-minute-long opening track, which tells the fantastical story of Priests of the Temples of Syrinx and the Solar Federation, which ... actually, never mind. Suffice to say it’s the sort of epic, storytelling lyricism that is easy to cynically mock but equally easy to sincerely embrace.

There’s no question which Peart would want you to do. He took this rock-and-roll thing as seriously as one could.

When Rush was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Peart spoke first. “We’ve been saying for a long time, years, that this wasn’t a big deal,” he said. “Turns out, it kind of is.” He proceeded to quote Bob Dylan, noted that the great honor as artists is inspiring others to follow in their footsteps, and offered

this poetic rumination: “All the previous inductees into this pantheon of rock are like a constellation of stars in the night sky. Among them, we are one tiny point of light, shaped like a maple leaf.”

Peart’s earnestness, then and now, almost seems revolutionary: He did something abjectly preposterous in a manner so serious that its very uncoolness made it cool. He made it OK to like ridiculous things just because you liked them. He made it OK to pull your car over and air-drum to a prog rock song if that’s what makes you happy.

In Judd Apatow’s short-lived and critically acclaimed 1999 TV series “Freaks and Geeks,” Jason Segel’s high school burnout character Nick Andopolis idolizes Peart. He excitedly convinces his new friend Lindsey, who is struggling to find her place in the world, to skip class and come to his house, where he shows her the drum kit he designed with “14 mounted toms, eight floor toms, four splashes, two gongs, 10 cowbells, four rides, five snares, man, a Roto tom rack! And it’s all mounted on our infamous quadruple kick-drum system. Six more pieces, and I got a bigger kit than Neil Peart from Rush!” The kit is Andopolis’ true love in life, which he calls “the essence of who I am now.”

The scene is played for laughs, until he tells his depressed friend, “You’ve got to find your reason for living. You’ve got to find your big, gigantic drum kit, ya know?”

Peart probably liked that. As his lyrics for that maybe-ridiculous/maybe-inspirational 21-minute song go, “Listen to my music / And hear what it can do / There’s something here as strong as life / I know that it will reach you.”

WEEKEND: BOOKS



BY JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

The line between fantasy and reality is blurry in the world of Philip Pullman. Which, he thinks, is how it should be.

The British author's latest book, "The Secret Commonwealth," is set in a world of mystery, magic, witches and daemons — as well as untrustworthy politicians, manipulative charmers and fake news.

"If you're interested in the world, the world is bound to affect what you write," Pullman says.

"The Secret Commonwealth" brings back the indomitable Lyra, whom millions of readers have followed in four previous books from infancy through an adventure-filled adolescence — and now into troubled young adulthood. In the latest book, Lyra's studies at Oxford University are interrupted by a personal crisis and a journey in search of mysterious Central Asian roses and their dangerous power.

Like his heroine, Pullman is troubled by the world around him. A chat with the 72-year-old author inevitably turns to Brexit, as many conversations in Britain do these days. Pullman thinks Britain's decision to leave the European Union is a big mistake. He considers ex-Prime Minister David Cameron a "complacent fool" for calling the 2016 referendum on the country's EU membership.

Like many people looking at the state of politics on both sides of the Atlantic, he worries about "the decay of truth ... the idea that nothing is real, nothing is true, life is a tissue of improbable lies spun over nothingness."

"You can say anything, and if you say it with enough effrontery, you can get away with it," Pullman told The Associated Press from his home in Oxford.

"We see this very clearly in Donald Trump and in Boris Johnson. And that's a very dangerous state of affairs. If you allow the idea to develop that it doesn't really matter what you say because no one will believe it anyway, we're on very shaky ground."

Questions about truth, lies and the limits of knowledge ripple through "The Secret Commonwealth," the second volume in a planned trilogy The Book of

Dust, and a follow-up to the three-volume saga His Dark Materials.

His Dark Materials introduced the world to Lyra, an imaginative, unmanageable child being raised by scholars of Oxford's Jordan College.

The world of the books is a familiar-yet-unfamiliar blend of old-fashioned technology — gas lights, airships — and advanced science, of everyday worries and fantastical creatures including witches and armored bears. In Pullman's most striking act of imagination, every human has an inseparable animal soul mate known as a daemon (pronounced demon).

Like its predecessors, "The Secret Commonwealth" brims with perilous trips to far-flung locales, including Geneva, Prague and Istanbul. But there is also a new, adult, sense of unease. Lyra is no longer a child but a troubled young adult who finds herself estranged from her daemon Pantalaimon

— effectively at war with herself.

"If we are estranged temporarily or permanently from part of ourselves, it's a terrible situation to be in," Pullman said. It's also one many people who have made a rocky transition from adolescence into adulthood will recognize.

The first volume of His Dark Materials was published in 1995, so Pullman is on his second generation of readers. Reviewing the new book in The Guardian, University College London English professor John Mullan said that "Pullman seems to be writing for those who read the HDM novels as children, but are children no longer."

He called it "a book for getting older with." It ranks Pullman that because of publishing industry categories, his work is categorized as children's literature. Such has been the success of the series — 17.5 million copies sold around the world — that Pullman says he is "quite often asked to sign a book for somebody's little baby that they've just named Lyra."

"I always sign it 'For the real Lyra,'" he said.

As she faces a personal crisis, the book also pitches Lyra into conflict with an oppressive religious hierarchy, the Magisterium, which has an intense interest in those mysterious Central Asian roses.

ADVENTURE FOR AN ANXIOUS AGE

Set in a fantastical universe, 'Secret Commonwealth' is also shadowed by the specter of current events

Pullman is an atheist, and his unflattering depiction of religious authority has drawn criticism in the past from some Christian groups.

His books have been pulled from some Catholic school library shelves in Canada and the United States over the years.

Pullman remains convinced that "when religious power acquires political power, terrible things happen." But the book also takes aim at a strain of hyper-rationalism that the author regards as equally dangerous. The title of "The Secret Commonwealth" refers to the realm of the mysterious, inexplicable and magical.

"I've always been associated with the rationalist side of things, with science and with evidence-based (thinking)," he said. "But you can have too much rationality. You can have too much reason. You can be reasonable that you're crazy."

"The one aspect of the world that science has looked at since Galileo is the parts that you can measure ... That's the domain of science. But what science leaves out is the things you can't measure, the things that we most treasure in our daily lives: affection, love, grief, longing for something, nostalgia."

"If we were being really reasonable about everything in our lives, we'd never fall in love."

A new contingent of fans is discovering Pullman's world through an eight-part HBO/BBC adaptation of His Dark Materials. It stars the sparky 14-year-old Dafne Keen as Lyra, with a supporting cast that includes James McAvoy, Ruth Wilson and Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Pullman is an executive producer on the series — "a title I'm very proud of — I want to put it on the back of a chair."

A third volume in The Book of Dust will wrap up Lyra's story, though Pullman says work on it is still at the stage where "I lie on the sofa staring at the ceiling; I read a lot about the places and the ideas I want to write about."

"I haven't actually written the words 'Chapter One' yet," he says. "I can't tell you very much except that we're going to Central Asia, and there's a desert in it, and there are roses."

"I have many pictures in my mind, both of events and of places and of people, but I don't know how it's going to get there. I can see where it's going, but I don't know how to get there till I write it."

Philip Pullman's "The Secret Commonwealth" is the second book in his Book of Dust trilogy. It expands on Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy.

Michael Leckie

WEEKEND: TELEVISION & DVD

NEW ON DVD

The Addams Family™: Like its everlasting theme song, the latest incarnation of “The Addams Family” stays true to the source material of Charles Addams’ New Yorker cartoons.

In this computer-animated tale, daughter Wednesday (voiced by Chloë Grace Moretz) rebels against her parents (Oscar Isaac, Charlize Theron) by befriending the daughter of a suspicious home and garden TV personality (Allison Janney). The host discovers the family’s property and sets her sights on destroying it to gentrify the New Jersey suburban community.

While it doesn’t necessarily have anything new to say, the film offers a comforting exploration of our personal dark sides through the macabre and the funny.

“The appeal of this ‘The Addams Family,’ which doesn’t break the mold, is simply to spend some more time in this gently spooky world, which is a gateway for budding creepsters and goths,” wrote Tribune News Service Katie Walsh in her review. “It’s refreshing that it doesn’t try to overreach the limitations of its story, but it’s so slight, it merely whets the appetite for more Addams fare, rather than providing anything truly satisfying.”

“Zombieland: Double Tap”: For better and for worse, a lot has changed since 2009. We are safely separated from a world in which “The Walking Dead” doesn’t exist, Juicy Couture is in its prime and misogynistic humor in comedies runs rampant (or at least it’s not as bad). Not so in the “Zombieland” franchise.

In the film, Tallahassee (Woody Harrelson), Columbus (Jesse Eisenberg), Wichita (Emma Stone) and Little Rock (Abigail Breslin) reside peacefully in the White House while the zombie apocalypse is still in full swing until broody nerd Columbus’ marriage proposal inspires sardonic Wichita and Little Rock to bail. Little Rock eventually falls for a hippie in Graceland, and the gang sets out to find her.

If you liked the first snarky movie, this is the unnecessary 10-years-later sequel for you, wrote Chicago Tribune critic Michael Phillips in his review.

Also available on DVD: **“Countdown”:** A nurse (Elizabeth Lail) must beat the clock after opening an app that says she’ll die in three days.

“Black and Blue”: A rookie police officer (Naomie Harris) is targeted by criminals and cops after she witnesses a murder.

“Pain and Glory”: A director (Antonio Banderas) reckons with his past and present in this semi-autobiographical film by Pedro Almodóvar.

“Jay and Silent Bob Reboot”: The infamous duo (Jason Mewes, Kevin Smith) head to Hollywood to try and stop a reboot from being made that’s based on them.

“The Courier”: A courier (Olga Kurylenko) realizes there’s a bomb in one of his packages.

— Katie Foran-McHale/TNS

A hero from St. Louis

Disney Plus featuring teen difference-maker in documentary

By DANIEL NEMAN
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

St. Louisans have long been the subjects of important documentaries: Chuck Berry, Stan Musial, Joseph Pulitzer, William S. Burroughs, Tina Turner.

The latest is Sidney Keys III. He is 13 years old.

Sidney is the focus of “The Spectacular Sidney,” now available on the Disney Plus streaming service. The half-hour documentary is part of the “Marvel Hero Project,” which began its first season in November.

The “Marvel Hero Project” is a series of short films about young people who are making a difference. Sidney is featured because he founded and runs Books n Bros, a book club for African American boys.

Sidney, an eighth-grader

at Loyola Academy of St. Louis, is an avid reader. A few years ago, his mother took him to EyeSeeMe in University City, the only African American children’s bookstore in the area.

“The school I was going to at the time was majority Caucasian, so I didn’t get to see a representation of myself in the school library.

I didn’t even realize it,” says Sidney, who lives in south city.

“When I saw the books at EyeSeeMe and I saw the books at my school library, I liked the books at EyeSeeMe a lot better.”

So entranced was Sidney — 10 years old at the time — that his mother made a Facebook Live video of him reading “Danny Dollar Millionaire Extraordinaire” at the store. It went viral, eventually being viewed 65,000 times.

“Since I was a big fan of the books that I was reading, I asked the book-

store if there was a book club I could join,” he says. “They said there was, but there was a catch: It was all girls. So I asked if I could start a book club for boys.”

From the start, the club was called Books n Bros. A group of black boys would meet at the store. Sidney would pick the book each month and lead the discussion about it, crafting the questions along with his mother. After a few months, Books n Bros outgrew the bookstore space and moved into a Microsoft store.

But then NBC News did a segment about the group. It grew so much that it had to move into space provided for free by the Ferguson Youth Initiative.

Membership now stands at more than 150. Many of the boys are from other states and participate in the meetups, as Sidney calls them, via Skype. Additional assistance is provided by adult mentors called Big Bros.

The cost for membership is \$25 per month, which includes a copy of the book and shipping costs.

“It’s not really about the money. I do it to promote African American literacy,” Sidney says. “Kids, especially kids of color, like to read books that they can relate to.”

“Adults force books on them, which they might not like,” he added.

The group has read books like “Danny Dollar Millionaire Extraordinaire,” of course; graphic novels “The New Kid” and “The Supadupa Kid”; “March,” which is about civil rights legend John Lewis; and “Hidden Figures,” which was turned into a movie, about black women working at NASA during the space race.

Books n Bros has a nonprofit side, too, Chub Cares: Adopt a Bro allows people to sponsor memberships for youngsters who can’t afford to join the club. The initiative is named for Sidney’s late uncle, “Chub” Caldwell, whom Sidney said tested as “really smart” but nevertheless was deemed to be a special-needs student. He was bored in school and found his way to the streets, where he died.

Being the subject of a documentary “is really surreal,” Sidney says. “I wouldn’t have thought, maybe two years ago, that I would be on Disney. It’s really crazy. Seeing it on Disney and seeing the Marvel logo with all of the comic pages whipping, that’s just crazy.”

Sidney Keys III is the focus of “The Spectacular Sidney,” now available on the Disney Plus streaming service. The half-hour documentary is part of the “Marvel Hero Project,” which began its first season in November.

DISNEY PLUS/TNS



WEEKEND: HEALTH & FITNESS

Itching to get rid of dry skin?

Doctors recommend products and best practices to keep cracking to a minimum

By STACEY BURLING
The Philadelphia Inquirer

Your skin doesn't like winter. The combination of cold air outside and heated air inside often leads to dry, itchy, scaly skin.

There's plenty of advice on the web about what to do and plenty of heavily marketed products that claim they'll solve this seasonal problem, often at a hefty price. But how many of us have tried a watery lotion that made big promises and stopped working by the time we got to the office? How many have tried one that made the itching worse? And, really, how exactly are we supposed to slather slippery concoctions on skin still wet from a shower when everyone knows that oil and water don't mix?

In the interest of cutting through the noise and possibly solving our own dry-skin problems, we asked three dermatologists — Jules Lipoff of Penn Medicine, Gopal Patel of Aesthetic Dermatology Associates in Media and Paoli, and Nazanin Saedi, director of the Jefferson Laser Surgery and Cosmetic Dermatology Center — for advice. Here's what they said.

Are there medical reasons to worry about dry skin?

Usually not. If you neglect it and let your skin crack, you could be at higher risk of infection. In some cases, dry skin can be a symptom of an underactive thyroid, Saedi said. It is more common in people with allergies, eczema or atopic dermatitis, and asthma. Patients with neuropathy, a nerve problem common in people with diabetes, may not realize their skin is dry and may wait too long to use moisturizers, Patel said. Dry skin may also be a sign of autoimmune conditions such as Sjogren's disease or of certain cancers, he said.

Is it more common in older people?

Yes. Older skin becomes less efficient at attracting moisture to itself. However, Saedi said she has teenage patients with dry skin. Their faces may still be oily, but they have dry knees, ankles, and elbows.

