US investigating claims of civilian deaths

Military confirms airstrike during operation against Taliban in Helmand province of Afghanistan

By Phillip Walter Wellman
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The military is investigating claims that a U.S. airstrike in southern Afghanistan killed dozens of civilians, including children and elderly people, officials said Wednesday.

Military officials in Kabul confirmed that U.S. aircraft conducted a strike in Helmand province’s Garmir district on Tuesday as Afghan special forces and their U.S. advisers battled Taliban fighters. Officials were still trying on Wednesday to determine whether civilians were among the dead, a military statement said.

If proven, the deaths would add to a spike in civilian casualties caused by airstrikes.

A rise in civilian deaths documented by the United Nations this year has corresponded with a surge in U.S. bombings.

Tuesday’s fatalities included children and the elderly, said Abdul Wadood, a Helmand lawmaker.

SEE CIVILIAN ON PAGE 7
An F-35B Lightning II has landed at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, marking the advanced stealth jet’s first visit to the Okinawa base.

U.S. Forces Japan released a photograph of the aircraft from Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121 — the “Green Knights” — at Futenma on Tuesday.

“An F-35B landing at MCAS Futenma demonstrates the air warfighting capability, operational flexibility and tactical supremacy that this platform brings to the Indo-Pacific region, our allies and our partners,” the photo’s caption said.

The short takeoff/vertical landing F-35Bs have been operating out of Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni since January 2017 and have notched a number of milestones, including their first operations last spring from the Sasebo, Japan-based USS Wasp amphibious assault ship.

Meanwhile, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force began flying its first F-35As, which perform conventional takeoffs and landings, from Misawa Air Base on northern Honshu in January. Japan had planned to buy 42 F-35As to replace its fleet of 60-year-old F-4 Phantom II jets.

However, the U.S. ally is in the market for another 100 F-35s to replace aging F-15s, according to a Wednesday report in the Nikkei Asian Review.

Japan’s government is concerned about China’s growing military might and has faced pressure from President Donald Trump, who wants Japan to buy more U.S. military gear to balance trade between the two countries.

Experts have speculated that Japan could upgrade its massive helicopter destroyers — the JS Izumo and JS Kaga — to carry F-35Bs. Nikkei reported that F-35Bs were part of the purchase plan and that the ships would be revamped to accommodate them.

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CAMP BUEHRING, Kuwait — Soldiers beat heavy thumps on a traditional buffalo hide drum as an Army private danced in her rainbow-colored dress at a powwow at Camp Buehring in Kuwait.

The powwow Tuesday was a chance for deployed Native American soldiers to honor their heritage and share it with others, said Capt. Warren Queton, a member of the Kiowa nation and the commander of the 1245th Transportation Company out of Oklahoma.

In August, members of Oklahoma City University’s Native American Society donated their drum to allow National Guardsmen deploying from their state to have a powwow in Kuwait.

“Tribal people are vanishing from this earth,” Queton, 37, said. “We have to maintain our identity to preserve who we are.”

About 9,000 Native Americans serve in the armed forces. They have the highest number of servicemembers per capita compared with other ethnic groups, according to military statistics.

The powwow was a chance to show the importance of the American Indian identity, said Pvt. Tayshaun Mingo, 21, from the 114th Field Artillery Regiment. Mingo, a member of the Choctaw tribe, said he grew up attending powwows but didn’t think he’d be the drummer at one so far away from his home in Kansas.

“I didn’t expect to be doing a powwow in Kuwait,” he said.

One of the dancers, Army Pfc. Loretta Menchaca, 21, had her white dress with streaming rainbow tassels shipped to Kuwait from her hometown of Keshena, Wis. The day of the dance, she peeked out the door of the hangar at the soldiers walking in for the ceremony. She usually doesn’t talk to people about being Native American, said Menchaca, a cook with the 395th Ordnance Company out of Wisconsin.

The prospect of telling everyone — through dance — about her heritage as a member of the Menominee nation made her nervous. Then she whirled around the drum as Queton and others beat a steady rhythm for several dances.

“I started dancing when I could walk. I’ve been dancing for about 21 years,” Menchaca said.

Near the end of the ceremony, Menchaca invited other soldiers to join a friendship round dance, in which men and women lock their arms and shuffle in a circle in time to the beat. She led them through the steps, with the soldiers mimicking her with varying levels of success.

She hugged her friends after the final beat of the last dance. No longer nervous, Menchaca said she was glad because she was able to educate others about her heritage.

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Photos by J. P. Lawrence/Stars and Stripes

Armty Pfc. Loretta Menchaca dances during a powwow at Camp Buhring in Kuwait on Tuesday.

Powwow in Kuwait allows Native American soldiers to honor heritage
The USS Ashland recently completed a 17-day stint helping the Northern Marianas recover from Super Typhoon Yutu, the strongest storm ever to strike the Pacific islands.

The crew of the Ashland — an amphibious dock landing ship based in Sasebo, Japan — pitched in alongside local authorities, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Guam Air and Army National Guards and other services to provide storm cleanup, drinking water and temporary shelter for locals, a recent Navy statement said.

The Ashland arrived in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. territory, on Nov. 3, nine days after Yutu passed directly over Tinian, leaving hundreds of destroyed homes in its wake.

Tinian and Saipan took the brunt of the storm, leaving about 2,000 residents without power or running water.

“I can only hope that our efforts and the continued efforts of all other branches of service can bring a sense of ease to the citizens of Saipan and Tinian during this time of hardship,” the Ashland’s commanding officer, Cmdr. Patrick German, said in the statement.

The Ashland’s sailors and Marines, who departed the islands on Nov. 20, were among more than 800 servicemembers from across all military branches working on relief efforts in the aftermath of Yutu, according to the Navy statement.

