**NFL:** Bills look to flip script against Brady, Pats  
**DRINK:** Pairing glühwein with good cheer  
**FOOD:** Delta East brings hip carts to Yokota

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**Action — and reaction**

McConnell blasts House impeachment of Trump, signals Senate acquittal

*By Mary Clare Jalonick, Laurie Kellman and Zeke Miller*  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top Senate Republican on Thursday denounced the “most unfair” House impeachment of President Donald Trump and reassured Trump and his supporters that “moments like this are why the United States Senate exists.”

Signaling in the strongest terms yet that the GOP-controlled Senate will acquit Trump, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky declared that the House impeachment “risks deeply damaging the institutions of American government.”

SEE ACTION ON PAGE 8

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**Troops at Bagram Air Base catch early premiere of Star Wars movie**

*By J.P. Lawrence*  
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Troops howled their best Chewbacca impressions as they waited for the latest Star Wars movie, which premiered in a special showing for troops in Afghanistan on Thursday.

About 10,000 service members deployed throughout the Middle East had a chance to see “Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker” a day before fans back home in America, thanks to a partnership between the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and Walt Disney Studios.

“It’s actually, really, really exciting, to be honest with you,” said Army Sgt. Danny Ramirez from Bagram Airfield in a phone interview.

“It was one of the things I thought I was going to miss out on,” added Ramirez, a lifelong Star Wars fan who watched the previous eight movies of the saga in preparation.

Troops at Bagram, the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, lined up outside one of four showings of the movie on its first day.

Inside, decorative Death Stars, TIE fighters and Millennium Falcons hung over their heads.

SEE STAR WARS ON PAGE 6

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**DAVE BARRY GIFT GUIDE**

Special stuff for no one on your list  
Pages 24-26
**EUROPE/GAS PRICES**

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**PACIFIC GAS PRICES**

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**EXCHANGE RATES**

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(Military exchange rates are those available to customers at military banking facilities in the country of issuance for Japan, South Korea, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. For non-local currency exchange rates (i.e., purchasing British pounds in Germany), check with your local military banking facility. Commercial rates are interbank rates provided for reference when buying currency. All figures are foreign currency rates provided for reference when buying dollars-to-euro, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

**WEATHER OUTLOOK**

**FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**FRIDAY IN EUROPE**

**SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC**

**INTEREST RATES**

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(Euro costs (Dec. 20) $1.1409, Dollar buys (Dec. 20) $0.8965, British pound (Dec. 20) $1.34, Japanese yen (Dec. 20) 107.00, South Korean won (Dec. 20) 1,155.00)

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb. ($1.1124/$1.0989)

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
Graham walks back talk of drawdown announcement

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States could conduct its missions in Afghanistan of fighting terrorist groups and supporting the Afghan military with about 8,600 troops, Sen. Lindsey Graham said Wednesday.

But he also told reporters on Capitol Hill that an official announcement of a U.S. military drawdown there might not be imminent.

Graham, R-S.C., said Army Gen. Scott Miller, the top commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, had convinced him during his visit to Kabul this week that the 12,000 to 13,000 troops serving there now were more than are needed in the country. But the senator, a key ally and confident to President Donald Trump, said he had not discussed the issue in depth with the president, seeming to clarify reporting this week that an announcement of a drawdown would come before the end of the year.

“We have some people there probably in redundant roles, and the capability of an 8,600 force is sufficient to maintain our counterterrorism mission and provide basic support to the Afghan military,” he said.

Graham has long been adamant that the United States maintain forces in Afghanistan and in the Middle East. He backed plans, eventually adopted by Trump, to reduce the U.S. force in Afghanistan from about 8,400 troops when former President Barack Obama left office to more than 2,600 after his departure.

Trump has long called for an end to American operations in Afghanistan and for a significant force reduction. Yet, the Pentagon has not received orders to draw down. Pentagon officials referred questions Wednesday to the White House, which did not reply to a request for comment.

Graham said he has highlighted the potential value of Afghanistan’s rare minerals, in an attempt to convince the president to maintain an American interest in that country. He compared the effort to another recent strategy to convince Trump to leave troops in a country that he desired to leave — using U.S. troops to secure oil fields in eastern Syria.

“The minerals in Afghanistan could be well over $1 trillion. Lithium and other really valuable minerals,” Graham said. “One thing President Trump really wants to do is look at those resources differently.”

The senator, a retired Air Force lawyer and former member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, warned the United States must maintain a presence in Afghanistan or risk “a second 9/11.” He said he was told during his recent visit to Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan that Islamic State’s affiliate in that country sought to attack the U.S. homeland.

“There was actual intelligence coming out of ISIS-Khorasan regarding plots against our homeland,” Graham said. “Elements in Afghanistan are reaching back to America trying to radicalize people here and attack us here at home.”

The senator declined to provide additional details about the plots. The revelations came as U.S., Afghan and Taliban forces have all hammered ISIS-K in its stronghold in eastern Afghanistan’s Nangarhar province in recent months. Graham said some 100 ISIS fighters had been taken captive after locals stopped supporting the terrorist fighters and essentially “starved them out.”

Those fighters, held now by the Afghans, are almost exclusively foreign fighters, many of them from Pakistan, Graham said.

While the ISIS group has been hit hard, it retains hundreds of fighters and continues to constitute a serious threat, Graham said. American support — especially air power — remains critical to fighting ISIS and other terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, which has maintained a presence in Afghanistan.

Graham’s visit came as the United States revamped — and quickly paused — peace talks with the Taliban in Doha. The negotiations stalled following a Taliban attack Dec. 11 outside Bagram that killed two Afghans and wounded dozens. The state of future negotiations was not clear Wednesday. In September, Trump abruptly called off peace talks with the group following a Taliban attack that killed an American soldier.

The Taliban has sought the full removal of American forces from Afghanistan in exchange for ensuring terrorist groups cannot thrive in the country. But Graham said a full withdrawal was not an option and opined the Taliban was not serious about negotiations.

“If they were serious, they wouldn’t have attacked Bagram. I don’t think they are there yet,” he said.

Nonetheless, Graham said he supports the negotiations because the potential for a breakthrough does exist — especially if the Taliban, the Afghan government and the Pakistani government could work together to broker a region-wide deal to end the violence.

“We’ve put a hurting on them,” Graham said of the Taliban. “I am OK with talking. It’s always good to talk, but you don’t want to reward bad behavior.”

He added later: “I know what happens … if we don’t get this right. We’re closer today to getting it right than we’ve been in a long time, and it’s still hard.”
Army mortuary affairs specialist found dead in S. Korea

**By Kim Gamel**  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — A 2nd Infantry Division Soldier who worked as a mortuary affairs specialist was found dead Sunday in his barracks room, the Army said Thursday.

The cause of death is under investigation.

The jet’s weapons officer survived after ejecting.

Four officers from the fighter squadron were fired after investigators determined the pilot’s inexperience conducting nighttime, in-air refueling and a toxic chemical climate contributed to the collision.

It’s tough to plan a memorial, said refueler squadron commander Lt. Col. Mitch Maury in an interview Monday. He was in command the day of the incident.

“You never feel like you can do enough for the families or to properly put things into perspective to honor those who we lost,” he said. “If I try to put myself in the family’s shoes, I think my biggest fear would be people not remembering what great men they were, what selfless individuals, what they contributed. We need something that would remind those coming into the squadron about who they were, what they gave.”

A committee within the squadron decided on a granite memorial site.

“Being able to use a piece of the wreckage that was recovered allowed us to be reminded about our brothers, and all events that took place that day,” Gunnery Sgt. Andrew Torrecillas, all of the refueler squadron, said in an email Thursday. “Sumo 41 will always be tied to those 5 great Americans, but also to the aircraft lost. We will never forget.”

The granite marker, which was flew to the crash site off the coast of Japan, was purchased with donations collected within the squadron, Maury said.

On the morning of the anniversary Wednesday, the Marines participated in a 4.1-kilometer memorial run. The 4.1 signified Sumo 41, and the group made five stops where two Marines shared stories about one of their friends who didn’t make it home, Maury said.

“From my personal experience, it is nice to have other personnel to talk to who are going through similar emotions,” Torrecillas said. He said he was friends with Herrmann, the squadron’s operations officer.

“Sharing stories and celebrating their lives together is beneficial to the grieving process. It also allows an opportunity not forget the sacrifices we all make in the line of duty,” Torrecillas said. “And it strengthens our bond immensely.”

As a final ode to the fallen, the squadron showed a video recorded in late November when a KC-130J dropped two wreaths at the crash site off the coast of Japan in remembrance of Baker and Ross — the only two Marines whose remains were not recovered.

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Marine Corps Sgt. Alberto Ruiz lays flowers during the unveiling of a memorial at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, on Dec. 5.

**By James Bolinger**  
*Stars and Stripes*

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Iwakuni Marines dedicated a memorial to five aviators who died one year ago after the tail of their KC-130J Hercules, call sign Sumo 41, was struck by an F/A-18 Hornet during a nighttime training mission. The Marines were assigned to Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152. The granite monument honoring them was unveiled outside the squadron building on the first anniversary of the accident.


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**Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni**

**By Wyatt Olson**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Iwakuni, Japan — The dedication ceremony was held to honor five Marines who died in a crash off the coast of Japan last December.

A committee within the squadron decided on a granite memorial site.

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NDAA orders courts to track race of accused

**By John Vandiver**
Stars and Stripes

The race, ethnicity and gender of service members accused of crimes must be tracked so that the armed services can root out possible disparities in the military justice system, according to the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act just passed by Congress. The legislation, expected to be signed by President Donald Trump, calls for reforms after a government investigation found that the rate at which men and some minorities were investigated and tried for crimes was disproportionate with their representation in the military.

The NDAA will require Defense Secretary Mark Esper within 180 days after the act is signed into law to direct the services to detect and address the disparities.

The services must record the race, ethnicity and gender of the victim and the accused in every court-martial, and that data must be included in annual military justice reports, the NDAA states.

The military also must establish criteria to determine when data indicates bias in the military justice system. The secretary of defense, in coordination with the service chiefs, must then “conduct an evaluation to identify the causes of any racial, ethnic, or gender disparities in the military justice system” and “take steps to address the causes of such disparities.”

There is no distinction made in the bill between gender, which is sometimes defined in terms of social identity, and sex, which denotes biological characteristics. The reforms were spurred by separate investigations conducted by the Government Accountability Office and the military justice advocacy group Protect Our Defenders.

Earlier this year, the GAO found that in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force, black, Hispanic and male service members were more likely to be investigated than white and female service members. They were also more likely to be tried in general and special courts-martial, the GAO found in an analysis based on data from 2013-2017.

General courts-martial include more serious offenses and typically carry greater potential punishments than special courts-martial. However, the disparities made little difference in terms of convictions.

“Race was not a statistically significant factor in the likelihood of conviction in general and special courts-martial,” the GAO said.

The GAO review was prompted by a 2017 report by Protect Our Defenders that first put a spotlight on the issue, finding that black service members were “substantially more likely than white service members to face military justice.”

**Marine gets 3-years suspended for drunken rampage**

**By Caitlin Doornbos**
Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — After spending months in a Japanese jail, a Marine lance corporal convicted of drunkenly assaulting three people in Tokyo is free on a suspended sentence.

Kahsa Tyree Hill, 21, assigned to 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment at Camp Lejeune, N.C., was found guilty Wednesday in Tokyo District Court of four counts of bodily injury. The judge gave him a suspended sentence of three years in prison with hard labor.

Hill won’t have to serve his prison time unless he commits another crime in Japan within the next five years.

Hill had been in jail for 110 days awaiting trial and sentencing, the judge said. Speaking through an interpreter Wednesday evening, Hill’s defense attorney told Stars and Stripes Hill would be immediately released. After a night of drinking with fellow Marines in the city’s Shinjuku ward on May 25, Hill struck two men and choked a woman, according to testimony at a November hearing. The Marines were in town from nearby Camp Fuji.

Hill broke the male bystander’s nose and left all three with bruises, according to his testimony. Separated from the other Marines around midnight that night, Hill became lost, passed out in an alley and woke up at 6:30 a.m. feeling scared and disoriented, he testified last month.

“My heart was racing. I shouted for help,” he said. “People ignored me, which made me think I was dreaming. I started to act recklessly because of that.”

He struck a taxi driver who approached him for an $8 fare and ran away without paying. Later, he punched a bystander who tried to help him find his hotel, Hill testified.

He said he mistook the woman he injured for his sister. Hill learned later, he testified, that he choked the woman, who fell and broke her jaw in the incident.

Through an interpreter, the judge on Wednesday called the attacks “violent and dangerous,” especially because of Hill’s “built-up physique through training” with the Marine Corps.

The judge said he suspended Hill’s sentence because Hill paid about $16,800 in compensation to his victims and he “can’t rule out” that an underlying mental illness played a role in Hill’s actions.

The judge said he also took into account Hill’s admission of guilt and promises to seek counseling, stop drinking alcohol and not reoffend.

“This is not a statistically significant factor in the likelihood of conviction in general and special courts-martial,” the GAO said.

The GAO review was prompted by a 2017 report by Protect Our Defenders that first put a spotlight on the issue, finding that black service members were “substantially more likely than white service members to face military justice.”

**Space Force may call Colo. base its home**

**By John Vandiver**
Stars and Stripes

The Space Force, a new armed service branch that will be responsible for America’s military efforts in space, needs a home and it may be Colorado.

The National Defense Authorization Act, passed by Congress and expected to soon be signed into law by President Donald Trump, doesn’t explicitly designate where the new military branch’s main hub will be. But the spending plan authorizes $148 million to begin construction on a Combined Space Operations Facility in Colorado Springs, an area already home to the newly established U.S. Space Command.

Colorado officials appear optimistic that the region will be the eventual headquarters for the Space Force personnel currently serving on Peterson and Schriever Air Force Bases, this NDAA solidifies our community’s position as the premier defense space community of the United States,” Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colo., said in a statement.

The establishment of the Space Force, a top priority for Trump, marks the first time in more than 70 years that a new military service has been formed. U.S. Air Force Gen. John Raymond, who heads Space Command, told Stars and Stripes in October that growing security demands in space and the need to defend satellites from potential attack require a military branch devoted to it.

The idea is for the Space Force to be a partner to the Air Force as the Marine Corps is to the Navy.

“I think it is absolutely important that we have a separate service with a singular focus on space,” Raymond said.

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Senators push Trump on N. Korea, urge sanctions

By David Nakamura
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Senators from both parties are seeking to force President Donald Trump’s hand on North Korea, with leading Democrats warning Wednesday that his diplomatic outreach is “on the brink of failure” and a bipartisan group pressing for stronger economic sanctions on Kim Jong Un’s regime.

The moves illustrate growing alarm on Capitol Hill that the administration’s stalled nuclear talks with Pyongyang could lead to an increase in hostilities on the Korean Peninsula, as Kim has promised an unwelcome “Christmas gift” by year’s end.

The increasing pressure from lawmakers could put Trump in a difficult spot as his administration has struggled to convince the North Koreans to reengage and move to defuse tensions in recent weeks by limiting joint military drills with South Korea and blocking a United Nations forum.

Despite those gestures, Trump’s top North Korea negotiator, Stephen Biegun, left Seoul on Tuesday after meeting with senior South Korean leaders in a visit that was viewed as a last-ditch effort to resuscitate engagement with the North, which has been stalled since a working-level meeting in Stockholm in October ended without a breakthrough.

Biegun, who was in Tokyo on Wednesday, was scheduled to visit Beijing before returning to the United States.

The secondary sanctions legislation calls on the administration to designate entities for sanctions within four to six months of the bill becoming law. The president can waive the sanctions only if he makes a case that they adversely affect U.S. national security, lawmakers said.

FROM FRONT PAGE

The building’s kitchen area was transformed into something like a Star Wars cantina. There was even a red carpet rolled out in the building for selves.

Not many troops at the first screening wore the fanciful costumes of the heroic Jedi knights or insidious Sith lords, but those at the late-night screenings often did, said Don Baumgartner, Morale, Welfare and Recreation director at Bagram.

Bagram has hosted other Star Wars movies in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Preparations to bring the new movie to the Middle East began in the spring, Tom Shull,AAFES director and CEO, said in an email.

“The movie was hand-carried into Afghanistan and other countries on encrypted DVDs that must be destroyed afterward,” Shull said.

“Enjoying a first-run blockbuster movie offers troops a break from the tensions of deployment,” Shull said. “It also helps them feel connected with family and friends, who are seeing the same movie back home.”

Ramirez, who is on his fourth deployment, recalled the days when he had to wait until he got home to watch big-ticket films.

“The aviation operations specialist said he feared speaking to his friends and family due to spoilers. But now that he has seen “The Rise of Skywalker,” he said he doesn’t want to spoil it for anyone else — although the thought had crossed his mind.

“It’s such huge relief, for the first time, I kind of get to know about these movies before other people,” Ramirez said.

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Sgt. Danny Ramirez from the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade prepares to watch the Star Wars premiere on Thursday at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

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A military vehicle passes by the Unification Bridge, which leads to Panmunjom in the Demilitarized Zone in Paju, South Korea, on Monday. Senators are pressuring the president over North Korea.

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2 models of helicopters eyed for Marines

By Tony Capaccio
Bloomberg

The Pentagon is assessing whether the Marine Corps should scale back its $31 billion program to buy new King Stallion helicopters from Lockheed Martin Corp. and opt for a modified version of the latest-model Chinooks built by rival Boeing Co.

Officials from the Pentagon's acquisition, sustainment, research and operational test offices are evaluating and expanding on a preliminary review completed in May by the Pentagon's independent cost assessment office at the urging of lawmakers.

They are "reviewing the operational suitability and cost effectiveness of a potential mix" of the helicopters "to perform the heavy lift mission," John Whiteley, acting director of the cost assessment office, wrote the congressional defense committees this month.

A Pentagon decision to move toward a combination of the copters as soon as the fiscal 2021 budget would be a blow to Bethesda, Maryland-based Lockheed.

The Navy's plans to buy 200 King Stallions were a prime mover in the $39 billion acquisition of Sikorsky Aircraft from United Technologies Corp. in 2015. Twenty have been put on contract to date. The current budget plan calls for requesting 77 King Stallions, designated CH-53K, through 2024, including 14 in fiscal 2021, which would be five more than this year.

A mix would be a boon to Chicago-based Boeing, its Philadelphia plant and the 4,580 workers there. That's especially true given that the Army has proposed halting procurement of 28 CH-47 Chinooks and shifting an estimated $862 million into a separate program.

The preliminary analysis "concluded that a pure fleet of maritized" Chinooks could save as much as 40% compared with a fleet composed entirely of King Stallions, John Sherwood, a spokesman for the cost assessment office, said in a statement. But he said a fleet solely of Chinooks "cannot meet the mission set" for heavy lift needs.

The preliminary analysis examined expenditures across a 20-year life-cycle and considered acquisition costs, fuel usage, logistics support costs, Sherwood said.

Army plans more medical drills in Africa amid growing demand

By Nancy Montgomery
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — The Army plans to nearly double the number of medical exercises it holds in Africa, providing care to some of the world's most disadvantaged people and giving Army medical units unique opportunities to practice and develop skills.

U.S. Army Africa has for years sent small groups of active duty and reserve medical doctors, nurses and medics on short-term medical-readiness exercises, or MEDREXs. They're designed to train soldiers to deploy and practice medicine without the technology and tools they're accustomed to, share best practices with health care providers in African nations and build relationships.

Last year, they performed 235 general surgeries, saw 725 people in the emergency room and did 98 medical-equipment repairs in countries across Africa.

"African and U.S. Army medical professionals who've participated in recent MEDREXes have benefited greatly, both personally and professionally," USARAF commander Maj. Gen. Roger Cloutier said. "Now there are more African partners and U.S. Army medical units asking to participate in these exercises than ever before."

"Taking part in exercises in places with scarce medical resources "creates a new environment and skills that could be useful on the battlefield," said Col. Doug Phillips, chief nurse at the 44th Medical Brigade in Fort Bragg, N.C., who has done two MEDREXs in Rwanda.

In the Rwandan military hospital where Phillips was based, many surgeries are done with only a nerve block and the patient still awake. "One guy almost didn't know what to do because the (patient) was sitting there looking at him," said Phillips, a nurse anesthetist. MEDREXs also expose Americans to injuries and illnesses not often seen in the U.S., he said. For example, a woman who had fractured all the bones on the left side of her face in a motor-cycle crash didn't have the money or opportunity to see a physician, and the fractures had begun healing on their own, causing pain and deformity, he said.

Her bones had to be rebroken and set "so she could close her jaw and chew," Phillips said.

But not every MEDREX has been worthwhile for the Americans. A surgeon who deployed to Cameroon two years ago said the U.S. team was allowed only to assist in mundane tasks, not perform surgery. Deployed surgeons in 2014 and 2015 on average operated on patients less than once a month, a study published in the Journal of the American College of Surgeons found — a rate that is insufficient to maintain skills, experts have said.

A Pentagon decision to move toward a combination of the copters as soon as the fiscal 2021 budget would be a blow to Bethesda, Maryland-based Lockheed.

The Navy's plans to buy 200 King Stallions were a prime mover in the $39 billion acquisition of Sikorsky Aircraft from United Technologies Corp. in 2015. Twenty have been put on contract to date. The current budget plan calls for requesting 77 King Stallions, designated CH-53K, through 2024, including 14 in fiscal 2021, which would be five more than this year.

A mix would be a boon to Chicago-based Boeing, its Philadelphia plant and the 4,580 workers there. That's especially true given that the Army has proposed halting procurement of 28 CH-47 Chinooks and shifting an estimated $862 million into a separate program.

The preliminary analysis "concluded that a pure fleet of maritized" Chinooks could save as much as 40% compared with a fleet composed entirely of King Stallions, John Sherwood, a spokesman for the cost assessment office, said in a statement. But he said a fleet solely of Chinooks "cannot meet the mission set" for heavy lift needs.

The preliminary analysis examined expenditures across a 20-year life-cycle and considered acquisition costs, fuel usage, logistics support costs, Sherwood said.

Army plans more medical drills in Africa amid growing demand

By Nancy Montgomery
Stars and Stripes

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Based on the initial work, Deputy Defense Secretary David Norquist directed a wider review of the service's initiatives to see if there was a mix or an all-King Stallion fleet "better balances" meeting the mission against cost-effectiveness, according to the material sent to Congress. It said the study "will include reviewing the options of training, simulators and maintenance."

But the Marine Corps is signalizing resistance to the mixed-fleet idea.

Lieutenant General Steven Faulk, the commander of the Marine Corps Reserve, said in a statement that a mixed fleet "degrades capabilities by 40%, while only realizing a po-
By Lisa Mascaro and Mary Clare Jalonick
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming only the third American chief executive to be formally charged under the Constitution’s ultimate remedy for high crimes and misdemeanors.

The historic vote split along party lines Wednesday night, much the way it has divided the nation, over a charge that the 45th president abused the power of his office by enlisting a foreign government to investigate a political rival ahead of the 2020 election. The House then approved a second charge, that he obstructed Congress in its investigation.

The articles of impeachment, the political equivalent of an indictment, now go to the Senate for trial. If Trump is acquitted by the Republican-led chamber, as expected, he still would have to run for reelection carrying the enduring stain of impeachment on his purposely disruptive presidency.

The votes for impeachment were 230-197-1 on the first charge, 229-198-4 on the second.

Democrats led Wednesday night’s voting, framed in what many said was their duty to protect the Constitution and uphold the nation’s system of checks and balances. Republicans stood by their party’s leader, who has frequently tested the bounds of civic balances. Republicans stood by their party’s leader, who has frequently tested the bounds of civic norms. Trump called the whole affair a “witch hunt,” a “hoax” and a “sham,” and sometimes all three.

The trial is expected to begin in January in the Senate, where a vote of two-thirds is necessary for conviction. While Democrats had the majority in the House to impeach Trump, Republicans control the Senate and few if any are expected to diverge from plans to acquit the president ahead of early state election-year primary voting.

Pelosi, once reluctant to lead Democrats into a partisan impeachment, gavotted both votes closed, risking her majority and speakership to follow the effort to its House conclusion.

No Republicans voted for impeachment, and Democrats had only slight defections on their side. Voting was conducted manually with ballots, to mark the moment.

On the first article, abuse of power, two Democrats, Jeff Van Drew of New Jersey, who is considering switching parties to become a Republican, and Collin Peterson of Minnesota voted against impeaching Trump. On the second article, obstruction, those two and freshman Rep. Jared Golden of Maine voted against. Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, who is running for president, voted “present” on both.

What Pelosi called a sad and solemn moment for the country, coming in the first year after Democrats swept control of the House, unfolded in a caustic day-long session that showcased the nation’s divisions.

House impeachment resolution laid out in stark terms the articles of impeachment against Trump stemming from his July phone call when he asked the Ukrainian president for a “favor” — to announce he was investigating Democrats including potential 2020 rival Joe Biden.

At the time, Zelenskiy, new head of a country reeling from Russian aggression and war, sought a coveted White House visit to show backing from the United States. A partial juror.

On the parallel side, Republicans argued that Democrats were impeaching Trump because they can’t beat him in 2020.

Congress. The White House delayed the funds, but Trump eventually released the money once Congress intervened.

Narrow in scope but broad in its charges, the impeachment resolution said the president “betrayed the nation by abusing his high office to enlist a foreign power in corrupting democratic elections,” and then obstructing Congress’ oversight like “no president” in U.S. history.

“President Trump, by such conduct, has demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national security and the Constitution if allowed to remain in office,” it said.

Republicans argued that Democrats were impeaching Trump because they can’t beat him in 2020.

Democratic leaders in the effort in the House to impeach President Donald Trump talk to reporters after the vote Wednesday on Capitol Hill in Washington.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif, center, walks to his office after a vote to impeach Donald Trump on Capitol Hill.

Action: Pelosi delays delivering articles of impeachment to Senate

FROM FRONT PAGE

As for what the Senate should do, the Kentucky Republican said, “It could not be clearer which outcome would serve the long-term health of our country and most unfair” impeachment trial in history.

Fighting back and using McConnell’s own words, Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York said on the Senate floor that the Republican leader was plotting the “most rushed, least thorough and most unfair” impeachment trial in history. His words were joined by other distinguished Democrats, including former Trump national security adviser John Bolton, who declined to testify before the impeachment.

“McConnell claimed the impeachment was motivated by partisan rage,” said Schumer. “This from the man who said proudly, I am not impartial.”

“What hypocrisy.”

McConnell accused House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of being afraid to send “their shoddy work product to the Senate” after she threw uncertainty into the impeachment process late Wednesday by refusing to say when she would send two impeachment articles to the Senate for a trial.

He said the bipartisan-controlled House “has let its partisan rage at this particular president create a toxic new precedent that will echo well into the future.”