Do men and women or people of different races have different rates of dry skin?

Mostly not. However, dryness may be more visible on darker skin. And oil gland activity declines earlier in older women than in older men, Patel said.

Will drinking more water or eating certain foods make skin less dry?

No. "For the average person, there's nothing you could consume that would make your skin better," Lipoff said.

Is using a loofah or washcloth to rub dry skin during showers a good idea?

No. You want to be gentle to dry skin. Exfoliating "just makes it worse," Saedi said.

What about showers?

Sadly, these doctors want to take all the joy out of showers. Hot, steamy showers may feel good for your muscles, your sinuses and your soul, but they dry out skin. The doctors want you to take lukewarm showers that last five to 10 minutes. (Trust us, 10 minutes is a long time in lukewarm water unless you keep your house really toasty, and you're not supposed to do that, either.)

There's no need to lather all over. Unless you are covered in dust or mud, you only really need to soap the smelly parts.

What soap should I use during my short, chilly shower?

Doctors like simple, unscented bar soaps with added moisturizers. Lipoff says people tend to overuse the liquid soaps. If you must use a liquid, Saedi says, go with one that is fragrance-free and says it's for sensitive skin. Patel likes cleansers from Vanicream and Cetaphil. Steer clear, the doctors said, of strongly scented soaps such as Irish Spring and Zest because they can irritate skin.

Should I wash my face differently?

Yes. You only need to wash it once a day, in the evening. You can just rinse in the morning. You don't necessarily need a different cleanser for both face and body.

Do I really have to put lotion on while I'm wet from the shower?

The doctors agree this is better, but they don't mean dripping wet. Pat yourself down with a towel, but leave a little moisture. Immediately rub on some lotion to trap the moisture against your skin.

What kind of moisturizer should I use?

There's no need to spend a fortune on what Patel called "Hollywood" skin creams. The fancy stuff sometimes contains scents and additives that are irritating.

"You have to understand that most of the skin-care industry is marketing," Lipoff said.

The doctors had different favorite products,

but they agreed on one of them: petroleum jelly. You can't beat it for value, they said. It's great for your lips, but probably not what you want for the rest of your face. There, you're looking for products that are noncomedogenic, which means they don't clog pores. Because it can feel a little thick and greasy, it may be best to apply petroleum jelly to your body at night.

The doctors also agreed that the thicker the product, the better, which generally means that you want products sold in jars, not tubes.

"When in doubt, just look for the cheapest thing you can get in a jar," Patel said, adding that he prefers "established brands."

Lipoff suggests starting with inexpensive products and working your way up until you find something that works for you. Saedi and Patel tend to like products you can get at the drugstore, but not at the lowest price points.

Saedi looks for thick creams that contain ceramides and hyaluronic acid. She likes Neutrogena Hydro Boost and Neutrogena Norwegian Formula hand cream. Patel recommends Aquafor, Aveeno, CeraVe, and Eucerin products.

For skin that is more seriously dry and cracked, patients can try "acid-based" creams such as Amlactin and CeraVe SA. For the face, he said products by Vanicream, CeraVe, and Cetaphil are good.

The doctors did not recommend oils and said that a lot of people find lanolin, a key ingredient in some products, irritating.

How often should I use skin cream?

Twice a day.

What if my scalp feels dry, too?

Patel said this is probably seborrheic dermatitis or dandruff, not dry skin. Use a dandruff shampoo.

Will a humidifier help?

Yes. Patel said 40% humidity is ideal. The bedroom is a good location at home because that's where you spend the most time.

What mistakes are patients making?

Patel has patients who like to rub their skin with alcohol and peroxide. That is very drying. Noxzema is too harsh for most people, he said, and back scratchers can break fragile skin. The doctors agreed that trendy tea tree oil can be problematic. Allergic reactions to it have been increasing.

WEEKEND: FAMILY

Tenacious 20-something tenants

Some adult children take longer than others to move on

By SHANE HARRISON
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

“Failure to Launch” is the name of a new book with the intriguing subtitle “Why Your Twentysomething Hasn’t Grown Up ... and What to Do About It.”

Parents live in hope that their adult children will be adult adults, making their own way and moving out of the house in a timely manner. But what if that child is thirtysomething and royal?

Prince Harry and Meghan Markle aren’t exactly your typical adult children clinging to their parents’ apron strings, but they’ve announced that they’re stepping back from frontline royal duties and looking for a more independent route. That silver spoon in Harry’s mouth will probably be tough to fully dislodge, though.

Do you really have to worry about your next paycheck when you can toss out social media statements like this?: “We now plan to balance our time between the United Kingdom and North America, continuing to honour our duty to The Queen, the Commonwealth, and our patronages.”

But maybe your unmovable progeny is a 32-year-old Emmy-nominated actor?

Michael B. Jordan, though, seems a little more typical. He loves his mom’s cooking, and that’s why, though he’s finally moved out of his parents’ house, it’s just a short distance away. “You know ... Sunday dinner. Mom and dad, they cook,” he said on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show.” A big batch of his mom’s delicious mac and cheese is a powerful magnet.

This situation is nothing new, of course. Back in 2006, an unrelated movie called “Failure to Launch” explored the same issue with Matthew McConaughey as the beloved son turned tenacious tenant. But, it might be more prevalent these days.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1 in 5 men ages 25-34 lived in their parents’ home in 2019. That compares to 13.1% of women that age living at home.

In all, there are 4.6 million men and 2.9 million women ages 25-34 living with their parents, for a total of 7.5 million still living at home, more than double the number living at home in 1980.



Most of those with a case of arrested development are in an entirely different world. It’s almost like the real one that most of us live in, where we have to earn our own living, but not quite. They just never grew up, according to “Failure to Launch” author and clinical psychologist Mark McConville.

“They perpetuate so many of the patterns we associate with adolescents — relying on adult oversight and management even while complaining about it,” he told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution’s Gracie Bonds Staples in a recent interview, “neglecting the sorts of mundane



TOBY MELVILLE, GETTY IMAGES/TNS

Prince Harry and Meghan, shown with their baby, Archie, are striking out on their own. But not all adult children are ready.

according to McConville.

“Everyone wants to support their children; nobody wants to enable them,” McConville said, and his book offers tips for striking the right balance, even providing goals for both children and their parents.

There’s no guarantee on getting that well-adjusted adult, but maybe one day you can celebrate like Michael B. Jordan’s parents.

“I’m pretty sure they sagged the entire house when I left,” Jordan said on “The Ellen DeGeneres Show.” “Like, they lit incense and bleached it down and got rid of all of me and then I got a place.”

But you can bet he’ll be back for that mac and cheese.

THE MEAT AND POTATOES OF LIFE

Lisa Smith Molinari



Has technology made deployment any better for military spouses?

For military spouses enduring deployments in this complicated world of internet-based communications and 24/7 news, is ignorance bliss, or is knowledge power?

My husband’s last deployment was more than a decade ago. Facebook was gaining popularity, but we didn’t use social media yet. And the Skype connection was so bad, we scrapped it as a means of communication early on. It was too hard on the kids, calling them to the computer to talk to their Daddy, only to have the screen freeze up.

We found our groove through frequent emails, monthly packages and letters, and a telephone call every few weeks. I surprised myself with how well I handled the yearlong separation. I know that my ability to cope was, in part, due to the lack of information at my disposal. I was, most certainly, in the “ignorance is bliss” camp.

The lack of communication from my husband also helped me accept my increased responsibilities and take control of our home life.

But that deployment might as well have been eons ago in terms of technology. I have no idea how active-duty spouses experience deployments today. My internet research suggests that new technology has played a largely positive role. But to find out, I reached out to a military spouse Facebook group to ask, “Has advanced communication technology made deployments better or worse?”

Of the 14 military spouses who responded, 10 were enthusiastically in favor of using Facebook Messenger, Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime, iMessage, Marco Polo, texting, cell phone calls — any means necessary to stay in frequent contact.

“Honestly I’d say if my relationship would have survived well without modern technology. My wife and I are dual military. Well over half of our relationship has been long distance. I think all the communication channels are fantastic.”

“I can’t imagine deployments without social media ... it literally saved my sanity being able to chat as often as we did.”

Five other spouses responded with mixed feelings. “I can see how it can make things better and worse. Better because of easier/more communication, worse because that volume of communication becomes expected and when it’s not there it hurts.”

“On one hand it’s good because it’s so much easier to stay in touch ... but on the other hand I think we’ve become so reliant on technology to communicate with our spouses it’s extremely difficult when you aren’t able to.”

“Some days I love being able to talk to my husband a short time every day, and it helps keeping him involved with the kids and major decisions. However, sometimes ... [t]he constant communication just reiterates how far away they are.”

Six wives were “old school” like me.

“I think today there can be TOO MUCH communication ... some people become to dependent on it. If there’s a ‘blackout’ of comms for any reason, people lose it.”

“It was actually easier not knowing if and when he would contact me because no pattern developed ... if he missed calling me or messaging me that evening, my mind didn’t automatically jump to ‘Oh my gosh, he’s dead.’”

Two were sub wives who informed us that “technology hasn’t advanced our forms of communication,” explaining that when there isn’t a total blackout, they communicate through a prescreened “secure” email system.

And one Navy wife quipped comically, “Video calls on a ship are the stuff of fantasy and unicorns and fairies and junk. Good luck with that phone call not randomly dropping in misadventure, too.”

What did I learn from this Facebook group? The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinari’s columns at: themeatandpotatoesoflife.com
Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@googlemail.com



iStock

Getting the adult children to move out, and move on, can be a challenge in some cases.

WEEKEND: CROSSWORD AND COMICS

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

STRESSED OUT

BY WILL NEDIGER / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Will Nediger, of London, Ontario, is a professional crossword constructor and writer of trivia questions. He's a regular contributor to National Academic Quiz Tournaments, which supplies questions for quiz-bowl tournaments at the middle-school, high-school and college levels. Since 2000, Will has had more Sunday crosswords in *The Times* (14, including today's) than any other Canadian. — W.S.

ACROSS

- 1 Stuffs with bacon, say
- 6 Convention handouts
- 10 Second of the 10
biblical plagues
- 15 Mission-driven org.
- 19 Underway
- 20 Congress person
- 21 Ancient neighbor of
Lydia
- 22 Intl. group founded
in 1960 with five
members
- 23 "We can't hear
you in the back,
Joanilles!?"
- 26 Winter leaf covering
- 27 "Oops, my bad!"
- 28 Fixtures at most
airport lounges
nowadays
- 29 Boston ____ (Sam
Adams offering)
- 30 Place to fill up in
Canada
- 31 Not just -
- 32 Canal trouble
- 35 Triage sites, briefly
- 36 Brown in a Food
Network kitchen
- 37 Not leave alone
- 38 Put on a production of
a classic Sondheim
musical?
- 41 Subjects of "birds and
bees" talks

- 43 Knowledgeable about
- 45 Pirate's chant
- 46 Scottish cap
- 47 What composers do
when they add the
finishing touches?
- 50 Lets out
- 52 Put away, as a sword
- 53 "What's the _____?"
- 54 Place to park at the
bar
- 55 Police, informally
- 56 Comedian Andre with
a self-named Adult
Swim show
- 59 Russian assembly
- 61 Super-duper
- 65 Western Hemisphere
grp.
- 66 What workers at the
sticker factory do?
- 70 _____ Royal Highness
- 71 Words before
"Remember" and
"Forget" in song
titles
- 73 Shooter of arrows
- 74 Code part
- 75 Brown in the kitchen
- 76 Scarfs down
- 79 Do some pogging
- 81 French France
- 83 Jackson nicknamed the
"Queen of
Gospel"
- 86 Shorten words like
"forecast" and
"boastwain"?
- 89 Equal
- 90 Stretching muscle
- 92 Certain yearling

- 93 What a private detective might photograph
94 Ignore what you have in reserve while taking inventory?
97 Mom's counterpart
98 Assumption that might have a page limit
99 #McToo ____
100 Underground places
101 A person who is a
102 Anti-bullying spot, for short
105 Tailing away
106 Computing pioneer Lovelace
107 Side dish with kalamata pig
108 Betrays a sibling, say
110 Statistician's worry
111 Encouragement at an N.B.A. mixer?
115 Irish novelist O'Brien
116 Pull
117 Lake near London
118 Country ruled only by kings named Tupou since 1845
119 Obstacle to overcome
120 Lous sleep (over)
121 Hinge (on)
122 Make a choice
- DOWN
- 1 Mental slip-up
2 Hairstyles for Pam Griener and Angela Davis

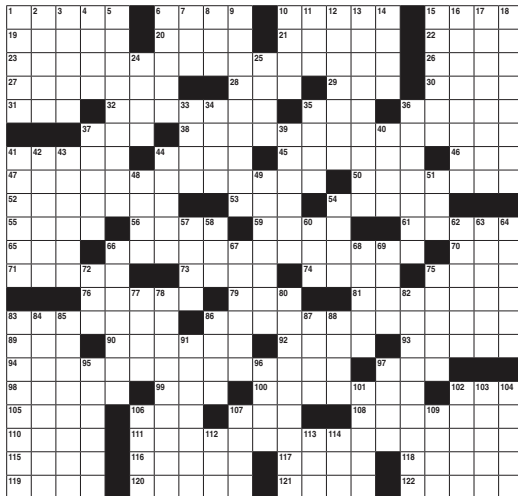
- 3 Take a break from flying, say
- 4 Martial-arts center
- 5 Audiophile's purchase
- 6 Nymph pursuer
- 7 Drag wear
- 8 Soccer phenom Freddy
- 9 Be nominated
- 10 Some scuba gear
- 11 Overcharge ridiculously
- 12 In the world
- 13 Samoa salesperson
- 14 Worth heeding
- 15 Utterly useless
- 16 Nonbeliever, now
- 17 Not always available
- 18 NASCAR and FIFA, e.g.
- 24 Ilex's perch
- 25 Brinks
- 33 Google Play buys
- 34 Big snapper, informally
- 35 Book of Mormon book
- 36 Ready for romance
- 37 Trim, in a way
- 39 Spectacle
- 40 "I totally forgot!"
- 41 End result
- 42 Take up again, as a case
- 43 Like foods said to be good for hangovers and bad for skin complexion
- 44 In (not yet delivered)

- [illegible]

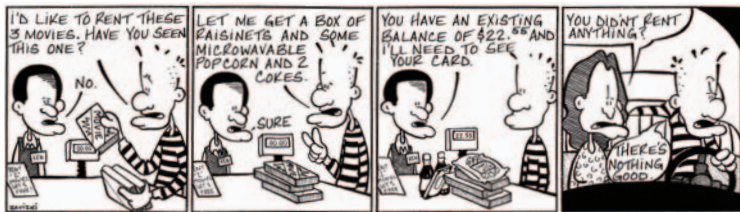
- 64 Something you don't want to be under
66 Noodle, for example
67 Colleague
68 Put on the books
69 Giving up time
72 Carrier until 2001
75 Rudder's place
77 Place
78 Dispersed, as a search party
80 Retro Chrysler
82 Corroborates

- [illegible]

- 97 Series finale abbr.
101 Baseball's Chase
102 Confederate in the audience
103 Ridged fabric
104 Syrian strongman
106 Doesn't just sit
107 Writers might click them
109 Sporty roof feature
112 Solemn statement
113 Poetic "before"
114 Feel bad

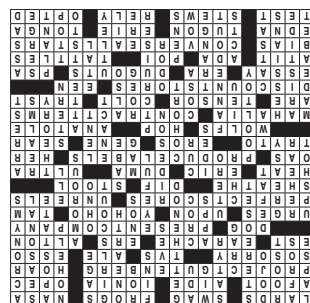


GUNSTON STREET



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RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE



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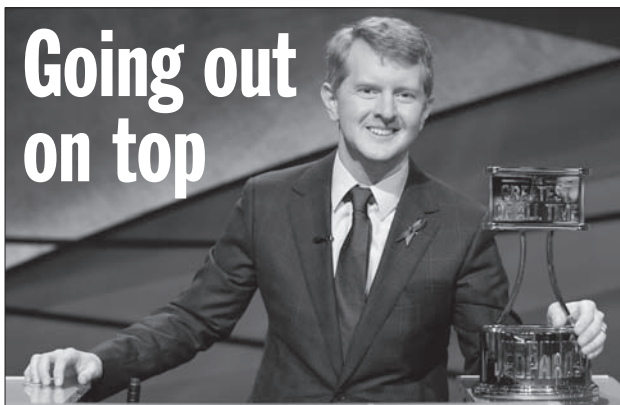
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FACES



'Jeopardy!' tournament winner Jennings says he doesn't think he'll ever return to game show

BY DAVID BAUDER
Associated Press

Here's one thing "Jeopardy!" fans can bet on after a gripping "Greatest of All Time" tournament: there won't be a rematch.