Nearly 160 sailors, Marines and Guam Army National Guard soldiers cleared more than 150 miles of debris along Commonwealth roads and distributed more than 300,000 gallons of drinking water, the statement said. About 400 tents were erected to serve as temporary housing in Saipan and Tinian.

Yutu, the equivalent of a Category 5 hurricane, packed winds of up to 180 mph. It was the strongest storm to hit a U.S. territory this year and the strongest ever to strike the Northern Marianas when it made landfall Oct. 25, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

In early September, the Ashland joined in relief efforts in the aftermath of Typhoon Mangkhut, which also struck the Northern Marianas.

The Ashland served as a refueling station for Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 25.

By Christian Lopez

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$100M suit dismissed in recruit death

Detroit Free Press

DETROIT — A federal judge in Detroit on Tuesday dismissed a $100 million lawsuit against the U.S. Marine Corps brought by the family of Raheel Siddiqui, who died in a fall from a stairwell at the Marines’ Parris Island, S.C., boot camp in April 2016.

In dismissing the Siddiqui family’s case, U.S. District Judge Arthur Tarnow said he was bound by federal precedent in cases involving liability stemming from harm to military personnel despite expressing “strong reservations” about it.

The family — contacted through its lawyer, Shiraz Khan, of Southfield, Mich. — didn’t immediately respond to the decision.

It is the latest chapter in a case that, from the start, has received international attention, leading, in part, to the court-martial of Siddiqui’s drill instructor and several investigations into recruit hazing and abuse at the famed boot camp.

Siddiqui, 20, was a former valedictorian at Truman High in Taylor, Mich., when he entered the Marine Corps.
STUTTGART, Germany — America’s top commander for Africa made a rare visit to war-torn Somalia, meeting with local leaders to discuss security in a country where U.S. forces quietly serve in a fight against militants.

U.S. Africa Command Gen. Thomas Waldhauser also met Tuesday with the newly appointed U.S. ambassador to Somalia, Donald Yamamoto, who is in the process of establishing a permanent American diplomatic mission.

A decade ago, such high-level talks inside Somalia involving top American officials were virtually unthinkable. U.S. military operations in the country were still a closely guarded secret and diplomatic efforts were minimal, given the widespread chaos in the country and the lack of a central government.

However, Somalia has emerged as AFRICOM’s main focus during the past three years as the military carries out regular airstrikes against Islamic militants in the country. U.S. special operations troops also serve on the front lines as advisers to government forces.

“AFRICOM and the Department of State are working as part of a substantial international security assistance effort in support of our Somali partners,” Waldhauser said in a statement.

The anticipated departure in 2020 of a multinational African force, which has led the decadelong battle in Somalia against the insurgent al-Shabab group, has added a sense of urgency to the American mission.

The U.S. campaign in Somalia is part of a push to ready government forces to lead the fight once the African Union ends its deployment.

Waldhauser, whose last public visit to Somalia was in May 2017, met with President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, who is a dual U.S. citizen, and Somali defense officials, AFRICOM said.

In Somalia, government corruption is widespread and clan rivalries have long-confounded attempts to impose order. But while the nation routinely ranks as one of the most corrupt on Earth, Waldhauser said the government has been making “measurable progress and it’s clear they are dedicated to reaching the goal of a safe, stable and prosperous Somalia.”

In Africa, the U.S. will be reducing its force by 10 percent during the next three years as the military focuses more on countering Russia and China. However, the mission in Somalia will remain unchanged, the Pentagon said earlier this month.

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes
FORT SHAFTER, Hawaii — USO Hawaii will host events on Oahu throughout December to bring a bit of extra cheer to servicemembers separated from friends and family during the holiday season.

Holidays for Heroes is intended to bring “a touch of home” to soldiers, Marines, airmen and sailors serving in Hawaii, said Alesha Burkeen, a USO Hawaii spokeswoman.

“We know how hard it can be for our servicemembers stationed overseas to be separated from family during the holidays,” she said. “And we’ve made it our mission to bring as much holiday joy as we can to them with events, food and gifts to those not going home this year.”

This is the first time USO Hawaii has participated in the annual program, which began as an effort to deliver gifts to servicemembers downrange at remote locations throughout the Middle East.

Among the scheduled free events are a water park excursion, breakfast with Disney characters, contests, organized sports games and a Christmas Day dinner.

Information about all events is available online at USO Hawaii’s Facebook page. The event schedule and offerings are subject to change.

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Coordination sought on toxic exposure study

National Academy of Sciences calls for agencies to track health woes for veterans, families

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The National Academy of Sciences called on federal agencies Wednesday to launch a new, coordinated effort to track toxic exposures and research the health of Gulf War and post-9/11 veterans affected by toxic exposures, as well as to track the health of their living and future children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The committee came in a new report from the Committee on Gulf War and Health, which was tasked by the Department of Veterans Affairs with reviewing existing scientific research on toxic exposures to find areas that need more study.

The committee spent two years looking through more than 4,000 papers on toxic exposures written by VA, Defense Department and outside researchers. What they found was a lack of information about how servicemen’s exposures affect their descendants.

Servicemen in the Gulf War and post-9/11 generation have been at risk for exposure to chemical and biological agents, smoke from burn pits and oil-well fires and depleted uranium. Some evidence exists of links between those exposures and developmental problems in their descendants, as well as low birth weight, preterm birth and childhood leukemia, the committee found.

“This is an area where evidence is very hard to collect,” said Kenneth Ramos, the committee chairman and professor of medicine at the University of Arizona Health Sciences.

The committee envisioned a future program that would monitor servicemen’s health from recruits through the remainder of their lives. For children, health monitoring would begin in the womb.