Pelosi was upbeat the day after the House impeached Trump on two charges — abusing his presidential power and obstructing Congress’ attempt to secure from his pressure on Ukraine to announce investigations of his political rival as Trump withheld U.S. aid.

“We’ve been hearing from people all over the country,” Pelosi told reporters at the Capitol on Thursday. “Seems like people have a spring in their step because the president was held accountable for his misbehavior.”

Pressed about next steps, Pelosi wouldn’t say. Democrats are insisting on more witnesses, testimony and documents than McConnell appears willing to provide before they name the House “managers” who would prosecute Trump in the Senate.

“The next thing will be when we see the process that is set forth in the Senate,” Pelosi said. “Then we’ll know the number of managers we may have to go forward and who would choose.”

Speaking earlier, McConnell said the two articles failed to meet the constitutional standard of high crimes and misdemeanors and that the Senate simply impeached a political foe for an abuse of power offense that isn’t considered a crime.

“The framers built the Senate to provide stability,” McConnell said. “To keep partisan passions from boiling over. Moments like this are why the United States Senate exists.”

A trial in the Republican-controlled Senate would almost certainly result in Trump being acquitted of the charges.

McConnell was meeting later Thursday with Schumner to begin negotiations on how to conduct next year’s Senate trial.

The two leaders have a tense relationship and McConnell holds a tactical edge if he can keep his S-3 member Senate majority united.

A day after his impeachment, Trump was quick to lash out at Pelosi.

“Now the Do Nothing Party want to Do Nothing with the Articles & not deliver them to the Senate,” Trump tweeted Thursday morning. He claimed the timing of the trial was up to the Senate, and that if Democrats didn’t transmit the articles of impeachment “they would lose by Default!”

But there is no Constitutional requirement on Pelosi to send them swiftly — or at all.

Pelosi said House Democrats could not name impeachment managers — House prosecutors who make the case for Trump’s conviction and removal from office — until they know more about how the Senate will conduct a trial.

“We cannot name managers until we see what the process is on the Senate side,” Pelosi said. “And I would hope that that will be soon. So far we haven’t seen anything that looks fair to us. So hopefully it will be fair. And when we see what that is, we’ll send our managers.”

McConnell rejected a proposal earlier this week from Schumner, D-N.Y., to call several witnesses. McConnell also said that he is coordinating with the White House and declared that “I am not an impartial juror.”
Trump says he’s ‘not worried’ in speech at rally

By Darlene Superville, Zeke Miller
Associated Press

BATTLE CREEK, Mich. — Defiant in the face of a historic rebuke, President Donald Trump lashed out Wednesday at the Democratic Party as he delivered a raucous two-hour rally speech that overturned the vote.

“Crazy Nancy Pelosi’s House Democrats have branded themselves with an eternal mark of shame,” Trump told the crowd in battleground Michigan, where he took the stage just minutes before becoming only the third president in U.S. history to be impeached.

“It’s a disgrace.”

It was a dramatic and discordant split-screen moment, with Trump emerging from a mock fireplace like Santa Claus at the Christmas-themed rally as the impeachment debate played out in Washington. It was also Trump’s longest rally ever, according to the tracking site FactCheck.org, clocking in at two hours and one minute.

As Trump spoke — seemingly unaware for a stretch that the votes had been tallied — the House moved to impeach him on two counts. The first charges him with abuse of power for allegedly pressuring the president of Ukraine to investigate his Democratic rivals while crucial U.S. security aid was being withheld. The second charges him with obstruction of Congress in stonewalling investigative efforts.

Yet there is little chance Trump will be convicted by the Republican-controlled Senate and removed from office — a fact that Trump and his allies have pointed to as they have tried to minimize the vote’s significance. Still, Trump clearly was stung by the stain that an “ugly” impeachment will attach to his legacy.

Throughout the rally, Trump unleashed his anger at the Democrats, slammed their effort as “illegal” and accused the party of demonstrating “deep hatred and disdain” for voters.

“After three years of sinister witch hunts, hoaxes, scams, tonight the House Democrats are trying to nullify the ballots of tens of millions of patriotic Americans,” Trump said, minimizing that it was the Democrats who were “interfering in America’s elections” and “subverting American democracy.”

Midrally, an aide held up a sign notifying Trump of the impeachment vote count and the president announced to the crowd that “every single Republican voted for us. Whoa. Wow. ... And three Democrats voted for us.”

Trump spent much of his marathon speech zigzagging between impeachment and unrelated topics, punctuating his remarks with more profanity than usual.

And after a day of harsh tweets, Trump at times projected a less-concerned attitude toward what he called “impeachment life.”

“I don’t really feel like we’re being impeached,” he said shortly after taking the Christmas tree-adorned stage. Later, he added: “I don’t know about you, but I’m having a good time. It’s crazy.”

At another point, he declared: “I’m not worried. I’m not worried.”

Aides had said that Trump would wait until the House had finished voting before speaking at the rally, but he appeared on stage ahead of the votes and promised “the best speech you’ve ever heard.”

Throughout the day, Trump had starred down the impending vote as he has every obstacle in his presidency by broadcasting his grievances via tweet.

“You can believe that I will be impeached today by the Radical Left, Do Nothing Democrats, AND I DID NOTHING WRONG!” Trump wrote in one of 45 tweets posted before noon. He asked his followers to “Say a PRAYER!”

Trump’s urgency appeared to escalate later in the day as he switched to all capital letters: “SUCH ATROCIOUS LIES BY THE RADICAL LEFT, DO NOTHING DEMOCRATS. THIS IS AN ASSAULT ON AMERICA, AND AN ASSAULT ON THE REPUBLICAN PARTY!!!”

As the impeachment debate wore on, Trump aides, including White House counselor Kellyanne Conway, fanned out across Capitol Hill to bolster the president’s message that impeachment is helping Republicans and damaging Democrats.

Trump’s campaign has experienced a surge in contributions since the start of the impeachment inquiry and was hoping to raise $2 million Wednesday ahead of the votes.

White House: Trump ‘just ruffling’ in swipe at Dingell

By Gary D. Robertson
Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — Republican congressman Mark Meadows, a top ally to President Donald Trump, said Thursday that he won’t seek reelection.

His announcement comes just a day after the U.S. House voted to impeach Trump on charges that he abused his power and obstructed Congress. For the administration, the North Carolina congressman said he struggled with the decision and came to it after discussion with his family.

“My work with President Trump and his administration is only beginning. This President has accomplished incredible results not just in our country in just three years, and I’m fully committed to staying in the fight with him and his team to build on those successes and deliver on his promises for the years to come,” Meadows said in the statement. “I’ve always said Congress is a temporary job, but the fight to return Washington, D.C. to its rightful owner, We The People, has only just begun.”

Meadows is a long-time leader of the House Freedom Caucus, which pushed hard-line conservative policies, often rebelling against House Republican leaders. Meadows is a staunch Trump loyalist and talks with him often.

Meadows’ name has been floated inside the White House as a possible replacement for Acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney.

In 2015, Meadows stunned his Republican colleagues by filing a motion to oust the powerful GOP House Speaker John Boehner, which eventually led to Boehner’s resignation. At the time, the Freedom Caucus was a solid bloc of conservative lawmakers that wielded considerable clout in the House, often thwarting the GOP leadership.

But Meadows also drew attention for his friendship with progressive Democratic Rep. Elijah Cummings, who died earlier this year.

“There was no stronger advocate and no better friend than Elijah Cummings,” Meadows tweeted after his death.

Meadows, 60, moved to the North Carolina mountains in the 1980s from Florida and opened a restaurant before getting a real estate license to sell houses. He eventually became a real estate developer and made millions of dollars before deciding to run in 2012 to replace a Democratic congressman who decided not to seek reelection. He won that year’s Republican nomination after a bruising eight-way primary and won the general election before making a name for himself as a staunch conservative who opposed the policies of President Barack Obama.

Candidate filing ends Friday in North Carolina. Four Democrats and one Green Party candidate had filed for Meadows’ seat.
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A federal appeals court Wednesday struck down “Obamacare’s” now-toothless requirement that Americans carry health insurance but sidestepped a ruling on the law’s overall constitutionality. The decision means the law remains in effect for now.

The 2-1 ruling handed down by a panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans means the ultimate fate of the rest of the Affordable Care Act including such popular provisions as protections for those with pre-existing conditions, Medicaid expansion and the ability for children under the age of 26 to remain on their parents’ insurance remains unclear.

The panel agreed with Texas-based U.S. District Judge Reed O’Connor’s 2018 finding that the law’s insurance requirement, the so-called “individual mandate,” was rendered unconstitutional when Congress, in 2017, reduced to zero the financial penalty to people without insurance to zero.

The court reached no decision on the big issue — how much of the Affordable Care Act must fall along with the insurance mandate.

“It may still be that none of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate, even after this inquiry is concluded. It may be that all of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate. It may also be that some of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate, and some is not,” Judge Jennifer Elrod wrote.

The panel remanded the case back to a judge who already ruled once to throw out the entire ACA but with some guidance. O’Connor has to be more specific about which parts of the law can’t fall along with the insurance mandate and the judge must also take into account Congress’ decision to leave the rest of the law essentially unchanged when it reduced the penalty for not having insurance to zero, Elrod wrote.

in dissent, Judge Carolyn Dineen Devine said the law from its earliest days were prolonging “uncertainty over the future of the healthcare sector.” King would have found the law unconstitutional, although unenforceable, and would have left the rest of the law alone. California’s Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who is leading state efforts to defend the law, promptly asked to appeal the Supreme Court.

“For now, the President got the gift he wanted — uncertainty in the healthcare system and a pathway to repeal — so that the healthcare providers, workers and families secured under the Affordable Care Act can be yanked from under them,” Becerra said in a statement.

Attorney General Ken Paxton of Texas, which spearheaded the lawsuit seeking to throw out the Affordable Care Act, said the court decision to declare the mandate unconstitutional.

“Judge O’Connor’s opinion recognized, the only reason the Supreme Court upheld Obamacare in 2012 was Congress’ taxing the uninsured, and constitutional, individual mandate’s penalty that justification crumbled,” Paxton wrote.

“We look forward to the opportunity to further demonstrate that Congress made the individual mandate the centerpiece of Obamacare and the rest of the law cannot stand without it.”

President Donald Trump also announced the decision, calling it “a win for all Americans.”

A legal analyst who has followed the healthcare law for years said the ruling seems to indicate that the lower court judge who struck the entire statute down as unconstitutional overreached.

“The opinion suggests that Judge O’Connor went too far in invalidating the entire statute, and that he should have considered what Congress intended in 2017 when it zeroed out the mandate penalty,” said Tim Jost, a retired law professor at Washington and Lee University in Virginia.

The question for the justices in the new cases is whether religious institutions can invoke a “ministerial exception” to anti-discrimination laws and for church-related employers. It’s a doctrine that the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of religion shields churches and their operations from the government’s reach.

In one case, a former fifth-grade teacher at the St. James School in Hermosa Beach filed a federal lawsuit in March 2020, arguing that the school’s refusal to rehire her was discrimination.

The court agreed that burdens on religious exercise must be weighed against important government interests, including the need to ensure that students are taught in an environment free from discrimination.

However, the Supreme Court has historically held that religious schools are not bound by anti-discrimination laws when they hire and fire their teachers.

The court's ruling on the individual mandate was a major victory for health care advocates who had long argued that the law's requirement that everyone buy insurance was unconstitutional. The mandate was a key provision of the law, which was enacted in 2010 and has been a central point of contention in legal challenges since then.

The Supreme Court has previously ruled that religious employees of a church cannot sue for employment discrimination. But it did not make clear the distinction between a secular employee, who can take advantage of the government’s protection from discrimination and retaliation, and a religious employee, who cannot.

The court’s decision could have far-reaching implications for religious organizations and the industries that work closely with them. It could lead to more lawsuits and legal challenges, and it could make it more difficult for religious organizations to operate.

The Supreme Court has already heard arguments in the case, and a decision is expected by the end of the year. The decision could be a significant victory for religious freedom advocates, who have long argued that the mandate was unconstitutional and that it violated the First Amendment’s guarantee of religious freedom.

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DETOUR — The Justice Department announced a crackdown Wednesday aimed at driving down violent crime in several of the nation’s most violent cities.

Attorney General William Barr released details of the initiative, known as Operation Relentless Pursuit at a news conference in Detroit alongside the leaders of the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the U.S. Marshals Service.

As part of the initiative, the Justice Department will intensify federal law enforcement resources in the cities — Detroit; Albuquerque, N.M.; Baltimore; Cleveland; the Kansas City, Mo., and Kansas City, Kan.; metropolitan area; Memphis, Tenn.; and Milwaukee — that have violent crime rates higher than the national average.

“Fighting violent crime is one of the priorities of this administration,” Barr said. “In a number of cities it’s a stubborn problem. The federal government can’t solve this problem alone. It depends on collaboration with state and local partners.”

The Justice Department will increase the number of federal law enforcement officers in each city and add additional officers to federal task forces. The department is also committing up to $71 million in federal grant funds that can help fund the task forces, be used to hire new officers, pay overtime of existing officers, purchase new equipment and technology. The federal law enforcement agencies will work with local and state investigators to target violent criminals, members of drug cartels and gun traffickers by utilizing federal resources and intelligence.

Agent will also utilize the ATF’s national database known as NIBIN, or the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network, which can help match images of bullet cases collected at crime scenes to link shootings.

Targeting violent crime has been a top priority for the Justice Department, Barr and President Donald Trump. Barr, an ardent backer of law enforcement officers have “done a great job” in bringing down the city’s violent crime.

Still, Barr has also embraced a bipartisan criminal justice reform measure known as the First Step Act, which gives judges more discretion when sentencing some drug offenders, causes for mandatory minimum sentences and encourages inmates to participate in programs designed to reduce the risk of recidivism, with credits that can be used to gain an earlier release.

He acknowledged that Detroit Police Chief James Craig and his officers have “done a great job” in bringing down the city’s violent crime.

Craig, also at the news conference, said overall violence in Detroit fell by about 14% from 2014 to 2018. Homicides have dropped from just over 300 in 2016 to 267 two years ago to about 260 in 2018 — the lowest number in Detroit in 50 years.

Senator proposes money, oversight for dam safety

Associated Press

U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand on Tuesday called for more federal money and oversight to shore up the nation’s aging dams following an Associated Press investigation that found scores of potentially blinding dams located near homes and communities across the country.

Gillibrand said new legislation in the works should ensure that federal standards are in place to make dams more resilient to extreme weather events that are becoming more common because of a changing climate. She also called for greater funding for federal grants to fix unsafe dams that pose a risk to the public.

“We should not wait for a catastrophic dam failure or major flooding event to spur us to action,” Gillibrand, a Democrat from New York, said in a letter to leaders of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which is crafting a new water resources bill. Gillibrand is a member of the committee.

She cited an AP analysis published last month that used federal data and state open records laws to identify at least 1,688 high-hazard dams rated in poor or unsatisfactory condition as of last year in 44 states and Puerto Rico. The AP analysis noted that the actual number is almost certainly higher, because some states haven’t rated all their dams and several states declined to release full data.

The AP’s investigation focused on high-hazard dams — which could kill people if they were to fail — that were found by inspectors to be in the worst condition. Georgia led the way with 198 high-hazard dams in unsatisfactory or poor condition followed by North Carolina with 168 and Pennsylvania with 145. New York had 48 such dams.

Inspection reports cited a variety of problems: leaks that could indicate a dam is failing internally; unrepaired erosion from past instances of overtopping; holes from burrowing animals; tree growth that can destabilize earthen dams; and spillways too small to handle a large flood.

The nation’s dams are on average more than a half-century old, but there is no national standard by which to inspect them. That’s led to a patchwork of state regulations in which some high-hazard dams are inspected annually while others wait up to five years.

Gillibrand said states should be required to inspect all high hazard dams yearly.

She said lawmakers should “proactively address dam safety” in the next Water Resources Development Act, which authorizes programs overseen by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies related to levees and dams.

A spokesman for the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee said its chairman, Republican Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, will consider Gillibrand’s request while working on the legislation next year.

3 states file lawsuit seeking to block ERA ratification

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Alabama, Louisiana and South Dakota have filed a federal lawsuit seeking to block the addition of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The lawsuit filed in federal court in Alabama comes in response to a renewed push to get the required 38 states to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, which would ban discrimination on the basis of sex. The lawsuit notes that Congress set a 1982 deadline to get the required 38 states to agree and seeks to prevent David Ferriero, the archivist of the United States, from accepting a new ratification from a state.

The people had seven years to consider the ERA, and they rejected it. To sneak it into the Constitution through this illegal process would undermine the very basis for our constitutional order,” Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall said in a statement announcing the lawsuit.

The amendment, submitted to the states in the early 1970s, would ban any discrimination based on sex. It fell short of the required 38 states needed to make it the 28th amendment to the Constitution.

There is an effort in Congress to try to remove the 1982 deadline. The ERA Coalition, an advocacy group working for the ratification of the amendment, criticized the lawsuit as “disgraceful exercise in fear mongering.”

“The filing of a lawsuit by Alabama’s Attorney-General to block the Equal Rights Amendment is a shameful effort to keep women from gaining Constitutional equality,” the organization stated. “Alabama has this lawsuit to thwart the democratic process, and the will of the over five million women in Alabama to enshrine the fundamental right to sex equality in our Constitution.”

The Attorney General of Alabama has done a disservice to women, including the women of Alabama.”
Sports betting grows, faces more tests in 2020

**By Jennifer McDermott and Geoff Mulvihill**

Associated Press

LINCOLN, R.I. — The line for the ticket windows at a Rhode Island casino's sportsbook stretched to the door on one afternoon last month: Gamblers were cashing in their winnings from betting on the NFL and the NBA, with some booking tickets the day before and placing new wagers for that night.

This could be the scene in more states in the years ahead. Legalized sports betting has caught on quickly since a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in 2018 clearing the way for it to be legalized in every state; 2020 will be a test of whether that rapid expansion continues.

**Where it's happening**

In 2019, the first legal sports bets were made in Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee. New Hampshire passed a law pending approval by voters, and a panel to consolidate at least 21 such lawsuits pending in 11 states into a single case in federal court.

**The biggest states**

So far, the four most populous states — California, Texas and Florida — have not legalized sportsbooks. But the industry is watching them, along with the fourth-largest, New York, where bets can be placed online at upstate casinos located far from the New York City area’s massive population. Whether those four casinos can add online betting without an amendment to the state constitution is under debate.

**How it works**

As with other gambling offerings, sports betting is legal in states where it is allowed, and offers betting on the outcome of any number of events. In New Mexico, lawmakers never explicitly allowed sportsbooks, but two Native American tribal casinos are offering it, with bets being taken only on site. In Arkansas, bets are being taken only at Oaklawn Racing Casino Resort.

By contrast, bets can be made practically everywhere in the nine states where online sports betting is happening. Online wagering has been allowed but not started in another five states plus the District of Columbia.

But the programs work in different ways. In New Jersey and Indiana, anyone who is eligible and within the state’s border can sign up online and start betting. In Iowa, Nevada and some other states, bettors must first register in person at casinos.

**What’s ahead in 2020**

Whether to legalize sports betting is expected to be debated in 2020 in a number of states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, Missouri and Ohio — all states where efforts this year fell short.

In Georgia, state Sen. Brandon Beach has been pushing for years to legalize horse racing as a way to promote economic development. He’s now trying to get momentum for a constitutional amendment to allow casino betting, horse racing and off-track betting, and that doesn’t have any legalized gambling outside the lottery. He wants to use the revenue to beef up a lottery-funded college scholarship program.

In California, a bill introduced by Assemblyman Ben Kal深深 was the worst part, is knowing that she was being forced to work as a prostitute in hotel rooms for days on end — forced to serve up to 10 johns a day without break... — but hotel employees didn't do anything.

The lawsuit says hotel staff overlooked easily observed signs of trafficking, including trash cans full of condoms, payment of rooms in cash, and refusal of housekeeping services.

“Despite her desperate pleas and screams for help... the hotel staff ignored her and did nothing...” March 9 lawsuit

Army 2nd Lt. Richard Collins III was slated for deployment to South Korea and days from graduating from Bowie State University when he was stabbed to death at a University of Maryland bus stop.

**Man guilty of murder in soldier’s slaying in Md.**

**By Michael Kunzelman**

Associated Press

UPPER MARLBORO, Md. — A white man was found guilty of murder on Wednesday for stabbing a black college student to death at a bus stop on the University of Maryland’s campus, a case in which prosecutors had claimed was racially motivated.

Sean Urbanski, 24, faces a maximum sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole. He is scheduled to be sentenced April 16.

A Prince George's County jury deliberated for about two hours without the possibility of parole.

Second-degree murder carries a maximum sentence of 30 years in prison. Prosecutors said a toxic mixture of alcohol and racist propa- ganda poisoned Urbanski's mind and emboldened him to act on his hatred of black people. Defense attorney John McKenna said there was no evidence or testimony to support a racial motive for the killing.

Urbanski was stupefied drunk, and the only poison in his veins was the alcohol,” McKenna said Wednesday during the trial’s closing arguments.

A prosecutor, Jonathon Church, said Urbanski already brandished a 3-inch folding knife when he emerged from the shadows of a wooded area and approached Collins at the bus stop.

“He had it ready because he knew in his mind what he was going to do,” Church said of the knife.

The judge allowed prosecutors to present evidence that Urbanski had saved at least six photographs of racist memes on his cellphone and liked a Facebook group called “Alt-Reich: Nation.”

Collins was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army shortly before his death and was preparing to be deployed to the demilitarized zone between North Korea and South Korea. He was days from graduating from Bowie State University, a historically black college, and was celeb- rating with a friend at bars on the night of his killing.

The jurors had to decide between two murder charges, a decision that hinged on whether they found Collins was killed in a premeditated, intentional act of hate or an alcohol-fueled attack by an “out-of-his-mind drunk.”

Defense attorneys did not dispute Urbanski killed Collins and conceded he committed a crime.
Maine eyes changes to declining fur trade

By Patrick Whittle
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — Trapping wild animals for fur is a way of life that goes back thousands of years in Maine, and the state is considering new ways to manage the declining business.

Maine trappers harvest mammals such as fox, beaver, and muskrats for their fur. The trapping trade has slowed in recent years as a result of depressed international prices and an aging workforce.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, which has long ignored the anti-trapping movement, is collecting comments online to gather feedback from trappers and others across the state as part of an effort to examine and possibly change the way it manages the animals. Management is also important to prevent the spread of diseases such as rabies and to avert dangerous encounters between animals and people, said Nate Webb, a biologist with the department.

“Everything is on the table,” Webb said. “We’re going to be talking about research priorities for these species. Habitat considerations. It’s not just about consumptive use or hunting and trapping.”

The subject of wild animal trapping frequently leads to conflicts between trappers and fur buyers and others in the industry going. However, the industry has long had to contend with activists who believe the practice is unnecessary, and the state’s attempt to update the rules will be no different, he said.

“They’ll open up a can of worms,” said Donald Trump, of people that don’t hunt, fish or trap that don’t like it,” Olson said.

Karen Coker, director of the animal advocacy group WildWatch Maine, said she feels the state has long ignored the anti-trapping movement. She described the process as “not an honest debate.” Because the state doesn’t consider arguments that trapping is inhumane.

The state’s attempt to update the rules is known as “stakeholder engagement,” Coker said. “It simply needs to know because it helps them craft their message to make trapping more palatable.”

The state hold a series of public meetings, for public fur buyer management in early December and is collecting comments online until Saturday, Dec. 7. The process of updating Maine’s rules about fur bearing animals will likely take three to four years in total, Webb said.

More election security funds headed to states

Associated Press

Congress is poised to give states a two-month infusion of federal funds to help boost election security with voting in early caucuses and primaries in states slated to begin in February.

Under a huge spending bill, states would receive $425 million for upgrading voting equipment, conducting post-election audits, cybersecurity training and other steps to secure elections. To receive the funds, states must match 20% of their allocation. The Senate is expected to approve the bill as soon as Thursday, sending it to President Donald Trump for his signature.

States have been scrambling to shore up their systems ahead of the 2020 election. The nation’s intelligence chiefs have warned that Russian and other state actors are interested in attempting to interfere in U.S. elections and under- mining the electorate.

For many who have been advocating for more congressional action on election security, the money is welcome, but they say more must still be done to ensure elections are secure. Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat from Oregon, has been among those pushing Congress to require states to implement rigorous post-election audits and use paper ballots in exchange for federal funds.

“I am afraid this bill will widen the gulf between states with good election security and those with perilously weak election security,” Wyden said in a statement. “I appreciate the intent behind this provision, but until Congress takes steps to secure the entire election system, our democracy will continue to be vulnerable to foreign interference.”

It’s the second batch of federal funds sent to states since the 2016 election, when Russian agents targeted voting systems across the country. Authorities say there has been no evidence that any vote tallies or voter data was changed. U.S. officials say Russians also stole Democratic emails and conducted an extensive social media campaign to support Trump’s candidacy and add to the divisiveness in U.S. elections.

The funds were a compromise after Democrats pushed for more money and advocates pressured Senate Republicans, who were initially resistant to send any additional funding. Republicans had said they wanted to see how states spent the first batch of federal funds, but later relented. Combined, states will have received $805 million from the federal government since 2016.

New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver said election officials appreciate Congress’ help, but added that “while this new batch of funding is needed and welcomed, ongoing and sustainable funding from the federal government to help states fight external threats to election security is still badly needed.”

The state previously used federal funds for a full-time election security position as well as to support counties by covering system upgrades, risk and vulnerability assessments and training. Future funds, Toulouse Oliver said, will likely be used for equipment upgrades, hiring IT staff, election audits and more training.

A key concern for election security advocates has been voting machines, which in many parts of the country are outdated and need to be replaced. A survey last year by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University found officials in 33 states said they must replace their voting machines by 2020. Many voting systems rely on software and hardware that is no longer supported by manufacturers.

It’s unlikely the most recent influx of federal funds can be spent on replacing many of these machines because it can take months to request bids, decide on a vendor, acquire the equipment, test it, deploy it and train workers to use it. But experts say the money can be used quickly to implement audits to ensure the accuracy of election results, hire cybersecurity personnel, conduct cybersecurity training and buy additional equipment to defend their systems.

Experts have urged Congress to build election security funds into the annual budget, so officials could plan for equipment upgrades and other election security priorities.

“The way Congress has been addressing election security is the Band-Aid approach; whenever they get sufficient pressure they spit out some money,” said Lawrence Norden, director of the Brennan Center’s Electoral Reform Program at the Brennan Center. “It’s not the way we need to make election security. Congress should be a full partner in this.”

The federal funds will be distributed by a formula that takes into account the voting-age population within each state.