"I'm out," said Ken Jennings, the veteran who beat young hotshot James Holzhauer and Brad Rutter to take a \$1 million prize in the tournament that stretched out over four entertaining nights on ABC's prime-time schedule.

Jennings was the first to win three matches, while Holzhauer won one and Rutter none. Jennings won Tuesday's broadcast when, with the game on the line, Holzhauer whiffed on a question about Shakespearean dramas.

Jennings, who established himself in "Jeopardy!" lore by winning a still-record 74 games in a row in 2004, said in an interview with The Associated Press on Wednesday that he's starting to feel his 45 years when it comes to high-stakes competition.

"I'm really happy to get one last hurrah," he said, "but I don't think I can top this. At some point (host) Alex (Trebek) is going to retire and I can't ever see playing with a different host, quite honestly. It wouldn't be the same."

That has to be bad news for ABC, which saw the tournament become a hit. The first three matches all reached around 15 million viewers last week before Tuesday's match slipped to 13.5 million, the Nielsen company said. A four-day break may have slowed momentum.

A series of second-place finishes in "Jeopardy!" tournaments through the past few years motivated Jennings this time around.

"It's a sports cliché, but I almost wonder if I wanted it more than the other two did," he said. "I got a lot of breaks. I ended up playing better than I thought I would, but honestly, I just wanted to win."

To beat Holzhauer, a 36-year-old professional sports bettor, he had to play Holzhauer's style.

"I had looked at so much tape of James, trying to figure the guy out, and the only way to beat James is to become James," he said. "You have to not be intimidated by his shock and awe approach to the game and you're going to have to do it, too: hop around for the Daily Doubles, bet big at every opportunity. It just shows what a dominant player he is."

It was admittedly stressful, and he was uncomfortable at first, making the type of wagers Holzhauer would traditionally make to pummel his competitors into submission.

Top: Contestant Ken Jennings poses with his trophy on "Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time." Jennings won the \$1 million prize in the tournament that stretched out over four entertaining nights.

PHOTOS BY ERIN MCCANDLESS, ABC/AP



From left, James Holzhauer and Brad Rutter couldn't stop Ken Jennings when the three competed in the "Jeopardy! The Greatest of All Time" tournament over the past two weeks.

"As it went on, you can see the dark side seducing you," he said. "It gets easier and easier every time to become a James Holzhauer-style Las Vegas gambler. I'm glad the tournament ended when it did before I totally split into Vegas-style depravity."

Twice in Tuesday's first game, he bet everything on Daily Doubles and won. Finally, with 32,800 points on the line in Final Jeopardy, he also put all his chips on the table for a question about Grecian geography. When he answered correctly, Holzhauer made a bowing motion in his direction.

Holzhauer picked up steam in the second game, and had a lead going into the Final Jeopardy question, about which non-title character in a Shakespeare drama had the most speeches.

Second-place Jennings answered correctly (Iago), but strategically bet nothing because he knew Holzhauer would wager a large amount. He did, but answered incorrectly.

"I think James had swung the momentum in that last game and if he had gotten that Final Jeopardy (clue) and forced a (fifth match), I think he would have had a very good chance. I was very lucky to be able to finish when I did."

Trebek watched adoringly from the podium. "As I said at the end of the competition, it's taken 15 years to get people to stop wondering how good Ken Jennings really is," he said. "In the 'GOAT' tournament, he showed everyone that he had developed a calm style, delivered with knowledge, and change in betting tactics and an improved signaling-in capability. It was fun to watch and be a part of."

Streaming service HBO Max plans climate change series

Associated Press

HBO Max will debut an anthology series called "The Uninhabitable Earth" featuring fictional stories about what could result from Earth's climate change.

The series is inspired by David Wallace-Wells' best-selling book and New York magazine article of the same name.

Writer Adam McKay ("Vice" and "The Big Short") will write and direct the first episode. He recently signed a five-year TV deal with HBO and HBO Max, which is WarnerMedia's streaming service debuting this spring.

"There's obviously no subject as vast and daunting," McKay said.

After McKay, the series will enlist other directors and writers work on episodes that focus on the unease with how the Earth is in a delicate state.

Apatow film to premiere at SXSW film fest

Studd Apatow's "The King of Staten Island," starring Pete Davidson of "Saturday Night Live," will make its premiere as the opening night film at this year's South by Southwest Film Festival in Austin, Texas.

Universal Pictures will release "The King of Staten Island" in June. Davidson co-wrote the film, a semi-autobiographical comedy about a young man living at home with his mother (Marisa Tomei).

Also premiering at SXSW will be Spike Jonze's "Beastie Boys Story," which the filmmaker touts

as a "live documentary experience." Jonze shot the documentary last April during a handful of performances in Brooklyn. Apple TV Plus has announced that it has acquired the film.

Other highlights in SXSW's lineup include Michael Showalter's "The Lovebirds," with Issa Rae and Kumail Nanjiani; "Critical Thinking," an inner-city chess drama from John Leguizamo; and RZA's "Cut Throat City," a heist drama set in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward following Hurricane Katrina.

The festival runs March 13-22.

Other news

■ Sir Patrick Stewart, Samuel L. Jackson and Lucy Liu will be among the readers for the audio edition of a new anthology edited in part by the American Civil Liberties Union. "Fight of the Century" is a collaboration between the ACLU and authors Michael Chabon and Ayelet Waldman. Titled to the ACLU's centennial, it includes essays by Salman Rushdie, Jesmyn Ward and dozens of other writers on landmark legal cases, from Roe v. Wade to Brown v. Board of Education.

■ Rocky "Soulman" Johnson, a WWE Hall of Fame wrestler who became better known as the father of actor Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, has died. He was 75. No cause of death was given. Johnson and Tony Atlas became the first black world tag team champions in WWE history when they defeated The Wild Samoans on Dec. 10, 1983.



NBC/TVS

"Friends," a '90s sitcom with a seemingly inexhaustible fan base, starred (clockwise from left) Courteney Cox, Matthew Perry, Jennifer Aniston, David Schwimmer, Matt LeBlanc and Lisa Kudrow.

'Friends' cast reunion a 'maybe'

The Associated Press

The "Friends" reunion will be there for you. Maybe.

"There's interest all the way around" in bringing the stars of the hit sitcom together again, said HBO Max chief content officer Kevin Reilly. "And yet we can't seem to quite get that interest sort of all aligned" and push the button on it.

"So today, unfortunately, it's still a maybe," Reilly told a TV critics meeting Wednesday.

Last fall, Jennifer Aniston said there were efforts to make something happen—but definitely not a "Friends" reboot. That was followed by reports that the cast and producers were in talks for an HBO Max special.

The show, which aired from 1994 to 2004, was a popular rerun staple on Netflix until HBO Max outbid it to become the new "Friends" streaming home beginning this year. HBO Max launches in May.

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OPINION

Can't anybody here ask debate questions?

By MARTIN SCHRAM
Tribune News Service

So here we were, smack in the middle of swirling crises, at home and half a world away, as we tuned in Tuesday night to catch six Democratic presidential hopefuls clashing in their last debate before the Iowa caucuses.

It was hard to keep track of all the calamities that had been flashing across our news screens: a presidentially ordered assassination of a terrorist in Iran general; all those fast-changing official explanations on just what President Donald Trump really knew (or never knew) before he ordered the hit; the riots in Tehran protesting Iran's shoot-down of an airplane it mistook for a U.S. missile; and of course, the looming presidential impeachment trial in the Senate, as new evidence has been surfacing with virtually every news cycle.

But the six Democrats seemed bizarrely content to just snip and snipe at each other and never choose to forthrightly fire away at Trump's war of attrition, his lies, distortions and failures that have so tarnished America's reputation around the world. Blame can be evenly shared by the six Democratic presidential hopefuls. Not one of them had come to the debate locked and loaded to really lambast Trump with the sort of vigor Trump relished every time he blasts away at Democrats, in his preferred reflex responses. (Political name-calling is the only form of combat in which Trump has indulged.)

Then again, not one of the Democrats seemed to have come ready to actually challenge and debate any of their opponents on

real issues. Instead, the Democrats' leading challengers seemed content with just snipping and sniping at each other. They seemed to be hoping the three news media moderators and facilitators would take the lead in doing their debate work by asking questions that challenged each candidate's weaknesses in the questions.

And that gets us to what is really wrong with the way our political debates have evolved (see also: devolved). Our presidential debates are really not debates at all anymore. And the blame for that really belongs with just one key segment of our democratic political process: It is my colleagues in the news media who have failed in their roles of being moderators and facilitators of political debates. And it has never been more apparent than it was Tuesday night.

Tuesday's debate began in a most unfortunate way — and frankly that was because of the line of questioning pursued by the anchoring moderator, my longtime friend Wolf Blitzer of CNN. Wolf began by very properly focusing on the latest war-and-peace crisis in the Middle East. "Just this month, the United States and Iran were on the brink of war, which has reignited the debate over America's role in the world," he began. But he then pursued it by merely asking each candidate why they were the best candidate to be commander in chief — which of course was just a lobbed softball each candidate could hit out of the park.

But suppose Blitzer had told all candidates: "Let's start by imagining this is not a debate stage — you all are in the real White House Situation Room. You've been given the alarming information the presi-

dent had about the events in the Middle East. How would each of you handle this crisis? Would you order the assassination of Iran's Gen. Qassem Soleimani? Who would you consult? What steps would you take?"

And after each candidate spoke, Blitzer could have told the rest of them: "This is your debate. So if you disagree with someone, this is the moment you must speak up, challenge and debate them."

Also, it has become accepted that journalists serving as debate moderators will ask "gotcha" questions that are simply not (debatably) about other candidates. Typical of this was when CNN's Abby Phillip, an excellent journalist, asked Sen. Bernie Sanders about Sen. Elizabeth Warren's recent claim that in 2018, Sanders told her he didn't believe a woman could be elected president. It's a claim Sanders had flatly denied, noting Hillary Clinton beat Trump by 3 million actual votes in 2016. Still at the debate, the correspondent asked: "Why did you say that?" So, of course, Sanders denied it, yet again.

And that's the way it was. Two time-wasted hours later, we found ourselves relying, once again, on the wisdom of just one pundit — the legendary baseball manager Casey Stengel. After years of managing the champion New York Yankees, Casey wound up at the helm of the brand-new Mets, hapless losers whose ways once led Casey to be quoted by my pal, writer Jimmy Breslin, as asking in frustration: "Can't anybody here play this game?"

Martin Schram, an op-ed columnist for Tribune News Service, is a veteran Washington journalist, author and TV documentary executive.

Extra interest can't save all Americans held abroad

By ADAM TAYLOR
The Washington Post

Last year, President Donald Trump claimed a winning streak for securing the release of American citizens held by foreign governments and groups. "We are 38-0," Trump said in September, adding that his own chief envoy on the issue had called him "the greatest hostage negotiator of all time."

But this week, when U.S. citizen Mustafa Kassem, 54, died on Monday after more than six years in an Egyptian prison, the White House remained silent. It was unclear whether it considered Trump's streak to be over.

Kassem, who worked as a New York City taxi driver, had smuggled a letter out of Cairo's maximum-security Tora prison that appealed directly to Trump. "I am putting my life in your hands," he wrote, according to The Washington Post's Sudarsan Raghavan.

Kassem was arrested in 2013 while visiting relatives in Cairo. His arrest coincided with a bloody crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood by the government of President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, and Kassem was sentenced to 15 years in prison on terrorism charges that rights groups say were far from clear.

That Kassem saw hope in Trump is logical. The president has portrayed himself as unusually engaged with the fate of U.S. citizens held overseas; he promoted the aforementioned special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, Robert O'Brien, to the position of White House national security adviser last year.

Since 2017, his administration has seen U.S. citizens held in Venezuela, Yemen, North Korea, Turkey — even Egypt — released to great fanfare. "We are very happy to have Ay'a back home," he told reporters in April 2017, as he greeted Ay'a Hijazi, a charity worker who had been detained in

Egypt for almost three years.

But unlike Hijazi, Kassem will not visit the White House. Instead, in ill health and on a hunger strike, he died. And there are many U.S. citizens who remain in limbo abroad — an estimated half-dozen others in Egypt alone. Their families watched the tragic end of this U.S. citizen's fight, too.

Walid Fitaihi, an American detained by Saudi Arabia who is alleged to have been tortured, remains in legal limbo despite American attempts at intervention. Austin Tice, an American journalist who disappeared in Syria in 2012, is still thought to be held by the Syrian government or allied forces. Paul Whelan, an American arrested by Russian security agents in December 2018, has been in and out of Moscow courtrooms for more than a year, with little clarity about his fate. After word of Kassem's death spread this week, Whelan's sister Elizabeth tweeted messages that directly criticized U.S. administration policy.