Committee members described it as an expensive undertaking that would require vast resources and collaboration between the Defense Department and the VA. They predicted ethical challenges with collecting data from participants during their lifetimes.

It’s up to government agencies to decide whether to follow through on the committee’s recommendation. The support and help of large veterans organizations would be “absolutely essential,” Ramos said.

“In the end, VA and veterans must weigh the risk of conducting and participating in such research against the risk of not seeking answers,” the report reads. “Only VA, in consultation with veterans and their descendants, can make this decision.”

The VA currently recognizes a link between toxic exposures and birth defects for descendants of Vietnam War veterans. Enough evidence exists to connect spina bifida, in which a developing baby’s spinal cord fails to develop properly, to parents’ Agent Orange exposure in Vietnam. Those descendants are eligible for VA benefits.

Benefits are also available to children of women who served in Vietnam and suffer from birth defects such as congenital heart disease, a cleft palate and hip dysplasia, among others.

“Toxic exposures in Iraq and Afghanistan are sometimes referred to as the Agent Orange of the most recent generation of veterans,” Ramos said.

In 2013, the VA created a burn pit registry to track exposures to airborne toxins, but some stakeholders, including Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, argue the registry is underutilized. The group supports legislation in Congress, the Burn Pits Accountability Act, to increase efforts to ensure servicemen’s toxic exposures in combat zones.

During a conference call Wednesday about the new report, Ramos said the health monitoring program that the National Academy of Sciences recommends is “badly needed” to answer questions about toxic exposures.

“The other aspect of this is that the beneficiaries of a program like this is not just going to be the military or veterans themselves; it’s going to be extremely important to our nation as a whole,” he said.

“Given its importance, we need to make sure we all continue from where we are now.”

Deadline looms for new retirement plan

BY CAITLIN M.KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Eligible servicemen have just over a month to decide whether they want to opt into a new retirement system or remain in the legacy system.

The Department of Defense’s Uniformed Services Blended Retirement System became available Jan. 1. The system combines automatic and matching contributions to a servicemember’s Thrift Savings Plan, continuation pay and monthly pay upon retirement, according to the Defense Department.

A veteran joined the military on or before Dec. 31, 2017, are grandfathered in the legacy high-3 retirement system, which requires servicemen to serve at least 20 years before they are eligible for benefits.

19 percent of active-duty and 14 percent of Reserve serve for at least 20 years to qualify for the legacy retirement benefit, according to informational slides on the BRS website. Under the BRS, 85 percent of servicemen will be retired and collecting benefits after they serve at least two years.

If members have served for less than 12 years before Dec. 31, 2017, they may choose between the legacy retirement or opt into the new system. Those servicemen have until Dec. 31 to make their final choice.

Uniformed servicemen who joined on or after Jan. 1, 2018, have been automatically enrolled in the new retirement plan.

“It is a highly personal choice to opt into BRS, with many factors that can affect a member’s decision,” Jeri Busch, director of the Department of Defense’s Military Compensation Policy, told reporters Wednesday.

The new system will allow servicemen to have government-provided retirement benefits regardless of whether they serve four years or 20 years, she said.

About 300,000 active, Reserve, and National Guard members have chosen BRS, and over 100,000 new servicemen this year have been automatically enrolled, according to Busch.

Although the blended system could replace the federal government in the long term, said Busch, it was “most specifically designed to be able to provide an early vested, portable” government retirement benefit, especially for younger servicemen.

“The Defense Department does not have a target for BRS membership, she said, but has worked to provide information and resources for everyone eligible.

If there is a surge of opt-ins before the deadline, Busch said the online systems for the services, including myPay and Marine Online, will be able to handle it.

From now until the deadline, every new veteran service member who has not made an opt-in decision will be notified by the Defense Finance and Accounting Services’ SmartDocs system, according to Busch, and reminders will be on Leave and Earning Statements.

The Department of Defense has not yet designated names for the new units.

In March, European Command chief Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti told Congress he needed an Army fires brigade added to the permanent force structure in Europe. A month later, the National Guard’s South Carolina-based 487th Air Defense Artillery Brigade was deployed to Germany on a rotational basis. They were replaced Wednesday by the National Guard’s Ohio-based 474th ADA Brigade.
Civilian: Airstrike casualties increase

FROM FRONT PAGE

“Some of the bodies are unrecognizable,” he said in a phone interview.

The strike was carried out against an insurgent position after Afghan and U.S. ground troops came under heavy machine-gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire from a compound in the area, the military said.

“At the time of the strike, the ground force was unaware of any civilians in or around the compound,” the military statement said. “They only knew that the Taliban was using the building as a fighting position.”

Militants had stockpiled ammunition in the area, which the military said could have caused civilian casualties.

As the Taliban on Wednesday claimed responsibility for an attack on the compound of security contractor G4S in Kabul, saying it was revenge for civilians killed in operations by Afghan and international forces, including a car bomb explosion.

The Associated Press reported that 10 people were killed and 19 injured in the attack, which included a car bomb explosion and gunfire.

The Helmand operation killed at least 16 Taliban fighters, Attaullah Afghan, head of the provincial council, told The Associated Press. All 16 of the casualties were civilians, he said.

An Afghan investigation was underway, the provincial governor’s office said. Casualty figures in the embattled southern province are difficult to independently confirm, and Afghan officials sometimes inflate the numbers of enemy fighters killed or wounded.

Helmand province has long been a Taliban stronghold and has been the bloodiest province for coalition forces during the 17-year war.

Nearly 1,000 coalition troops — largely U.S. Marines and British soldiers — have died fighting there since 2001.