2 Iranian judges hit with US curbs

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States is imposing sanctions on additional senior Iranian officials for human rights abuses as the Trump administration increased its “maximum pressure campaign” on the Tehran government.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced the recent violent crackdown by Iranian authorities against widespread protests, and the Treasury Department on Thursday targeted two top Iranian judges with penalties. Pompeo accused Iranian officials for “hypocrisy” by depriving citizens, particularly ethnic and religious minorities of their constitutional rights.

Pompeo said he had redesignated Iran as a “country of par- ticular concern” for its “serious and systematic violations” of religious and ethnic minorities. This status adds a layer of potential sanctions against the government. He also said the administration would enact travel bans on officials found to have violated human rights, as well as their families.

“The United States has stood, and will stand under President (Donald) Trump, for the Iranian people,” Pompeo said in a speech at the State Department. “The appeasement of the regime simply will not work.”

The sanctions announced by the Treasury Department freeze any assets the two Iranian judges may have in U.S. jurisdictions and bar Americans from any transactions with the judges. The sanctions also applied to foreign entities and business with the judges, who sit at the top of two branches of the Tehran Revolutionary Court.

“Abolghasem Salavati and Mohammad Moghisseh oversaw the Iranian regime’s miscarriage of justice in show trials in which journalists, attorneys, political activists, and members of Iran’s ethnic and religious minority groups were penalized for exercising their freedom of expres- sion,” Pompeo said. “Both judges sentenced to lengthy prison terms, lashes, and even execution,” the depart- ment said in a statement.

Salavati and Moghisseh were arrested on Aug. 11, 2019, by the Revolutionary Court. The state- ment said he had sentenced so many people to capital punishment that he is nicknamed the “judge of Death.” Moghisseh presides over Branch 28 of the court, and the statement said he had sentenced numerous artists to lengthy sentences for “collu- sion against national security and propaganda against the state allegedly found in their artwork.”
Surprising USDA move: Wakanda off free-trade list

By Reis Thebault
The Washington Post

The implications of the United States’ sudden tariff decision weren’t clear at first. Was the move an opening salvo in yet another trade war? Was the Trump administration making a political statement ahead of the 2020 campaign? And perhaps the most important consideration: What would become of our nascent economic partnership with the Kingdom of Wakanda?

These pivotal geopolitical questions swirled for several hours Wednesday, as a Washington immersed in an impeachment imbroglio briefly turned its attention to issues of international trade with the Marvel Universe nation best known as the home country of T’Challa, aka Black Panther.

Taxpayers and reporters alike demanded answers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which at some point on Wednesday removed Wakanda from its Agricultural Tariff Tracker, an government-operated tool that tracks the cost of importing and exporting goods from countries that have free trade agreements with the United States.

Wakanda was added to the list — where it appeared alongside partners like Colombia, Costa Rica and Peru — sometime between June 10, when an archived version of the tracker’s website omits the fictional country, and this week, when a reporter at NBC News first queried the agency about it.

The outlet was tipped off by Francis Tseng, a fellow at the nonprofit Jain Family Institute, who noticed the puzzling inclusion and tweeted his confusion Wednesday morning.

The tracker listed hundreds of data inputs for Wakanda, reported NBC News, which noted the details before they were deleted.

The country’s commodity groups ranged from fresh vegetables and unroasted coffee beans to essential oils and livestock.

Wakanda’s yellow potatoes were to maintain a “0.5 cent/lb” base rate when imported, according to the report. Frozen Chinese water chestnuts, however, were tariff free, too.

But, the tracker cautions, the information it presents “is not official and should only be used as a general reference.”

Far from having the USDA’s imprimatur, an agency spokesman told The Washington Post that Wakanda’s public listing was a mistake from the start. The staff responsible for the tracker were “using test files to ensure that the system is running properly,” Mike Illenberg said in a statement.

“We the Wakanda information should have been removed after testing and has now been taken down,” he said.

Wakanda, and its most famous resident, first appeared in a July 1966 edition of the Fantastic Four, with cover announcing the introduction of “The sensational Black Panther!” It’s said to be an East African country, located near Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

Online, those who track trade developments with fictional countries were left perplexed by Wednesday’s back and forth.

“So do we, or do we not have free trade with Wakanda?” Christopher Heath, a reporter in Orlando, Fla., asked. Then, floating possible bilateral discussion with the country home to Jasmine, Aladdin and Jabari, he added: “Also where are things at on negotiations with Agrabah?”

One conservative commentator argued the news was a sign of the president’s booming economy.

“(Donald) Trump made America so great that even fictitious super zero countries wanna do business with us,” tweeted Cabot Phillips, editor of the website Campus Reform.

Others argued that the move centered on Wakanda’s valuable status, the super- strong element out of which Captain America’s shield was forged.

Whatever the root, there is precedent for the United States taking an official stance on a Marvel country — at least in the comic book’s universe.

In one issue that unfolded during the Nixon administration, then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met with the villainous Dr. Doom to discuss a nonaggression pact with Doom’s Latveria, an Eastern European nation. Kissinger would later intervene, ordering the Fantastic Four to back off during an invasion of Latveria territory.

So it was unsurprising when Tseng feared a similar international incident after seeing Wakanda removed from the list.

“Well, the USDA took Wakanda off the list,” Tseng wrote on Twitter. “Guess we’re in a trade war with them too.”

Wakanda trade representatives could not be reached for comment.

So do we, or do we not have free trade with Wakanda? Also where are things at on negotiations with Agrabah?

Christopher Heath reporter in Orlando, Fla.

A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket rolls out to the pad at Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Wednesday. Apace with the launch of a new Starliner capsule, scheduled to lift off Friday morning to the International Space Station. The capsule will carry Christmas presents and treats, as well as 500 tree seeds.

Boeing crew capsule prepared for debut flight to space station

Associated Press
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Boeing’s shiny new Starliner crew capsule makes its debut this week with a launch to the International Space Station, the company’s last hurdle before flying astronauts for NASA next year.

Testing the cosmic waters will be Rosie the mannequin, decked out in Boeing’s custom blue space suit and a red polka dot bandanna modeled after the World War II riveter.

If the orbital demo goes well, the first Starliner crew will be rocketing to the space station by spring. It completed a similar test flight of its crew capsule in March.

The space agency hired the private companies to build and fly the capsules while it focused on a new generation of moonshots and other distant travel. Regardless of which company flies astronauts first, NASA’s commercial crew program finally seems to be closing in on the finish line, after years of technical difficulties and delays.

It’s been 8½ years since Americans rocketed into orbit from home soil, and everyone — Boeing, SpaceX, NASA, local residents — is anxious for astronaut launches to resume.

Rosie is outfitted with sensors to gauge the stresses of the week-long flight.

NASA gave more than $4 billion to Boeing in 2014 to develop and fly the capsule to the space station, the company had been working on it since 2010. SpaceX got $2.6 billion for its crew capsule, an upscaled version of its Dragon cargo ship, flying since 2012.

Navy eyes Russian ship near Fla. coast

(Fort Lauderdale, Fla.) Sun Sentinel

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — A Russian surveillance ship has been spotted off the coast of Florida, prompting the U.S. Navy and other officials to keep it under close watch amid security concerns.

South Florida’s congressional leaders see the presence of the Viktor Leonov, a Russian reconnaissance and communications ship, as a display of military power off the state’s shores.

“The U.S. Navy and intelligence community will closely monitor all Russian activity near our shores,” Sen. Marco Rubio said.

Viktor Leonov also has been spotted sailing off the coast of South Carolina in recent days. The ship’s actions were deemed unsafe because it wasn’t running lights in low-visibility weather and wasn’t replying to hails from commercial vessels that were trying to help prevent collision, according to CNN, which cited information from two U.S. officials.

The Viktor Leonov has been seen before off the United States coast, and it also routinely operates in the Caribbean.

“What’s unusual about this is it’s not putting on their lights when they ought to, and not communicating with nearby vessels about their location,” said Benjamin Friedman, policy director at Defense Priorities, a foreign policy organization. “The Russian ship seems to be endangering other ships in the area and maybe even themselves.”

On November 20, 2019, a United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket rolled out to the pad at Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying a new Starliner capsule. The capsule was scheduled to lift off the following morning to the International Space Station. The mission was significant as it marked Boeing’s debut in the commercial crew program, aiming to provide NASA with human spaceflight capabilities to the space station for the first time since the retirement of the space shuttle program.

In related news, the Russian Viktor Leonov surveillance ship was identified as a presence off the coast of Florida. The ship’s activities were deemed unsafe by U.S. officials, who noted concerns over the lack of communication and lighting practices.

These events highlight ongoing tensions in regional and international waters, underscoring the importance of national defense and security measures.
LONDON — Prime Minister Boris Johnson signaled an end to Britain’s era of Brexit deadlock Thursday, announcing a packed legislative program intended to take the U.K. out of the European Union on Jan. 31, overhaul everything from fishing to financial services and shore up the country’s cash-starved public services.

The commanding House of Commons majority won by Johnson’s Conservative Party in last week’s general election all but guarantees he will be able to turn those promises into law, although with Brexit casting a shadow over the British economy, there’s a question mark over how he will pay for it all.

In a speech delivered from a golden throne in Parliament by Queen Elizabeth II, Johnson opened the legislative floodgates after three years in which minority Conservative governments tried in vain to win legislators’ backing for their Brexit plans.

“This is the moment to repay the trust of those who sent us here by delivering on the people’s priorities,” Johnson told lawmakers after the speech. “They want to move politics on and move the country on.”

In less than 10 minutes, the monarch rattled through more than two dozen bills the government intends to pass in the coming year. The first will be the EU Withdrawal Agreement Bill, the law needed to make Brexit a reality, which is set to receive its first significant parliamentary vote on Friday.

The bill commits Britain to leaving the EU on Jan. 31 and to concluding trade talks with the bloc by the end of 2020. Trade experts and EU officials say striking a free trade deal within 11 months will be a struggle, but Johnson insists he won’t agree to any more delays. That vow has set off alarm bells among businesses, who fear that means the country will face a “no-deal” Brexit at the start of 2021.

The government also plans to pass several other Brexit-related measures, including a new “points-based” immigration system that will be introduced after Brexit, when EU citizens will lose the automatic right to live and work in the U.K.

There are also plans to overhaul agriculture, fishing, trade and financial services after Brexit in ways that will have a huge — though still largely unknown — effect on the British economy.

Johnson also promised “an ambitious program of domestic reform,” including a law committing the government to spend more on the overstretched National Health Service after a decade-long funding squeeze by previous Conservative governments.

There were tough-sounding announcements on law and order, including longer sentences for people convicted of terrorist offenses and other serious crimes.

The speech also promised to “prioritize investment in infrastructure,” and Johnson hinted he might revive an idea he’s floated before: a bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland. Engineers say spanning at least 12 miles of the deep and stormy Irish Sea would be difficult to impossible.

Several of the measures are likely to prove contentious. The government said it would hold a sweeping review of defense and foreign policy, and set up a “Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission” that could lead to reform of institutions including the Supreme Court. The court angered the government by ruling in September that Johnson’s decision to suspend Parliament was illegal.

Shami Chakrabarti, justice spokeswoman for the opposition Labour Party, called the proposal “vindictive revenge” and “another play from the Book of Trump.”

The government also intends to pass a law protecting military veterans from “vexatious” prosecutions. The question of whether veterans who served decades ago in Northern Ireland should be open to criminal prosecution is hugely controversial.

Also proposed is a ban on public institutions taking part in “boycott, divestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries and those who trade with them” without the government’s approval. The move is aimed at universities that have boycotted Israel over its treatment of the Palestinians.

The government also promised to lessen regional inequality and bring greater unity to the United Kingdom.
Anti-government protesters are keeping up pressure on President Emmanuel Macron with a new march through Paris in the afternoon. And some workers are expected to maintain their strike through the Christmas holidays.

The SNCF national rail authority said about 60% of trains were at a standstill Thursday, down from 90% earlier in the strike. While provincial cities have suffered fewer problems, tourists and Paris commuters alike are still struggling to get around the capital, spending hours fighting through clogged intersections or waiting for elusive subway trains.

The centrist Macron, a former investment banker, wants to raise the retirement age to 64 and says the current pension system costs too much; unions say the pension reform is part of Macron’s plans to dismantle hard-won worker rights, and want to preserve a system that allows some workers to leave as early as their 50s.

Macron showed willingness Wednesday to compromise, and his prime minister launched negotiations with unions on potential amendments to the landmark pension reform bill. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe will meet again with union leaders and employers’ representatives Thursday.

The government hopes to reach a deal with more moderate players such as France’s largest union, CFDT, which Macron hopes may divide and weaken the protest movement.

CFDT Secretary General Laurent Berger said Thursday the government showed a “willingness to discuss” the issue.

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**Associated Press**

**BRUSSELS** — Traffic improved slightly on French trains Thursday as nationwide strikes over the government’s retirement reform entered a 15th day and small signs of progress emerged in negotiations with unions.

However, the crisis hitting one of the world’s biggest economies at the height of the holiday season is far from over.

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**Associated Press**

**NEW DELHI** — Police detained more than 1,200 protesters in some of India’s biggest cities Thursday after they defied bans on assembly that authorities imposed to stop widespread demonstrations against a new citizenship law that opponents say threatens the country’s secular democracy.

At least three people were reported killed as protests raged around the country despite the bans as opposition increased to the law, which excludes Muslims. The legislation has sparked anger at what many see as the government’s push to bring India closer to a Hindu state.

Authorities erected road blocks and disrupted internet and phone services, including in parts of New Delhi, and tightened restrictions on protesters in the northeastern border state of Assam, where the protests began last week.

A curfew was imposed in parts of Mangalore, a city in southern Karnataka state, after police fired warning shots and used tear gas and batons to disperse a large group of protesters.

At least two people were killed during clashes with police, the Press Trust of India news agency said late Thursday. Details were not immediately available because top police officers could not be reached by phone.

Protesters also clashed with police in parts of Lucknow, the state capital of northern Uttar Pradesh state, where police said one person died from a gunshot fired by someone among the protesters. The protesters torched a bus, hurled rocks at police and damaged some police posts and vehicles, police officer Vikas Dubey said.

The new citizenship law applies to Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities who are in India illegally but can demonstrate religious persecution in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It does not apply to Muslims.

Critics say it’s the latest effort by Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist-led government to marginalize India’s 200 million Muslims, and a violation of the country’s secular constitution.

Modi has defended it as a humanitarian gesture. Rather than contain uprisings, the protest bans appear to be helping them spread — from Assam and a handful of university campuses and Muslim enclaves in the capital — to campuses and cities from coast to coast.

“I think what is wonderful is that young people all in their 20s have so vividly understood the game plan, which is to divide people,” said Zoya Hasan, a political scientist in New Delhi. “What people are saying is that you are going to divide, we are going to multiply.”

The protests come amid an ongoing crackdown in Muslim-majority Kashmir, the restive Himalayan region stripped of its semi-autonomous status and demoted from a state into a federal territory last summer. They also follow a contentious process in Assam meant to weed out foreigners in the country illegally.
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Zimbabwe turning to solar energy

BY FARAI MUTSAKA
Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Outside Cecilia Ziwane’s house sits a neatly stacked woodpile next to a small solar panel — her two major sources of energy.

“We cannot do without them,” said the mother of three, who lives in Glen Norah, a working-class suburb of Zimbabwe’s capital, Harare. Like the rest of the country, Ziwane has been coping for more than a year with crippling power cuts lasting up to 19 hours per day.

With no sign of the state utility generating adequate electricity, desperate Zimbabweans are reverting to a combination of old and new sources of energy: firewood for cooking and solar for light.

“I would rather have normal electricity supplies. Solar is better but firewood ... as you can see, it is heavy, it is dirty, but I have no choice,” she said.

Zimbabwe is experiencing its worst economic crisis in a decade, with inflation estimated at nearly 500%. The most severe drought in decades has added to the country’s woes, increasing shortages of food and water.

The drought has also made electricity even more scarce. Zimbabwe’s state power utility relies heavily on hydro-power generated by the Kariba Dam on the Zambezi River. Lake Kariba, one of the world’s largest man-made bodies of water, is currently only 10% full, compared to 55% at the same period last year, according to the Zambezi River Authority, which manages the dam.

With water levels still shrinking, authorities have severely reduced power generation and, at times have warned of a complete shutdown.

Nor does Zimbabwe have the foreign currency needed to import adequate electricity from neighboring Mozambique and South Africa. The result is the widespread power cuts leaving homes, offices and factories in the dark.

To promote solar energy, the government has removed import duties on solar panels and accessories and encouraged new buildings to include solar power, said Energy Minister Fortune Chasi.

“It is clean, it is sustainable and could save us a lot of the money that we use to import electricity,” said Chasi to The Associated Press. “Climate change means we have to look at alternatives, we can’t rely on hydropower as much as we did before.”

Zimbabwe’s rich and poor alike are turning to solar energy. Small solar panels are perched atop makeshift shacks made from plastic sheets, cardboard boxes, grass and mud in a squatters’ camp on what used to be open land in Borrowdale, one of Harare’s affluent suburbs. Larger solar panels are on the roofs of the substantial homes, just a few yards away.

“They have money but they don’t have electricity, just like us squatters,” said 78-year-old Chiwenga Mutekede, 78, pointing at the posh houses nearby. “We are in the same boat, solar all the way,” he said with a chuckle.

Grinches steal Christmas tree in Germany

Associated Press

BERLIN — Police in western Germany say thieves have made off with a town fire department’s Christmas tree, lights and all.

Mayen police said Thursday that sometime in the early morning hours of Wednesday, thieves cut the cables to the lights and carted away the 13-foot fir tree from outside the fire department in nearby Bell.

Given the size of the tree, police believe several people were likely involved in the theft.

Bell is a town of about 1,500 people that is 20 miles west of Koblenz.

Police are asking for any witnesses to come forward.
AMERICAN ROUNDEUP

Man stuffs shrimp down pants in grocery thefts

CA — A thief stuffed a total of 30 bags of frozen shrimp down his pants in back-to-back burglaries of a Southern California grocery store, police said.

The man took the shrimp from a Von's market in the city of Riverside by entering the store three times in a span of 15 minutes on Dec. 14.

Each time he went to the frozen food section and concealed the shrimp in his pants, Riverside police said in a statement.

The stolen food had a retail value of more than $500.

Woman surprised by delivery of AR-15 parts

FL — A Florida woman was surprised by the delivery of a package she didn’t order. The bigger surprise came when she opened the package and found parts for an AR-15 rifle inside.

Volusia County Sheriff’s officials said the 69-year-old woman had been notified by her bank about fraudulent payments that recently appeared on her credit card. She canceled the card and was told the charges were also canceled, but one was processed. The News-Journal of Daytona Beach, Fla., reported the woman plans to return the parts.

Boy, 15, heads to Stanford on scholarship

NC — A 15-year-old math whiz in North Carolina has earned a scholarship to Stanford University.

WRAL reported that Kenan Hasanaliyev is a standout student at Triangle Math and Science Academy in the Raleigh suburb of Cary.

He earned math credits in sixth grade that put him three grades ahead. Since then, he’s mastered AP Calculus and Calculus 2 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He’s also taken graduate-level math classes.

 Incident involving hyena, zookeeper investigated

NM — Albuquerque Biological Park officials are investigating an “emergency incident” involving a zookeeper and a hyena.

KOBI-TV reported the zoo confirmed it is looking into a Nov. 7 episode before the park opened.

According to emergency dispatch calls, first responders reported a 40-year-old female with “some type of hand injury” who was bleeding profusely. The calls also indicated the need for medical transport at the time and that “this is a city employee.”

Park officials are not answering questions about the case.

Police: Marijuana gifts snifted out at airport

TN — A man who may have been dreaming of a “green” Christmas found himself inside the gray walls of a Tennessee jail.

According to court documents, state police caught Somphone Temmeraj, 57, with more than 80 pounds of marijuana disguised as Christmas gifts at Nashville International Airport, news outlets reported.

Officers and a K-9 smelled a strong odor of marijuana coming from three bags, according to the documents. The officers said they saw Temmeraj pick up the bags and load them onto a cart. He allowed officers to search the bags. Temmeraj had flown to Nashville from Seattle, the documents state.

Feds seize cocaine headed to Canada

VT — Federal agents seized almost 370 pounds of cocaine that was hidden in a truck preparing to enter Canada at Vermont’s Derby Line border crossing, a court document said.

The cocaine, packed in 142 brick-shaped packages, was found by agents of U.S. Customs and Border Protection with the help of a drug-sniffing dog in a hidden compartment, said an affidavit filed in the case.

The driver of the Quebec-registered truck and trailer, Jason Nelson, was charged in federal court in Plattsburgh, N.Y., with possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

May the force help you heal

Patient Brandon Callison, 10, of Warrenville, Ill., checks out a puzzle given to him by Star Wars characters at Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield, Ill. The visitors were members of the Midwest Garrison, which is the Illinois chapter of the 501st Legion, a Star Wars Imperial costuming club. The 501st is dedicated to the movie-quality costumes of the “villains” of the Star Wars universe. Brandon was in the hospital after recovering from a trampoline injury.

Pranksters cover home, 2 cars in cheese

PA — A man and two teenage boys who allegedly covered two cars and a home with cheese slices are facing disorderly conduct charges.

Pennsylvania state police said the prank occurred in Girard, but it’s not clear what motivated it.

The names of the three suspects — a 17-year-old Girard boy and two Lake City residents, ages 17 and 18, — have not been released. Authorities said they admitted their involvement in the prank.

College offers free tuition to firefighters

IN — A community college in Indiana will offer free tuition to volunteer firefighters and first responders seeking associate degrees, officials announced.

Ivy Tech Community College and the Indiana Volunteer Firefighter Association have joined together to offer the program starting in the 2020 spring semester. Ivy Tech, with more than 40 locations statewide, is providing $250,000 over two years to cover tuition.

The goal is to increase the number of volunteers.

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So bad, they're good

Terrible gift ideas a snap with Dave Barry’s guide

Pages 24-26
Become a super searcher
17 tips to make your Google search more efficient

By Dave Lieber
The Dallas Morning News

Google is magic. Life before Google sunk. You had to work the Yellow Pages, make phone calls, visit a library and stop at store after store to find the exact product you were looking for.

What once could take hours now takes seconds. I’ve put together this list of Google tips. How many do you know and use?

1. **Know which links are ads and which aren’t.** Until a couple of years ago, Google placed most of the paid advertised websites on the right side of search results. Search results and paid ads were clearly separated. But then Google moved the paid ads to the top of search results. Now the only way to tell if a result is an ad is by looking for a tiny square box at the front of the result marked “AD.” I bet many people miss it. I usually skip the ads and burrow down lower on the front page to find non-advertised results.

2. **Don’t stay on the front page.** Dig deeper. Many of us don’t go past the first search results page. Good results are often deeper inside.

3. **Search first.** One of my cardinal rules is to always search before buying something or hiring someone. Use a search engine and location with key words: John Doe Plumbing of Carrollton, Texas. There are likely many more plumbers in the area’s Chamber of Commerce and on Yelp. By the way, you can’t rely on a quick online search to find a contractor’s license, if any.

4. **Be suspicious.** Although Google has made improvements, scammers still know how to game the system. They are there to help. Their test other keywords with that: complaints, scam. Better to do this before rather than after.

5. **Use private browsing.** For products, try the manufacturer, the model number of the product, the name of the store where you may buy it: Frigidaire model 39-A at Best Buy and complaints.

6. **Don’t forget the “News” tab.** Most of us use the “All” tab on Google because it’s the first one listed. But don’t forget to slide over and use “News” also. That search often brings up more recent information on the subject.

7. **Auto-complete is a favorite.** Go to the magic search box and type in the start of your query and see what choices pop up. The words that automatically fill in are indicative of what most people are asking.

8. **Use private browsing.** If you’re signed into Google, Google knows who you are and where you live — and delivers search results accordingly. To hide your identity from Google, use the private browsing option. In Chrome, it’s called Incognito. In Safari, it’s called Private Window. In Firefox, it’s called Private Browsing. Why do this? When searching for personal health questions, for example, it’s best to keep the most private questions as private as possible. It’s still traceable, but it doesn’t show up in your search history — and shows up a level of privacy.

9. **Remember that Google has competitors.** Microsoft’s Bing is one. DuckDuckGo is another search engine that promises to protect your privacy.

10. **Google tries to keep you.** Google now tries to answer popular questions on its main page so you don’t click away. One way is a fairly new “Knowledge Panel,” which pulls information and presents it in a box. You’ve seen it. Often the knowledge provided is scant and odd (How old is a celebrity?). But don’t stop there.

11. **Use the minus symbol before a word to exclude that word from search results.**

12. **Pay attention to how you arrange your keywords.** Lisa Eadicicco, who attended a Google event in Dallas, says: “It’s about being very deliberate.” One refers to pet food while the other is the name of a breed of dog,” she writes on BusinessInsider.com.

13. **Wikipedia? Nah.** Google loves to return the first link. By the way, Google now tries to answer popular questions on its main page so you don’t click away. One way is a fairly new “Knowledge Panel,” which pulls information and presents it in a box. You’ve seen it. Often the knowledge provided is scant and odd (How old is a celebrity?). But don’t stop there.

14. **Use a colon to search a particular website.** For example: dallasnews.com: Dave Lieber watch dog.

15. **Be wary of phrase stealers.** There’s not much more time until the end of the holiday shopping season. Still need another idea? Here are a few suggestions. The AirFly Pro takes your own Bluetooth headphones and allows them to work with a video entertainment system with up to two sets of headphones. The pocket-sized adapter charges with USB-C for about 15 hours of use. Setting it takes seconds; put both the AirFly Pro and your headphones in pairing mode and they’ll find each other. That’s it. You plug in the connected 3.5 mm audio cable from the AirFly Pro in the headphone port.

16. **Is your final result legitimate?** Who is behind the website? What’s their motive? Is it really a consumer information site? Or is it a front for a specific company?

17. **Finally, don’t forget your human search engines.** They are called librarians. They know how to find stuff better than almost anybody. Your taxpayer dollars help pay for reference librarians at your neighborhood public library. Don’t be shy. They are there to help.
"Hallelujah. Holy (expletive). Where's the Tylenol?"

As foul-mouthed holiday rants go, a couple of Chevy Chase's — as family man Clark Griswold in "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" — are up there.

Oh, they're not as intentionally offensive as Steve Martin's rental car counter tirade in "Planes, Trains and Automobiles" (he drops the F-bomb 18 times, if you're counting). Nor are they as endearing as Peter Billingsley's "Only I didn't say fudge" from "A Christmas Story." And let's not even mention Jimmy Stewart's filthy diatribe in the uncensored version of "It's A Wonderful Life."

I kid.

Like Santa's sleigh, "Christmas Vacation" flies under the radar. It's nowhere near as popular as those other holiday mainstays, but that's OK — with its unvarnished look at the impossibly high expectations and nonstop pressure of the holidays, it works best as a cult classic, anyway.