Trump's focus on freeing U.S. citizens has also been praised by the relatives of those imprisoned. Some argue that the high-profile strategy was a welcome change to the quieter methods used by the Obama administration.

O'Brien, now one of Trump's most prominent allies, was personally praised by his mother, who wrote to him last year. "We know he's a good man," Debra Tice, mother of the missing journalist, told The Washington Post in September.

But Trump's foreign policy is defined by its rapidly shifting focus. There are some U.S. citizens held in Iran at this moment of position, but they are not being held. The family of Otto Warmbier, an American student who died after being released from North Korea in 2017, has opposed Trump's attempts to make a deal with Pyongyang after his previous tough talk.

Trump's savvy about spectacle resulted in O'Brien being sent to try to help rapper ASAP Rocky after he was arrested in Swe-

den last summer — despite little sign that the rapper wanted the president's help.

At an event to mark Kassem's life on Wednesday, lawmakers and activists criticized Egypt over the death. Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., who represents Kassem's district and had received his letter to Trump, called for imposing sanctions on officials in Egypt — a key ally of the United States in the Middle East and a major recipient of U.S. foreign assistance.

"Some argued that the United States had failed to provide the help that could have saved Kassem's life. 'Did the Trump administration adequately use its leverage? In my opinion, I don't think so,' said Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass.

Indeed, though both Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo brought up his case with Egyptian authorities, neither appeal made an impact. "Kassem was forgotten, although he was an American," Hijazi said Wednesday, almost three years after her release.

Though Kassem died in an Egyptian prison, his family face scrutiny about the American man's death. Trump has praised Egypt's authoritarian leader, dubbing el-Sissi a "great president" and privately referring to him as "my favorite dictator," according to The Wall Street Journal.

One tragic irony of Trump's conspicuous interest in Americans held abroad is that it may have helped create an incentive to target U.S. citizens, aware that doing so will get an easily distracted world leader's attention, for now at least.

But moreover, by presenting a scorecard for "hostages" released, Trump has reduced the complicated process of freeing citizens abroad to a competitive game. The death of Kassem shows that it's anything but.

Adam Taylor writes about foreign affairs for The Washington Post. Originally from London, he studied at the University of Manchester and Columbia University.

OPINION

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.

IOC's ban on political statements ignores history

Los Angeles Times
Among the many inspiring displays at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington is a statue of U.S. Olympic athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos thrusting their clenched fists into the air as they received their gold and bronze medals at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. It was a defining moment of the era — two African American athletes representing the U.S. at the pinnacle of global athletics silently telling the world they were one with the struggle for racial equality.

But under a new rule adopted last week by the International Olympic Committee, such displays would be banned at this summer's Games in Tokyo. It's an absurd decision.

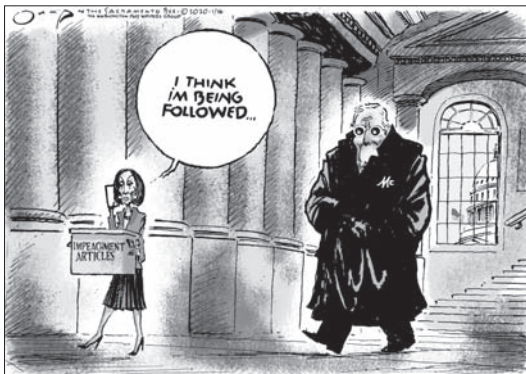
The IOC said the rule reflects its longstanding desire to insulate the international sports competition from controversy, and to let political expression be the spotlight for athletes' performance, sport and the international unity and harmony that the Olympic movement seeks to advance." So it will not allow "political messaging, including signs or armbands" nor "gestures of a political nature, like a clenched fist or a raised fist." It is not clear if these rules will be applied to reporters and on social media, but not on the field or in the Olympic Village, nor during any Olympic ceremonies.

Yet an international competition between nations is inherently political, a reality the IOC has itself embraced upon occasion. Two years ago, the North Korea co-hosted the 2018 Games with South Korea in part to display how sports can bridge political divisions. Asked former North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's interest in the Olympics was little more than a charm offensive, IOC chief Thomas Bach said. If this charm offensive leads to peace talks, I welcome every charm offensive." In 2015, the IOC agreed to recognize a team of refugee athletes — they competed in the 2016 Rio Games and will again this summer in Tokyo — to draw attention to the global refugee crisis. So maybe the concern about the 2020 Games is not about athletes who are protesting; the institution, or the athletes.

Granted, the Olympic Games have aspired to transcend politics, but in reality they never have been able to do so. And they shouldn't. Teams march into the opening ceremonies under national flags and receive medals as national heroes who have played. During the Cold War, the medal race between the U.S. and the USSR was a closely followed competition in and of itself, a harmless proxy of national pride. In fact, the 1980 U.S. "Miracle on Ice" victory over the Soviet hockey team resonates through time because of the political environment in which it occurred.

Nor can the IOC wall itself off from the world. Politics has forced its way into the Games, as well, most darkly with the 1972 massacre of Israeli athletes by a Palestinian terrorist group. Also, individual performances by athletes have long been part of the Olympic spectacle. As Owens, a black American winning gold in prewar Nazi Germany, comes to mind.

The IOC ought to rethink the ban on free expression. A clenched fist or a kneeling athlete will do little to disrupt the spectacle of the Olympics, and there is nothing to be gained by an international forum to



draw attention to issues they feel deeply about. If the Olympic games are to stand as an international symbol of harmony and peace, the IOC probably shouldn't echo the oppressive tactics of silencing protest practiced by authoritarian regimes.

Consider minor leagues for athletes not paid in college

The (Lakeland, Fla.) Ledger
Now that the NCAA has crowned the college football champion a few things will happen.

First, fans will be treated to rampant speculation about which underclassmen will enter the NFL draft. Second, many fans and sports journalists will redirect their attention toward basketball, specifically of the men's variety, as we draw closer to March Madness. That, too, also will generate buzz as to which talented non-seniors will declare for the NBA draft.

In addition, we will probably see a renewal of the debate over whether college athletes should be paid, as Florida lawmakers are now discussing.

California ratcheted that up in late October by passing a law permitting college athletes to be paid beginning in 2023. The NCAA's Board of Governors followed suit. The panel voted unanimously to authorize directors of the NCAA's three sports divisions to craft rules so that athletes could, as CNBC reported, "profit off of their name, image and likeness."

That income most likely would come through advertising, including for using likenesses of athletes in video games.

Last month Saint Leo University in Florida polled 1,000 people on this issue and found: 45.5% believe athletes should be able to profit, while 32.1% disagreed, saying scholarships sufficed.

Count us among the naysayers. The NCAA and its member colleges bank tremendous amounts of money because of these young athletes. And that pays dividends in other, less publicized ways. For instance, that revenue allows colleges to fund scholarships for gifted, impoverished students who are not athletes.

And we understand the arguments that many others aside from the athletes themselves profit from their abilities, and that they are also college kids who want to do the same things as their peers, but are restricted from the earning money because of NCAA rules.

Yet to us the main point is that this will only lead to further hypocrisy, on the NCAA's part, that many of these athletes are students first.

The solution that allows these players to make dough and for colleges to quit pretending they are in school for an education is right in front of us.

On Tuesday at the RP Funding Center, the Lakeland Magic lost to the Delaware

Blue Coats, an affiliate of the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers, in an NBA G-League contest. The G League is the NBA's minor leagues; a proving ground where basketball players make money — base salary of at least \$35,000 a year — while honing their skills in pursuit of the dream of one day playing in an actual NBA arena.

The NFL and other sports — should create minor leagues where post-high school players who want to be paid can make money as they play against people with their own level of physical maturity and skills as they prep for the pros. Unfortunately, the NCAA won't force the pros into a position to do it. It will continue the mirage of the "scholar athlete" until, as will inevitably occur, the first big pay-for-play scandal blows up in its face.

Trump impeachment to test the Senate's integrity

The Washington Post
The impeachment of President Donald Trump returned to center stage in Washington after a four-week interregnum that might have cost it momentum and public attention, but that also improved the prospects for a credible Senate trial. Even before the House transmitted two articles of impeachment across the Capitol, Trump's proposal that the Senate dismiss the charges without a hearing was rejected by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who said he didn't have the votes for it.

The seven impeachment managers named by the House will have a solid case to lay out next week in the new Senate trial of his official powers to induce Ukraine's president to announce an investigation of Joe Biden and of conspiracy theories about Ukrainian interference in the 2016 election. The second article, on Trump's obstruction of Congress, is self-evident. The president has improperly blocked subpoenas from responding to congressional subpoenas seeking further testimony and documents.

The test of the Senate's integrity will come with a promised vote on whether to call for the witnesses and documents implicated by Trump's stonewalling. Doing so is essential for two reasons. First, the testimony of top aides such as former national security adviser John Bolton could confirm — or perhaps undercut — the case that Trump withheld military aid and a White House meeting from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in order for him to help Trump's reelection. White House documents on the aid suspension could even more telling.

In addition, Congress must demonstrate that a president cannot simply reject its oversight.

Trump has said that he will invoke executive privilege to a partial testimony by Bolton and others. That should only incen-

tivate senators: If the president had nothing to fear from truthful testimony, he would not go to such lengths.

McConnell will do his best to cut the trial short. So it is encouraging that several Republican senators are suggesting they will at least consider voting for witnesses. In truth, the question should not be a hard one. In matters as grave as impeachment, a trial that is seen by the public as thorough, rather than partisan, is essential.

Tech firms also obligated to protect customers' privacy

The Wall Street Journal
The advance of digital technology is creating new ethical challenges across society, and here we go again in the battle between law enforcement and the privacy of encrypted cellphones in a democracy.

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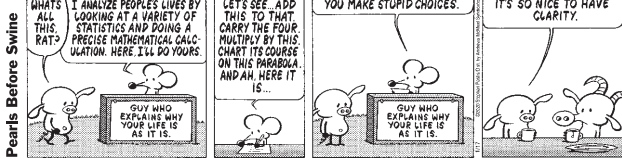
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Eugene Sheffer Crossword

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12					13			14		
15					16			17		
	18				19			20		
21	22			23				24		
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55								56		
								57		

- ACROSS**
- 1 Insurance giant
 - 6 USN officers
 - 9 Crow's cry
 - 12 Yule tune
 - 13 Where Lux. is
 - 14 "Eureka!"
 - 15 Pub perch
 - 16 Bussybody
 - 18 Delphi figure
 - 20 Baby carriage
 - 21 Diamond arbiter
 - 23 "Bali —"
 - 24 Peruses
 - 25 Future flower
 - 27 Pie nut
 - 29 Tried hard
 - 31 Deli sandwich
 - 35 Gibbs or Maples
 - 37 Stage show
 - 38 Custom
 - 41 Pump up the volume
 - 43 Tramar contents
 - 44 Golf bag item
 - 45 Elvis' birthplace
 - 47 Item carried by a dog walker
 - 49 Trade shows
 - 52 Collection
 - 53 Salt Lake athlete
 - 54 Property claims
 - 55 Gridiron stats
- DOWN**
- 56 Solidify
 - 57 Temptress
 - 1 Rm. coolers
 - 2 Consume
 - 3 Highway cop
 - 4 Former queen of Jordan
 - 5 God, in Islam
 - 6 Caron of "Gigi"
 - 7 Melody
 - 8 "No seats"
 - 9 "It's a Wonderful Life" director
 - 10 Winning
 - 11 Heats up
 - 17 "Let me in!"
 - 19 Prank
 - 21 Constitution letters
 - 22 Convened
 - 24 "Norma —"
 - 26 Spotted tile
 - 28 Muscle woe
 - 30 Cistern
 - 32 On-air gaffe
 - 33 Corn spike
 - 34 "Science guy" Bill
 - 36 Hardy's partner
 - 38 — fit
 - 39 Rainbow-shaped
 - 40 Winter footgear
 - 42 Facial treatments
 - 45 Head, to Henri
 - 46 62, in Roman numerals
 - 48 Boxer
 - 50 "A Chorus Line" song
 - 51 Nine-digit ID

Answer to Previous Puzzle

A	A	R	P	N	A	E	S	H	O	P
I	G	O	R	I	L	L	H	Y	P	O
N	A	T	O	T	E	E	A	D	I	N
T	R	E	M	O	R	C	A	R	R	E
			O	X	O			G	O	O
A	S	P	S	G	O	T	A	N	G	R
M	I	L		E	L	I		E	A	R
C	L	A	R	I	N	E	T	A	N	T
			T	A	N		A	O	L	
T	H	I	N	K	S	N	O	M	P	H
H	A	N	G		I	C	I	O	R	E
A	G	U	E		L	I	T		N	E
I	S	M	S		T	A	M		D	Y

1-17 CRYPTOQUIP

RMZGZBZV SMWS JGKXVYWGS

YWHZ LGKRJ MJO OGJSPMJGQ

JHZWO, MZ FZQWG RJSM "J'BZ

FZZYXG XJGLJGQ ..."

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SONG ABOUT A WISTFUL SCHOOLTEACHER RESIGNING AFTER WORKING FOR DECADES: "BYE BYE BLACKBOARD."