While the bulk of U.S. forces withdrew from the country in late 2014, the coalition handed over its sprawling base in Helmand to government forces. As the Taliban gained ground in the following years and after they nearly seized the provincial capital in 2016, U.S. soldiers deployed to bolster government forces.

Since early 2017, several hundred Marines have been training Afghan army and police forces as they work to recapture districts lost to the insurgents.

Late last year, after President Donald Trump announced plans for a reinvigorated strategy in Afghanistan, U.S. warplanes began striking drug labs and other targets in Helmand before expanding the operation to other provinces. Since then, there has been a sharp rise in airstrikes against Taliban insurgents as well as the Islamic State and al-Qaida terrorist groups.

Airstrikes have caused more noncombatant deaths and injuries in the first nine months of 2018 than during any similar period since the U.N. began documenting them in 2009.

Airstrike casualties included 313 dead and 356 wounded, a 39 percent increase from the same period last year, a recent U.N. report said.

The U.N. attributed just over half of the airstrike casualties to international forces — namely the U.S., which is the only foreign country officially conducting strikes — while Afghan forces were blamed for 38 percent. Another 11 percent were undetermined.

Ground-based attacks by the Taliban and other militant groups have claimed the majority of civilian deaths, according to U.N. reports.

Top diplomats at UN meeting offer support for Afghanistan

BY JAMEY KEATEN
Associated Press

GENEVA — Top diplomats from Russia, the United States and the European Union united Wednesday in support for the Afghan president’s efforts to stabilize his war-battered nation, saying progress has been made but more is needed, especially in areas of security, anti-corruption and the push to launch peace talks with the Taliban.

The statements come at a U.N.-backed conference in Geneva, where President Ashraf Ghani said he wanted to “specifically recognize the commitment in blood and treasure that the United States has shown since 2001” in Afghanistan.

Ghani called the U.S. its “key ally” and praised the Trump administration’s “smart, serious” policy as a “game changer” for Afghanistan.

The Geneva meeting aims to take stock of the Afghan government’s use of billions of dollars in foreign aid for education, health care, humanitarian support and needs since 2016.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said his country hoped for an “end of this fratricidal war” in Afghanistan and cited concerns about the stepped-up militant attacks by the Islamic State affiliate in Afghanistan.

Federica Mogherini, the EU foreign affairs chief, said the bloc was “ready to do our part as a neutral player.” She welcomed Ghani’s offer of peace talks with the Taliban.

“It is a unique opportunity to break the stalemate and to move the country forward,” she said. “We believe that the concrete talks about peace to begin.”

U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale urged all to seize the opportunity to move toward peace.

“We today reaffirm our commitment to the Afghan people,” he said, noting that Ghani’s initiative was among “encouraging signs.”

Iran Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said he was concerned about the drug trade across the region’s borders and said the “presence of foreign military forces has never brought stability in our region and has historically provided a recruiting ground for extremists.”

“All of us need to facilitate the inter-Afghan dialogue,” he said. Ghani, who has faced an increasingly violent Taliban insurrection in recent months — the Taliban now hold sway in nearly half of the country — presented his government’s efforts in areas such as security, justice, women’s rights and anti-corruption.

“We have a plan for reform, and we need your support to help implement it,” he told the conference. “Does this mean that we have eliminated corruption? Absolutely not. We want it to happen faster, but meaningful change cannot be rushed.”

“We face multiple challenges on many fronts,” he concluded.

Afghanistan is among the most corrupt countries in the world, and last year Transparency International ranked it 177th out of 180 countries ranked. The corruption monitoring agency said the Afghan government’s anti-corruption efforts had been insufficient. The country’s overall score was a dismal 15 out of 100.

The United States has spent nearly $1 trillion on the war in Afghanistan, nearly $800 billion of which was spent on America’s own troops there and also Afghanistan’s National Security Forces. The U.S. has committed roughly $4 billion annually for the next several years toward financing these forces.

Russia has been accused by the U.S. of aiding the Taliban, a militant group that once ruled Afghanistan and that is seen by Moscow as a bulwark against an emerging Islamic State affiliate which has sought to recruit Afghanistan’s ethnic Uzbeks, posing a threat to Central Asian States and creating a source of instability for Russia.

Also, Iran has been charged with sending Afghan Shiites, most of whom live as refugees in Iran, to fight in Syria in an Afghan-only brigade known as the Fatimayoun Brigade. Pakistan is routinely accused by both the U.S. and Afghanistan of harboring the Taliban.

On Tuesday, at the start of the conference, the European Union announced $35.5 million in financial aid for Afghanistan.
First lady Melania Trump, second from right, works with other volunteers at the Red Cross in Washington on Tuesday.

Melania Trump and Karen Pence assemble comfort kits for troops

WASHINGTON — Melania Trump and Karen Pence helped to assemble military comfort kits for troops deployed overseas at the American Red Cross in Washington.

Trump said Tuesday the packages are “one small way that we can say thank you and honor the sacrifices that members of the military make year-round.”

The first lady added, “Our prayers remain with all those serving overseas and for the families who wait for them to come home.”

Trump then joined Pence, Cabinet secretaries’ spouses, military families, Elizabeth Dole and other volunteers to assemble the packages.

The packages contain snacks such as popcorn and peanuts, playing cards and toiletries including bottles of hand soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste and tissues. They will be sent to troops deployed in Iraq, Poland, Djibouti and Kuwait.

Police say California bar shooter had enough ammunition to kill many more

The first two officers to arrive at the scene, sheriff’s Sgt. Ron Helus and a highway patrolman, saw at least 100 people fleeing the bar and ran into an ambush of arriving officers, killing one of them, police said Tuesday.

Investigators said they still don’t know why Ian David Long, 28, attacked staff and customers at the Borderline Bar and Grill in the Los Angeles suburb of Thousand Oaks on Nov. 7.