Much like Clark, it's a perpetual underdog.

If you're a fan of the film, take this 20-question quiz to see just how closely you've watched. And if you've never seen it, get your "cheap, lying, no-good, rotten, four-flushing, low-life, snake-licking, dirt-eating, inbred, overstuffed, ignorant, blood-sucking, dog-kissing, brainless, (expletive)less, hopeless, heartless, fat-(expletive), bug-eyed, stiff-legged, spotty-lipped, worm-headed sack of monkey (expletive)" self to the big box store bargain bin.

The sanitized ABC Family version's just not as much fun.

Above: Chevy Chase and Beverly D'Angelo star in "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation."

Warner Bros.
The holiday season is upon us once again, and there’s “something special” in the air. Specifically, it’s the sound — you cannot escape it, especially at the mall — of high-pitched voices shrieking “rum-pa-pum-pum” over and over and OVER until you want to stuff a festive holiday fruitcake deep into your ear canals.

At least that is our reaction. Don’t get us wrong: We love the holidays. Really. We just happen to dislike the traditional holiday song “The Little Drummer Boy,” because it is tedious, repetitive, wildly overplayed and above all — we do our best to put this delicately — stupid.

Consider the situation from the point of view of the Virgin Mary. You have just given birth. In a manger. With livestock. You are probably not in a festive mood. What you want is rest and quiet for you and your newborn child.

Then a little boy shows up. He is a poor boy, and according to the lyrics he has no gift to bring. Fine! You and your infant do not need a gift. What you need — this bears repeating — is rest and quiet. But no, this little boy is determined that his gift will be to PLAY HIS DRUM.

The song does not explain why the boy, if he is so poor, has a drum. Was it common, in Biblical times, for poor children to carry around musical instruments? Is the boy in a band? Does he play in a trio with the Little Piano Boy and the Little Bass Boy at the Bethlehem Ramada Inn?

The song does not answer these questions. The song simply asserts that the boy played his drum, and that — this is a direct quote — “the ox and lamb kept time.” Which raises the question: how, exactly, did the ox and lamb keep time? Did the lamb bleat to the beat? Did the ox clack its hooves together, or chew its cud rhythmically? Do oxen even have cuds?

Again, these questions go unanswered. Instead, the little drummer boy informs us that the baby Jesus responded to his performance by smiling. We hate to burst anyone’s bubble, but if that happened, with a newborn infant, it was not because the infant enjoyed being drummed at from close range. That was gas.

But we have gone on too long about the flaws of “The Little Drummer Boy.” Let’s not waste any more of our time on how bad it is (namely, very bad).

Let us move on to another tradition that comes around every year at this time whether people want it to or not: our Holiday Gift Guide.

This is not a typical gift guide, the kind that features gifts that people might actually want to receive. This guide features a very special kind of gift — the kind that, when you give it to a person, causes that person to sincerely wonder what he or she ever did to you.

Note that all the gifts in this guide are real. You can actually buy them. We know this because we here at the Gift Guide did buy them, although of course we did not use our own money. We may be tasteless, but we are not stupid.

Each item in this guide was subjected to a rigorous testing procedure in which we open the box, examine the item and shake our heads in quiet despair. It is because of this rigorousness that we are able to offer you our Holiday Gift Guide Guaranteed Legal Warranty Promise of Complete Customer Satisfaction: If you purchase any item from this guide, and you are not completely satisfied, simply wipe your fingerprints off the item, wrap it in chains and drop it into any major body of water under the cover of darkness. We will take it from there.

With these words of reassurance, let us turn to the items that made the cut for this year’s Holiday Gift Guide:

Is it too gross, or just gross enough? Flushin’ Frenzy is a game of one plunger, some poop and fast reflexes.

Whether it be flying excrement, a bubble wrap suit or a chicken swing, Dave Barry’s 2019 Holiday Gift Guide has all the things no one wants
This item is a “must-have” for the fashion-conscious individual on your gift list who wants to be protected from the rain and at the same time look like he or she is wearing one of those cones that veterinarians use to keep dogs from licking themselves.

This garment, which is made from 100% genuine sticky plastic, is basically a hood, which goes over the wearer’s head, attached to a plastic disc approximately three feet in diameter, which protects the wearer’s body while leaving the wearer’s hands free to make gestures, which is something the wearer will probably be doing often if he or she wears this garment in public.

— Suggested by Christina Robertson, of Stanwood, Wash., and John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

**The Umbrella Jacket**
$6.95 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Bev Buckle**
$29.95 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Thanos Swimsuit**
$29.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Chicken Swing**
$34.95 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

If you’re like most people, and you own a chicken, you are constantly tormented by the nagging worry that your chicken is not having enough recreational fun. That is why this item is the perfect gift for you or for the special chicken-owner on your holiday list. This is a swing designed specifically for chickens. According to the manufacturer, its “patented design allows the chicken to pump the swing.”

This means that, at last, your chicken will have something to do besides standing around pecking things. Imagine the happiness this swing will bring! The expression on your chicken’s face will tell you all you need to know.

— Suggested by John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

**Flushin’ Frenzy**
$19.59 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Flushin’ Frenzy** is a game of skill and strategy, wherein players try to unplug a “stopped-up toilet” by taking turns pushing a plunger until the poop pops up. “Be the first to grab it and score points!” Ha ha! What strategic fun! It is no wonder that Flushin’ Frenzy is the official party game of Mensa.

— Suggested by John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26
Here is the ideal gift for anybody on your holiday gift list who finds the Flushed’ Frenzy game too intellectually challenging. The Chow Crown game consists of a motorized “crown” that you assemble yourself (allow six hours) that has forks dangling from it. You stick pieces of food on the forks, place the crown on the player’s head, then start the motor, causing the forks to rotate around the player’s head while a song plays. The goal is for the player to eat as many pieces of food as possible before the song ends. Take our word for it: If you were to rank all the games on the market featuring musical head-mounted food-spinning devices, this game would be in there somewhere. And we do not say that lightly.

— Suggested by John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

**Chow Crown**
$16.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

We love our phones, and we need to look at them all the time. Tragically, however, we are sometimes forced to use both of our hands for non-phone-related activities, such as driving, holding infants, performing brain surgery, etc. This means that there can be situations in which entire seconds pass during which we cannot see our phones.

And that is why everyone on our holiday gift list needs this neck-mounted phone holder. Thanks to its revolutionary hands-free design, you can ALWAYS have your phone right in front of your face, where it belongs. You can be in constant touch with the people you love, unless they are physically standing in front of you, in which case your phone will block them from view. But you can see their texts.

— Suggested by Dan Given, of Forest Hill, Texas

**Neck Phone Holder**
$10.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

The problem with ordinary nose hair trimmers is that they lack flair. This is why we are now recommending to use them in public. Instead we break into the bathroom to perform our nasal grooming, like common criminals. But that is no longer necessary, thanks to the breakthrough modernistic design of this trimmer, which is perfect for the Space Age.

This is a nasal trimmer that you can confidently whip out and use in a fashionable restaurant, swanky nightclub or high-level corporate meeting — any situation, really, except maybe in an airport security area. (“Don’t shoot! It’s a nose trimmer!”)

— Suggested by John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

**Ray Gun Trimmer**
$17.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

Waist packs are practical, but many people refuse to wear them because they (the waist packs) are dowdy and unattractive. But what if you had a waist pack that didn’t LOOK like a waist pack? What if it was virtually invisible?

That’s the idea behind the Dadbag, which is a waist pack cleverly disguised as a pale hairy pot belly, the kind that Dad develops after a decade or so of zero sit-ups and several thousand beers. Once strapped on, the Dadbag becomes an undetectable secret hiding place for your possessions. That’s why this is the official waist pack of the Central Intelligence Agency.

— Suggested by Peter Metrinko, Jane Linderman, of Kenai, Alaska, and John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

**Dadbag Waist Pack**
$10.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

This exciting and fun gift idea is a “new wrinkle” on the old classic board game Monopoly. Instead of being based on Atlantic City, N.J., Idaho-opoly, as the name suggests, is based on Newark, N.J.

No, seriously, Idaho-opoly is based on Idaho, which is a state famous for potatoes, as well as many other famous attractions that are not coming to our mind right now. To play Idaho-opoly, you choose one of the tokens — which include a hugging boot, a trout and of course a potato — and then take turns rolling the dice and proceeding around the board buying properties and collecting rents, while trying to avoid picking up a penalty card. This is a gift that will keep the youngsters enchanted from the moment they unwrap it to the moment, approximately one nanosecond later, when they move on to the next gift.

— Suggested by Craig Roberts, of Meridian, Idaho

**Idaho-opoly**
$24.99 plus shipping and handling from lateforthesky.com

Childhood is a time of innocent fantasy — the happy, naive belief that someday you will grow up and survive the coming zombie apocalypse. It’s a beautiful sentiment, and that’s why this gift idea is perfect for the young person on your holiday gift list. This is a toy that ... OK, let’s set the words on the packaging describe it: “It’s panic time — the only hope for normal living folk vs. attacking zombie hordes is ZOMBIE ROADKILL ESCAPE, which in 360-degree rotating ‘crane decapitator’ ...

Apparently when the zombie apocalypse comes, humanity will no longer be able to distinguish between a “horde” and a “board.” But let us not nitpick about the packaging of this toy. Let us instead imagine the joy it will bring to a special child on your holiday gift list, who will spend countless happy hours — as children have for generations — beheading zombies with a rotating crane decapitator. For that, truly, is what the holiday season is all about.

— Suggested by John Lobert, of Cary, N.C.

**Zombie Roadkill Toy Truck**
$29.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Bubble Wrap Suit**
$16.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

Here’s a great gift for the business executive on your holiday list who wants to look sharp and at the same time be protected from damage. This is a two-piece suit made entirely out of plastic bubble wrap. Needless to say, it looks great, and you can just imagine how comfortable it is, especially on a hot day.

But the real benefit of this suit is the way it cushions the wearer in the event that — this happens far too often, in today’s hectic business world — the wearer is sealed in a cardboard box that is handled carelessly by delivery persons. But this suit is not mere protection: It makes a strong impression on innocent fans. And who will spend countless happy hours — as children have for generations — beheading zombies with a rotating crane decapitator? For that, truly, is what the holiday season is all about.

— Suggested by Karen Lassman

**Bubble Wrap Suit**
$16.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Toy Truck**
$24.99 plus shipping and handling from lateforthesky.com

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**Dadbag Waist Pack**
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**Ray Gun Trimmer**
$17.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com

**Idaho-opoly**
$24.99 plus shipping and handling from lateforthesky.com

**Toy Truck**
$24.99 plus shipping and handling from lateforthesky.com

**Bubble Wrap Suit**
$16.99 plus shipping and handling from amazon.com
Slippery winter holiday fun

By Nancy Montgomery
Stars and Stripes

Ice is slippery; skates are thin blades. That people fall down is to be expected.

And so it goes at the skating rink adjacent to Vicenza’s main plaza, the Piazza dei Signori, that opens in December as part of the city’s winter holiday fun.

What surprises is how much fun it is to watch. I skated on ponds all winter in my youth in upstate New York, but when I laced up some rental skates years later, I immediately pulled a muscle in my groin, fell backwards and hit my head on the ice. That was it for me.

But standing rinkside on a recent visit watching small children skate was great for anyone who appreciates physical comedy.

The contortions as they tried to maintain their balance, the pratfalls as they lost it — the slapstick — made me laugh out loud. It was like watching a bunch of little Inspector Clouseaus, Mr. Beans or Nutty Professors.

It was important to the comedy, obviously, that they sprang right back up unharmed and undaunted.

Fractures, dislocations, sprains and bruises — the most common ice skating injuries, most common in adults — aren’t the least bit funny.

The skating rink is one of the charms of the Christmas season in Vicenza’s beautiful old town, already resplendent with Palladian architecture. The city strings white lights throughout the plazas and cobbled streets and decorates a big Christmas tree in the Piazza dei Signori. Vendors set up shop throughout the center both before and after Christmas, offering jewelry, furs, antique silver and other treasures.
Finding peace in Europe’s overlooked sights

S

ing the top sights in Europe’s
cities can be intense. Here you
crowded Colosseum is sheltered
by around six million people
every year.

Many travelers stick to the most famous
sights — and I don’t blame them; every-
one’s vacation time is limited. But the
sights are famous for a reason. But cities
like Rome, Florence, and Venice have
a handful of attractions you can
enjoy an equally thrilling artistic encoun-
ter without the overwhelming crowds.

In Rome — the “Eternal City” — you can
spend what feels like an eternity wait-
ing in line with your fellow tourists at the
most crowded spots. Fortunately, Rome
has plenty of examples of rewarding sights
that are cool, quiet, and give an intimate
peek at an amazing ancient world.

Just a 10-minute stroll from Rome’s over-
crowded Colosseum is a free-standing
ruin of nearly equal vastness — the Baths
of Caracalla. This sight is dramatic in part
because nothing was built around or on
top of it.

The same goes for Florence, where
visitors crammed into the three most famous
sights (the Accademia Gallery, Uffizi Gallery,
and Duomo), leaving other museums and gal-
leries essentially empty. On my last trip to
Florence, I visited the Hospi-
tal of the Innocents, just
a few minutes away from the mobbed
Accademia, where Michelangelo’s
David stands surrounded by adoring fans.

Most visitors to central European
sites of ancient ruins, especially the Colos-
seum and Forum, and often neglect the
studies tucked indoors. The relatively
empty National Museum of Rome, for ex-
ample, houses the world’s greatest collec-
tion of ancient Roman art, including busts
of emperors and empresses and Roman
copies of Classical Greece’s long-revered
Discus Thrower statue. And just a few
minutes’ walk from the Roman Forum, the
Capitoline Museum holds more of
ancient Rome’s most impressive art.

Highlights include an equestrian statue
of Emperor Marcus Aurelius and a bronze
statue depicting the legendary she-wolf
nursing Romulus and Remus, the infants
who became the founders of Rome.

A 10-minute stroll from Rome’s over-
crowded Colosseum is a free-standing
ruin of nearly equal vastness — the Baths
of Caracalla. This sight is dramatic in part
because nothing was built around or on
top of it.

In Rome, the Baths of Caracalla are a 10-minute walk from the mobbed Colosseum.

TOP TRAVEL PICKS

Living nativity scenes

Nativity scenes with their static displays of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, The Three Kings, don-
key and oxen are familiar sights throughout Europe. Italy elevates the phenomenon through
the creation of Presepe Vivente, in which living beings re-create the
holy birth.

St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan Order, is cred-
ited with having staged the first
living scenes of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Circular figures of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and
believing for children ages 6-14 go for

3.90 euros/4.90 euros. Additional tickets go for
14.50 euros/16.50 euros on dates
through Thursdays and 19 euros

for adults and 10 euros for children. Online:
tinyurl.com/vd6dh5y

Stuttgart: Through Jan. 6, visitors can enjoy a Christmas

Garden set up in the Wilhelma Zoological and Botanical
garden, where a mile-long walk leads past
illuminated settings to a second use in the
dark months of winter. Sparkling lights,
shows, skating rinks and stick figures
are tossed away in their nighttime quarters.

Here’s a look at what zoos are
offering this holiday season and
beyond.

Berlin: Christmas at the Tierpark is a new event offer-
ing a mile-long stroll through the
colorfully illuminated park,
punctuated by light installations
and projections, then warm up in
the setting of a rain forest. The
event will be staged from Jan.
through Feb. 9 on Fridays
through Saturdays only. Hours
are 5 p.m.-10 p.m. and entry
costs 14 euros for adults and
10 euros for children. Online:
tinyurl.com/yd9trw_gwg

Leipzig: The Leipzig Zoo’s
Gondwanaland hosts “Magic
Tropical Lights,” in which vis-
itors can experience a trail
punctuated by light installations
and projections, then warm up in
the setting of a rain forest. The

event will be staged from Jan.
through Feb. 9 on Fridays
Gluehwein across Europe

Best places to try a spicy, sweet mulled wine

Gluehwein takes cheap red wine and makes it palatable by adding ingredients liked citrus fruit and many of the spices you find in gingerbread. Literally “glow wine”, it’s heated and served warm, but don’t be fooled: the alcohol hasn’t been burned off and it can make you plenty tipsy and unable to safely drive a car.

Our reporters fanned out to try the Gluehwein on offer at Christmas markets this year and delved into our memories to recall some of the best Gluehwein we’ve had in Christmas seasons past.

Kaiserslautern

The Gluehwein at the Christmas market stand called Schoko B’e(l)las Gluehwein Haus near the Stiftsplatz has subtle over-tones of citrus, cloves and cinnamon, and is neither too sweet nor too strong. Served in purple ceramic mugs, it goes down easily and pairs well with a side of locally grown potatoes cut in wedges and served with garlic herb sauce, available for 4 euros from the nearby Koch’s Wild Spezialitäten’s stand. But what’s really special about Schoko B’e(l)las is its location next to an open fire and in the shadow of the city’s Gothic Stiftskirche — perfect for getting to know your German neighbors or complete strangers while sipping Gluehwein.

Opposite the Dolomiten Eis Café, is the Gluehwein Eck’, or Gluehwein Corner. Their Gluehwein, served in a clear glass mug, was heavy on cinnamon, and is neither too sweet nor too strong. The taste wasn’t as good as the one from the Eck’ and this was the only place where we had a problem when we tried to return our mugs to collect the deposit. Make sure you get a casino chip when you buy your Gluehwein there and you won’t have the same issue.

All charged 3 euros for the wine and a 2.50-euro deposit for the mug.

— Heather Benit and Karin Zeitvogel

Weilerbach

The Gluehwein offered by Puur at the Christmas market in Weilerbach, near Ramstein, is the drink I most look forward to every holiday season. Made with merlot, it’s more spice than sweet and comes in a wine glass with an orange slice. It costs 3.50 euros, 6.50 euros if you want to keep the glass. Sadly, the Christmas market in Weilerbach is already over, but make a note on your calendar to go there next year to try Puur’s Gluehwein. They also have a winebar and restaurant on Hauptsstrasse in Weilerbach.

— Jennifer Svan

Weiden

There were about five Gluehwein stands at the Weiden market, which is close to Grafenwoehr. Of the flavors we tried, the cherry and blueberry ones stood out. Cherry Gluehwein is the mulled wine of choice for fans of cherry pie, and pairs beautifully with a warm pretzel or crepes. Blueberry Gluehwein is a little sweet for some people’s palates but added variety and a nice berry punch to an evening of research for this article. The cost of Gluehwein at the market was between 5 and 7 euros, including mug deposits of between 2 and 3 euros.

— Immanuel Johnson and Martin Egnash

From Krakow, Poland to Bastogne, Belgium

The Gluehwein at the Christmas market in Krakow, Poland is hard to beat. I had it in 2005, and it still gets rave reviews online. Called grzaniec in Polish, which is too many consonants strung together for the average English speaker to attempt until they’ve had some Gluehwein, it tasted like gingerbread. It paired well with anything. I can’t remember how much it cost but I didn’t care. I had two cupsful.

Sadly, the budget for this article didn’t stretch as far as a trip to Krakow to see if the grzaniec was still as good, but I was able to travel to Bastogne, Belgium, about 90 minutes west of Spangdahlem, and try their vin chaud, Gluehwein’s French cousin. Of what must have been a dozen stands in the Christmas market that served vin chaud, I chose the seventh on the left (it didn’t have a name) and took a paper cup of Alsatian-style Gluehwein. It was strong on aniseed and citrus, and my co-taster thought it was just the right amount of sweet. But I still compare all Gluehwein to the one in Krakow and it wasn’t as good as that. Served in a paper cup, it also got cold faster than if it had been in a ceramic mug. This Gluehwein costs 3 euros, with no deposit because who wants to keep a paper cup?

— Karin Zeitvogel

If you’re looking to add a real punch to your heated holiday drink, try Gluehwein’s fiery cousin, the Feuerzangenbowle. Think Gluehwein with some fruit floating on top and a “sugar hat” balanced on the rim of the bowl the wine is served in. The “hat” is doused with super strong rum and lit on fire, allowing the sugar and alcohol to drip into the wine. Available at many Christmas markets, including in Kaiserslautern, it’s delicious and has a kick like a mule.

— Martin Egnash
Mulled wine, warm spiced cider and hot toddies have long been British staples during winter.

Whiskey expert Ross Dennis at Dewar’s Aberfeldy Distillery explains that the hot toddy comes from Scotland.

“The first mention of what we now think of as a hot toddy comes about in the 1780s. We think the name hot toddy comes from the Todian Well, an ancient water source in Edinburgh,” he says.

The traditional recipe mixes honey and hot water with a shot of whiskey, a squeeze of lemon, and a cinnamon stick and orange slice to finish.

“In the 18th century, it would have been a very common thing to mix whiskeys with other ingredients to make it more palatable. They didn’t have the same cask management that we have today,” Dennis says.

While the hot toddy remains popular, many cocktail bars now offer their own seasonal winter warmers.

Here are five examples from London’s cocktail scene, with tips for the home mixologist:

**Bad Santa**

Rewind to a ‘70s Christmas at the kitsch seasonal pop-up “Miracle,” transported from New York to the Henrietta hotel in Covent Garden. Surrounded by garish festive cheer, you can enjoy a “Bad Santa” served in a winking Santa mug.

“It’s based on rum,” bar manager Nico Brulin explains. “There’s a bit of Arak, which is kind of like a variation of sugar cane. We do a date-infused oat milk and spiced vanilla syrup, and also some black chai tea. So it’s like totally Christmas vibes, all the flavors you can find in one drink.”

The smell of the spices, he adds, will have you “feeling like a kid again.”

**Snowplow Espresso**

Also in Covent Garden, at Sushisamba’s latest outpost, bar manager Daniele Ziaco has created this wintery espresso martini. He starts by combining vodka with a hot double espresso and a dash of sugar, adds a measure of amaretto for a nutty taste, and then adds coconut and pistachio foam.

The top is garnished with marshmallows, pistachios and coconut.

Greg Goose brand ambassador Ambre Morin says vodka’s versatility makes it ideal for modern takes on the hot cocktail. Her advice for home cocktail makers: Be creative.

“Just try to do it step by step and add things,” she says. “I would take inspiration from mulled wine, for example. Play around with that; try to twist your hot coffee or your hot chocolate. And think about flavors such as, we know that chocolate and orange match. If we think about mulled wine and pear, that’s great. I would play around with flavors a lot, and spices.”

**Wassail**

For a more sophisticated tipple, head to Manetta, the atmospheric, art deco basement bar at the Fleming hotel in Mayfair. The hotel was established in the 19th century, and the bar became a glamorous hangout for arts and literary figures in the ’30s.

Bar manager Pasquale Ferrillo makes an upscale and extravagant version of wassail, a hot mulled cider drunk at Christmas time in medieval England in hopes of a good harvest the following year.

“I use cinnamon, fresh ginger, cloves. They bring some nice Christmas atmosphere and some sweetness to the cocktail,” says Ferrillo. “Plus, of course, we use apple juice, and we serve it in combination with cognac.”

**Warm Winter Bishop**

Soho cocktail bar Swift is serving a mulled wine with a difference this season.

“We thought we’d do a bit more of a richer, more alcohol-full one with bourbon, chestnut, orange and red wine. We added a little bit of chocolate as well,” says senior bartender Sam Ameye.

He uses a Malbec red wine, and says bourbon enhances the flavors.

“It’s that kind of spirit that, because it has such rich, caramel, grainy flavors, works really well being heated,” Ameye says. Its nutty taste also goes well with the chestnut, he says.

**Hot Buttered Rum With Fudge**

Finally, over in East London at the Queen of Hoxton’s rooftop bar, head bartender Chris McGovern agrees it’s all about experimentation, but adds, “I’d stick to the spices that a lot of people recognize. So, your festive spices like cinnamon, clove, star anise. But then, do experiment with totally new flavors like maybe pineapple, or play around with gins like hot gin and tonics. Things that you can recognize, but then give it a festive twist.”

This winter, McGovern has created a new version of his hot buttered rum punch, adding fudge for an even creamier texture.

“Our hot buttered rum has always been a firm favorite with our customers. The spices we use — cinnamon, nutmeg, clove, peppercorns — it’s automatically the beginning of the festive season,” he says. “We add a bit of spiced rum, calorific amounts of butter, and it’s just a real winter warmer, almost like a soothing jacket going into the festive season.”

He melts the butter and fudge in a pan with all the spices and an apple juice base, adding the rum at the end before pouring the mix into a tin mug.

McGovern’s top tip for home mixologists making hot serves is never rush it.

“You get the most flavor when you let it mull for maybe up to one hour, up to six hours,” he says. “I always like to add the alcohol at the end so you get all that flavor and you don’t lose anything.”
Hong Kong remains most popular city destination in 2019

Hong Kong is likely to hold on to its status as the world’s most popular city with international visitors in 2019 despite months of political unrest that led to a sharp drop in tourist numbers. Meanwhile, New York City falls out of the top 10, and Delhi joins the ranks for the first time.

The Top 100 City Destinations report from global market research company Euromonitor International shows Asian destinations dominating the list, with more than 40 entries. Bangkok is expected to take second place, followed by Macau and Singapore.

Globally, inbound arrivals are expected to rise 4.2% in 2019, to 1.5 billion trips.

New York City, the most popular American destination with international travelers, is expected to sink from the eighth spot to number 11, while Miami (29), Los Angeles (33) and Las Vegas (38) were the next highest U.S. cities on the list. Competition from Asia and Europe has seen most American cities slip in recent years, despite positive growth in arrivals for most.

The 2019 rankings were calculated using estimates based on part-year arrivals data, meaning Hong Kong’s place as the global travelers’ capital could still change. The city’s tourist industry has been badly hit by protests that have raged almost every week since June.

However, Euromonitor senior analyst Simon Haven said strong arrivals numbers in the first half of the year would lessen the impact of the protests on total annual visitor numbers. “Over the period January to June of 2019, inbound arrivals grew by 14% versus the same period last year. In July, arrivals started to drop, with the most notable drop being in August, when the city experienced a 40% drop versus August 2018,” he wrote in an email.

More broadly, the Euromonitor list shows that Asian tourism is booming. The region accounts for significantly more locations than any other, and the number has risen steadily since the first edition was published in 2013. Travelers within Asia are responsible for much of the growth, according to the report, as income levels rise and the numbers of Chinese visitors to other countries — as well as millennial travelers from around the region — increase.

The biggest leap up the rankings in 2019 is expected to come from Hurghada in Egypt, which is forecast to take 63rd position after joining the top 100 in 82nd place last year. Thanks in part to a tourism reform program and improving security, Egypt remains North Africa’s leading destination, with Cairo also enjoying strong growth.