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals T

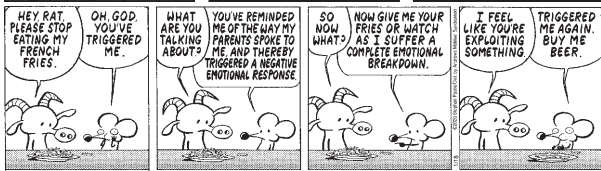
Frazz



Dilbert



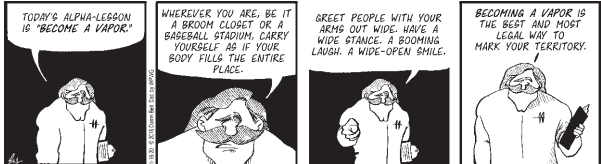
Pearls Before Swine



Non Sequitur



Candorville



Carpe Diem



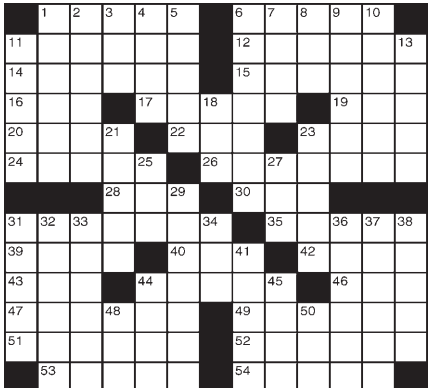
Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



ACROSS

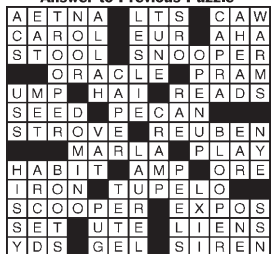
- Designer Geoffrey
- Complains
- "Part II" film
- Motorcycle maker
- Zodiac bull
- Zodiac crab
- Call — day
- Cash drawers
- Tease
- Tennis barriers
- Tokyo, once
- Takeout order?
- Pick up the tab
- Hardly luxurious
- Pantheon member
- Paulo
- Scale ranges
- Throng
- "Get Smart" evil agency
- Force (Lat.)
- Bell sound
- Lawyers' gp.
- "Peanuts" blanket carrier
- Minivan
- alternative
- Zodiac fish
- Zodiac twins
- Chant
- Elite groups
- Religious council

54 Tirades

DOWN

- Egg-whisking utensil
- Regard as identical
- Continent north of Afr.
- Not taking sides (Abbr.)
- Commercial cow
- One-eyed monster
- Very small batteries
- LBJ's successor
- Small bundle
- Aussie gal
- Brief job
- "As You Like It" setting
- Mormon church, for short
- Heroic tales
- Wilt
- "Mazel —!"
- Apt rhyme for "spa"
- Concocted
- Giraffe's kin
- Rustic homes
- Warm and cozy
- Fall from grace
- Deify
- Intimidates
- Graceland idol
- Tea sweetener
- Carlson's successor
- Actress
- Ward
- Inmate
- Hr. fraction

Answer to Previous Puzzle



1-18

CRYPTOQUIP

F V S U - B Z D U J X E V Q N B
T F Z Q F L E U L M K U X Y
W Z X V I X Y L J Y D U H L H J
L F L K W F V A I M L Q N B :
U Z S F X U U H - T F L K U E B .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHENEVER THAT INFORMANT MADE KNOWN HIS SNITCHING IDEAS, HE BEGAN WITH "I'VE BEEN FINKING ..."
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals Z

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HIGH SCHOOL/MMA/TENNIS

Weekend peek

Taipei teams visiting Okinawa

By DAVE ORNAUER
Stars and Stripes

KADENA AIR BASE, Okinawa — For the first time since the season began in early December, Kadena's and Kubasaki's basketball teams get to face an opponent not based in Okinawa.

Taipei American's teams come to Okinawa this weekend, playing the Panthers and Dragons in the teams' annual Taipei Basketball Exchange.

The event takes place at Kadena, and Panthers boys coach Antiwun Tucker said his team is excited about the opportunity.

Kadena's boys won both their games against the Tigers last season, while the Panthers girls went 1-1; the Dragons boys and girls went winless in two starts each.

"We're looking forward to this," Tucker said, noting that the weekend's games will be "our first big test" since the Panthers' only loss of the season, 79-73 late last month at Tomishiro, the island's top-rated Japanese team.

Four games are scheduled Saturday starting at 10 a.m. and four more beginning at 9 a.m. Sunday. Kadena's and Kubasaki's boys and girls teams each play twice against the Tigers.

Tucker said he's aware that Taipei's boys team has a move-in guard from Florida who could give the Panthers problems.

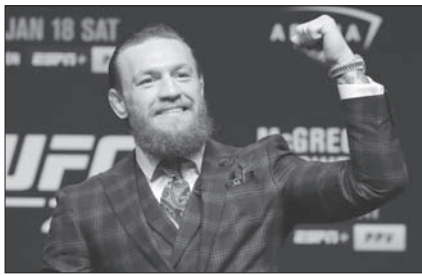
Kadena senior guard Casey Cook will draw the assignment of defending against the Tigers' guard "and he's up to the task," Tucker said. "This is going to be some good competition."

This weekend's schedule is otherwise a light one for DODEA teams, with first semester-ending exams scheduled most of next week. As a result, there are no long-haul basketball or wrestling trips involving DODEA-Japan schools in the Tokyo-Kanto Plain area.

On the mats, Korea's four programs converge Saturday on Humphreys in a dual-meet tournament, while Japan's Kanto Plain schools battle it out at Christian Academy Japan in an invitational freestyle tournament.

Guan's boys hoops season begins Thursday with a new format: After 20 years of competing together in the Independent Interscholastic Athletic Association of Guam, the island's private and public schools have gone their separate ways, forming their own leagues.

Guam High belongs to the private league, which still carries the IIAAG banner. The Panthers open their season Friday at Notre Dame. The only time public and private schools will face each other is on the five Saturdays in February.



JOHN LOCHER/AP

Conor McGregor motions to the crowd during a news conference for UFC 246 on Wednesday in Las Vegas. McGregor is scheduled to fight Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone in a welterweight bout Saturday.

A muted McGregor: Irishman not fiery ahead of UFC 246

By GENE WANG
The Washington Post

Conor McGregor arrived roughly 15 minutes early for the start of his pre-fight news conference Wednesday in Las Vegas, where the fiery Irishman is set to face Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone Saturday in the headline bout of UFC 246.

Such a prompt showing may have been the first indication this was not going to be the circus atmosphere McGregor (21-4 MMA, 9-2 UFC) so often has courted during his rapid ascent to becoming one of the most recognized figures in mixed martial arts.

The former two-division champion known as much for verbal sparring as his decorated combat sports resume then proceeded to heap praise on his opponent, speaking virtually explictive-free.

"I'm very, very grateful and just very honored and happy to be here on U.S. soil, back on United States soil, back here in Las Vegas," McGregor said. "I've had so many amazing moments here in America, you know, and I'm very grateful for this country, and I'm very honored to be here and to perform for the people."

Circumstances inside and outside the octagon certainly may have compelled McGregor, 31, to take a far more muted approach heading into his first MMA fight since October 2018, when he lost via submission in the fourth round to Khabib Nurmagomedov, which preceded a retirement announcement in March of 2019.

That humbling result followed what was billed as "The Biggest Fight in Combat Sports History" matching McGregor against Floyd Mayweather Jr., the undefeated boxing champion, in a boxing-only match that Mayweather won in a stoppage in the 10th round.

McGregor also has faced questions about sexual assault allegations revealed in separate New York Times reports. The most recent report details a complaint by a woman in her 20s who alleges McGregor sexually assaulted her

in a vehicle parked outside a Dublin pub.

McGregor has denied the charges, and fans booed when he was asked again to address them during Wednesday's news conference that was open to the general public in addition to media.

UFC president Dana White, who served as the moderator of the news conference, denied the sexual assault charges would have any impact on the scheduled five-round fight at T-Mobile Arena.

"I'm certainly more grown, I'm more experienced, and I've been through certain things that have helped shape me as a man like us all on this journey of life," an almost stoic McGregor said. "If you were to ask my family, my people who know me, I am no different."

"I'm certainly a bit more focused since this camp and a bit more aware."

Part of that focus includes abstaining from alcohol during this training camp. McGregor revealed his recent sobriety in an interview with ESPN, and discussed it further during the subdued news conference in which he and Cerrone came off more as longtime friends than heated combatants.

McGregor, who said he has not had a drink in the last three to four months, admitted to drinking throughout training camp leading to his fight against Nurmagomedov, even to the point where he refused to stop during fight week.

McGregor also reportedly called the 36-year-old Cerrone (36-13 MMA, 23-10 UFC) a worthy opponent who has earned top billing in the sport, having fought 49 times, the most in the history of UFC.

Although there will be blood spilled on January 18, it will not be bad blood," said McGregor, who ended the night with a face-to-face standoff with Cerrone, providing the most drama in an otherwise unconventional news conference, at least by McGregor's standards.

"You're not going to get your clickbait," Cerrone said to reporters.

Australian Open

Coco vs. Venus II in first round

Youngest and oldest women in field in tough quarter that includes Osaka and Serena

By JOHN PYYE
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Get ready for Coco Gauff vs. Venus Williams, Part II.

That headline-grabbing pair of tennis players — Gauff, 15, is the youngest woman in the Australian Open; Venus is the oldest — will meet again in the first round of a Grand Slam tournament after Thursday's draw at Melbourne Park put them in a tough quarter that also includes Serena Williams and Naomi Osaka.

Gauff had a breakout run at Wimbledon last year, when she became the youngest qualifier in tournament history, upset Venus Williams to start her main draw run and became the youngest player to reach the round of 16 there since Martina Hingis in 1996.

The winner of Coco vs. Venus — no last names required — could meet defending champion Osaka in the third round. The winner there potentially faces Venus' younger sister, 23-time major winner Serena, in the quarterfinals.

Serena Williams is coming off a victory in the ASB Classic in Auckland, her first title since her victory at the 2017 Australian Open and her time off the tour to have her daughter. She is seeded eighth in Melbourne and will meet Anastasia Potapova in the first round. Osaka opens against Marie Bouzkova.

Defending men's champion Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer were drawn into the same half of the field at Melbourne Park, where play begins Monday, so they could meet in the semifinals.

The second-ranked Djokovic has won a record seven Australian Open trophies and is coming off his unbeaten run at the inaugural ATP Cup, where he guided Serbia to the title. Federer hasn't added to his 20 Grand Slam titles since winning the Australian Open in 2018, his sixth title at Melbourne Park.

Top-ranked Rafael Nadal could face a fourth-round match against Nick Kyrgios — their blockbuster at Wimbledon last year was memorable — and a projected quarterfinal against Dominic Thiem, the man he has beaten in the last two French Open finals.

The so-called Big Three of men's tennis joined other stars, including Serena Williams, Osaka and Gauff, at the Rally for Relief on Wednesday night, an exhibition event that raised millions of dollars for relief efforts for the

wildfires that have devastated parts of Australia, leaving at least 27 people and millions of animals dead. Smoke from the bush fires had the air quality in Melbourne ranked among the worst in the world earlier in the week.

On the court, Gauff looked comfortable and relaxed in the company of champions.

Osaka, speaking before the draw was revealed, said she didn't like to look at who she was playing until the day before her match. She joked in a TV broadcast that she'd leave the studio if she was forced to watch the draw.

It will certainly have her interest.

Osaka won back-to-back majors, claiming her first Grand Slam title at the 2018 U.S. Open before winning in Australia last year. Her best run since then was to the fourth round at the U.S. Open, where she thinks she got some benefit from the experience.

"I had a try at being defending champion at the U.S. Open. I'm more prepared this time," she said.

Top-ranked Ash Barty is in the same half of the field and is a potential semifinal opponent for Osaka.

Barty will open against Lesia Tsurenko. That quarter includes 10th-seeded Madison Keys, the U.S. Open runner-up in 2017, and seventh-seeded Petra Kvitova, a two-time Wimbledon champion and the runner-up in Australia last year in her first major final since a violent home invasion in late 2016 left her with career-threatening hand injuries.

Serena Williams is aiming to equal the all-time record for most women's majors, held by Australian Margaret Court.

After her drought-breaking run to a 73rd career singles title in Auckland, Williams will again be among the favorites at Melbourne Park, where she has won the title seven times dating back to 2003.

In other standout first-round matches, five-time major champion Maria Sharapova, playing as a wild card because of an injury-interrupted 2019, will meet 19th-seeded Donna Vekic, and two-time major champion Simona Halep, the runner-up here in 2018, will take on Jennifer Brady, who upset Barty at the Brisbane International last week.

On the men's side, U.S. Open finalist Daniil Medvedev, seeded No. 4, will take on Frances Tiafoe, who made a breakthrough run to the quarterfinals in Australia last year.

NHL

Around the league

Coaches find they're on thin ice

Golden Knights' dismissal of Gallant means 7 have been fired this season

By TOM CANAVAN
Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Firing coaches has been the norm in the NHL for decades. It's just gone to another level this season in our instant-gratification society.

Halfway through the season, seven coaches have been either fired or forced out, and in all likelihood there will be more disappearing from some struggling teams.

Five of the firings were related to team performance. The latest came Wednesday when Gerard Gallant was abruptly fired by the Vegas Golden Knights less than two years after leading them to the Stanley Cup Final in their first season of existence and winning NHL coach of the year honors along the way.

Peter DeBoer, fired last month by the San Jose Sharks, takes over immediately and will be the Vegas coach the rest of the season.

General manager Kelly McCrimmon announced the change in the aftermath of a 4-2 loss to Buffalo on Tuesday night that dropped Vegas out of a playoff position in the Western Conference. The Golden Knights have lost four in a row, matching the longest point drought in their brief franchise history.

The coaches let go for off-ice performance include: Bill Peters, who either resigned or was fired in Calgary over alleged racist comments, and Jim Montgomery, who said he was fired in Dallas for unprofessional conduct. He said he is undergoing alcohol rehabilitation.

While underachieving teams, poor records and owner impatience are the leading factors in the changes, other things have influenced the moves that are based on the hope that past results elsewhere deliver similar gains.

Start with the Craig Berube factor. He took over as coach of the St. Louis Blues in November 2018 and led them from dead last in the standings in January to their first Stanley Cup title.

Mike Sullivan led the Pittsburgh Penguins to consecutive Cups after taking over in December 2015. A few years before that, Darryl Sutter took over the Los Angeles Kings in December 2011 and led them to their first Cup that season. There was another parade after the 2013-14 season.

Instant success in all cases. Hockey owners are far too impatient with their coaches, former NHL executive and current Sportsnet NHL analyst Brian Burke said Tuesday.

"It is a lot easier to turn around a business in some other area than it is in hockey and pro sports, and the Berube factor does not help," Burke said.

It certainly has put more hock-



CHRIS SEWARD/AP

By taking over the Vegas Golden Knights from the fired Gerard Gallant, Peter DeBoer, above, is the 14th coach in his first season with his team this season.

ey coaches on notice in a field that already had very little security.

Of the 31 current NHL coaches, only three have been with the same team since the start of the 2015-16 season. Jon Cooper of the Tampa Bay Lightning has the longest tenure, starting in March 2013. Paul Maurice was hired by the Winnipeg Jets the following January, and Jeff Blashill joined the Detroit Red Wings on June 9, 2015.

They are the longest tenured among current coaches.

Including the seven firings this season: Gallant from Vegas; Mike Babcock from Toronto; Peters from Calgary; John Hynes from New Jersey; Montgomery from Dallas; Pete DeBoer from San Jose; and Peter Laviolette from Nashville, where there are 14 coaches in their first season with their team this year.

Berube, who has been on the job less than 14 months, has the 18th-longest tenure with his team among the current coaches.

Many hockey owners are tired of waiting for success, said Pierre McGuire, NBC Sports' NHL Inside-the-Glass analyst.

"I think people look at history in the league and ownerships in particular, and say: 'What about us?'" McGuire said. "You've told us about this five-year plan, or four-year plan and these guys are doing it in one year, and in some instances six months. That's what leads to itchy trigger fingers."

Change does bring some positives. Following Tuesday night's games, the Maple Leafs are 16-6-2 under Sheldon Keefe. The Flames are 13-6-1 under Geoff Ward. The Stars are 10-4-1 with Rick Bowness, and the Devils, Sharks and Predators are showing signs of improvement under Alain Nasreddine, Bob Boughner and Hynes, who only needed a month to find a job. Still, only four are currently in playoff spots.