There’s no evidence that Long was radicalized or was targeting anyone at the bar, and though Long had previously been a customer there the owner didn’t know him, investigators said.

They painted a clearer picture of the chaos that ensued when Long opened fire as a crowd of people mostly in their 20s danced to country music.

Long threw smoke grenades into the group of revelers, obstructing what they could see. He used a flashlight with a laser sight attached to his .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol as he fired, killing 12 of the 13 people who were struck.

He stabbed one of the shooting victims in the neck, investigators said.

He then joined a tactical position and fired on them when they entered, killing Helus, a 29-year veteran of the department who was close to retirement.

Initial reports from survivors spread further confusion. Some of those who were injured in the escape fled to a nearby bar, and authorities at first feared that a separate shooting had occurred there. Survivors also gave different descriptions of the shooter, leading officers to believe there was more than one gunman.

Long, who was not hit by the officers’ gunfire, fatally shot himself. The former machine gunner and Afghanistan War veteran posted on social media during a break in the gunfire that he wondered if people would think he was insane. He had the capability to kill many more than 12 people. Of seven 30-round high-capacity magazines that Long had, five remained unused, Ayub said.

Such magazines are illegal to buy and possess in California but can easily be purchased in neighboring states.

Investigators have interviewed hundreds of witnesses and gathered bullet casings, surveillance video and other evidence from the scene, as well as seized items from Long’s home, including digital media, said Paul Delacourt, assistant director in charge of the FBI’s Los Angeles field office. Most of the evidence taken by the FBI is being analyzed at its lab in Quantico, Va.

By Colleen Slevin

DENVER — Despite federal opposition, Denver is trying again to become what could be the first U.S. city to open a supervised drug injection site, a strategy that some liberal cities have tried repeatedly to launch to reduce overdose deaths fueled by a nationwide opioid epidemic.

The Denver City Council voted 12-1 on Monday to approve a measure that would allow one site to open for at least two years under a pilot program. But there are still several hurdles to clear.

The program must win approval from the state Legislature, which is now under Democratic control after this month’s election. Earlier this year, the Republican-controlled state Senate killed similar legislation.

Despite the Democratic edge in the session starting in January, Democratic Gov.-elect Jared Polis has not taken a position on the issue and could veto the measure.

If successful, Denver could have the nation’s first publicly sanctioned site for people to use heroin, methamphetamine and other illegal drugs under medical supervision, with staffers able to intervene in case of an overdose.

Supporters say it’s a safer alternative for those who aren’t ready for rehab, while opponents say it condones dangerous drug use. Facilitating the use of illegal drugs is a federal felony, and the U.S. government has indicated it wouldn’t stand by if cities move to open such sites.

Other U.S. cities, including San Francisco, Seattle, New York and Philadelphia, have expressed interest in opening supervised injection sites.

Colorado lawmakers passed a measure that would have protected workers and participants in a San Francisco pilot program from state prosecution, but Gov. Jerry Brown vetoed it in September.

A private nonprofit is raising money for a supervised injection site in Philadelphia but has pushed back its potential opening date from January to mid-March, the group Safehouse said. While Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner has said he won’t prosecute anyone providing medical oversight at the facilities, state and federal officials have said they wouldn’t be legal.

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, who serves on Safehouse’s board, said he’s willing to go to prison to try a new approach that may save lives in Philadelphia, which has the highest rate of opioid deaths of any large U.S. city. It had more than 1,200 fatal overdoses last year.

Drug overdoses were the second-leading cause of death in Denver last year, killing 201 people. They died in places like grocery stores, abandoned buildings and along a bike path, according to death records reviewed by Denver’s Harm Reduction Action Center, the largest needle exchange in Colorado. It’s offered to host the supervised injection site.

Once users get a clean needle, they now have to leave the center, which is across the street from the state Capitol, and usually wind up injecting drugs in nearby alleys and streets, executive director Lisa Raville said.

The cities’ efforts come as federal officials have vowed to crack down on injection sites. U.S. law includes a “crack house” statute that makes it a felony to knowingly maintain a place for using a controlled substance.

In an op-ed in The New York Times in August, days after California lawmakers passed their measure, U.S. Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein said cities and counties that allow such sites should expect “swift and aggressive enforcement” from the Justice Department.
Mattis, Pompeo press senators on Yemen

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pressed senators in a closed-door meeting Wednesday to thwart a resolution that would stop U.S. military operations against the Saudi-led coalition fighting in the Yemen civil war.

The private meeting at the Capitol comes in the midst of rising concerns of U.S. support to Saudi Arabia, especially in light of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi's slaying at the country’s consulate in Istanbul.

Mattis and Pompeo told senators the United States was at a critical juncture in the Yemen confrontation and couldn’t afford to withdraw at this time.

“Pulling back our limited U.S. military support, our weapons sales to our partners and our protection of the Saudi and Emirati populations would be misguided on the eve of the promising initial negotiations,” Mattis said, according to prepared remarks. “It took us too long to get here, but at this key juncture, a change in our approach would work.”

U.S. forces have provided support for Saudi Arabia and the Yemen government in their fight against Iran-backed Houthi rebels, which some lawmakers contend the U.S. military has not been given proper authority to do. The U.S. forces have assisted in coordinating, refueling and providing target guidance and intelligence to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.

The stakes were high for Wednesday’s meeting between Mattis, Pompeo and the senators. Democrats have been set on winning the House in the midterm elections earlier this month that would push for greater oversight of U.S. operations, and look at efforts to withdraw the U.S. presence in Yemen, with some Republicans echoing the concerns.

Also this week, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said he could have enough support to force a Senate vote on his measure that would force the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Yemen.