In Europe, more traditional travel hotspots like Barcelona, Milan and Vienna have slid down the rankings, while “cities in off the beaten path destinations such as Croatia, Slovenia and Sweden have moved up,” the report said. For the most part, however, such locations have yet to break the top 100.

— Bloomberg
If you’ve ever taken the Ken-o Expressway to Narita airport, you passed an unforgettably large statue of Buddha. About two hours northeast of Yokota Air Base, in a suburb of Tsukuba called Ushiku, the Ushiku Daibutsu, a bronze statue built in 1993 and nearly 38 stories tall, was once listed by Guinness World Records as the world’s tallest statue of Buddha. It was unseated by the Laykyun Sekkya Buddha in Myanmar.

It is still the tallest Buddha in Japan. By comparison, the Ushiku Daibutsu at 390 feet is more than 300 feet taller than the well-known seated Great Buddha of Kamakura.

Visitors must remove their shoes upon entering the hollow statue. A bag is provided to store them. Illuminated busts of Buddha fill the darkened first story and the sounds of wind and chimes fill your ears. Climb the stairs to the second floor where you’ll find a small museum that recounts the building of the statue. It’s filled with photographs taken during construction and holds a replica of the Buddha’s toe.

From the second floor, an elevator climbs another 250 feet to an observation area, where on a clear day you can see the Tokyo Skytree, the world’s tallest tower.

The World Lotus Sanctuary is just beneath the observation deck. Here, more than 3,000 golden Buddhas line the wall. Continuing down a flight of stairs, you will find a small gift shop and elevator access to the ground floor exit.

Outside is a park more than a mile square and built to commemorate the birth of Shinran, founder of the Pure Land sect of Japanese Buddhism.

The park is filled with paths that wander throughout the grounds past picnic areas, and a large koi pond where the fish will nearly throw themselves out of the water for the feed pellets you can buy from a small stand.

You might even find yourself in the small petting zoo or catching a monkey show.

Open 365 days a year, the Ushiku Daibutsu might be a little out of the way for some, but it’s a pretty big deal — literally.

godbold.theron@stripes.com
Twitter: @therongodbold

**INFORMATION**

Phone: 029-889-2931; Online: daibutu.net

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**DIRECTIONS**

Address: 2083 Kunocho, Ushiku City, Ibaraki Prefecture 300-1288. From the Ken-o Expressway, head toward Narita for about two hours and look for the Buddha exit in English. Ample parking in several lots is free.

**TIMES**

October through February: open daily, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
March through September: open 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on weekends and holidays.

**COSTS**

Admission is about $8 for ages 13 and up and $4 for ages 4-12. Children 3 and younger are admitted free.

**FOOD**

A small restaurant at the entrance to the Buddha serves basic Japanese fare like curry.

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**LARGER THAN LIFE**

390-foot Buddha the tallest in Japan

**BY THERON GODBOLD**

Stars and Stripes

Left: Visitors take in more than 3,000 Buddha statues on display Sept. 18 inside the Ushiku Daibutsu. Right: Tourists walk through the statue’s interior, viewing photos, sculptures and a replica of its toe.
Eclectic, hip but simple dining

Delta East food carts bring a touch of Portland to western Tokyo

By Aaron Kidd
Stars and Stripes

A community of eclectic, Portland, Ore.-inspired food carts recently opened just steps away from the home of U.S. Forces Japan in western Tokyo.

Delta East is the brainchild of Ryuma Sato, vice board member and creative director of Flag, a local nonprofit that aims to inspire and empower up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

These five carts — all under the Flag umbrella but with individual owners — have been serving up solid New York-style pizza, Vietnamese banh mi sandwiches, chicken and rice, craft beer and Ethiopian coffee since Delta East’s debut last month near the westside of Yokota Air Base.

The group is anchored by Dosukoi Pizza, which is operated by Sato and his partner, Shiori, who also serves as a Flag board member. A drawing of a sumo wrestler grappling an enormous pizza slice serves as the shop’s logo. Wrestlers used to shout “Dosukoi!” while shoving an opponent out of the ring.

Sato said he came up with his recipe after spending countless hours studying “Brooklyn-style” pizza, and he’s already received some high praise for his efforts. A customer from Brooklyn stops by for a slice almost every day, and another from Portland told him Delta East has cured her homesickness.

Dosukoi keeps things simple by offering only two flavors: cheese and pepperoni for 500 yen per slice (about $4.60). On a recent visit, the 9-year-old pizza fanatic in my family devoured both flavors and has been begging to return ever since. He enjoyed eating outdoors at one of Delta East’s many picnic tables enjoying soothing techno music.

I was impressed with Dosukoi’s quality. The slices are a bit small to be categorized as New York pizza, but Sato makes up for that with a flavorful sauce and crust that’s heads above other area pizzamakers. It’s easily the best pizza I’ve had outside of central Tokyo.

I also tried The Must Chicken, which specializes in “chicken over rice” dishes. I ordered the most popular selection — cheddar and basil — which cost 800 yen for a large portion. I definitely return for more of this hearty, tasty dish.

The Must Chicken offers seven other flavors, including one called “hot death sauce.” They also have an extensive drink menu (300 yen to 480 yen) that has plenty of options for kids and adults.

DELTA EAST

Location: 1990-1, Fussa-shi, Tokyo 197-0011
Directions: Just north of Higashi-Fussa Station and a short drive from the West and Terminal gates at Yokota Air Base, Japan.
Limited parking available.

Hours: Open daily, except Tuesdays, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Last order at 7:30 p.m.

Prices: Varies by cart; most food items cost between 500 yen and 1,100 yen.

Information: npoflag.com

— Aaron Kidd
Stuck in the middle?
How to survive your flight without giving up your seat or your sanity

BY NATALIE B. COMPTON
The Washington Post

It is a fate you wouldn’t wish upon your enemies. It’s a form of cruel and unusual punishment. It’s a curse that can plague a third of passengers on any flight.

It’s the middle seat, and, technically speaking, it’s the worst.

Aside from parents and people flying in groups, few fliers choose to sit here. After you book your ticket, and it’s time to reserve your seat assignment, you’ll find a glut of middle seats lingering before the plane fills up.

Airplane seats are already too small to be comfortable, so why would you want one wedged between two strangers? Not only are your legs crammed into the back of the seat in front, but you also typically have the body parts of the passengers on either side ramming into you repeatedly.

If you get lucky with good neighbors, there are still the inherent issues of the seat’s placement. You’re trapped by the aisle-seat passenger, unintentionally restricting your access to the lavatory and overhead compartments. You’re in an awkward spot if you want to look out the window. To the window-seat passenger, it feels like you’re staring right at their head.

There are many cons and few, if any, pros.

Here are the rules of the middle seat for those who are stuck there.

Rule 1
The middle seat owns both armrests

This rule is so important that it should be engraved onto the doorway of the plane or included in the safety video that plays before takeoff that people are definitely watching. Passengers in the surrounding seats must be made aware.

The mandate is this: The middle-seat passenger gets both armrests, period. Do they have to use them? No. But should they be made available to that cursed soul trapped in airplane purgatory? Yes. It’s not a conversation. It’s a given.

Offering up both of those tiny little ledges that provide minimal relief is the least that can be done.

Rule 2
The middle seat must not exploit its position by annexing more leg space

Yes, you are jam-packed into your row like a middle pea in the world’s least comfortable pod, but that does not mean that you can let your legs flail open into the limited personal space of your neighbors. Leg space is sacred. Respect the invisible boundaries that extend from the armrests down to the plane’s soiled carpet. Note that knocking knees with strangers is also not OK. Although your arms and shoulders are likely to touch your neighbors’ wrangle your legs together. Keep them to yourself.

Rule 3
The middle seat must not sleep on anyone’s shoulder

Waking up to find yourself snoozing on your plane neighbor might have been cute when you were a kid, but it’s not a good look as an adult. Be mindful of teetering over too far and ending up on a neighbor’s shoulder. Using a stranger as a pillow without their permission sends a weird message. Save yourself the embarrassment of waking up mid-drool by focusing on sleeping upright. A travel neck pillow that straps to your headrest might help drifters.

Rule 4
The middle seat must be taken if traveling in a couple

The middle is the worst. We’ve established that. But if you’re traveling as a couple, one of you must claim it. Cursed is the couple who opts to book the aisle and window seat to avoid the center, leaving a stranger to endure two lovebirds talking and passing things across the row.

For the love of all that is holy, don’t split up. Someone be an adult and sit in the middle.

Rule 5
The middle seat should at least attempt to time lavatory visits with the aisle seat

This rule pertains to the passenger seated next to the window as well. This one is less a necessity and more of a recommendation for being a good neighbor. If your body allows it, wait until the other passengers in your row get up, for whatever reason, to make your trip to the lavatory. It’s not the end of the world if you have to ask them to get up just for you, but it’s nice to be considerate of timing, particularly if they’re sleeping.

This courtesy extends beyond bathroom use. Be mindful when you board to store what you need below the seat in front of you, so you don’t have to get up throughout the flight to access the overhead bin.

Next week: A glimpse into the responsibilities of the window seat
None of the characters in Afterparty want to take up too much of anyone’s time, even in hell where the game is set. Demons, if you didn’t know, take schedules seriously, and it’s only because a demon at a processing center considers his off-hours sacrosanct that Milo and Lola, two new arrivals to the Pit, are free to stroll about for a night rather than being assigned an ironic form of torture for their sins.

Milo and Lola aren’t sure how they died — one minute they were chatting with their fellow college grads at a party then, zap! — or why they’ve ended up in hell, but they adapt quickly. Looking for an escape plan, they learn that if they can best Satan in a drinking contest, they’ll win their liberty. And so begins a pub crawl in which the kids — sorry, I mean the recently-certified adults — get involved in a whole lot of tomfoolery.

Before the night is over Milo and Lola will, among other things, commit themselves to a bad impersonation, instigate a fight and cut past lots of people waiting to get into a party. They’ll also suffer the occasional interruption from their personal demon, Sister Mary Wormhorn, whose job, naturally, is to remind them of difficult memories. Wormhorn is batty and overeager, but like the rest of Hell’s denizens, she keeps her routines short.

To everyone’s good fortune, Milo, a people pleaser, and Lola, the one who will tell you that your tastes are too commercial, have Sam (voiced by the talented Ashly Burch) to ferry them across lava on her boat from place to place and deliver clipped exposition. Without the burden of responsibility, Milo and Lola can, and really should, drink all manner of concoctions since they impart extra dialogue options.

Hell is a repository of drinks with names such as Famous Last Words (“menthol, colored solvents, with a touch of sugar; slightly more enjoyable than death”) and the Headless Groom (“orange rum; melted chocolate; catholic guilt; twisty straws for mild enjoyment”). There are drinks that will boost the characters’ courage, as well as to make them more flirty, more obnoxious or more inclined to speak like someone out of a 1940s Hollywood noir film.

Afterparty is the second game from Nightschool Studio. Like its previous game, Oxenfree, Afterparty feels like a marriage of graphic novels, animated films and video games. Playing it mostly involves walking around and talking to people. Though occasionally Milo and Lola might be called upon to dance, play beer pong or try to stack shot glasses on top of each other, these are low-pressure activities that don’t carry the threat of a game over screen. Indeed, Afterparty provides a breezy, frictionless experience that lasts about as long as a good party (four or five hours).

Chatting with the characters, you get the feeling that everyone is trying extra hard to deliver their snappiest lines. The reference-heavy humor pulls in everything from Schopenhauer to “How Stella Got Her Groove Back,” to ’90s-era cartoons. The approach is scattershot, but not grating.

In contrast with Milo and Lola’s vigor, the demons come across as weary, working stiffs. For example, after hopping in and out of cages operated by elevator demons to ascend the cliffs outside of Satan’s house, Milo asks the third elevator demon, “Why didn’t Satan make more stairs?” to which the demon replies, “Because Satan likes to keep demons employed.” Khoi Dao (Milo) and Janina Gavankar (Lola) are gifted vocal actors, and their banter flows. Of course, not every joke hits, but a good number do. I’m surely not the only one who started a new game after the credits rolled because I wanted to see how the night could have turned out differently.

Afterparty ably emulates the manic tempo of being young, smart (and stupid) and having a wild night out.

#noregrets

Platforms: Mac, Nintendo Switch, PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One

Online: nightschoolstudio.com/afterparty

More game reviews at stripes.com/games
Serving the fans, not the story

By Michael O’Sullivan
The Washington Post

In a Star Wars, no one’s ever really gone. So Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) says, near the end of 2017’s “The Last Jedi” and again in the trailer for the new sequel, “The Rise of Skywalker.” In the trailer, those words are followed by an evil laugh so instantly familiar to fans of the long-running sci-fi franchise as belonging to a character who was killed five movies ago that it held on to the promise of resurrection.

That promise is confirmed in the on-screen text “craw” that, as with previous films, spins “Skywalker,” catching us up with what we need to know.

What that text doesn’t tell us is that this move, while fast-paced, eventful, occasionally even surprising, also panders wildly, closing out this last chapter of the nine films that have come to be known as the Skywalker Saga with a story that delivers to the faithfully the movie that they wanted.

On the one hand, that’s a good thing. On the other, it may not be the closure this epic, now 42 years in the making, deserves.

As with previous films, “The Rise of Skywalker” learns that Adam Driver’s Kylo Ren, new supreme leader of the First Order (the bad guys), is about to take a meeting with that character we all thought was dead, a meeting that he hopes will confer even more power upon him and dominion over the galaxy. Rey (Daisy Ridley), our scavenger-turned-hero, introduced in 2015’s “The Force Awakens,” is meanwhile continuing her training as a Jedi knight among the rebel forces, struggling against the oppressors.

She and Kylo are powerful enemies, each of them sensitive to the mystical energy known as the Force, with Kylo having embraced its dark side and Rey at its light. It is no accident that her name sounds like “ray,” but she wrestles with the pull of the shadows, for reasons we don’t yet know (but will by this film’s final act).

For his part, Kylo, the son of Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher, digitally resurrected), is also torn between good and evil. That tension — Rey and Kylo kind of dig each other, but they’re also, you know, mortal enemies, so let’s call it a love-hate relationship that years after the epic, the new film, a-million stratagem. And the film’s aversion to death, or at least the sort of sacrifice that matters — one that demonstrates victory comes at a real cost — is also familiar.

When Luke said no one’s ever really gone, he didn’t mean that no one actually dies in Star Wars. It’s just that plenty of characters, named and unnamed, have given their lives in the pursuit of destruction — or preservation — of life as we know it in the rebel stronghold.

But we’re not given even the deaths of prominent characters in ways that might make us actually feel something other than adrenaline.

In myth, the good guys are often flawed. So it makes sense that Rey must be seen to grapple with her less virtuous nature than the future, two movies away. In “The Rise of Skywalker,” it’s the easy kind.

Everybody wants a happy ending. But that doesn’t mean that we should always get the one we want. If the hero actually had to give up something, or someone, it would feel a bit less like a cop-out.

“The fact that it’s lasted for 40 years is pretty amazing.”

— THEelic

For the new movie, Abrams was able to revisit some past ideas.

“Working with (writer) Larry Kasdan on ‘Force Awakens,’ we had a million discussions about all sorts of things that didn’t end up, didn’t fit in ‘Force Awakens,’” Abrams said. “So when I unexpectedly came back to work on this one, it was like opening a time machine or time capsule or a crate full of ideas of things we had discussed that suddenly weren’t far flung, which in the future, two movies away. Suddenly it was, like, now.”

Abrams always approached “Episode IX” as the complete conclusion of the Skywalker Saga, rather than as an ending that could double as a new beginning.

As someone who’s been part of a galaxy far, far away since the original trilogy, a long time ago, Williams appreciates the staying power of the series.

“It’s a phenomenon,” Williams said. “The fact that it’s lasted for 40 years is pretty amazing.”

theme with these stories. It’s the demons outside of yourself and the demons within yourself.”

“The events of ‘The Last Jedi’ left the Leia-led resistance on its last leg in its fight against the First Order, with Rey, Finn and Poe finally together at the end.

For the new movie, Abrams was able to revisit some past ideas.

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“It’s a phenomenon,” Williams said. “The fact that it’s lasted for 40 years is pretty amazing.”

From left: Joonas Suotamo, Oscar Isaac, Daisy Ridley and John Boyega star in “Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker.”

‘Skywalker’ film wraps things up a little too easily

By Peter Sblendorio
New York Daily News

To borrow a line from Darth Vader, the circle is now complete.

For more than 40 years, the Star Wars movies centering on the Skywalkers have been a force unlike any other in this galaxy or beyond. And now, the epic saga is coming to an end.

It’s a phenomenon,” Williams said. “The fact that it’s lasted for 40 years is pretty amazing.”


Abrams’ mission for the upcoming film was to create a satisfying conclusion to a movie series known as the Skywalker Saga that’s seen the ascent of Darth Vader, the heroics of Luke to defeat the Evil Empire and now, the epic saga is coming to an end.

For more than 40 years, the Skywalker Saga has inspired generations of moviegoers who truly believe the Force is with them.

Amidst them is director J.J. Abrams, who was 10 when the first Star Wars soared into theaters.

“It’s hard to separate it from what it’s always been to me, which was a mind-expanding, sort of magical world that George created that blew the roof off of my imagination and made all things possible,” Abrams said recently. “I just feel like, selfishly, to have been part of it all, to even be a footnote in that, is something I feel incredibly blessed about.”


Abrams’ mission for the upcoming film was to create a satisfying conclusion to a movie series known as the Skywalker Saga that’s seen the ascent of Darth Vader, the heroics of Luke to defeat the Evil Empire and now, in rapid succession, flying Stormtroopers — yes, they fly now, as Poe notes sardonically — quicksand and a giant, carnivorous worm, as well as many scenery and climate changes. The special effects and cinematography are well done, particularly a scene in which Rey must be seen to grapple with the pull of the shadows, for reasons we don’t yet know (but will by this film’s final act).

For his part, Kylo, the son of Han Solo (Harrison Ford) and Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher, digitally resurrected), is also torn between good and evil. That tension — Rey and Kylo kind of dig each other, but they’re also, you know, mortal enemies, so let’s call it a love-hate relationship that years after the epic, the new film, a-million stratagem. And the film’s aversion to death, or at least the sort of sacrifice that matters — one that demonstrates victory comes at a real cost — is also familiar.

When Luke said no one’s ever really gone, he didn’t mean that no one actually dies in Star Wars. It’s just that plenty of characters, named and unnamed, have given their lives in the pursuit of destruction — or preservation — of life as we know it in the rebel stronghold.

But we’re not given even the deaths of prominent characters in ways that might make us actually feel something other than adrenaline.

In myth, the good guys are often flawed. So it makes sense that Rey must be seen to grapple with her less virtuous nature than the future, two movies away. In “The Rise of Skywalker,” it’s the easy kind.

Everybody wants a happy ending. But that doesn’t mean that we should always get the one we want. If the hero actually had to give up something, or someone, it would feel a bit less like a cop-out.


Abrams’ mission for the upcoming film was to create a satisfying conclusion to a movie series known as the Skywalker Saga that’s seen the ascent of Darth Vader, the heroics of Luke to defeat the Evil Empire and now, the epic saga is coming to an end.

For more than 40 years, the Star Wars movies centering on the Skywalkers have been a force unlike any other in this galaxy or beyond. And now, the epic saga is coming to an end.

It’s a phenomenon,” Williams said. “The fact that it’s lasted for 40 years is pretty amazing.”

— THEelic

For the new movie, Abrams was able to revisit some past ideas.

“Working with (writer) Larry Kasdan on ‘Force Awakens,’ we had a million discussions about all sorts of things that didn’t end up, didn’t fit in ‘Force Awakens,’” Abrams said. “So when I unexpectedly came back to work on this one, it was like opening a time machine or time capsule or a crate full of ideas of things we had discussed that suddenly weren’t far flung, which in the future, two movies away. Suddenly it was, like, now.”

Abrams always approached “Episode IX” as the complete conclusion of the Skywalker Saga, rather than as an ending that could double as a new beginning.

As someone who’s been part of a galaxy far, far away since the original trilogy, a long time ago, Williams appreciates the staying power of the series.

“It’s a phenomenon,” Williams said. “The fact that it’s lasted for 40 years is pretty amazing.”
Outliving its nine lives

Cats’ appeals to some; other will find it pointless

**Michael O’Sullivan**
The Washington Post

Having just watched “Cats,” the movie version of the hit musical about something called “Jellicle cats,” it is clear that “Jellicle” must be cat-speak for “wackadoodle.”

Of course, cats don’t actually speak. But neither do they sing their little feline hearts out or have oddly unsettling human breasts and faces that make them look like the winner of a Halloween costume contest as the Cow-fuddy Lion. Neither do they wear red pants with suspenders or dance all sexy-like in front of a miniature chorus line of human hoofers dressed up like cockroaches—all in competition to be selected for ascension to heaven (called the Heaviside layer here), where, presumably, the winner of the contest, called the Jellicle Ball, will be reincarnated in the next of nine lives.

And that, dear friends, is the last attempt at a synopsis that you will read in this review. Some people say that “Cats”—based on the silly little 1939 children’s book “Old Possum’s Book of Practical Cats”—is no plot. But by “plot” they probably mean point. And by “some people,” I mean me.

But it is what it is, and boy is it ever.

This is not to say that “Cats” the movie is the same as “Cats” the stage play—not by a long shot. The long-running live show featured people in cat makeup, wigs and furry, striped bodysuits that made them look like a troupe of Russian acrobats auditioning for Cirque du Soleil. “Cats” the movie features prestigious performers from stage, screen, music and dance—including Jennifer Hudson, Sir Ian McKellen, Dame Judi Dench, Idris Elba, Rebel Wilson, James Corden and ballerina Francesca Hayward—all tricked out in digitally generated fur that is simultaneously so lifelike and so creepily hallucinatory that the cast looks like a colony of feral felines who have taken up permanent residence in the uncanny valley.

None of this is by way of saying that “Cats” is bad, per se. In fact, some of the songs are pretty toe-tapping at times, and the dancing, which includes turns by the French siblings known as Les Twins (who play cats wearing inexplicably, sneakers), is well choreographed for the screen, by Andy Blankenbuehler. Wisely or rashly, the film embraces the decisions its creative team has made—which include setting decor with oversize furniture to make the cats look smaller—with a commitment that is admirable, if also, inevitably, off-putting to a large part of the potential audience.

But those people were never going to see “Cats” in the first place.

The first trailer alone, which looked so alarming to so many that the film’s effects actually dialed back the CGI fur, should be sufficient to tell you whether this movie is for you. And if you need more help making up your mind, just go back and read that paragraph with the synopsis.

It also helps to like cats (meaning the animal, and not just “Cats”). Jellicle in the context of the show is a play on “angelical”—a pun that is only really obvious when you hear it, not read it—and Eliot clearly had an affection for the beasts.

But as catlike as they may look, the cats in “Cats” are not really cats at all. It feels odd to have to type that out, but some people continue to make the mistake of thinking the musical is a love song to their pets. As Old Deuteronomy (Dench) sings toward the end of the film, “You’ve learned enough to take the view that cats are very much like you. But that does have a point. Cats are not people. That certainly will be enough for some. Other one thing to be learned from watching “Cats”: For people to grasp the sort of thing that you are—‘Cats’ is just the sort of thing you will like.

Two stars. Rated PG for peril, some mature thematic elements and rude humor. Run time: 109 minutes.

**What Others Are Saying**

...Audiences unfamiliar with the material may be stunned to learn how little there is to “Cats,” not just in terms of narrative but in terms of everything besides narrative. It’s a kooky music hall revue, and a pushy, needy, antiquated one at that...

—Michael Phillips Chicago Tribune

...The film doesn’t have an ounce of the bite or sex appeal of the 1998 video version of the stage production...

—Katie Walsh Tribune News Service

...However you feel about “Cats” the show—and let’s face it, some love it and some hate it—give director Tom Hooper credit for assembling a cast that knows its way around a stage...

—Jocelyn Noveck Associated Press
Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend of The Who have joined forces again and released a new batch of songs, the band's first since 2006.

**The Who**
*Interscope*

While frequently joining forces for tours and other projects, Pete Townshend and Roger Daltrey have released just two studio albums as The Who since 1982, with 2006’s “Endless Wire” their last such work until now.

On “WHO,” the musicians are backed by some of their frequent collaborators since the deaths of drummer Keith Moon in 1978 and bassist John Entwistle in 2002, such as drummer Zak Starkey and bassist Pino Palladino. Others include drummers Joey Waronker and Carla Azar, bassist Gus Seyffert and keyboard player Benmont Tench.

Still, all the splendid back ing notwithstanding — and not forgetting co-producer and multi-instrumentalist D. Sardy, either — it’s the high standards of The Who’s last remaining trademarks, Townshend’s songwriting and guitar playing and Daltrey’s superlative singing, that make the album such a joy.

Townshend has written a strong batch of songs full of yearning and confronting the passage of time, many carrying shades and echoes of his past work; he rips power chords and performs slinky riffs; and his vocals, especially in support of Daltrey’s leads, are a highlight.

Daltrey, for his part, with health concerns behind him, sings with power, sensitivity, range and conviction, just as he has done for decades.

While it doesn’t have the same air of finality as Leonard Cohen’s “You Want It Darker,” released just weeks before his death in 2016, based on their recording habits of the past decades, “WHO” could well be their last studio album.

The catchy, propulsive opener “All This Music Must Fade” seems like a message about Townshend and Daltrey’s difficult relationship, even though that seems to have mellowed: “I don’t care/I know you’re gonna hate this song. And that’s it/We never really got along.” It may also be a missive to their fans and closes with what will become Townshend’s most famous last words since his “I saw ya!” at the end of “Happy Jack.”

“Ball and Chain,” “Street Song” and “Beads on One String” are topical, but many other of the 11 tracks (plus three on the deluxe edition) are simultaneously defiant, vulnerable and contemplative, with aging repeatedly rearing its head.

On the rousing “Rocking in Rage,” like a coda to “Quadrophenia,” the talk is still about their generation: “I thought I’d be calmer/Not rocking in rage,” even if “I’m too old to fight.” It’s a shiver-inducing Daltrey performance.

Townshend sings lead on “I’ll Be Back,” a nostalgic tune with strings and harmonica, that seems lifted from his 1982 solo album, “All the Best Cowboys Have Chinese Eyes.”

On “I Don’t Wanna Get Wise,” Daltrey seems to have changed some of the lyric sheet’s “I pronounce into “he,” “she” and “us,” as if making space for himself in the rocking mini-biography of a song — “He was drunk/I was blind/Though we tried to be kind” — and belting out a “We got wise” at the end.

Thankfully, it’s much too late for Daltrey and Townshend to die before they get old, so with “WHO” they show that even in rock ‘n’ roll, it’s possible to age both with grace and vigor and without abandoning purpose. Or lose the talent to make stirring, highly gratifying music.