Bowness credits his players, noting the positive results were not instantaneous.

"We had to work our way through a lot of things," he said. "And honestly they're all behind us."

The reality for owners is the NHL is quickly becoming a 50-50 league. With the addition of Seattle through expansion, half of the league's teams will make the playoffs each season.

While it sounds like a fair number, things have changed since 1987, when Burke took a job with the Vancouver Canucks. There were 21 teams and 16 made the postseason. If a team missed, a tweak here or there and it could get back to the playoffs relatively soon.

"There was no exile," Burke said. "There was no six, seven, eight years of missing the playoffs. Some teams are missing the playoffs for six, seven or eight years. The industry has never

been patient enough with coaches and it's at an all-time low right now. Casualty rates are at an all-time high, and we're not done yet this year."

The Blues beat the odds with their coaching job change because they had a solid team entering the season under Mike Yeo and underachiever, Berube provided the right voice, players such as Ivan Barbashev and Alexander Steen accepted roles, defenseman Colton Parayko took his game to another level, and a kid name Jordan Binnington gave St. Louis what it needed: most-unbelievable goaltending.

Islanders coach Barry Trotz was Predators coach for 15 seasons. He worked the entire time with general manager David Poile and the two had a plan they followed. They counted on each other and communicated.

"What happens when you're winning, you're the smartest guy on the planet," said Trotz, who won a Cup with Washington in 2018. "When you're losing, you don't know a thing. You need people when things aren't going well. In this business, when it's not going well, you have the fan base on you, you have the media on you. You need someone that trusts what you're doing and can say, 'Hey, I believe in you and I don't see that there's a change needed.'"

It's exactly what he got from Poile.

Cooper knows the feeling. There were rumors about his job being in jeopardy earlier this year when the Lightning got off to a bad start on the heels of the playoff debacle after winning the Presidents' Trophy last season.

"We know the business we get into in this league," Cooper said Sunday before the Lightning had its franchise-record-tying 10-game winning streak snapped by the Devils. "For me being in this organization we have one common goal: we're all in it together. A big part of why I have been around is the communication among all of us. I have been very fortunate."

Trotz said surviving tough times builds better teams.

"The easiest thing is to panic when it's not going really well," he said. "But we're in the winning business and I understand that totally. I understand it more now, 20-something years into it, than I did probably in Year 1 or 2. In the first or second year when you're starting out you're just trying to survive."

Unfortunately, many coaches have not been surviving lately.

"We've had a lot of volatility this year," McGuire said. "There was a lot of volatility last summer. Hopefully it is going to straighten out a little bit here, the next little while."

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division						
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GP	GA
Boston	48	27	18	5	59	128
Tampa Bay	46	28	14	4	60	133
Toronto	45	25	16	6	56	173
Florida	48	24	16	8	53	168
Buffalo	47	21	19	7	49	140
Montreal	48	20	21	7	47	145
Ottawa	46	16	22	8	40	123
Detroit	47	13	30	7	30	185

Metropolitan Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GP	GA
Pittsburgh	48	31	11	5	67	166
N.Y. Islanders	48	29	12	5	63	125
N.Y. Rangers	45	28	13	4	60	132
Carolina	46	17	25	1	56	184
Philadelphia	47	25	16	6	56	150
Columbus	48	20	23	8	54	124
N.Y. Rangers	45	22	19	4	48	152
New Jersey	46	17	22	7	41	124

Western Conference

Central Division						
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GP	GA
St. Louis	48	29	10	8	68	129
Dallas	46	27	15	4	58	124
Colorado	46	25	15	5	56	184
Winnipeg	47	25	18	4	54	145
Chicago	48	20	26	6	50	141
Nashville	45	21	17	7	49	152
Minnesota	46	20	26	6	46	138

Pacific Division

GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GP	GA
Arizona	48	26	18	5	57	142
Edmonton	48	25	18	5	55	148
Calgary	48	25	18	5	53	141
Vancouver	47	25	18	5	54	155
Vegas	49	24	19	6	54	151
San Jose	48	20	23	8	54	121
Los Angeles	48	18	25	5	41	121
Anaheim	46	17	24	5	39	116

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

Tuesday's games

Buffalo @ Vegas 3	OT
Columbus @ Boston 0	
N.Y. Islanders @ Detroit 2	
Pittsburgh 7, Minnesota 3	
Tampa Bay 4, Los Angeles 3, 5O	
Toronto 7, New Jersey 4	
Washington 5, Vancouver 0	
Arizona 6, San Jose 3	
Dallas 3, Colorado 2, OT	
Edmonton 4, Nashville 2	

Wednesday's games

Chicago 4, Montreal 1	
Philadelphia 4, St. Louis 3, OT	
Thursday's games	
Pittsburgh @ Boston	
Carolina @ Columbus	
Los Angeles @ Florida	
N.Y. Rangers @ N.Y. Islanders	
Montreal @ Philadelphia	
Calgary @ Toronto	
San Jose @ Washington	
Winnipeg @ Ottawa	
Tampa Bay @ Minnesota	
Anaheim @ Nashville	
Buffalo @ Dallas	
San Jose @ Colorado	
Arizona @ Vancouver	

Friday's games

Anaheim @ Carolina	
Pittsburgh @ Detroit	
Tampa Bay @ Winnipeg	
Saturday's games	
Washington @ N.Y. Islanders	
Edmonton @ Chicago	
Arizona @ Edmonton	
Calgary @ Detroit	
Carolina @ Columbus	
Florida @ Ottawa	
Los Angeles @ Montreal	
Los Angeles @ Philadelphia	
Chicago @ Pittsburgh	
Buffalo @ Nashville	
Dallas @ Minnesota	
San Jose @ Vancouver	

Sunday's games

N.Y. Islanders @ Carolina	
Winnipeg @ Chicago	
Columbus @ N.Y. Rangers	
Leaders	

Goal scoring

Name	Team	GP	G
David Pastrnak	Boston	48	34
Brayden Point	Toronto	47	34
Alex Ovechkin	Washington	47	28
Connor McDavid	Edmonton	46	27
Nathan MacKinnon	Colorado	46	27
Jack Hughes	New Jersey	46	27
Antoni Panarin	N.Y. Rangers	45	26
Elias Lindholm	Carolina	46	25
Kyle Connor	Winnipeg	47	24
Patrick Kane	Chicago	48	24
Sebastian Aho	Carolina	47	23
Mark Scheifele	Winnipeg	47	22
Artemi Panarin	N.Y. Rangers	47	21
Anthony Duclair	Ottawa	45	21
Max Pacioretty	Montreal	47	20
Jake Guentzel	Pittsburgh	39	20
Brad Marchand	Boston	48	20
Elias Lindholm	Carolina	48	20
David Perron	St. Louis	48	20
William Nylander	Toronto	47	20

Plus/Minus

Name	Team	GP	+/-
Dougie Hamilton	Carolina	46	30
Auston Matthews	Toronto	47	34
Jacob Slavin	Carolina	46	26
Roman Josi	Nashville	45	23
Artemi Panarin	N.Y. Rangers	47	21
Ian Cole	Colorado	41	22
Radko Gudas	Washington	47	22
Auston Matthews	Toronto	47	19
Brayden Point	Toronto	47	19
Bryan Rust	Pittsburgh	32	18
Zdeno Chára	Boston	46	18
Sebastian Aho	Carolina	47	18
David Krejci	Boston	41	17
Artemi Panarin	N.Y. Rangers	47	14
Ondrej Palat	Tampa Bay	45	16
Kevin Shattenkirk	Tampa Bay	46	16

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Surprising Auburn rebuilt above expectations

Even with their first loss, the Tigers have skipped growing pains

By JOHN ZENOR
Associated Press

The Auburn Tigers haven't missed a step after losing their three best players from last season's Final Four team. The fourth-ranked Tigers, who were blew out 83-64 Wednesday at Alabama for their first loss, have ascended 20 spots in the AP Top 25 since the season began and won their first 15 games.

Even with a relatively friendly early schedule, it's an impressive start for a team that had to reload following the program's first Final Four appearance.

The Tigers (15-1, 3-1 SEC) are led by guard Samir Doughty, center Austin Wiley and freshman Isaac Okoro.

"Auburn is a tremendous team, one of the best in our league, probably one of the best in the country," Georgia coach Tom Crean said after the Bulldogs' 82-60 defeat last weekend. "Any conversation that comes up in the next few months about who could win it all should have Auburn in it."

It was far from a foregone conclusion that the Tigers, who have often struggled to sustain success from season to season, would still be generating that much buzz in mid-January. They were picked 24th in the preseason rankings.

The Tigers have undergone quite a makeover after the loss of three-point marksmen



PHOTOS BY JULIE BENNETT/AP

Auburn had to reload after reaching the Final Four last year. The Tigers have eight newcomers paired with five seniors.

Bryce Brown, point guard Jared Harper and versatile Chuma Okeke, the program's first NBA draft pick in 18 years. The current group has eight newcomers paired with five seniors.

"The biggest thing — they're really skilled, but they play hard all the time," first-year Alabama coach Nate Oats said. "There's no dips in their effort, in my opinion. I think it's an every game, every play deal that they're bringing an intensity that we're starting to figure out. But they've been doing it here for a couple of years, and that's why they played in the Final Four."

Okoro has emerged as one of the SEC's top freshmen and a potential first-round NBA draft pick, living up to coach Bruce Pearl's prediction that he would contend for the league's freshman of the year honor. Doughty has picked up some of Brown's scoring and shooting load and Harper's backup J'Von McCormick has ably replaced him.

"Nobody in our program could replace those three guys offensively," Pearl said Tuesday. "And it's harder to replace Chuma Pearl's because he was so good. But J'Von can defend like Jared."

"Samir is a better overall defender (than Brown). And then you add Isaac Okoro, who can be one of the better defensive guards in the country."

This Auburn team is making fewer three-pointers and grabbing more rebounds, thanks partly to a healthy Wiley. The team is giving up 67.3.3 points per game and outscoring opponents by an average of 13.6 points per game.

"I feel like we're probably the best defensive team in the country," Okoro said. "We just work on it day in and day out in practice. Bruce instills that in us, so I feel like we're one of the best teams at it."

The Tigers haven't been ranked this high since spending four consecutive weeks in the No. 4 spot from Dec. 27, 1999-Jan. 17, 2000. No Auburn team had been ranked in the Top 5 in 20 years, including last year's.

The Tigers have won 27 of their last 29 games, dating to last season's run to the SEC Tournament title and the Final Four.

They have benefited from a schedule that so far hasn't been too demanding. Auburn has only played one team in the top 50 of the NCAA's power rankings — No. 48 Saint Louis.

One thing Pearl doesn't know is how his team will handle its first loss.

"We'll see how we respond to losing," he said before Thursday's night's defeat. "We're going to lose. And I always say adversity reveals character. And so our character will get more and more revealed once we lose."



Auburn guard Samir Doughty, right, leads the team in scoring with an average of 15.1 points a game, but all of the Tigers starters have averaged double figures against SEC opponents this season.



Freshman forward Isaac Okoro has been Auburn's second-leading scorer at 13.1 points a game.



UConn (10-6)
at No. 14 Villanova (13-3)
AFN-Sports2
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 2 Baylor (14-1)
at Oklahoma State (9-7)
AFN-Prime Atlantic
6 p.m. Saturday CET
2 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 9 FSU (15-2)
at Miami (10-6)
AFN-Sports
7 p.m. Saturday CET
3 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 10 Kentucky (12-4)
at Arkansas (14-2)
AFN-Sports2
10 p.m. Saturday CET
6 a.m. Sunday JKT



No. 11 Louisville (14-3)
at No. 3 Duke (15-2)
AFN-Sports
12 a.m. Sunday CET
8 a.m. Sunday JKT



COLLEGE BASKETBALL

On the rebound

Injured NBA prospects often face shut-it-down dilemmas in college

By Aaron Beard
Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — When college stars such as Cole Anthony are injured, they are faced with the question of whether they should return or just sit out the season to protect their looming draft prospects.

Like Anthony, who has said he plans to return to action with North Carolina, most want to return to the basketball court, which has proven to be a good option — provided they're healthy. Look no further than last year, when Zion Williamson returned to Duke's lineup after a freak injury and went on to become the No. 1 pick in the NBA Draft.

The more prospects can showcase how they handle game situations certainly helps in their NBA Draft evaluations.

"Seeing them play in a game is always going to be better than an individual workout or 3-on-3," Ryan Blake, an NBA consultant with a long scouting background, said of players in general. "That doesn't mean those aren't important. One of the most important things is getting to know a player, during the drive from the airport to having dinner. The combine, individual workouts, those are important as well."

"But it's always (good) to get as much intel, and in-game situations, there's so much more that you can get from that, too."

Williamson, fellow No. 1 overall draft pick Kyrie Irving and first-round pick Michael Porter Jr. are some of the highest-profile players who have faced that decision.

Each returned to finish his lone college season.

Williamson has yet to play for the NBA's New Orleans Pelicans following surgery on his right knee in October. He recently started full practices and Pelicans executive vice president of basketball operations David Griffin said Wednesday he anticipates Williamson making his NBA debut Jan. 22 against San Antonio, barring any setbacks.

As for Anthony, he has been actively cheering on his Tar Heels teammates from the bench and offered some hope for UNC fans Tuesday night, replying to an Instagram post: "I will be back soon."

North Carolina has struggled without its point guard, who had arthroscopic surgery Dec. 16 to repair a partially torn meniscus in his right knee. His projected recovery time was 4-6 weeks.

The Tar Heels beat current No. 8 Oregon in the Battle 4 Atlanta with him, but have lost five of seven without him to slide near the bottom of the Atlantic Coast Conference standings. That includes last weekend's first home loss to Clemson in 60 meetings.

Tar Heels coach Roy Williams said last week Anthony has done some shooting but hasn't practiced.

The coach has outlined a simple plan for Anthony: "I'm going to treat him like he was my son, like I would want his parents to treat my son."

Williams said no one at North Carolina would push Anthony to return, adding "He's got to feel completely safe about it himself."



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

Denver Nuggets forward Michael Porter Jr., right, only played briefly in his one year at Missouri because of back issues. He fell to No. 14 in the draft but has been playing well lately.



ROBERT WILLETT, (RALEIGH, N.C.) NEWS & OBSERVER/AP

North Carolina's Cole Anthony, left, and Jeremiah Francis, both out with injuries, watch their teammates warm up for their first home loss in 60 games to Clemson last Saturday. Anthony, a potential first-round draft choice, had arthroscopic surgery on his right meniscus on Dec. 16 and has yet to return to practice.

But that doesn't stop the question.

The topic of whether a top prospect should return from injury has become more common in recent years amid the NBA Draft's minimum age requirement that typically steers a handful of players to college basketball for one season.