Mattis and Pompeo were at the Capitol on Wednesday as part of a White House effort to push against such a resolution. Peace talks involving all sides of the Yemen civil war are slated to take place in Sweden as early as next week.

“The view of the [President Donald Trump] administration, Secretary Mattis and myself is that pass ing a resolution at this point undermines that,” Pompeo said in comments to reporters following the meeting. “It would encourage the Houthis. It would undermine the Iranians. It would undermine the fragile agreement for everyone to go to Sweden and have this discussion. So we hope that they’ll consider that, be thoughtful in how they proceed, and we’re happy to give them further information if they should so choose.”

The 11 a.m. meeting Wednesday day wasn’t without controversy, with some lawmakers and pundits questioning why CIA Director Gina Haspel wasn’t included in the briefing with senators. As senators exited Wednesday’s meeting, some of them said Haspel wasn’t at the meeting at the direction of the White House, according to news reports.

Mattis, in his remarks, said if the United States was to pull its support, it would disrupt ongoing efforts by U.N. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths and breathe new life into the Houthis’ comb at operations just as they are reluctantly engaging with a U.N. interlocutor.

Mattis said he has had eight meetings with Griffiths since his February appointment to align those efforts with the U.S. mission in Yemen.

“We actively facilitate diplomacy and the U.N.-brokered peace process led by U.N. Special Envoy Martin Griffiths to end this civil war,” Mattis said of the progress so far in the Yemen conflict. “We have worked assiduously with the State Department to assist him in bringing all parties to the negotiating table to discuss substantive issues.”

In his prepared remarks, Pompeo said abandoning Yemen would do immense damage to U.S. national security interests and the interests of its Middle East allies and partners. He also suggested Griffiths’ efforts are gaining momentum.

Mattis and Pompeo called for a cease-fire on Oct. 30, with the goal of causing all sides to take a step back from the fighting, Pompeo said in his remarks.

“If that diplomacy starts to make breakthroughs, our hopes are high that hostilities will soon stop entirely,” he said.

Questions about U.S. support of Saudi Arabia have grown in the wake of the death of Khashoggi after the Virginia resident visited the Saudi consulate in Turkey. Subsequent reports of recordings and other intelligence tied to the meeting have detailed Khashoggi’s brutal slaying at the hands of several Saudi officials.

“Those responsible for the killing cannot be dismissed, even as we seek accountability for what President Trump described as an unaccept-able and horrible crime” of Jamal Khashoggi’s slaying, a crime which “our country does not condone,” Mattis said questioning Trump. “We must maintain our twin requirements of holding those responsible for the slaying to account while recognizing the reality of Saudi Arabia as a nec-essary strategic partner.”

However, Trump’s comments about Khashoggi’s death have been met with its share of criticism. “The President hasn’t fully agreed with U.S. intelli-gence reports suggesting the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, directed the killing.”

Pompeo on Wednesday appeared aligned with Trump’s take on intelligence.

“There is no direct reporting connecting the crown prince to the order to murder Jamal Khashoggi,” he said.

Regardless, Mattis said the United States should not be deterred from its effort to aid others who are innocent.

“We cannot be defeated from using the Iranian influence to end this war for the good of innocent people in trouble, and ultimately the goal of our own people, and this includes our military engage-ment,” he said.

For senators, Mattis said a withdrawal of limited military support would further remove any reason for the Saudi-led coalition to hold the line on Yemen’s Hudaydah Port, a critical artery for supplies that has come under Houthi control and as a result exacerbated rampant starvation throughout the country. A U.S. disengagement and subsequent withdrawal would “do immense damage to the humanitarian crisis,” he said.

Bolton: Didn’t listen to tape of slaying because ‘I don’t speak Arabic’

BY FELICIA SONMEZ
The Washington Post

White House national security adviser John Bolton on Tuesday defended his deci-sion not to listen to the tape of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi’s slaying, telling reporter-s at the White House, “I don’t speak Arabic.”

CIA Director Gina Haspel has listened to the tape, according to U.S. officials. But Bolton said earlier this month that there was “no reason” for him to hear the recording, which was pro-vided by Turkey and captures Khashoggi being killed by a Saudi hit team moments after entering the Saudi Consulate in Is- tانب ul on Oct. 2.

Khashoggi was a prominent critic of Saudi leaders and a contributing columnist to The Washington Post.

“No, I haven’t listened to it, and I guess I should ask you, ‘why do you think I should?’” Bolton said Tuesday, turning a question back on a re-porter during an ap-pearance in the White House briefing room.

“What do you think I’ll learn from it?”

He went on to ask how many in the room spoke Arabic, prompting a contentious back-and-forth.

“Do you have access to an interpreter?” the reporter asked.

“You want me to listen to it?” Bolton re-sponded. “What am I going to learn from— I mean, if they were speaking Korean, I wouldn’t learn any more from it either.”

Later in the briefing, another reporter again asked Bolton why he did not choose to listen to the tape with the help of an interpreter.

“People who speak Arabic have listened to the tape and they have given us the sub-stance of what’s in it.... I’m very satisfied that we know what the tape picked up, and it was factored into the president’s deci-sion and he’s announced his position very clearly,” Bolton said.

Members of Congress from both parties have called for the Trump administration to take a harder line against Saudi Arabia in the wake of Khashoggi’s killing, and tensions were likely to be on full display Wednesday when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis briefed lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

Bolton’s remarks prompted criticism from some Democrats on Tuesday, in-cluding Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio. He noted in an appearance on CNN that Haspel, who has listened to the tape, would not be at the Tuesday’s briefing.

Bolton on Tuesday dismissed reports that the White House had blocked Haspel from attending.