— Pablo Gorondi
Associated Press

### Various artists

**If You’re Going to the City**
*A Tribute to Mose Allison (Fat Possum)*

It may be a tired cliche to say someone was one of a kind, but Mose Allison most definitely was.

A jazz and blues pianist whose songwriting career meshed lyrics with Mad magazine wit, keen philosophical observations and pure melodies that he sang in a cool conversational voice, Allison, who died three years ago at age 89, was an inspiration to everyone from Pete Townshend to Van Morrison.

In an album benefiting the Sweet Relief Musicians Fund, a collection of greats — from Fiona Apple and Bonnie Raitt to Taj Mahal and Iggy Pop — put their own artistry at the service of 15 outstanding Allison tracks.

It’s their diversity and personalized takes on the songs that make this album so enjoyable. There have been many versions of Allison’s songs over the years, and several here are marvelous. They include Loudon Wainwright’s guitar-and-voice take on “Ever Since the World Ended,” with its upbeat descriptions of post-apocalyptic life; Dave and Phil Alvin’s fierce version of “Wild Man on the Loose”; Ben Harper and Charlie Musselwhite’s fiery “Nightclub”; and Iggy Pop’s late period Miles Davis-like adaptation of the title track.

With Apple backed by, among others, Benmont Tench and Fred Tackett, the all too-brief “Your Molecular Structure” applies scientific terms to explain the whys and hows of physical attraction but ends in most primal fashion — “Your molecular structure baby, ooh wee!”

Other highlights are live versions by Raitt of “Everybody’s Crying Mercy” and Richard Thompson of “Parchman Farm.” Robbie Fulks puts a folky spin with banjo and fiddle on “My Brain,” and daughter Amy Allison and Elvis Costello close the album in fine fashion on the sophisticated “Monsters of the Id.”

The album comes with a bonus DVD of a 2005 documentary about Allison by Paul Bernay, “Ever Since I Stole the Blues,” that shows in what high regard far more famous musicians held him.

— Pablo Gorondi
Associated Press
NEW ON DVD

Judy: It’s 1969, and Judy Garland (Renee Zellweger), in dire financial straits, has taken on a residency at London’s Talk of the Town in hopes of making enough money to rejoin her children in Los Angeles. Along the way, she falls for a pianist, Mickey Deans (Finn Wittrock), who would become her fifth husband, and she struggles to keep her substance use and mental and physical health in check both onstage and off. Garland died of an accidental barbiturate overdose just a few months later.

Zellweger gives an absolutely mesmerizing performance, completely losing herself in Garland's voice, mannerisms and the tiniest of facial expressions (not to mention the powerhouse tial of our most beloved stars, and the darkest psychology of one of our greatest performers). It's a performance that digs into the fabric of Garland's soul and leaves you breathless.

But unlike those genres, the movie, about a small town besieged by a Christmas Eve snowstorm, has Asian American characters front and center who aren’t there just to be comedic relief.

Jacob Batalon (Marvel's “Spider-Man” movies) and Anna Akana (“Ant-Man”) play an aspiring DJ and closeted lesbian cheerleader, respectively. For Akana, nothing felt taken about the role.

“When I first read the script, I was like, ‘This is perfect.’” Akana said. “I was always the one being the token Asian character.”

The film also relies on flashbacks to show the beginnings of the character. Garland faced racism in the studio system (diet pills, chronic overworking, general psychological torture). Also available on DVD:

Adopt a Highway: An ex-con (Nat Wolff) turns his life around after discovering an abandoned baby in a dumpster.

The Gallows Act II: This sequel to the hit 2016 film follows a college student who discovers an evil spirit after transferring to a new school and finding a key to an internet challenge. Ezra Horvath stars.

The Kill Team: A U.S. soldier (Jacob Batalon) turns his life around after discovering an abandoned baby in a dumpster.

Anna Akana, left, and Liv Hewson appear in the TV movie “Let It Snow.” It’s one of the rare yuletide offerings that includes diversity.

By Terry Tang
Associated Press

W

The disproportionate representation is somewhat mystifying when you consider Asian Americans have the highest growth rates in population and purchasing power of any U.S. ethnic or racial group.

TV networks slow to add Asian Americans to holiday fare on TV

Tina Perry, president of OWN, said filling roles with more diverse actors in general is a great way to sprinkle unique cultural nuances in a very formulaic genre. The network’s three original holiday movies have all-black casts.

“There’ll be a distinction I think for viewers when they watch and compare the Hallmark and Lifetime (movies) with our movies,” Perry said. Even the music is “more jazzy, R&B, a little soulful, which I think is going to be really fun for our viewers and just give it a different feel.”

Akana, 30, thinks the issue is with a Hollywood system that’s still shedding racial stereotypes while claiming there are few Asian actors. For a long time, she said most of the auditions she got were for stereotypical parts like a massage therapist or the girl who was “upset she got a B.” She credits her YouTube channel, which has 2.5 million subscribers, for helping her leverage better auditions.

Jenny Han, author of “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before” and a producer on the Netflix film adaptation, said it’s frustrating as an adult to look back at some of these movies and see hardly anyone of color.

Why make a fuss over a genre that’s often a punching bag for its light and fluffy nature? Well, that’s the point, says the Korean American scribe. Stories about minorities are somewhat mystifying when you consider Asian Americans have the highest growth rates in population and purchasing power of any U.S. ethnic or racial group.

Hotel,” airing on Lifetime. “These are people who have been fans of Christmas movies for years and they always bring up how nice it is to see people of color, how much more exciting it is for them to tune in.”

Candice Frederick, an entertainment reporter and critic based in New York City, said studios, especially in TV, are still “more willing to throw away millions of dollars on a white actor than an actor of color.”

Though Hallmark films seem to cater to an audience that’s “very white middle America who eat that up,” networks like BET can go after other demographics.

“I just kind of find it less interesting. Not to say that’s a bad thing,” Frederick said. “You can’t not win with a Christmas movie during Christmas time.”

Dreaming of a less white Christmas

TV networks slow to add Asian Americans to holiday fare on TV

With its multiple teenage characters, the Netflix movie “Let It Snow” is a mix of holiday feels and a John Hughes comedy. But unlike those genres, the movie, about a small town besieged by a Christmas Eve snowstorm, has Asian American characters front and center who aren’t there just to be comedic relief.

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Anna Akana, left, and Liv Hewson appear in the TV movie “Let It Snow.” It’s one of the rare yuletide offerings that includes diversity.

By Terry Tang
Associated Press

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Why make a fuss over a genre that’s often a punching bag for its light and fluffy nature? Well, that’s the point, says the Korean American scribe. Stories about minorities are
Studies show loneliness in men common

Contributing factors include tendency to be independent, society’s views on masculinity

By Armin Brott
Tribune News Service

Loneliness kills. According to former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, isolation and weak social connections “are associated with a reduction in lifespan similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day and even greater than that associated with obesity.” Even when it’s not fatal, loneliness makes life a lot less pleasant. We’ll talk about exactly what that means below.

While loneliness cuts across all racial and socioeconomic lines — just about everyone feels lonely at some point, right? — one group in particular is disproportionately affected: men. As Henry David Thoreau put it more than 170 years ago in his classic book, “Walden,” “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” And a recent study by YouGov backs him up. In that study, 44% of males 18 and over said they feel lonely all the time — far higher than the percentage of women who gave the same answer. And that doesn’t even take into account men’s well-documented habit of underreporting anything that might make us feel — or give someone else the impression that we might be — weak or defective. In the same study, men were 50% more likely than women (18% vs. 12%) to say they don’t have any close friends, and 33% more likely (32% vs. 24%) to say they don’t have a best friend. In fact, many men feel emotionally closer to their dogs than to other humans. In a recent study by psychologist Christopher Blazina and researcher Lori Kogan, 62% of male dog owners said that their relationship with their dog is “almost always” secure, while only 10% said the same about the relationship with the closest human in their life.

Aside from the predictable increase in suicide, the other consequences of loneliness and the lack of human connection are devastating. A variety of studies have found a strong correlation between loneliness and increased risk of alcoholism and substance abuse; heart disease and stroke; high blood pressure; mental health issues (such as anxiety, depression, and risky behavior, and poor decision making), dementia and cognitive decline; poor self-care (like not eating well or getting enough exercise); disrupted sleep; lack of motivation and poor job performance; decreased resistance to infection; high stress levels; and even chronic diseases such as diabetes.

There are many contributing factors. Here are the two biggest:

Men and women make friends differently. Boys and men bond better when they do things with groups of other guys, such as playing sports or going to a club. As we get older and our responsibilities increase, we have less time to engage in group activities and our friendships often fade. Women have an easier time with one-on-one relationships and can maintain them via phone.

Society’s wacky definition of masculinity. From the time we’re boys, we’re told that emotional vulnerability, talking about and expressing our feelings and asking for help (the kinds of things one might do with a friend) are signs of weakness. Being an independent, lone wolf who can handle his own problems, however, is a sure sign of maleness. Ha.

Here are a few steps that can combat loneliness:

Find a group activity. Sign up for a class at your local community college. If you’re physically able, check out an adult sports league at your local Parks and Rec department or YMCA. Or join a religious, social group, or networking group. The goal is to connect with people with similar interests.

Reduce social media. If you’re not on social media at all, set up some profiles and try to reconnect with old friends. But don’t go too far. Psychologists have found a direct causal link between time spent on social media and decreased well-being.

Volunteer. Working with others for a good cause is a great way to meet people.

Just say yes. If you get invited somewhere, go. Just go.

Study by psychologist Christopher Blazina and researcher Lori Kogan
How gift-giving rituals evolved

S
ometime after the Earth cooled — let’s just say it was between a gazillion and a bajillion years ago — hairy Homo sapiens began squirming away special rocks and animal pelts to present to each other as gifts. I’m no archaeologist, but I’m pretty sure gift giving in those days wasn’t a holiday ritual. Darwin would probably say that exchanging gifts was a way humans ensured reproductive success and perpetuation of the species.

But let’s not get into all that tedious history. Suffice it to say that, eventually, human beings and gift giving evolved into the wallet-busting tradition known today as “The Holidays.”

While it’s true that my husband, Francis, is unusually hairy and has been known to grant, our gift-giving ritual has progressed significantly from that of our cave-dwelling ancestors. However, I must admit that our family’s holiday evolution has been marked with periods of barbarism, savagery and other primitive behaviors.

When Francis and I first married, we celebrated the holidays snuggled on our couch, whispering sweet nothings and exchanging meaningful gifts we charged on credit cards with $1,000 limits, blissfully ignorant of the 23% interest rates.

Soon, I gave birth to our three children. Unable to contain our “Baby’s First Christmas” excitement, we bought toys, clothes and tiny rocking chairs, carefully wrapping them and placing them under the tree.

The rookie mistake we realized was that babies are more interested in pulling ornaments off the tree and taking naps on Christmas. We had saved ourselves a lot of time and money had we just bought them each a 97-cent bag of Walmart bows to slobber on.

Then, the kids got older. Their developing brains were soon able to contemplate things like St. Nicholas, the Christmas Miracle, and that the Star Wars Jedi Master Light Saber requires three AAA batteries. Our kids’ new level of consciousness meant that we had to hit the streets, elbowing fellow humans in a primitive race for the last Barbie Saddle ‘N Ride Horse at Toys R Us.

If we survived the shopping, we nearly died of exhaustion on December 24th. After cookie baking, photos with Santa at the mall, an elaborate prime rib dinner during which the kids whined for boxed macaroni and cheese, church in the itchy outfits Grams sent, and a reading of ‘The Night Before Christmas’ we were forced to stay up until the wee hours wrapping gifts. Then, too, when the kids woke us up, it was all we could do to grab a cup of coffee and witness the mayhem. Wrapping paper flying, we spent our last bit of energy removing hundreds of wires, zip ties and Fort Knox plastic packaging from the kids’ new toys.

When our children became teenagers, they had evolved to use their advanced knowledge and take full advantage of the season. To them, the “Magic of Christmas” was that they could manipulate us into buying them an Xbox One even though they got Cs in chemistry.

Furthermore, even though they used to hate it when we gave them clothing for Christmas, it became crucial that our teenage children received lots of new clothes. Their entire social lives seemed to depend on getting Superga platform sneakers, a puffer jacket and a Carhartt beanie.

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Problem was, we never seemed to get them what they wanted. We learned to keep the receipts and braced ourselves for the years to come.

Despite it all, we know that the holiday is not just a Darwinian gift exchange ritual designed to perpetuate our species. It’s a time of selfless generosity, when human beings gather to joyously celebrate with family and friends. And, as we remind ourselves of the ancient miracles that gave rise to our treasured traditions, we will heed the most important lesson of gift giving, which can be summed up in three simple words: Buy gift cards.

Read more of Lisa Smith Molinar’s columns at: themeatandpotatoesoflife.com
Email: meatandpotatoesoflife@gmail.com
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

‘LOOKIN’ GOOD!’

By Emily Carroll / Edited by Will Shortz

ACROSS

DOWN

F3HIJKLM


“Gunston Street” is drawn by Basil Zaviski. Email him at gunstonstreet@yahoo.com, and visit gunstonstreet.com.
Yet another 'Christmas Carol'

...but actor Serkis says the world can use a new take on the Dickens classic

By Hilary Fox

Associated Press

Wearing a tall black hat, a heavy, bobbled fur coat covered in frills, a long beard and plenty of hair, Stellan (Stefan) Skarsgård received a round of applause from the crew of “A Christmas Carol" after thanking them for their hard work on the set.

An hour later, he emerged clean shaven and delighted to be “derigged” from his garb as the Spirit of Christmas Past — a pagan-inspired look he describes as “artistic sexual deprivation.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever worn such an uncomfortable costume,” said Serkis. “The costume’s really heavy. I’ve got an eye, which is kind of a milky eye, which I have no peripheral vision out of the right-hand side of my face. I’ve got long fingernails.”

It didn’t help that this festive offering was shot during a heat wave in July.

Even the colder night shoots were no relief. “I thought, I’ve got the best costume; I don’t need a warm set coat. But then it started raining and I realized that when my costume started getting wet, it weighed about five times as much,” Serkis said.

This new version of “A Christmas Carol,” starring Guy Pearce as Ebenezer Scrooge, airs state-side several times this month on FX.

Serkis, who is perhaps best known as an actor behind the computer-enhanced character of Gollum in “The Lord of the Rings" and “Hobbit" films, talked to the Associated Press during a set visit in Hertfordshire, England, after wrapping his part in the production titled “A Christmas Carol” last summer.

He described shaving off the heavy beard as “joyous.”

“My son will speak to me now.”

Despite the discomfort of his “facial accoutrements,” this was a project Serkis couldn’t turn down.

Coming from “Peaky Blinders” creator Steven Knight, this version of the classic Charles Dickens story was “plugged into the zeitgeist,” Serkis said. The script appealed to him, said, because although it told the tale with the 21st century lens, it feels incredibly contemporary — philosophically and emotionally.

“Everything is transactional in the world of Scrooge. Everything has a currency and value and a monetary sense. So, I think that sort of ultra or uber capitalist view is very much what Stu- ven has been trying to grapple with,” Serkis said.

Serkis loves Dickens and isn’t surprised there have been so many versions of his work.

At the end of the day, who needs another “Christmas Carol?” he asked. “There’s so many ‘Christmas Carols’ and there’s so many versions of every Dickens story. But when you have a production company and a writer and a creative team that have such a specific and unique take on the source material, then it’s something you’d love to be involved in.

Also on the set, Pearce’s Scrooge looked pale, tormented by his hairless, Victorian-tailored costume, he looked quite different from the stripy bed socks, night cap and comical grumpy demeanor of many other interpretations.

Serkis thinks Pearce’s portrayal is something fresh.

“He’s so wary of the cliche of presenting a Dickensian character. He wants him to be totally emotionally truthful; very, very subtly pulled back. It’s a tight rope, but he’s avoided all of the trapings of any version of this character I’ve seen before. He’s really very mean-spirited, yet still, a grain of you feels some empathy toward him, even though he’s incredibly hard and refuses to be drawn into any kind of an emotional release,” Serkis said.

When asked which modern, political figures could benefit from Dickens’ lesson on Scrooge, Serkis laughs.

“I don’t think the imagination feels incredibly contemporary, because although it told the tale of the zeitgeist, Serkis said. The version of the classic Charles Dickens tale is plugged into the modern zeitgeist.

Photos from FX

Driver walks out of NPR interview over sound clip

By Christi Carras

Los Angeles Times

After a tumultuous, scandal-marred season, “Survivor: Island of the Idols” has come to an end. But the #MeToo controversy that engulfed the long-running reality show “The Bachelor” during its contestant’s expulsion and criticism of CBS and the producers’ handling of the situation — will continue to reverberate into future seasons, with the network planning to implement new policies and procedures to improve safety on set.

“Survivor” crowed its 39th winner Wednesday night during its reunion special, bringing the players back together after the finale to reflect on the game.

“Island of the Idols” repeatedly broke the fourth wall to address multiple misconduct issues, for the first time, ousted a contestant for misconduct before the final vote. During the reunion, the spotlight was on Kellee Kim, an MBA student who first expressed concerns about fellow contestant Desiree Spencer’s inappropriate touching of her and other young female players in the season premiere.

After he revealed the final votes in the studio, host and executive producer Jeff Probst spoke directly to Kim, apologizing for how she was treated during production — the first time he had done so on the show.

“Before we begin, I want to say to you, you were right,” Probst said. “You were right to speak up. You were right to stand up and to speak your truth. And I want to acknowledge and apologize for your pain. You didn’t ask for it, and you didn’t deserve it.”

By midseason, a tearful confession from Kim and more accounts from castaways of on-air verbal harassment by Spilo, corroborated by island footage, motivated production to step in, issuing a warning to Spilo and a public statement. Producers moved Spilo from the game four episodes later.

CBS’ proposed new “policies and procedures” include adding “another on-site professional to provide a confidential means of reporting any concerns,” amending pre-production orientation to include “new anti-harassment, unconscious bias and sensitivity training for cast, producers and production crew”; implementing a new policy preventing immediate physical contact, sexual harassment and impermissible biases cannot be brought into the competition and will not be permitted as part of gameplay”, and partnering with “a third-party expert in the field to review, evolve or add to these new policies and procedures going forward.”

Driver walks out of NPR interview over sound clip

From wire services

With three concurrent starring roles in buzzworthy films this season, actor Adam Driver was an obvious choice for an interview view on “Fresh Air,” the popular and influential NPR talk show produced by WHYY.

Now, Driver and “Fresh Air” are making headlines for the interview, but for the interview that wasn’t.

On Tuesday, the Daily Beast reported that Driver left in the middle of his interview. Miller said they did the same thing — cueing him to remove his headphones during a clip playback — during his 2015 interview on “Fresh Air,” which “seemed to work out fine.”

“Honestly, we’re surprised we were never able to do it as planned,” Gross said.

Representatives for Driver did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

“Honestly, we’re surprised this has become such a big deal. We always play clips when we have on actors — that’s just the standard procedure for any broadcast or podcast interview,” he said. “But knowing that Adam Driver does not like to hear back clips of himself, we invited him to remove his headphones while playing back the clip from ‘Marriage Story,’ which, after all, he was on Fresh Air to talk about.”

Miller said they did the same thing — cueing him to remove his headphones during a clip playback — during his 2015 interview on “Fresh Air,” which “seemed to work out fine.”

“We still don’t understand why he left, and we wish we would have been able to feature him as a guest on our show last week,” Miller said.

Cabello apologizes for old posts

Pop singer Camila Cabello is apologizing for past racist language she used on social media.

“After I was younger, I used language and terminology that I do not agree with anymore,” she wrote in an email to The Washington Post.

Driver

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Driver walks out of NPR interview over sound clip.

Friday, December 20, 2019

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FACES

Kim

Spiro

‘Survivor’ host apologizes to contestant

By Christi Carras

Los Angeles Times

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By Noah Feldman

Bloomberg News

The House of Representatives’ historic vote to impeach President Donald Trump comes near the end of the third tumultuous year in office—which is also the third year of the prolonged stress test he’s been given to the high wire. It’s an occasion to check in on the most basic question that can be asked in a democracy: What is the state of our Constitution?

The state of the Constitution is so far, holding up in the face of the most extended challenge to its principles and norms that it has confronted since World War II. The impeachment itself is actually a significant improvement in the Constitution’s performance. It signals that at least half the legislative branch — the House — is now taking seriously its own responsibility to uphold the Constitution in the face of presidential overreach.

Until now, it’s the other branch of government — the judiciary — that has been almost the only effective check on Trump’s recurring impulsivity. Condoleezza Rice, Constitution. When Trump has signed executive orders that break the Constitution, courts have often struck them down. But courts have also blocked other unlawful executive branch actions. So when it comes to the formal constitutional rules that courts interpret and apply, the House has been functioning remarkably well since January 2017.

When the Constitution has been failing is in the significant erosion of our informal, unwritten norms. These have constitutional weight even if they aren’t identifiable as strict rules of constitutional law. They include things like the politicization of the Department of Justice and the FBI and the subtle corruption of the president himself, blurring the line between his business interests while in office. For most of the last three years, Trump has stood accused of those kinds of hard-won, unwritten norms.

Since taking office, Trump has committed a wide range of acts that could plausibly be classified as impeachable high crimes and misdemeanors. The House chose not to impeach him for those — like the obstruction of justice described in Robert Mueller’s report — but for high crimes and misdemeanors that specifically violated the constitutional principles of democracy and the separation of powers.

The first article of impeachment, for abuse of power, stands for the House’s insistence that the Constitution prohibits the president from using his office for personal political gain, and from corruptly influencing his own reelection with the help of a foreign power. If it chose not to impeach this conduct, it’s barred by the Constitution itself through the clause that prescribes impeachment for “high crimes and misdemeanors.” The impeachment puts flesh on the bones of basic principle that the president can’t try to break down the independent constitutional inquiry. It’s a principle embedded in the Constitution itself — specifically in the logic of Congress’ authority to oversee the president.

Impeachment on its own is only part of what the legislative branch should do to stand up for the Constitution. If, as is likely, the Senate does not remove Trump, it could imply that Trump’s conduct is acceptable under constitutional norms still further.

Nonetheless, the House at least has conveyed the message that Trump has broken his oath of office. And it’s so much more markedly than any president in U.S. history, with the possible exception of Andrew Johnson, for whom the House impeached for ignoring a law, itself unconstitutional, that said he couldn’t fire his Cabinet members without Senate consent. Bill Clinton was still not impeached for lying about his sexual relationship with an intern, an act that was legally and morally wrong, but not obviously a violation of a bedrock constitutional principle.

Nixon, who resigned before he could be impeached, complained that his impeachment efforts to subvert democracy — much like Trump. And he obstructed Congress, albeit less absolutely than Trump did. Nixon obstructed Congress during his impeachment for abusing the Constitution. They were high crimes and misdemeanors, like Trump’s. And they had the same effect of undermining our norms as exemplars of unpresidential conduct.

When historians tell the story of Trump’s legacy of weakening the Constitution, they will tell that history about the crucial test on Donald Trump from which he failed. That test is the common defense of the Constitution. That is the test that will define the Trump era. And it is a test that the House has passed. That is the meaning of what we have done.

Bloomberg Opinion columnist Noah Feldman is a professor of law at Harvard University.

By Karen Tumulty

The Washington Post

The last time the House of Representatives impeached a president, Donna Shalala was watching it on television from her office.

Twenty-one years ago, as Bill Clinton’s secretary of health and human services, she felt betrayed when she discovered that the president in whose cabinet she served had lied under oath about his affair with a White House intern. Shalala told Clinton so to his face.

As debate in the impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump began on Wednesday, Shalala — now a freshman member of the House from Florida — sat in the second row on the Democratic side of the chamber, waiting her turn to speak in favor of removing the president from office.

She had been promised 90 seconds, but got cut off after a minute. In the next hour or so, her office received a few dozen phone calls from people who had heard her on Fox News, none of whom live in her district.

When I asked her what it felt like to experience yesterday’s events again, this time from such a different perspective, she told me: “Painful. It is just as painful now as it was then.”

Shalala had not been eager to do this. When other Democrats had been urging impeachment for Trump’s alleged obstruction of justice during the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election, she had urged restraint.

“So soon,” she said. “It’s not what I finally say — enough. Let us step back from the abyss and let’s begin a new politics of respect and fairness and decency which raises what has come before.”

The consensus signal continued its downward trajectory.

Two decades later, lawmakers in both parties intoned about the historic and momentous step they were taking. But it felt pretty much like another ordinary day on Capitol Hill, with each side taking past each other as they always do in a chamber that was mostly empty.

About an hour before the House debate began, a few hundred pro-impeachment demonstrators gathered in an area of the Capitol lawn that they probably did not realize is adjacent to the “Swamp.” The protests seemed dutiful — certainly nothing like the intensity everyone could feel the day the House passed the Affordable Care Act in 2010, when thousands of protesters surrounded the building, screaming so loudly that they could be heard inside.

That is probably because, from here, the script has already been written. Trump seems virtually certain to be acquitted in the Senate, which he will claim as a vindication.

On cable news, there will be endless speculation as to which party gets what and which gets hurt.

What remains to play out as they usually do in the Trump era — all of this will soon be subsumed in the next thermoelectric burst of chaos generated by a president who can not be stopped.

Once again, the House has made a notch in history. What’s different this time, however, is that no one really believes anything will change as a result.

Karen Tumulty is a Washington Post columnist covering national politics.
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.

Trump panders as N. Korea advances weapon development

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump's personal diplomacy with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is not bearing fruit. Trump, seeming unnerved, wrote on Twitter Friday that the U.S. envoy is pleading for talks — and North Korea is boasting of progress in developing nuclear weapons.

Recently, Trump delivered a gift to Kim by blocking a discussion at the 13-member United Nations Security Council of North Korea's severe human rights abuses. Elected members had agreed to such a discussion, which requires nine votes. The United States, however, has the veto, and the council for December, refused to become the ninth, as first reported by Foreign Policy magazine. As a result, North Korea demanded in a letter circulated Dec. 4 at the United Nations. Trump seems panicked by Kim's recent warning of a nuclear weapon test and is pulling our country out of the agreement he craved and angling for the aid he needs to satisfy his people under the banner of tyranny. Korea is a police state with concentration camps. It also has tested nuclear weapons, built long-range missiles and carried out devastating cyberattacks. Trump has tried a charm offensive in three meetings with Kim, but they have not produced the results he hoped for. He demanded that Pyongyang totally relinquish its nuclear weapons; Kim brushed aside the international community's efforts to set still more ambitious goals to work toward the goal of the “Total” annihilation that newspapers have been warning about. Yet without U.S. leadership, it becomes increasingly difficult for world economies to increase ambition to the levels that we need to avert catastrophic effects of global warming. Indeed, although the pact called for holding warming to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, the world has already warmed by 1 degree and is now expected to warm by 3 degrees or more — disastrously high — by the end of the century even under the current Paris commitments.