It follows a recent trend in college football that has had some NFL prospects skip bowl games rather than risk a career-jeopardizing injury ahead of the draft.

"I think it's an extension of the way we're looking at things so much more in college these days, and it's through an economic prism," said Chris Spatola, a former

Army player and Duke director of basketball operations who now is ESPN analyst. "So when you look at it strictly through a static economic prism, it basically comes down to: 'OK, what is he risking in terms of his financial future moving forward?'"

"But what you ignore is the human element to this. And I think, to me, those guys want to play. They want to be a part of their teams, at least for the limited time that they're going to be in college."

It wasn't nearly as much of a discussion nine years ago when Irving went down with a toe injury after just eight games as Duke's freshman point guard. He

returned for three NCAA Tournament games before going No. 1 to the Cleveland Cavaliers.

By comparison, that conversation was rolling about Williamson even before he suffered a freak-injury knee sprain that sidelined him for nearly six full games, with NBA Hall of Famer Scottie Pippen among the shut-it-down supporters in an ESPN interview.

But Williamson returned to lead Duke to the Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament championship and the NCAA Elite Eight.

"For people who said I shouldn't return," Williamson said during the ACC trophy presentation, "I couldn't abandon my brothers and coaches like that."

Porter understands that feeling, too.

It was in 2017 when the 6-foot-10 current Denver Nuggets forward arrived at Missouri as a possible No. 1 overall pick, only to play 2 minutes before needing back surgery. He was expected to miss the rest of the season, though he recovered enough to play one game for the Tigers in the Southeastern Conference Tournament, then one in the NCAA Tournament.

Porter fell to No. 14 in the 2018 draft, though he could prove to be an injury-discounted steal for the Nuggets.

In an interview with The Associated Press, the rookie who sat out last year to rehab his back was asked what advice he'd give another top pro prospect recovering from injury.

"I would tell him if he feels fully, fully recovered — back to 100% — college is an amazing time of your life," Porter said. "That's going to be some of the most fun you'll ever have. If you can get back out there and be 100% do that. If you're feeling a little limited, you've got to make sure you're fully recovered."



WINSTON TOWNSON/AP

The New Orleans Pelicans' Zion Williamson, who returned from a knee sprain at Duke to become the No. 1 pick in the 2019 NBA Draft, has yet to play this season.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Pick six: Top stories to watch in 2020

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

Six story lines that will define 2020:

Trevor vs. Justin

The first meeting between Georgia natives Trevor Lawrence of Clemson and Justin Fields of Ohio State produced a classic College Football Playoff semifinal. Both are entering their junior years, which most likely will be their final college seasons. If they play again it will have to be in the playoff.

But make no mistake: They will be competing. Fields and Lawrence will enter next season as the preseason favorites to win the Heisman Trophy. And if there is anybody who might be able to challenge Lawrence to be the first overall pick in the 2021 NFL Draft it is Fields, who grew up 20 miles away from Lawrence outside Atlanta and uses the same personal quarterback coach.

Alabama vs. LSU

The Tigers snapped an eight-game losing streak to the Crimson Tide in Tuscaloosa, vanquishing their nemesis en route to a national championship.

There is no reason to believe Alabama is in decline. Now fans will be watching to see if the Tigers' perfect season was a one-off for LSU with a generational quarterback in Joe Burrow or if this is the beginning of a new dynamic where the rivals are really rivals.

Transfer QBs

This season the transfer quarterback trend reached a new peak; three of the four playoff teams started QBs who began their careers elsewhere.



Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields, left, and Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, right, will be the favorites for the Heisman in 2020.

Which quarterbacks will be passing through the portal this offseason and playing prominent roles in 2020? Jamie Newman from Wake Forest has said he is heading to Georgia. Former South Carolina starter Jake Bentley has already landed at Utah, and Kentucky has signed former Auburn

quarterback Joey Gatewood.

Still on the market are K.J. Costello from Stanford, Anthony Brown from Boston College and D'Eriq King of Houston, all with extensive starting experience. Phil Jurkovec from Notre Dame and Justin Rogers from TCU are intriguing former four-star pros-



RICK SCUTERI, LEFT, AND GERALD HERBERT, RIGHT/AP

pects. Jurkovec appears on the way to BC.

Expect a few more to come available after spring practice competitions play out — the way Burrow did in 2018 after losing out on the starting job at Ohio State.

Six degrees of hot seat

Several coaches have various levels of something to prove in 2020.

■ **Clay Helton, USC** — His last last chance. And the season starts against Alabama.

■ **Manny Diaz, Miami** — Diaz quickly burned through his hometown cred with Hurricanes fans, and firing a coach after two seasons is no longer a rarity.

■ **Scott Frost, Nebraska** — Progress has been measured so far in baby steps. It's time for a breakout.

■ **Tom Herman, Texas** — The Year 2 turnaround turned out to be more of a mirage than a new normal. By Year 4, it best be real.

■ **Jimbo Fisher, Texas A&M** — It is time for the Aggies to at least contend in the SEC West.

■ **Kirby Smart, Georgia** — UGA fans believe Smart is building Alabama East. Since being on the verge of winning a national title in 2017, Georgia has not gotten any closer to reaching that goal. The Bulldogs play the Crimson Tide in Week 3.

Sustainability

Following up a breakout season is one of the toughest things in college football, especially for those programs that hit heights they rarely reach.

Many wonder what endures No. 10 Minnesota (11-2) and No. 13 Baylor (11-3) will have in 2020. The Gophers have a talented core of players returning, such as receiver Rashod Bateman, and a hot coach in P.J. Fleck.

Baylor will try to sustain its Big 12 contender status without coach Matt Rhule. The Bears should bring back a loaded offense with quarterback Charlie Brewer, but a retooled defense.

Playoff expansion talk

The College Football Playoff enters the back six of its 12-year deal with ESPN. While there does not appear to be much momentum for expanding the system past four teams before the contract ends, its apparent expansion is likely. Expansion talk among the college football leaders who most matter has become common and transparent.

Serious work on redoing the format will probably take a couple of years. Be on the lookout for more chatter coming from college football's hierarchy. Eventually, expansion might not come with a grand proclamation as much as series of incremental public acknowledgements.



KEVIN C. COX, GETTY IMAGES/TNS

The LSU-Alabama game on Nov. 9 in Tuscaloosa, Ala., was one of the year's best. The Tigers won 46-14 and ended an eight-game losing streak to the Tide. Has the fire returned to this rivalry?

NFL

Chiefs rolled the dice with Clark, Mathieu

Free agents with question marks have had a huge impact in Kansas City's retooled defense

By Dave Skretta
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Tyrann Mathieu and Frank Clark were watching the AFC championship game on television a year ago, their teams knocked out of the playoffs, never thinking for a moment what the following 12 months might bring them.

Or more accurately, where it might bring them.

But after the Chiefs watched their defense fold in overtime against the Patriots, costing them a chance to reach the Super Bowl for the first time in nearly five decades, coach Andy Reid embarked on a massive overhaul of the unit. He replaced longtime coordinator Bob Sutton with Steve Spagnuolo, jettisoned aging and unproductive players, then asked general manager Brett Veach to bring in some legitimate playmakers to better fit their new scheme.

That's how Mathieu and Clark wound up in Kansas City.

The Chiefs signed the ball-hawking safety to a \$42 million, three-year deal to bring his talent and swagger to the back end of their defense. A month later, they traded a package of draft picks to the Seahawks for Clark, then signed him to a \$105.5 million, five-year contract before the bruising pass rusher had even played a down for them.

Now, the pair not only reside in Kansas City, they're playing for an AFC championship there.

"A great opportunity to play in Kansas City and in front of the world," Mathieu said Wednesday, before their first practice to prepare for Sunday's game against Tennessee. "To be on this stage is everything you work for, especially myself, being in my seventh year, going through what I've gone through in my career. To be in this position is a blessing."

Mathieu is making more money per year than in any other season of his career, and Clark is now among the highest-paid defensive



JEFF ROBERSON/AP

Houston Texans quarterback Deshaun Watson, left, scrambles under pressure from Kansas City Chiefs defensive end Frank Clark (55). Clark, a free-agent signee in the offseason, has eight sacks this season.

players in the league, yet they both seem like wise investments for a club with a lousy history of big contracts.

Eric Berry never lived up to the \$78 million, six-year deal the safety signed in 2017, playing three games total over the next two seasons due to injuries. Justin Houston appeared in only 32 games over three seasons after signing a \$101 million, six-year contract in 2015, at the time the second richest for a defensive player in NFL



AFC Championship
Titans (11-7)
at Chiefs (13-4)
AFN-Sports
9:05 p.m. Sunday CET
5:05 a.m. Monday JKT

sional career.

He turned that around, too. Mathieu helped the Texans reach the playoffs last season, then landed his contract in Kansas City, where he immediately became the go-to leader not only of the secondary but the entire Chiefs defense.

"That's who he is," quarterback Patrick Mahomes said. "He doesn't have to be anything other than himself. He goes out there every single day and just by his attitude, his mindset, he's leading other guys. His play speaks for itself, but the way he's every single day able to be great, it spreads through the team."

Clark has a remarkably similar story in finding his way to Kansas City.

He also was kicked off his college team, though Michigan did so following a domestic violence incident. And when Seattle gave him a chance, Clark avoided drama until an ugly social media incident involving a female TV reporter.

The Chiefs insist they did their due diligence before trading for him, though, and Clark has steered clear of trouble while helping Mathieu steer their revamped defense deep into the postseason. Clark had three sacks of Deshaun Watson in their comeback win over Houston last week, including one in which he whiffed twice and ran about 40 yards before he

finally brought down the Texans quarterback from behind.

"He's relentless. That one sack kind of tells you the whole story," Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. "He was running around chasing him, missed him twice, got back up and sacked him. That's how he is wired."

That's how Mathieu and Clark are both wired. It's a big reason they have bucked the NFL trend — so far — by living up to their massive contracts, and in doing so, helping the Chiefs return to the AFC championship game.

This time, they won't be watching it on TV.

"It's awesome," Clark said, "but our goal isn't just to make it there, it's to win it all. It's one game at a time. But it would feel good to go ahead and bring home that trophy, the AFC championship trophy — that would mean the world to us."

Notes: Pro Bowl DT Chris Jones (calf) did not practice Wednesday, though Reid said he was improving. Jones missed last week's game against Houston and is likely to be questionable Sunday. "He's a tough kid," Reid said. "It's not a pain thing. It's however he can play to the best of his ability. That's what we're looking at."

RB LeSean McCoy and QB Matt Moore also did not practice Wednesday because of illnesses.



ORLIN WAGNER/AP

Since coming to Kansas City, strong safety Tyrann Mathieu has taken on a leadership role and led the team with 75 tackles during the regular season.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Titans' big gamble close to paying off

Tennessee took a risk when it selected Vrabel as head coach

By TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

TNASHVILLE, Tenn. — Titans safety Kenny Vaccaro listened to how coach Mike Vrabel praised his performance in Tennessee's wild-card win with the hint of a smile.

"I know how Vrabel is," Vaccaro said. "He's tough. He wants you to be physical, gritty, grindy, and he just likes guys that are going to hit. I was hitting people like I've always hit people. I appreciate the compliment because he doesn't really give out too many."

No, the second-year head coach doesn't waste much time with praise.

That's not why the Titans fired Mike Mularkey two years ago after losing in the divisional round of the playoffs, preferring to gamble on hiring a coach who could push them to compete for championships. They chose Vrabel as a first-time head coach, and the former 14-year linebacker with three Super Bowl rings has the Titans a win away from the franchise's second Super Bowl berth and first since the 1999 season.

Vrabel's message since mid-April has been pushing the Titans to find a way to go from good to great after three straight 9-7 seasons. Tennessee went 9-7 again during the regular season, but Vrabel isn't ready to grade his team yet, not before the AFC championship game Sunday at Kansas City (13-4). It will be the Titans' first time playing for the conference title since the 2002 season.

"Well, I think that we have certainly improved," Vrabel said. "I think we've made progress. Something that we focused on a while back is just trying to continue to improve each and every week. So, how close we are, I don't know that. I know that we're going to do what we've done for a long time, and what we know is to prepare to try to go in and play with confidence and execute."

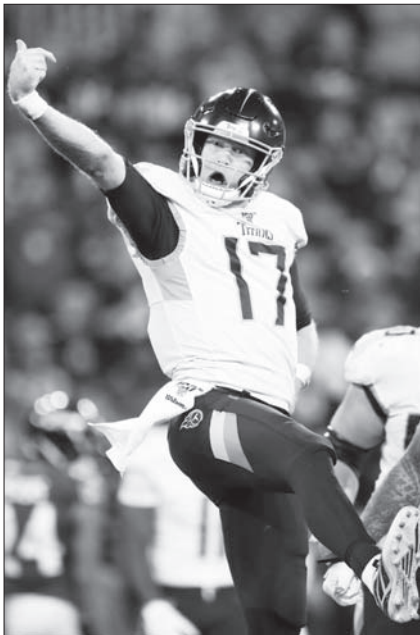
That focus on improvement has endeared him to the Titans. He has a hands-on approach, whether he's banging away at a football being carried by Derrick Henry during a running back drill or wearing a blocking pad to work on technique with linebackers and defensive linemen. Four-time Pro Bowl defensive lineman Jurrell Casey loves how Vrabel and all his coaches are involved and detail-oriented at practice.

But it's Vrabel's mindset that Casey appreciates most.



PHOTOS BY JULIO CORTESZ/AP

With the Titans sitting at 2-4 after six games this season, first-time head coach Mike Vrabel, above, benched starting quarterback Marcus Mariota in favor of veteran Ryan Tannehill, below. The Titans are 9-3 since, including winning their last three on the road.



'I ain't going to say the guy is perfect, but he damn near understands football better than anybody in this building.'

Jurrell Casey

Four-time Pro Bowl defensive lineman on Titans head coach Mike Vrabel

"He doesn't care about the wins, he don't care about none of that that happened," Casey said. "He's excited for that moment. But he's onto the next. His mindset is always onto the next. 'We can cherish the moments for a bit, but let's get back to the grind. I don't care about the excuses you have. You're sore, whatever. You get back in this building and get back to it.'"

Vrabel dealt with numerous injuries during his first season, including starting quarterback Marcus Mariota missing the regular-season finale, which the Titans lost with a playoff berth on the line.

His biggest challenge came in mid-October this season. The Titans had scored only one touchdown in a 10-quarter stretch capped by a 16-0 loss at Denver that dropped Tennessee to 2-4. At that point, Vrabel benched Mariota for veteran Ryan Tannehill, who had been acquired in a trade with Miami to upgrade the back-up position.