“I’m just a bad movie,” Brown said. “You have John Bolton refusing to listen to a tape because he doesn’t speak Arabic.... He should want more information, not less.”

Brown added that a number of lawmakers will likely ask for the tape at Wednes-day’s briefing. He also took aim at what he described as the Trump administration’s “arrogance,” accusing the president of “throwing in with the world’s dictators.”

“They’re the only people he doesn’t criti-cize,” Brown said.
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has placed responsibility for recent stock market declines and this week’s announcement by the Federal Reserve for raising interest rates on the central bank and the politician himself, declaring that he is “not even a little bit” happy with his hand-selected central bank chairman.

“I’m doing deals, and I’m not being paid as much as the Fed,” Trump said. “They’re making a mistake because I have a gut, and my gut tells me that the other guy, and anybody else’s brain can ever tell me.”

He added: “So far, I’m not even a little bit happy with my selection of Jay. Not even a little bit. And I’m not blaming anybody, but I’m just telling you, I don’t think that the Fed is way off-base with what they’re doing.”

Sitting at the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office, Trump also threatened to cancel his scheduled meeting with Saudi Arabia’s King Salman, who is scheduled to visit the United States next month. The president said the kingdom’s decision to maintain a close alliance with the oil-rich desert nation was a cause of Trump’s decision to maintain a close alliance with the oil-rich desert nation was a cause of Trump’s decision to maintain a close alliance with the oil-rich desert nation. The comments were Trump’s sharpest criticism of the kingdom, which he has repeatedly said was responsible for the death of the Washington Post newspaper columnist Jamal Khashoggi, and said he considered Dubai’s crown prince ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and said he considered Dubai’s crown prince ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and said he considered Dubai’s crown prince ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Trump again questioned the CIA’s assessment of Saudi Arabia’s role in the killing of Khashoggi, and said he considered Dubai’s crown prince ordered the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Trump commented on the July 15 assessment by the nongovernmental organization Human Rights Watch that it was moving some jobs overseas as a result of the rising unemployment rate. Trump also called the killing of Jamal Khashoggi, a participant in the National Hockey League’s expansion draft, a “national security team” decision.

Meanwhile, Trump said he had “no intention” of moving to stop special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

“The Mueller investigation is what it is. It just goes on and on and on,” he said. “When pressed on whether he would commit to letting the probe continue until its conclusion, Trump stopped short of making an explicit pledge.”

Trump’s sharpest criticism was reserved for his Fed chairman. Though Trump said several times in response to a question about emerging cracks in the economy that he wasn’t “blaming anybody.” Trump is now making that claim, he clearly assigned blame to Powell for leading the Fed through several interest rate increases this year. In a series of Twitter posts Tuesday, issued shortly after his interview with The Post, Trump blamed GM chief executive Mary Barra for the company’s plant closures and layoffs and threatened to strip away any government support for the auto giant. Trump’s appeal to GM and the Fed was similar to his outrage at Harley-Davidson last summer. The Mueller probe is expected to be completed in October. In a series of Twitter posts Tuesday, Trump said Powell was moving jobs overseas as a result of the rising unemployment rate.

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President Donald Trump sits at his desk in the Oval Office during an interview Tuesday with The Washington Post. He said he is considering visiting troops in a war zone soon, perhaps before Christmas.

Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post

‘Fed is way off-base with what they’re doing’ Interview: Trump slams chairman, questions climate change and threatens to cancel Putin meeting

President Donald Trump sits at his desk in the Oval Office during an interview Tuesday with The Washington Post. He said he is considering visiting troops in a war zone soon, perhaps before Christmas.

Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post

‘Fed is way off-base with what they’re doing’ Interview: Trump slams chairman, questions climate change and threatens to cancel Putin meeting

Trump’s selection of Powell to lead the central bank was driven largely by Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. Powell’s appointment was very unusual, as he is not an economist. He had served in a past Republican White House but was first tapped to serve as a “conduit” for his boss, the Treasury secretary, to get his initial tenure at the Fed, Powell was seen as largely supportive of Powell’s moves, even as he disagreed with Powell’s view that interest rates are too high and that the U.S. economy is overheating.

“Look, I took recommendations. I’m not blaming anybody.”

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How Mueller may make Manafort findings public

By Deanna Paul

Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Special counsel Robert Mueller — President Donald Trump’s former campaign chairman — of broaching his cooperation agreement. In doing so, Mueller may have created the opportunity to release information outside of grand jury indictments and a final report, sidestepping acting Attorney General Matthew Whitaker.

Manafort’s attorneys disputed allegations that he had repeatedly lied to federal agents since entering the deal in September. Mueller.vstacked a detailed sentencing memo with the court “that sets forth the nature of (Manafort’s) crimes and lies, including those after signing the plea agreement.”

Now, the public could potentially see details, including the special counsel’s investigation in the Manafort sentencing memo and its accompanying hearing.

Whitaker plays a significant role in whether Mueller’s findings are made public, according to attorney Jonathan Meyer, a partner at Sheppard Mullin and former Department of Justice senior official.

When a special counsel concludes a grand jury investigation, Department of Justice regulations require he write a confidential report detailing his decision to indict or decline to indict its subjects and submit it to the attorney general.

The attorney general must then notify the chair and ranking member of the House and Senate Judiciary committees that the special counsel investigation has ended. The attorney general can forward the final report to Congress but is not required to. He is also authorized to release the document to the general public if he determines it’s in the public interest.

For the time being, Whitaker, an outspoken critic of the Russia probe who has decried calls to rescind himself as Jeff Sessions did, is the acting attorney general.

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Trump’s controversial appointment has been called unconstitutional; prominent figures across party lines opposed it, including George Conway and former solicitor general Neal Katyal, and Senate Democrats filed a lawsuit challenging it.