The conference and the protests spotlighted a couple of significant friction points. Attendees said smaller nations that stand to lose the most from rising seas and changing climates pushed for aggressive measures while larger economies balked. Helen Mountford of the World Resources Institute, an environmental group, lamented the lack of progress. Instead of leading the charge for more ambition, most of the large emitters were missing in action or obstructive, she said.

That, of course, includes the United States. Last month, President Donald Trump formally notified the U.N. that he is pulling our country out of the agreement effective in November 2020, leaving most of the large emitters were missing in action or obstructive, she said.

Of the world that they need to act quickly on climate change because it is actually getting worse. Climate change impacts are already being felt around the world, with more frequent and intense heat waves, droughts, floods, and storms. The world is not acting quickly enough to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

But in truth the blame belongs primarily to Trump for failing to lead. What he has left us with is a budget. He has left us with a budget that delays the implementation of the global climate agreement. But the world is facing a crisis, and we need to act now to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

For years, we have been told that the world needs to act quickly on climate change. But the world is not acting quickly enough. We need to act now to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

When we look back on this time, we will say that we could have done more. We will say that we could have acted sooner. We will say that we could have done more to prevent the worst effects of global warming.

The world is facing a crisis, and we need to act now to prevent the worst effects of global warming. We need to act quickly on climate change, and we need to act now.
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 Dining room furniture 54 Obliterate
6 Listener 21 Dime portrait
9 Bro or sis 55 Like Yeller
12 Tatum of 56 Drenched
“Paper Moon” 57 Finger or toe
13 Work with 22 Tram load
14 Chemical suffix 24 Prefix with punctuation
15 Dolphins’ home 26 Thrilling feeling
16 Present 28 Incendiary crime
attachment 30 Yr. parts
18 Tidy up 32 Face cloth
20 Waikiki’s island 33 Squishy chair variety
21 Watch chain 34 “Uh-huh”
23 Wd. from Roget 36 Altitude
24 “Rubber Capital” 37 Hobblist
25 “Pokey!” 38 Gambling game
27 Quiet partner? 39 “Paradise Lost”
29 Ruling group archangel
30 Model’s path 40 Identified
31 Model’s path 41 Allied (with)
32 Model’s path 42 Allied (with)
35 — Ark 45 Con-front
37 Shopper’s delight 46 Ran’s wrap
38 Breathing organs 48 Attorney’s field
41 Dawn goddess 50 Hit CBS series
43 Potential syrup 51 Stil
44 Spoken 52 Casual shirt
45 End 53 Essen
47 Response delay 54 exclamation
49 “Pride and Prejudice” author
AnSweR TO pReviOuS puzzle
ALMA DOT ASTI
LEAR RA TWIN
GIIGI VOL REEK
AS IA GOGRIERS
NO R IST
NAPA CHICKPEA
ILE EON ELL
PEAGREEN RAMP
SIT USE
MOORED EIFFEL
ABUT A WN URG
SOPHLAD TOGS
TESS I DO EGO S

12-20 CRYPTOQUIP
EA WTRGOQVKQ RKTN E1
FZDKL EX KXNEQKPC NZZ
ROFW STNKQ, CZO REVWN
NWEXD ZA EN TI LQZSXXL
GKKA.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY TO A COW UNWILLING TO LET A DIFFICULT SITUATION GO? “IT’S TIME TO MOO ON.”

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: R equals M
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OUR FREEDOM
FROM ALL
OF US
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  - People ceasing to pay for a dog (some breeds) for adoption.

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Stay connected and hey, welcome to the neighborhood.
College football

Bowl schedule
Friday, Dec. 20
Bahamas Bowl
Buffalo (8-5) at Florida Atlantic (7-6)
Florida (Texas) (6-6) at Utah State (7-6)
Utah State at Arizona (7-6)
December 21
At Atlanta
NC A&T (2-9) vs. New Mexico State (3-9)
Central (Michigan) (8-5) vs. San Diego State (8-4)
December 22
Cure Bowl
Liberty (9-3) at Arkansas State (7-5)
Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl
SMU (10-2) at Tulane (8-4)
Camellia Bowl
FGCU (5-7) at Arkansas State (7-5)
Boise State (12-1) vs. Washington (7-5)
UAB (4-8) at Appalachian State (12-1)
December 23
At Atlanta, Fla.
UCF (9-3) vs. Houston (8-4)
Tuesday, Dec. 24
At Honolulu
BYU (7-6) vs. Nevada (7-5)
Thursday, Dec. 26
December 27
Miami (6-6) vs. Akron (9-3)
Quick Lane Bowl
Detroit (7-5) vs. Eastern Michigan (6-6)
December 28
Military Bowl
North Carolina (6-6) vs. Temple (8-4)
December 29
New Year’s Day
Forest Grove vs. Warm Springs (Oregon)
Texas Bowl
Oklahoma State (7-6) at Texas A&M (7-6)
San Diego (7-6) at Iowa (9-3)
December 30
Cheez-It Bowl
Notre Dame (7-5) at Florida State (7-5)
Air Force (10-2) vs. Washington State (10-2)
December 31
December 31
Saturday, Jan. 1
Cotton Bowl Classic
Nebraska vs. Oklahoma (11-3)
Neb. vs. Kansas State (8-5)
February 3-21
Salary arbitration hearings

Wednesday's transactions
BASEBALL
Kansas Royals — Agreed to terms with RHP Tanner Roark on a two-year contract.
Kansas City Royals — Agreed to terms with 3B Humberto Arteaga and 2B Andrew Benintendi.
New York Yankees — Designated RHP Jordan Montgomery for assignment.
New York Yankees — Agreed to terms with RHP Gerrit Cole on a two-year contract.
Tennessee Titans — Placed LB Jayon Brown on injured reserve.
New England Patriots — Signed DT Bruce Arians to the practice squad.
Ontario Blue Jays — Signed RHP Pete Hoesly to the practice squad.
Virginia Cavaliers — Signed RHP Ryan Emmons to the minor league contract.
San Francisco Giants — Signed RHP Ryan Jones to the minor league contract.

Wednesday’s men's scores
EAST
Buffalo 62, Canisius 73
East Carolina 86, Old Dominion 60
Franklin Pierce 74, Roberts Wesleyan 59
Humboldt State 96, Georgia Southwestern 67
La Salle 774, Wagner 60
Monmouth 70, Central Connecticut 60
New Hampshire 64, Marist 56
Pfeiffer 76, Queens 58
Saint Mary’s 67, Haverford 39
St. John’s 85, Albany (NY) 70
Transylvania 75, Peoria 74
UC Davis, 86, Long Beach State 74
UC Greenburg 54, Vermont 53
University of Mary Washington 54, St. Mary’s (Calif.) 73
William Peace 80, Shivikshana 70
SOUTHEAST
Alabaster Christian 96, Phenix City 54
Georgia Southern 85, Alabama Southern 63
Georgia Southern 85, Georgia College & State 42
Mississippi 89, Delta State 44
South Alabama 99, Alabama A&M 55

College basketball

Bowl schedule
December 20
Bahamas Bowl
Michigan (9-3) vs. Alabama (10-2)
Minnesota (10-2) vs. Wyoming (7-5)
Oklahoma State (11-2) vs. Utah State (9-3)
Sugar Bowl
Georgia (12-1) vs. Baylor (11-2)
Birmingham (Ala.) Bowl
Cincinnati (11-2) vs. Southern Miss (6-6)
Gator Bowl
Indiana (8-4) vs. Tennessee (7-5)
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
Ohio State (9-4) vs. Air Force (7-5)

College basketball

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New England Patriots — Signed DT Bruce Arians to the practice squad.
Ontario Blue Jays — Signed RHP Pete Hoesly to the practice squad.
Virginia Cavaliers — Signed RHP Ryan Emmons to the minor league contract.
San Francisco Giants — Signed RHP Ryan Jones to the minor league contract.

Wednesday’s men's scores
EAST
Buffalo 62, Canisius 73
East Carolina 86, Old Dominion 60
Franklin Pierce 74, Roberts Wesleyan 59
Humboldt State 96, Georgia Southwestern 67
La Salle 774, Wagner 60
Monmouth 70, Central Connecticut 60
New Hampshire 64, Marist 56
Pfeiffer 76, Queens 58
Saint Mary’s 67, Haverford 39
St. John’s 85, Albany (NY) 70
Transylvania 75, Peoria 74
UC Davis, 86, Long Beach State 74
UC Greenburg 54, Vermont 53
University of Mary Washington 54, St. Mary’s (Calif.) 73
William Peace 80, Shivikshana 70
SOUTHEAST
Alabaster Christian 96, Phenix City 54
Georgia Southern 85, Alabama Southern 42
Mississippi 89, Delta State 44
South Alabama 99, Alabama A&M 55

College basketball

Bowl schedule
December 20
Bamahas Bowl
Michigan (9-3) vs. Alabama (10-2)
Minnesota (10-2) vs. Wyoming (7-5)
Oklahoma State (11-2) vs. Utah State (9-3)
Sugar Bowl
Georgia (12-1) vs. Baylor (11-2)
Birmingham (Ala.) Bowl
Cincinnati (11-2) vs. Southern Miss (6-6)
Gator Bowl
Indiana (8-4) vs. Tennessee (7-5)
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
Ohio State (9-4) vs. Air Force (7-5)
## Scoreboard

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## Leaders

### Goal scoring

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| GLENDALE, Ariz. — Taylor Hall wanted out of New Jersey. The Coyotes needed a scoring boost. Arizona’s deal with the Devils turned out to be a perfect match for both. Hall got the change of scenery he wanted, to an up-and-coming team in contention for a playoff spot, no less. The Coyotes got a top-line scorer without having to top-line scorer without having to give up much in return. “To keep the group together, it was almost too good to be true, and we were very fortunate and opportunistic,” Coyotes general manager John Chayka said during Hall’s introductory news conference on Wednesday. With support from ownership, these things come together, and so far it’s been great.” The Coyotes have undergone a shift, both philosophically and financially, since Alex Meruelo became majority owner this summer. Typically the franchise watching other teams go after the biggest names on the market, Arizona made the largest splash of the offseason, trading for highly productive forward Phil Kessel. The move came 10 days after Meruelo was approved by the NHL’s Board of Governors. The Coyotes are off to one of their best starts in years behind two superb goalies and a steady defense. They still have struggled to score despite the addition of Kessel, so instead of sitting back and trying to grind out wins, they went out and tried to find an immediate fix. Taylor fits that bill perfectly. The 28-year-old has scored at least 20 goals in six of his nine NHL seasons and eclipsed 25 assists seven times. He had 39 goals and 54 points while winning the 2018 Hart Trophy as the League MVP and had six goals with 20 assists before the trade. Hall had an immediate impact on his new team, setting up the winning goal in Arizona’s 3-2 win over San Jose Tuesday night. “I just know when John told me we acquired Taylor, the juice — not so much for the coaching staff — just trickled down,” Coyotes coach Rick Tocchet said. “The excitement that you acquire a guy like him is something that I think the fan base is so excited about. I know John made a point: They deserve it.” The Coyotes have not made the playoffs since reaching the 2012 Western Conference finals, but have taken steps to rebuild the past few seasons under Chayka. Arizona added Nick Schmaltz, Derek Stepan, Carl Soderberg, Antti Raanta, Darcy Kuemper and Michael Grabner. Arizona also drafted Clayton Keller, Jakob Chychrunk and Barrett Hayton under Chayka. The Kessel trade was an eye-popping move by the franchise and they shook up conventional wisdom again by trading for Hall. “Between Phil Kessel and Taylor, it’s a paradigm shift in how we’re operating and the things we’re doing here,” Chayka said. The trade gives Hall a chance he’s rarely had during stints with Edmonton and New Jersey: to play in the postseason.

### Holiday roster freeze

Jan. 1 — Winter Classic, Nashville at New Jersey; St. Louis at Dallas.
Jan. 26 — All-Star Game, St. Louis.
**Hawks’ Carter piling up milestones**

The Atlanta Hawks’ Vince Carter, now in his 21st season in the NBA, is closing in on numerous milestones. Carter will tie John Stockton for fourth-most games played in NBA history on Tuesday when the Hawks play the Knicks at Madison Square Garden in New York.

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

The milestones are piling up, and running out, for Atlanta’s Vince Carter. His next game — which could come as early as Tuesday, when the Hawks visit the New York Knicks — will be the 1,504th in his career, which will tie John Stockton for fourth-most in NBA history. Battling injury, Carter will pass Dirk Nowitzki later this season for fourth place on career games played list. He has an outside chance of climbing a couple more rungs on that ladder as well.

His next game — which could come as early as Tuesday, when the Hawks visit the New York Knicks — will be the 1,504th in his career, which will tie John Stockton for fourth-most in NBA history. Battling injury, Carter will pass Dirk Nowitzki later this season for fourth place on career games played list. He has an outside chance of climbing a couple more rungs on that ladder as well.

**Hoka, future**

The G League is where the NBA tinkers with various ideas to see what works. It bears wondering if the Mexico City move is a test balloon, as well.

**Another milestone**

LeBron James, by the count of basketball-reference.com, is up to 57,223 minutes so far in his career, including playoffs.

That’s fifth all-time. He’s probably going to be third in a couple of days. And he’s slowing down.

By that site’s count, James is 60 minutes behind Nowitzki and 70 minutes behind Kobe Bryant. He’s about 3,500 minutes behind Abdul-Jabbar and roughly 5,500 behind all-time leader Karl Malone.

Nowitzki averaged 7.3 points in his final season, when he got to that minute total. Bryant averaged 17.6 points in his final season. James, meanwhile, hasn’t dropped off a bit — he’s averaging 26.1 points and 7.4 rebounds, both basically consistent with his career norms, and is averaging a far-and-away career-best 10.7 assists.

James is not interested in load management, either. He’s in Year 17, and still wants to play whatever he can.

**Around the league**

Fourth place on career games played list up next on eight-time All-Star’s farewell tour

The league hasn’t said yet if Carter will get the farewell tour he’s been worth celebrating.

**Scoreboard**

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### Leaders

**Scoring**

- Harden, HOU | 37.5
- Davis, LAL | 32.0
- Lillard, POR | 31.4
- Simmons, PHX | 30.2

**Rebounds**

- Gobert, UTA | 14.0
- Sabonis, IND | 13.5
- Lillard, POR | 12.6
- Embiid, PHI | 12.5
- Whiteside, MIL | 12.4

**Assists**

- Curry, GSW | 8.7
- Doncic, DAL | 8.5
- Young, ATL | 8.3
- Holiday, MIL | 8.1
- Lillard, POR | 7.9

**Points Off Foul Tot. Avg**

- Young, ATL | 2.8
- Embiid, PHI | 2.6
- Doncic, DAL | 2.4
- Lillard, POR | 2.3
- Sabonis, IND | 2.2

**FT%**

- Memphis | 89.7
- Dallas | 89.6
- Charlotte | 89.5
- L.A. Clippers | 89.4
- Phoenix | 89.3

**FG%**

- Cleveland | 48.0
- Baltimore | 48.0
- Miami | 48.0
- Portland | 48.0
- Brooklyn | 48.0

**3P%**

- Oklahoma City | 40.3
- Memphis | 40.3
- Milwaukee | 40.3
- Portland | 40.3
- Miami | 40.3

**Defensive Avg**

- Denver | 109.4
- Golden State | 109.4
- Cleveland | 109.4
- Los Angeles | 109.4
- Orlando | 109.4

**CesearCare**

- Denver | 113.9
- Golden State | 113.9
- LA Clippers | 113.9
- Portland | 113.9
- Memphis | 113.9
Tickets tough to find amid unprecedented demand

1 million tickets offered, 23 million requested in latest Olympic lottery

BY STEPHEN WADE
Associated Press

TOKYO — Tokyo's Olympic tickets continue to be very hard to find — particularly in Japan.

Organizers on Wednesday said there were 23 million tickets requested in the latest lottery for Japan residents only. The bad news is that only 1 million tickets were available. Which means that almost everybody went away empty handed.

Next summer's Olympics have generated unprecedented demand. Organizers said 3.57 million tickets had been awarded to Japan residents in previous lotteries. Organizers confirmed for the first time the demand was almost 20 times over supply — about 60 million tickets requested.

And now Japan residents are running out of chances.

The next ticket offering in Japan will be early next year, but will be open to Japan and non-Japan residents on a first-come, first-served basis.

Overall, organizers say about 7.8 million tickets are available for all events. Organizers have said that at least 70% of the tickets will go to Japan residents. Large blocks also go to sponsors, international sports federations, national Olympic committees, and the International Olympic Committee.

Millions are also sold outside Japan by official Olympic ticket resellers, which can charge a 20% handling fee on every ticket. They can also take advantage of fluctuations in currency exchange rates.

The lucky — and unlucky — were quick to vocal on social media.

"It's like a dream," said one.

"What did I do wrong? This is unforgivable," said another.

Ticket shortages have led some to question why they cannot find tickets for a local Olympics, which is being funded by billions in taxpayer money.

The opening ceremony on July 24 features the most expensive ticket — 300,000 yen ($2,700). The most expensive ticket for the closing ceremony is 220,000 yen ($2,000).

The demand is sure to create a vibrant secondary market, and opportunities for ticket scalpers.

Japan earlier this year passed a law that prohibits ticket scalping, with the penalty of a 1 million yen ($9,100) fine and a one-year jail term — or both.

Three years ago at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, IOC member Patrick Hickey of Ireland was arrested on suspicion of ticket scalping. He is suspended from the IOC but remains a member and has denied any wrongdoing.

The demand for Paralympic tickets is also surpassing supply. Paralympic organizers expect the 2.5 million tickets available will be sold before the Paralympics open on Aug. 25. This would also be a first.

Organizers hope to raise about $800 million in ticket sales. This revenue makes up a large part of the privately funded operating budget of $5.6 billion. More than $3 billion of that revenue comes from more than 60 local sponsors, a record for local sponsorship.

A national government audit report has said Tokyo will spend about $25 billion to organize the Olympics, all of which is public money except for the operating budget.

Organizers dispute the figure and say it’s half that much, part of a debate about what are — and are not — Olympic expenses.

Russia plans to file appeal against four-year Olympic ban

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia has signaled it will file an appeal against its four-year Olympic ban due to World Anti-Doping Agency sanctions which President Vladimir Putin on Thursday branded "unfair."

The Russian anti-doping agency's supervisory board voted Thursday to file an arbitration case with the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland. WADA last week ruled Russia had manipulated doping laboratory data to cover up past offenses.

"The ball will be in WADA's court and the issue will be discussed in a legal context," supervisory board chairman Alexander Ivlev said. "We consider the argumentation to be fairly strong and we will see how the issue develops."

Thursday's decision must be approved by another panel of Russian sports and anti-doping figures, but that seems a formality. Most of the panel's members, including the Russian Olympic Committee and Russian Paralympic Committee, have said they want an appeal.

The case will likely be referred to the Court of Arbitration for Sport within the next 10-15 days, Ivlev said. If a panel of three CAS arbitrators is chosen, a verdict will be issued within three months.

Senior political figures including Putin had signaled they wanted an appeal filed.

"We need to wait calmly for the relevant rulings, including the arbitration court ruling and we'll know what position we're in," Putin said Thursday. "Russian athletes have been training and will keep training for all competitions."

Putin said it was not fair to threaten Russia with more doping-related punishment, and that any sanctions should be on an individual basis. "I think it is not just unfair but not corresponding to common sense and law," Putin said.

The WADA sanctions, announced last week, ban the use of the Russian team name, flag or anthem at a range of major sports competitions over the next four years, including next year's Olympics and the 2022 soccer World Cup.

However, Russian athletes will be allowed to compete as neutrals if they pass a vetting process which examines their history of drug testing, and possible involvement in cover-ups at the lab.

That has prompted anger from some Western athletes and organizations like the United States Anti-Doping Agency, which wanted a blanket ban on Russian athletes.

Putin added WADA's recommended four-year ban on Russia hosting major sports competitions would have little effect, pointing to the 2022 men's volleyball world championships as an event Russia intends to keep.

That ban already does not apply to next year's European Championship soccer games in St. Petersburg or the 2021 Champions League final, both of which are exempt because they're continental, not world, championships.

Russia handed over the lab's doping data archive in January in return for having earlier sanctions lifted in 2018. WADA investigators found evidence that Russia was intensively editing the data in the weeks before the handover to remove signs of failed drug tests.

WADA said it found fake messages spliced into chat logs in an apparent attempt to smear former lab director Grigory Rodchenkov, who's become a key witness for WADA since leaving Russia.

Russia has produced its own report arguing that any editing was the result of illicit changes made from abroad, or the instability of the lab software.
Here’s why every bowl is must-see TV

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

This bowl season starts a bit earlier and ends a bit later. The number of games is the same, but they are spread over more days. That means more days with at least a little bit of college football, ending with the national championship game Jan. 13 in New Orleans.

We will save the playoff picks for another time. Do you really need a reason to watch the national championship game Jan. 13 in New Orleans. For the other 38 games, you might need a little convincing. We’re here to help.

The picks and a reason to watch every bowl game:

Friday, Dec. 20
Bahamas Bowl
Nassau, N.P.
Buffalo vs. Charlotte
Why watch? Three words: Early happy hour.
Pick: Charlotte 24-21.

Frisco (Texas) Bowl
Utah State vs. Kent State
Why watch? Impress your friends when you inform them Kent State coach Sean Lewis is the youngest (33) and tallest (6-foot-7) coach in the FBS.

Saturday, Dec. 21
Celebration Bowl
Atlanta
North Carolina A&T vs. Alcorn State
Why watch? FCS football, but major college band at halftime.

New Mexico Bowl
Albuquerque
Central Michigan vs. San Diego State
Why watch? You are that rare Florida fan who thought Jim McElwain, now coaching at SMU, really got a raw deal in Gainesville, and you want to root him on to a bowl victory.
Pick: San Diego State 20-16.

Cure Bowl
Orlando, Fla.
Liberty vs. Georgia Southern
Why watch? Remember when Liberty coach Hugh Freeze began the season coaching from a hospital bed? Tune in to find out how he’s doing.
Pick: Georgia Southern 21-19.

Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl
SMU vs. FAU
Why watch? The program that survived the NCAA death penalty or the program that survived Lane Kiffin.
Pick: SMU 35-30.

Camellia Bowl
Montgomery, Ala.
FIU vs. Arkansas State
Why watch? FIU gave up 50 points to Middle Tennessee and then beat Miami for the biggest victory in program history. How about that?
Pick: Arkansas State 31-27.

Las Vegas Bowl
Boise State vs. Washington State
Why watch? Chris Petersen’s final game before stepping down as Washington’s coach comes against his former team. Should be a quality send-off for one of the most successful coaches of the past two decades.

New Orleans Bowl
UAB vs. Appalachian State
Why watch? Appalachian State beat two Power Five teams and probably deserves better than the New Orleans Bowl. The least you could do is watch the Mountaineers try to wrap up a 13-win season.
Pick: Appalachian State 35-14.

Monday, Dec. 23
Gasparilla Bowl
Tampa, Fla.
UCF vs. Marshall
Why watch? Remember when UCF was a big deal? Ahh, those were the days.
Pick: UCF 38-17.

Tuesday, Dec. 24
Hawaii Bowl
Honolulu
BYU vs. Hawaii
Why watch? When you’re putting together that bicycle you got your kid for Christmas, the Hawaii Bowl can distract you from worrying about all those “extra” parts.
Pick: BYU 24-21.

Wednesday, Dec. 26
Independence Bowl
Shreveport, La.
Miami vs. Louisiana Tech
Why watch? At some point, the 6-6 Hurricanes will break out the Turnover Chain ... in Shreveport ... against a Conference USA team ... without a shred of irony or self-awareness.
Pick: Miami 28-20.

Quick Lane Bowl
Detroit
Pittsburgh vs. Eastern Michigan
Why watch? Feeling bleated and weary the day after Christmas? Have we got a bowl game for you.
Pick: Pittsburgh 35-17.

Friday, Dec. 27
Military Bowl
Arlington, Texas
North Carolina vs. Temple

Pinstripe Bowl
New York
Wake Forest vs. Michigan State
Why watch? The Pinstripe Bowl has been the only opportunity to see a trophy ceremony at Yankee Stadium for a decade.
Pick: Wake Forest 24-21.

Texas Bowl
Houston
Oklahoma State vs. Texas A&M
Why watch? Same reason to watch most Oklahoma State bowl games in recent years: You miss the original Big 12. Since the conference splintered in 2011, this will be the fourth time the Cowboys have faced a former Big 12 member in the postseason.
Pick: Texas A&M 31-27.

Holiday Bowl
San Diego
Iowa vs. Southern California
Why watch? Did you know that Clay Helton is still USC’s coach? Really!
Pick: USC 26-23.

Cheez-It Bowl
Phoenix
Air Force vs. Washington State
Why watch? Last year’s Cheez-It Bowl was a glorious 10-7 OT debacle between Cal and TCU. So bad it was great. This year features the yin and yang of college football.
Pick: Air Force’s triple-option averages 57 rushes per game. Wazzu’s Air Raid attack averages 56 passes per game.
Pick: Air Force 31-27.

Saturday, Dec. 29
Camping World Bowl
Orlando, Fla.
No. 14 Notre Dame vs. Iowa State
Why watch? The Cyclones pretty much play only close games. Nine of their 12 games were decided by 10 points or fewer. Should be a good one.
Pick: Notre Dame 28-23.

Cotton Bowl
Arlington, Texas
Penn State vs. Memphis
Why watch? Memphis has fun playmakers on offense such as RB Kenneth Gainwell and WR Antonio Gibson. Penn State has its next great line-backer in All-American Micah Parsons to chase them down.
Pick: Memphis 33-30.

North Carolina quarterback Sam Howell has thrown for 3,347 yards and 35 touchdowns this season.

Monday, Dec. 30
SERP-VPRO First Responder Bowl
Dallas
Western Kentucky vs. Western Michigan
Why watch? Find out which Western is the Best Western. (rim shot)
Pick: Western Kentucky 31-21.

Music City Bowl
Nashville, Tenn.
Mississippi State vs. Louisville
Why watch? One team (Louisville) went 7-5; ended the season getting whipped by its rival and its fans are feeling pessimistic about the future. The other team went 6-6, ended the season by beating its rival and its fans are feeling pessimistic.
Expectations are everything in college football.
Pick: Mississippi State 28-22.

Redbox Bowl
Santa Clara, Calif.
Illinois vs. California
Why watch? Tired of all those pesky points in college football? The Redbox Bowl produced 13 last year and probably won’t do much more than that this year.
Pick: California 17-14.