The Titans (11-7) are 9-3 since then, including winning their last three on the road. They clinched the AFC's No. 6 seed in the regu-

lar-season finale against AFC South champ Houston, beat the defending Super Bowl champion Patriots in New England and then knocked off the top-seeded Ravens in Baltimore. Vrabel is the Titans' first coach to win his first two postseason games since Jeff Fisher after the 1999 season.

"They're playing real good football right now," Kansas City coach Andy Reid said. "They're strong. They're well-coached. Mike does a nice job with them."

Vrabel, who greets each player outside the locker room door after games, says he's made clear that everyone should be held accountable. That includes himself as he works to improve as a coach.

His approach has helped build a locker room where teammates hold each other responsible for their preparation and play.

"I ain't going to say the guy is perfect, but he damn near understands football better than anybody in this building, outside this building," Casey said. "The guy, he's an intelligent dude. It's not really too much you can question that man."

AP sports writer Dave Skretta contributed to this report from Kansas City, Mo.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Impact player

Rookie DE Bosa one of biggest reasons behind 49ers' turnaround on 'D'

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Nick Bosa remained on the turf with the wind knocked out of him after beating yet another offensive lineman for a sack when the appreciative San Francisco 49ers fans started chanting his name.

Bosa hopped up, jogged off the field and then quickly got back to doing what he's done for his entire rookie season by harassing quarterbacks and spoiling game plans for offenses around the league.

There are plenty of reasons for the remarkable turnaround in San Francisco that has the 49ers (14-3) ready to host the Green Bay Packers (14-3) in the NFC championship game on Sunday after winning only 10 games in the first two seasons under coach Kyle Shanahan and general manager John Lynch.

There's been a healthy season for quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo, innovative play-calling from Shanahan, physical dominance from All-Pro tight end George Kittle and a throwback season from shutdown cornerback Richard Sherman.

But perhaps no one has had a bigger impact than Bosa, a rookie who already has the physical tools and techniques of a player far more experienced.

"It was kind of shocking how silly he was able to make a lot of talented tackles look early, myself included," veteran left tackle Joe Staley said Wednesday. "Now it's just who he is and is what we expect now."

Bosa was born for this role as a disruptive defensive end. His father, John, was a first-round pick by Miami in 1987 who played three seasons in the NFL.

His older brother Joey was drafted third overall by the Chargers in 2016 before winning Defensive Rookie of the Year and recording 40 sacks in his first four seasons.

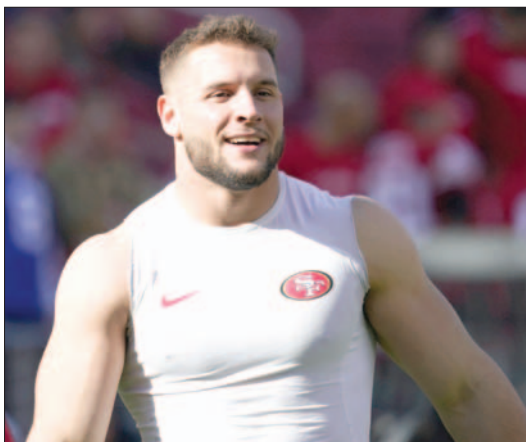
Nick Bosa was dominant as a rookie as well after being picked second overall last spring. His nine sacks were the fourth most ever for a 49ers rookie, and he ranked third in the NFL with 68 quarterback pressures, according to SportsInfo Solutions, trailing only Cameron Jordan and Danielle Hunter.

Bosa also has been disruptive against the run and even flashed the ability to play in pass coverage. He dropped off last week and broke up a pass to Minnesota's Dalvin Cook.

"Obviously, making the plays is good," Bosa said. "But, I mean, I try and bring the same effort, same technique, same every-



PHOTOS BY BEN MARGOT, ABOVE, AND TONY AVELAN, LEFT/AP



Above: Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins, foreground, is tackled by San Francisco 49ers defensive end Nick Bosa with teammate Dee Ford in pursuit during the second half of Saturday's divisional playoff game in Santa Clara, Calif. **Left:** Bosa was dominant after being picked second overall last spring. His nine sacks were the fourth most ever for a 49ers rookie, and he ranked third in the NFL with 68 quarterback pressures.

cause of injuries.

But Ford's return against the Vikings last week contributed to a six-sack performance as he drew extra attention with the threat of his speed rush to open opportunities for teammates.

Ford got one sack of his own to force a field goal late in the first half and even lined up next to Bosa at times, including on Bosa's first of two sacks in the game. That gave the line a new look for offenses that still have to deal with power rushers DeForest Buckner and Arik Armstead on the other side.

"I told Dee, 'I wish I could scare people with my presence like you do,'" Bosa said. "I mean, when a guard sees Dee Ford on them, their mind is racing, they're thinking about what he's about to do, whatever it is. Just having his presence and his pass-rush ability, his knowledge and communication, he's a true vet. It's nice to have him out there."

Notes: All-Pro TE George Kittle missed practice with a sore ankle. Kittle hurt the ankle during the game Saturday but was walking around the locker room before practice without a noticeable limp. ... Ford got the day off from practice after missing time late in the season with a hamstring injury but is still slated to play. ... LB Kwam Alexander was limited after returning last week from a pectoral injury.

thing every week. (Sunday) I got a couple sacks. That always helps. But most of the plays that I'm most proud of are the plays that weren't the sacks."

Bosa and the entire defensive line have been making plays all season. The four first-round draft picks the team spent on defensive linemen the past five seasons and the trade for another former first-rounder in Dee Ford are paying big dividends.

The Niners also made some schematic changes this season under new defensive line coach Kris Kocurek, lining up the defensive ends out wider than in the past to create better angles to get to the quarter-

back and more 1-on-1 matchups.

It has worked as advertised as the 49ers increased their sack total in the regular season from 36 to 48 and went from a record-low seven takeaways to 27 in large part because of the improved pass rush.

"Once we got the pads on in training camp, it was very eye-opening," quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo said about the upgraded line. "They made it difficult on us in training camp and it transferred over to the season, thankfully."

The defensive line took a little step backward late in the season when Ford played only four snaps in the final six games be-

NFL PLAYOFFS



TONY AVELAR/AP

From left, San Francisco defensive linemen DeForest Buckner, Nick Bosa and Dee Ford smile during the second half of last week's divisional playoff win over the Minnesota Vikings, in Santa Clara, Calif. The 49ers' defense dominated Green Bay when they played in November, holding Packers QB Aaron Rodgers to 104 yards on a career low 3.15 yards per attempt and sacking him five times.

Promise: 49ers expect better challenge this time

FROM BACK PAGE

goals and got a fourth-down stop against Aaron Jones before breaking that game open at the end of the first half with a 42-yard TD pass from Garoppolo to Deebo Samuel and a third field goal from Chase McLaughlin in the final 65 seconds of the half to make it 23-0.

Rodgers threw a TD pass in the third quarter to Davante Adams only to have the Niners answer two plays later on a 61-yard pass to George Kittle, and the rout was on. The 37-8 final was the second-most lopsided loss in Rodgers' career in a game he didn't get injured.

"I'd like to think we've improved through the course of the season, especially the last six weeks or whatever it's been," coach Matt LaFleur said Monday. "Certainly I don't think we played our best that day. You got to give them a lot of credit, there's probably a reason for that. That's a really talented football team. We know that. But in order to compete with them, in order to have a chance to beat them, we're going to have to be at our best."

Rodgers finished the game 20 for 33-for-104 yards and had a career low with only 3.15 yards per attempt. He was also sacked five times for 38 yards, with right tackle Bryan Bulaga leaving early in the first quarter with a knee injury. The 1.9 net yards per pass play were the lowest for the Packers since 1991, the year before Brett Favre arrived.

"We've got to play a lot better, obviously," Rodgers said. "They're a great football team, have a great front, obviously get after the passer and don't match to rush a lot of guys to do that. (They have an) excellent pass rush, really good on the back end, smart."

The Packers haven't lost since, winning the final five games of the regular season and then the playoff opener over Seattle 28-23 on Sunday to set up the rematch. San Francisco beat Minnesota 27-



Green Bay Packers at San Francisco 49ers

AFN-Sports
12:30 a.m. Monday CET
8:30 a.m. Monday JKT

10 on Saturday.

Green Bay should have Bulaga back even though he missed Sunday's game with an illness. The Niners also are healthier with edge rusher Dee Ford, left tackle Joe Staley, linebacker Kwon Alexander and running back Matt Breida all back after missing that game.

But regular-season blowouts don't always repeat when the teams meet again in the playoffs. There have been 23 times in the Super Bowl era, excluding one replacement player game in 1987, that a team lost a regular-season game by at least 28 points to a team it met again in the playoffs.

In nine of those cases, the team that got blown out earlier in the year came back to win in the playoffs, and in six other games the team lost by a touchdown or less.

No matchup has occurred as frequently in the past quarter-century, with the eighth meeting this week putting Green Bay-San Francisco three games ahead of any other rivalry. In fact, the only teams to play more than eight times in the postseason in the Super Bowl era are the Rams and Cowboys, who met for the ninth time last January.

The Packers have won four of those previous seven meetings, going 4-1 with Favre at quarterback and losing both times with Rodgers as starter in the 2012-13 seasons when he was outdueled by Colin Kaepernick.

Obsessed with greatness

Packers WR Adams has worked his way to top

By KEITH JENKINS
Associated Press

GREEN BAY, Wis. — Davante Adams obsesses about being great.

The Green Bay Packers wide receiver wasn't a five-star recruit. He wasn't the biggest, fastest or most athletic. He wasn't even a football player until late in his high school career.

But the two-time Pro Bowler has worked himself into being Aaron Rodgers' top option and is one win away from playing in his first Super Bowl. Adams and the Packers will face the San Francisco 49ers in Sunday's NFC championship game, just a few miles from his native Palo Alto, Calif.

"I'm trying not to (freak out)," Adams said on Wednesday. "But, I mean, we're all excited in here. This is a great opportunity. We understand what's in front of us."

Adams, who caught two touchdowns and had a franchise playoff-record 160 yards in a win over the Seattle Seahawks last Sunday in the NFC divisional round, now must face one of the top defenses in the NFL and one of the league's best cornerbacks.

"Well, I mean, it doesn't change, really," Adams said on facing Richard Sherman. "He's definitely a great player, and people have said a lot about whether he's fell off or what not and I don't see that. I see that he's still the same guy, still making plays."

Sherman's 35 interceptions since entering the league in 2011 are the most among active players during that span. The 31-year-old is looking to make his third Super Bowl appearance after being one of the key parts to the Seahawks' back-to-back Super Bowl appearances in the 2013 and 2014 seasons. Though Sherman's resume is longer than Adams', the respect between the two is mutual.

"He's very good at beating man coverage," Sherman said. "When guys that are hard to cover because of their quickness, their feet, their size and their hands, it's tough in the zone. They've got a good quarterback who gets the ball in the right spot. Davante's definitely their best guy beating man to man."

What makes Adams special is his release off the line of scrimmage. It's a skill he acquired during his years as a basketball player and one that he works tirelessly every day to master.

"I'd say obsession is a good word for it," he said. "...I don't know at which point exactly it turned into that, but once I started realizing I could lose people at the line of scrimmage and essentially run a route on air, I figured that that was the way to go. So I just put a lot into that and obviously I made it a big part of who I am as a football player."

Since Green Bay drafted Adams in the second round in 2014 out of



MATT LUTHE/AP

The Packers' Davante Adams caught two touchdowns and had a franchise playoff-record 160 yards in a divisional playoff win over the Seattle Seahawks last Sunday in Green Bay, Wis.

Fresno State, the 6-foot-1, 215-pounder has grown from being Rodgers' third or fourth option behind the likes of Jordy Nelson and Randall Cobb to one of the most productive pass catchers in the league. Adams was on pace for his second straight 1,000-yard season before a turf toe injury in Week 4 against the Eagles sidelined him four weeks. Adams finished with 997 yards.

Rodgers said what has changed most about Adams in their six seasons together is Adams' ability to use his mind to his advantage.

"Because he's made certain plays throughout the year where him and I have had conversations either on the sidelines or in the locker room after the game and he will bring up certain plays from previous games or previous years," Rodgers said.

Adams said that recall has just come with time. He remembered a game last season against the Cardinals when the two linked up for a 13-yard touchdown in the back of the end zone after Rodgers gave Adams a simple point.

"When you get a certain amount of reps under your belt, I

think that that's what puts you in position where now you can kind of read each other's body language," he said.

The Packers will need more than body language to defeat a 49ers team that dominated them 37-8 in Week 12. The lopsided loss was Green Bay's worst of the season. San Francisco will no doubt look to take away Rodgers' No. 1 option.

"You have to understand what they're going to try to do to us, and obviously taking away 17 has got to be right near the top of the list because he's so talented," Rodgers said. "So we're going to have to find ways to get him the football still."

Adams already has 18 tickets to Sunday's game to accommodate family and friends who will be in attendance. But he said there's no pressure for him to perform well.

"The pressure is really on them," Adams said of the 49ers. "They went out there and they dominated us last game and we did not take care of business the way we should have. It's only up from here as far as how we go about it."

SPORTS

NFL PLAYOFFS



'SEE YOU LATER'

Rodgers' November promise to Garoppolo proved prophetic

By JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

WHEN Aaron Rodgers greeted Jimmy Garoppolo following the least productive start of his sterling career, he had a simple message for the San Francisco 49ers quarterback: "We'll see you later on." Less than two months after that lopsided loss, the Green Bay Packers quarterback has proven prophetic. For the eighth time in the past 25 seasons, Green Bay and San Francisco are squaring off in the postseason, this time with a berth in the Super Bowl on the line.

"We know it will be different," 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said.

"That game got away from them early. That's definitely not the team we'll see this week. Everyone knows how good Green Bay is, how good their coaching staff is, how good their players are, how good their quarterback is. ... That game really holds zero relevance to what's going to happen this Sunday."

The Packers (14-3) looked nothing like a Super Bowl contender back on Nov. 24 when they were completely overwhelmed by the 49ers (14-3) from the start. Rodgers was strip-sacked by Fred Warner on the opening drive and Nick Bosa returned the fumble to the 2, setting up Tevin Coleman's TD run.

The Niners added a couple of field

SEE PROMISE ON PAGE 63

Pack bounced back

6-0

Green Bay's record since a 37-8 loss at San Francisco on Nov. 24. The Packers and 49ers will meet again Sunday in Santa Clara, Calif., for the NFC Championship.

SOURCE: Associated Press

Above: Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers celebrates after defeating the Seattle Seahawks 28-23 on Sunday in Green Bay, Wis., to advance to the NFC Championship. Left: San Francisco 49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo celebrates beating the Minnesota Vikings 27-10 on Saturday in Santa Clara, Calif.

MIKE ROEMER, ABOVE, AND BEN MARGOT, LEFT/AP



Top six stories to watch in 2020 season

College football, Page 59

Injuries force choice on NBA prospects

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