Orange Bowl
Miami Gardens, Fla.
Florida vs. Virginia
Why watch? The Cavaliers have not played in a bowl in 12 years since they lost in the Sugar Bowl to Tennessee in 1991. And, hey, that game was close.
Pick: Florida 38-23.

Tuesday, Dec. 31
Bekl Bowl
Charlotte, N.C.
Kentucky vs. Virginia Tech
Why watch? Longtime Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster’s last assignment: Stop Kentucky’s receiver-turned-quarterback Lynn Bowden Jr., an All-American who has run for 1,245 yards and 11 touchdowns.
Pick: Kentucky 23-21.

Sun Bowl
El Paso, Texas
Florida State vs. Arizona State
Why watch? Four words: Early happy hour margaritas.

Liberty Bowl
Memphis, Tenn.
Tennessee vs. Navy
Why watch? Long for the days when games took less than three and half hours to play? K-State and Navy like to keep that clock rolling and the number of possessions down.
Pick: Navy 24-20.

Arizona Bowl
Tucson, Ariz.
Wyoming vs. Georgia State

Alamo Bowl
San Antonio
Texas vs. Utah
Why watch? How back will Texas be heading into this offseason?
Pick: Utah 31-21.

Wednesday, Jan. 1
CITrus Bowl
Orlando, Fla.
Michigan vs. Alabama
Why watch? No matter what happens, this game should create enough offseason content to get The Paul Finebaum Show through June.
Pick: Alabama 35-17.

Outback Bowl
Tampa, Fla.
Minnesota vs. Auburn
Why watch? Defensive linemen wearing single-digit jersey numbers is one of the best things about college football. That makes Auburn stars Derrick Brown (No. 5) and Marlon Davidson (No. 3) even more to watch.
Pick: Auburn 24-18.

Rose Bowl
Pasadena, Calif.
Oregon vs. Wisconsin
Why watch? Over the next year you will be hearing a lot about Oregon OT Penei Sewell. The sophomore is already the best offensive lineman in the country.
Pick: Wisconsin 28-23.

Sugar Bowl
New Orleans
Georgia vs. Baylor
Why watch? At least one of these teams is going to be really into this game.
Pick: Georgia 26-20.

Thursday, Jan. 2
Bahamas (Ala.) Bowl
Cincinnati vs. Boston College
Why watch? There’s no way you’re putting in a productive work day when this close to the weekend so might as well cut out early.

Gator Bowl
Jacksonville, Fla.
Indiana vs. Tennessee
Why watch? The Hoosiers could win nine games in a season for the first time since 1967.
Pick: Indiana 24-20.

Friday, Jan. 3
Famous Idaho Potato Bowl
Boise, Idaho
Ohio vs. Nevada
Why watch? Blue field.
Pick: Ohio 34-21.

Saturday, Jan. 4
Armed Forces Bowl
Fort Worth, Texas
Southern Miss vs. Tulane
Why watch? The Navy Cadets take on a Southern Miss team in yet another Division I-A vs. USA football game. The Golden Eagles and Green Wave played every year from 1979-2010, with Southern Miss going 23-7.
Pick: Tulane 27-17.

Monday, Jan. 6
Lendingtree Bowl
Mobile, Ala.
Miami (Ohio) vs. Louisiana-Lafayette
Why watch? If you like smashmouth football, the Ragin’ Cajuns are for you, averaging 6.3 yards per carry (second only to Clemson) behind All-America guard Kevin Dobson.
Pick: Louisiana-Lafayette 38-10.
Playoff teams reap their share of the top recruits

Eight of the top 16 prospects go to 3 CFP teams

BY STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

Teams competing for the national championship this season got good news well before the College Football Playoff — even if they didn’t have much time to celebrate.

The early signing period opened Wednesday with three playoff teams — Clemson, LSU and Ohio State — landing eight of the nation’s top 16 prospects according to composite rankings of recruiting sites compiled by 247Sports.

They worked to sign those recruits while preparing for playoff matchups, one consequence of the early signing period that arrived two years ago. Ohio State faces Clemson and LSU meets Oklahoma in the CFP semifinals on Dec. 28.

“You have 14 guys coming in mid-year, you have award shows to go to and, by the way, once you get off the road you have university weeks to prepare to play Clemson,” Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. “That’s a very stressful job. But it is what it is and we’re keeping our head down and going.”

Those busy schedules haven’t stopped the usual university efforts reaching the playoffs and topping the recruiting rankings each year.

Many of the elite recruits that didn’t choose LSU, Clemson or Ohio State are instead heading to Alabama and Georgia, two other recent playoff participants. Those five programs have commitments from about half the top 50 prospects.

Clemson tops the 247Sports Composite team recruiting rankings and was followed in order by Alabama, Ohio State, Georgia and LSU as of early Wednesday evening. Oklahoma’s class was ranked ninth.

“More teams are recruiting at an elite level,” said Barton Simmons, the director of scouting for 247Sports. “Usually, it’s one, two or three No. 1 teams tops. This cycle, there’s legitimately four or five teams recruiting at a national championship level.”

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said he needed a big recruiting haul as he attempts to replace a senior class that is trying to help the Tigers win their third national title in four years.

“When you graduate players like that, you better have quality coming in the door,” Swinney said.

Clemson signed seven of the nation’s top 29 prospects according to the 247Sports Composite. That included No. 1 overall recruit Bryan Bresee, a defensive tackle from Damascus, Md.

Ohio State’s class features wide receiver Julian Fleming (No. 2) and offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. (No. 7). The Buckeyes landed the top uncommitted quarterback when C.J. Stroud (No. 87) chose Ohio State.

The top two uncommitted prospects to sign Wednesday were Upland (Calif.) linebacker Justin Flowe and Columbia (S.C.) defensive end Jordan Burch. Flowe, ranked fourth overall, picked Oregon. Burch, the nation’s No. 5 prospect, chose South Carolina.

Forging his own path

All-purpose back E.J. Smith, the son of Hall of Fame running back Emmitt Smith, is Stanford-bound wide receiver Jerry Rice.

LSU wins some, loses some

LSU had one of the most eventful days of any program.

The Tigers signed two of the nation’s top 12 recruits in tight end Arik Gilbert (No. 9) and cornerback Elias Ricks (No. 12).

The Tigers also landed two previously uncommitted top-100 recruits in outside linebacker Phillip Webb (42nd) and offensive tackle Marcus Dumerville (97th) but also lost three players who had verbally committed to them.

Wide receiver Rakim Jarrett (20th) made a switch to Maryland, wide receiver Jermaine Burton (52nd) opted for Georgia and four-star safety Malcolm Greene selected Clemson.

Top Florida, California prospects leaving home

Seven of the top 10 prospects in Florida according to the 247Sports Composite picked out-of-state schools. Clemson landed three of Florida’s top four recruits in running back Demarkcus Bowman (No. 16), defensive tackle Demonte Capelhart (No. 24) and cornerback Fred Davis II (No. 26). The top Florida prospect is the LSU-bound Ricks. The high-rated California player to sign with a home-state school so far is Stanford-bound wide receiver John Humphreys, ranked 114th.

Study: White males still ‘dominate’ FBS leadership

BY AARON BEARD
Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — A diversity study finds that white men continue to “dominate” leadership positions at the Football Bowl Subdivision level of college athletics.

Wednesday’s report card from The Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sport (TIDES) issued identical letter grades from last year with a D overall, a C for racial hiring and an F for gender hiring.

The study examined positions that include university presidents or chancellors, athletics directors, faculty athletics representatives and conference commissioners, using data submitted by the NCAA.

Richard Lapchick, the institute’s director and lead author, noted there were some positives such as the highest percentage of people of color serving as athletics directors in the study’s history as well as two black men — Kevin Warren in the Big Ten and Keith Gill in the Sun Belt — becoming the first people of color to serve as FBS conference commissioners.

“Everything else is not good,” Lapchick said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Overall, whites held 337 of 400 campus leadership positions in the study (84.3%), down slightly from 85.4% last year.

More specifically, white men held 77.7% of president or chancellor positions, up 3.8 percentage points from last year, and 76.2% of the 130 positions as athletics directors, according to the study.

The study’s positive news included 24 people of color serving as FBS athletics directors, up from 20 last year, to account for 18.5% of those jobs and the highest percentage recorded by the study dating to 2002. Women made the most gains as faculty athletics representatives, going from 31.6% of those positions last year to 35.7% this year.

The study also looked at football coaching positions, though Lapchick said those were not included in the grades. The study found the number of football head coaches of color fell by one to 18, representing 13.8% of those positions while people of color represent nearly 60% of football student-athletes.

Lapchick has long backed the creation of rules at the college level modeled after the NFL’s Rooney Rule requiring teams to interview a diverse group of candidates for open positions.

The study references the NCAA’s adoption in 2016 of a pledge for schools and conferences to recruit and interview diverse candidates for openings.

But that pledge, signed by 871 schools and 102 conferences as of October, “is not binding” and lacks sanctions for failures to improve that record, according to the study. And Lapchick said the study’s findings have remained “basically the same” since the pledge was adopted.

“You have to mandate a diverse pool of candidates or people are going to take the easy path and get the people they usually know into those interview rooms,” Lapchick said.

By the numbers

84.3%
Percentage of whites in leadership positions in college athletics at Football Bowl Subdivision Schools, according to a study.

77.7%
Percentage of white men serving as president or chancellor at FBS schools, up 3.8 percentage points from last year.

SOURCE: Associated Press
Early favorites for 2020 Heisman have Georgia ties

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The 2020 Heisman Trophy race will start with a couple of clear front-runners and plenty of room for other stars to emerge, the way LSU’s Joe Burrow did this year.

Six contenders for 2020, ranked from most likely to least:

Justin Fields, QB, Ohio State

The only Heisman finalist likely to be back in college next season. Unless LSU quarterback Joe Burrow returns, Fields is not likely to have teammates like Young and running back J.K. Dobbins cluttering up the Heisman field. He still has the clear top Buckeye. Expectations will be sky high after he threw 40 touchdown passes and just one interception in his first season at Ohio State.

Trevor Lawrence, QB, Clemson

Fields and Lawrence both played quarterback in high school in Georgia and were in the same recruiting class. They were Nos. 1 and 2 among quarterback prospects in 2018, so it seems appropriate they would battle it out for the Heisman — and then maybe to be the first overall pick in the 2021 NFL draft. Lawrence’s 2019 Heisman campaign never gained traction after he played less than his best over the first month of the season. He played great over the final two months, but Clemson was so overwhelming that Lawrence and the Tigers were sort of forgotten. Glancing ahead to the Clemson’s 2020 schedule, there is a chance that could happen again.

Jake Fromm, QB, Georgia

Fromm did not play very well for much of the first season, with a 139.67 efficiency rating that ranked 55th in the nation. But remember, last year Burrow finished with a 153.21 rating that ranked 65th in the country. If Bulldogs coach Kirby Smart can go 2-0 against LSU, as Ed Orgeron did and find someone to revamp Georgia’s offense, maybe Fromm takes off next season like Burrow this year.

Spencer Rattler, QB, Oklahoma

A Sooners quarterback has been a Heisman finalist the last four years. The next one up should be a little different from the last three in that he likely won’t be a transfer. Rattler was a huge recruit in the 2019 class and the front-runner to slide into coach Lincoln Riley’s Heisman machine.

Sam Howell, QB, North Carolina and Brock Purdy, QB, Iowa State

The Heisman almost always goes to a player on a playoff contender. An exception is occasionally made for a player who lifts their team above its usual standards. Think Robert Griffin III at Baylor in 2011 or Lamar Jackson at Louisville in 2016. Howell was the most productive freshman quarterback in the country this season, with 3,347 yards passing and 35 touchdown passes.

A running back

The Heisman is a quarterback’s award now. Seventeen QBS have won the award since 2000. Running backs have a hard time even breaking into the group of finalists. This season featured some wildly productive runners such as Jonathan Taylor of Wisconsin (fifth in the Heisman voting). Dobbins (sixth), Chuba Hubbard of Oklahoma State (eighth) and Travis Etienne of Clemson (ninth). None made it to New York and there is a good chance all will be off to the NFL next year. You could slot Alabama’s Najee Harris or Georgia’s D’Andre Swift into this spot if they come back for their senior seasons. But what are the chances of that?

Javian Hawkins of Louisville is likely to enter next season as the leading returning rusher among Power Five conference players after going for more than 1,400 as a freshman. But realistically, if a guy with the resume of Taylor can’t get an invitation to New York, what running back can?

Extra point

Three more names to keep in mind: Ja’Marr Chase, WR, LSU; Kedon Slovis, QB, Southern California; and Kenneth Gainwell, RB, Memphis.

The early favorites for the 2020 Heisman Trophy include three quarterbacks with ties to Georgia.
Jenkins: Sorry for tweet, not sorry to be with Saints

By Brett Martel
Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — Former Giants cornerback Janoris Jenkins asserted he was in fact sorry about his use of an offensive term in an exchange with a fan on social media.

Jenkins also made it clear he was not upset about his exile from New York, particularly after it landed him with playoff-bound New Orleans.

Giants coach Pat Shurmur said last week that Jenkins “refusal to acknowledge the inappropriate and offensive language” when he used the word “retard” to social media exchange influenced the club’s decision to waive the cornerback. But Jenkins said Wednesday that the Giants “twisted” his position on the matter.

“I’m sorry to whoever I offended. You know, you can’t take it personally and raise, we got different cultures and different terms that you use,” Jenkins said. “I apologize if I offended anybody or anybody with those disabilities. I didn’t mean it that way.”

Jenkins added that he’s open to playing various roles in a defensive backfield with Apple, who was claimed by the team off waivers from New England.

The Saints are counting on Apple and Jenkins to shore up a pass defense that has struggled of late, with opposing quarterbacks throwing for a combined 805 yards, six touchdowns and no interceptions over the last two games.

Jenkins has said he hurt his ankle in a loss to Philadelphia on Dec. 9, but that he is fine now.

“He was not listed on New Orleans’ weekly injury report on Wednesday. Jenkins, who goes by the nickname “Jackrabbit,” said he isn’t bitter about the way the Giants cut him loose.

“I look at it as, ‘business is business.’ You know, you can’t control what they do in the front office,” Jenkins said. “You just go in each and every day and go to work. And anybody around that facility can tell you that Jackrabbit always showed up on time, never late and did what he had to do.

It remains unclear how the Saints will deploy Jenkins, who has four interceptions this season, as many as the Saints’ leader in that department, safety Marcus Williams.

“We’ll see,” Saints coach Sean Payton said, adding that his staff believes Jenkins is capable of playing multiple roles in the defensive backfield. “He gives us versatility, and I think that’s important here down the stretch.”

The Saints’ starting cornerbacks are Marshon Lattimore and Eli Apple. Jenkins and Apple were teammates in New York before the Giants traded Apple to New Orleans during last season.

Jenkins said the Saints consulted him before claiming Jenkins off waivers. Apple described Jenkins as “somebody with great instincts, smart and savvy and great ball skills.”

Apple said he was not worried about whether his role as a starter could be threatened by Jenkins’ arrival, adding that a team trying to win a championship needs to capitalize on opportunities to add players of Jenkins ability.

“Around this time you’ve gotta have good depth, especially on the back end,” Apple said. “We’ve had some injuries. So it makes sense.”

Jenkins said being teammates again with Apple is “fun.”

“We always had a bond,” Jenkins said. “Now I’m here where he’s at, so he can show me and kind of tell me the playbook and I’ll learn it and just move forward.”

Jenkins added that he’s open to playing various roles in a defense that often fields more than four defensive backs in passing situations.

“I can thrive anywhere,” he said.

Seahawks’ Lockett shakes flu, injuries to return to form

The New York Giants cited an offensive tweet by cornerback Janoris Jenkins when they waived him last week. He has landed with the playoff-bound New Orleans Saints.

By Curtis Crabtree
Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — After a rough few weeks due to injury and illness, Tyler Lockett’s return to form against the Carolina Panthers was a huge boost for the Seattle Seahawks.

Lockett had been ailing since mid-November, when a badly bruised shin required a stay in a Bay Area hospital following a win over the San Francisco 49ers. Then as the bruise began to heal, Lockett became one of several Seahawks to come down with a nasty case of the flu.

The two issues left Lockett without his usual explosiveness over Seattle’s last several games. That changed against the Panthers as Lockett caught eight passes for 120 yards and a touchdown.

“He was just kind of battling through,” quarterback Russell Wilson said. “He is such a tough warrior in how he prepares and how he plays, plays through injuries and stuff like that. He is back to full speed Tyler Lockett, which is a great thing for us.”

The highlight for Lockett was a 44-yard catch behind close coverage from cornerback Donte Jackson. His ability to stretch the defense vertically is important for Seattle’s offense because of what it opens up for his teammates underneath.

“It felt good but the biggest thing about it was everybody on our team can ball, so even when I’m not getting the chances or anything like that, you see other people that are being able to take advantage of their opportunities,” Lockett said. “For me, that’s just the biggest thing because if you just have one person that teams can focus on, a team’s not really going to be able to go far.”

Without that extra kick in his step in recent weeks, Seattle’s passing attack hadn’t been quite as productive as it has been earlier in the season. Lockett was on pace to potentially break multiple team receiving records this season before the injuries and illness limited him to just eight catches for 107 yards in his previous four games combined.

“It was a beautiful sight because you see some amazing things, like that catch he had,” receiver David Moore said. “Everyday probably thought it was going to be a pick, but somehow Tyler came up with it.”

Moore and Lockett were afflicted with the flu at the same time and Moore said it took over a week after the illness subsided to begin feeling back to normal.

“He always wants to see everyone else do great,” Moore said. “He had it rough coming off the sickness, both of us. Then he found himself back this past game and it was like Tyler is doing good again and he and Russ are connecting again.”

The Seahawks had averaged 24.8 points per game in their first 10 games of the season as Lockett gained newly 800 yards and six touchdowns in that span. But with Lockett ailing the last few weeks, Seattle’s offense failed to score a touchdown against the Los Angeles Rams and was held to just 17 points against Philadelphia. Seattle’s 37-30 win over Minnesota was bolstered by the ground game which had 218 yards rushing.

With four defensive starters out against Carolina and two more leaving the game with injuries, the Seahawks needed their offensive to carry the load and Lockett’s resurgence helped kick their attack into gear.

“We’re better when he’s playing like that,” head coach Pete Carroll said. “You can see. Look at Russ’ efficiency numbers when he’s got Tyler on the field. That’s no accident. Russ was on a tear with his numbers. It’s great to have him back, he’s a wonderful football player.”

Lockett is just 6 yards shy of going over 1,000 yards on the season for the first time in his career.
Jaguars fire Coughlin following NFLPA criticism

By Mark Long
Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The Jacksonville Jaguars fired top executive Tom Coughlin on Wednesday, parting ways with the two-time Super Bowl-winning coach a little more than a day after the NFL Players Union took a sledgehammer to his reputation.

Coughlin served as executive vice president of football operations since 2017. It was his second stint with Jacksonville, the expansion franchise he helped build from the ground up in the mid-1990s.

The unbending taskmaster had been in trouble for weeks because of the team’s sagging record and several questionable roster moves. The NFLPA seemingly forced owner Shad Khan’s hand after an arbitrator’s decision to undo millions in fines imposed by Coughlin himself.

The NFLPA said Monday that more than 25% of player grievances filed in the last two years have been against the Jaguars. The union’s take: “You as players may want to consider this when you have a chance to select your next club.”

“I determined earlier this fall that making this move at the conclusion of the 2019 season would be in everyone’s best interests. But, in recent days, I reconsidered and decided to make this change immediately.”

Shad Khan
Jacksonville Jaguars owner, in a statement on the firing of executive vice president of football operations Tom Coughlin

Khan said in a statement. “But, in recent days, I reconsidered and decided to make this change immediately.

“I thank Tom for his efforts, not only over the past three years but for all he did from our very first season, 25 years ago, to put the Jacksonville Jaguars on the map.”

Khan said general manager Dave Caldwell and head coach Doug Marrone will each report directly to him on an interim basis.

“My expectations, and those of our fans, for our final two games and the 2020 season are high,” Khan added.

The NFLPA grievances are a product of Coughlin’s peccadilloes, many of which come from a good place — that of an old-school coach who always believed that football was more than just a business.

But the rules that once seemed trifling — no sunglasses, all meetings start 5 minutes early — took a more sinister tone since Coughlin’s return. He was still basking in the glow of two Super Bowl titles during his in-between stay as coach of the New York Giants that painted him as a man who had truly changed his ways.

He fined defensive end Dante Fowler more than $700,000 in 2018 for missing “mandatory” appointments at the facility during the offseason. Problem was, the appointments weren’t really mandatory — a reality cooked into the rule book after some hard-fought wins by the union in collective bargaining about how much time players were obliged to spend at team headquarters in the offseason.

Coughlin and the Jaguars have been on the wrong end of other high-profile battles against players — involving running back Leonard Fournette, cornerback Jalen Ramsey and now-retired defensive end Jared Odrick. All involved fines or criticism of players who didn’t act the way Coughlin liked, or failed to show up to voluntary sessions that the old coach always believed weren’t really voluntary.

The pushback against Coughlin was as much a sign of the attitudes of players in the late 2010s as it is of their willingness to blindly follow a leader who hadn’t proven himself to them — regardless of whatever message those Super Bowl rings might have delivered.

Rare: Bills riding high ahead of showdown with division rival Pats

By the numbers

31-3

Patriots quarterback Tom Brady’s career record against the Buffalo Bills. The Patriots have never lost to Buffalo in a game Brady has started and finished.

“‘That’s our next challenge,” Bills defensive end Jerry Hughes said. “It’s not like we’ve proven much. We’ve just been knocking down the challenges that have been in front of us. In order for us to get to where we want to go next — that’s to hang a banner up here — we have to handle the Patriots. ... This is the playoffs for us.”

This may be Buffalo’s best chance yet. The Bills are riding high after a 17-10 win over the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday Night Football that earned them a trip to the postseason.

One week before, Buffalo held Lamar Jackson in check and pushed the Baltimore Ravens to the brink in a 24-17 defeat. And on Thanksgiving the Bills picked up a season-defining 26-15 win on the road over the Dallas Cowboys.

Buffalo has yet to beat the Patriots under coach Sean McDermott, who is the driving force behind the Bills’ turnaround. The Bills have just three wins over the Patriots since 2003 and have never beaten New England in a game that Tom Brady has both started and finished. Brady’s 31-3 record against Buffalo is tops by any quarterback-back against a single opponent; he also has more touchdowns (69) and 300-yard games (11) against Buffalo than any other team.

Buffalo did an admirable job of containing Brady and the Patriots in their Week 4 meeting, however.

The quarterback finished with the fifth-worst passer rating of his career (45.9), completing 18 of 39 attempts for 150 yards, no touchdowns and one interception. New England had just 11 first downs (compared to Buffalo’s 23) and finished with 224 net yards of offense. The defense picked apart Steelers quarterback Devlin Hodges on Sunday night, leading Buffalo to victory with five interceptions. White had two of those interceptions, placing him in a tie with Patriots cornerback Stephon Gilmore for the league lead.

“It’s been building since 2017” White said. “I was McDermott’s first pick and I was the start of the new rebuild. I don’t take it lightly and it’s something that I’m going to cherish and I feel like we’ve been building it and we’re still going, it’s not a finished product.”

White was named Buffalo’s only Pro Bowl selection on Tuesday night, which was bittersweet for the third-year corner. White has established himself as one of the league’s best corners, but the Bills were disappointed to not see any other players honored. They know that only continued success can make that change — starting with a win over the Patriots.

“They’re the best for a reason,” McDermott said.
WEEK 16 TELEVISION GAMES

**MARQUEE MATCHUP**

Green Bay Packers (11-3) vs. Minnesota Vikings (10-4)

AFN-Sports, 2:15 p.m. Tuesday CET; 10:15 a.m. Tuesday JKT

**SERIES RECORD:** Packers lead 60-53-3.
**LAST MEETING:** Packers beat Vikings 21-16, Sept. 15, 2019.

**PACKERS OFFENSE:** OVERALL (21), RUSH (17), PASS (17).
**PACKERS DEFENSE:** OVERALL (23), RUSH (24), PASS (22).
**VIKINGS OFFENSE:** OVERALL (10), RUSH (4), PASS (20).

**STREAKS, STATS AND NOTES:** Vikings have won past three of five meetings. ... Packers can clinch NFC North with win. ... Packers are plus-14 in takeaways/gameaways category, while Vikings are plus-11. ... Vikings quarterback Aaron Rodgers had two TD passes in Week 2 meeting. He has 21 TDs and two interceptions in 11 career road games against Vikings. ... Running back Dalvin Cook had 191 scrimmage yards (career-high 172 in Week 15) and two TDs last week. He has 150 scrimmage yards (116 rushing, 34 receiving) in Week 2 meeting. ... Wide receiver Davante Adams had seven receptions for 103 yards and a TD in Week 15. He had seven catches for 106 yards in Week 2 meeting. ... Linebacker Blake Martinez led team with 11 tackles last week. He has eight tackles with four more receptions this season, tied for the most in the NFL. ... Linebacker Preston Smith had an interception in Week 2 meeting. He has two sacks and two interceptions in three games against Vikings. ... In one of the league’s oldest rivalries, Vikings coach Mike Zimmer is 5-5-1. ... Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins passed for 342 yards and three TDs in his last home game against the Packers. ... He has 1,372 yards, 11 TDs and three interceptions in four career games against the Packers. ... Running back Dalvin Cook had 191 scrimmage yards (career-high 154 rushing, 37 receiving) and a rushing TD in Week 2 meeting. ... Wide receiver Stefon Diggs led team with 74 receiving yards last week in 39-10 victory over Chargers. ... Wide receiver Adam Thielen has 25 receptions for 331 yards and two TDs in his past three games against the Packers.

![Game capsules compiled from NFLCommunications.com](image-url)
Orchard Park, N.Y.

Tre'Davious White didn’t know much about the one-sided rivalry between the Bills and New England Patriots prior to his arrival in Buffalo. He quickly caught up to speed.

“Since I first got here, before I even played my first game, I was sitting at Buffalo Wild Wings and I was by myself and I was eating and the Patriots were on,” White said. “It was a Thursday night, and just a random guy came up to me, ‘You’ve got to beat these guys.’”

The Bills have come a long way since White’s arrival in 2017. They have clinched their second playoff berth in three years. They have won 10 games for the first time since 1999. Yet they still have to topple the Patriots, who have held a stranglehold over the AFC East as well as the Bills over the past two decades.

The surging Bills (10-4) will get that opportunity to flip the script on Saturday when they travel to take on the Patriots (11-3) in a battle between the division rivals.

SEE RARE ON PAGE 62

Jerry Hughes
Buffalo Bills defensive end

That’s our next challenge. It’s not like we’ve proven much. … we have to handle the Patriots.

Tom Brady
New England Patriots quarterback

Charles Krupa/Associated Press