Since he has not recused himself from the special counsel investigation, Whitaker and presumably, through him, the White House — will get the first look at the Mueller report. It will be his decision whether to disclose it to Congress or the American people.

As a practical matter, sitting on a report of this magnitude and media interest would be difficult. If the acting attorney general tried to restrict access, Meyer said there are several other ways Mueller’s findings could become public.

“It’s safe to say there’s going to be strong public pressure to release some version of the report, and since the Democrats will soon take control of the House, they have subpoena power as a check on the executive branch,” Meyer said, though a legal fight would ensue between Congress and the executive branch.

At the same time, the way the information may come out is through filings by Mueller himself.

In the past, he has intentionally released information by making certain indictments public, painstakingly detailed. Mueller could do the same with the Manafort sentencing memo, which would neither be covered by executive privilege nor in Whitaker’s reach.

At the same time, the sentencing memo may contain information that could hinder his ongoing work. Up to this point, the Mueller investigation has been leak-proof, with no unnecessary disclosures, making it interesting whether he requests to have the memo sent or received through her personal account that could relate to government work, you simply just store or received through her private email server.

Clinton deleted thousands of emails that she and her lawyers decided were personal or unrelated to her work as secretary of state before she turned over thousands of other emails to federal investigators. She said she had been unaware of rules against using personal email to conduct the public’s business.

Donald Trump harshly criticized Clinton, his 2016 Democratic presidential rival, for her use of the private email server. Trump dubbed her “Crooked Hillary” and repeatedly said, including in her face, that she belonged in jail.

At his campaign rallies, chants of “Lock her up!” rang out.

Ivanka Trump was asked by ABC News, “So the idea of ‘Lock her up!’ doesn’t apply to you?”

“No,” she replied.

Referring her father’s denunciations of Clinton’s private email server, she said, “There’s no equivalency to what my father’s spoken about.”

Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill plan to scrutinize Ivanka Trump’s personal email use. The Republican chairmen of Senate and House oversight committees — as well as a top House Democrat who will be wielding a gavel when his party takes power in January — have called on the White House to provide more information about the email account and the nature of her messages.

That would renew Republican-led congressional probes that had languished since last year when reports by Politico revealed that Ivanka Trump’s husband, Jared Kushner, and other White House officials had been using private email for government purposes in possible violation of the Presidential Records Act and other federal record-keeping laws.

On other issues, Ivanka Trump said her father is not worried about legal exposure for herself, her father or anyone else in her family with regards to special counsel Robert Mueller’s probe into Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

“I know the facts as they relate to my family, and so I have nothing to be concerned about,” she said.
Republican prevails in Miss. Senate race

Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Republican Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith returns to Washington as a solidly loyal Trump supporter after the president stumped for her in a GOP runoff marked by racial turmoil over a video-recorded remark Hyde-Smith made that was decried as racist.

Hyde-Smith defeated Democrat Mike Espy, who was vying to become the state’s first black senator since Reconstruction, during Tuesday’s runoff. The win for Hyde-Smith, 59, the first woman elected to the Senate seat in the Deep South. The GOP pumped resources into Mississippi, and President Donald Trump made a strong effort on behalf of Hyde-Smith, holding last-minute rallies in Mississippi on Monday.

Speaking to supporters after her win, Hyde-Smith vowed to fight for everyone in the state when she goes back to Washington.

“I want everybody to know, no matter who you voted for today, I’m going to always represent every Mississippian. I will work very hard and do my very best to make Mississippi very proud,” she said. Speaking to reporters later she said Trump had called to congratulate her and said she’d been through a storm and “survived it with grace.”

Her supporters said the furor over her crack about Mississippi was overblown. They also stuck by her as a photo was circulated of her wearing a replica Confederate military hat during a 2014 visit to Beauvoir, the last home of Confederate president Jefferson Davis.

“So many things are taken out of context,” said Elizabeth Gallighouse, 84, from Diamondhead. “The fact that he toured Jefferson Davis’ house. You or I could have done the same thing. They said, ‘Put this cap on. Hold this gun.’ It was a fun time. She wasn’t trying to send any messages.”

With Hyde-Smith’s victory, Republicans control 53 of the Senate’s 100 seats. The GOP lost control of the House, where Democrats will assume the majority in January.

In the final weeks of the runoff, Hyde-Smith’s campaign said the remark about making voting difficult was a joke. She said the “public hanging” comment was “an exaggerated expression of regret” for a fellow cattle rancher. During a debate nine days after the video was publicized, she apologized to “anyone that was offended by my comments,” but also said the remark was used as a “weapon” against her.

Espy, 64, a former U.S. agriculture secretary, replied: “I don’t know what’s in your heart, but I know what came out of your mouth.”

Hyde-Smith was in her second term as Mississippi agriculture commissioner when Republican Gov. Phil Bryant appointed her to temporarily succeed GOP Sen. Thad Cochran, who retired in April amid health concerns.

Write then run: Democrats pen books, consider 2020 campaigns

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Speaking to a packed auditorium of enthusiastic young people Tuesday night, Bernie Sanders already seemed to be campaigning for the White House again.

The Vermont senator was appearing at George Washington University as an author — not a presidential hopeful.

His new book, “Where We Go From Here: Two Years in the Resistance,” went on sale Tuesday. The second volume of Sanders’ saga was influenced, in part, by his acclaimed memoir “Faith of My Fathers,” which came out in 1999, around the time of his first presidential run.

It marked the first time he wrote at length about his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam, which helped define his public identity.

The deeply personal exploration of race in Barack Obama’s “Dreams from My Father” propelled him onto the national scene when it was republished during his 2004 Senate campaign. His follow-up, “The Audacity of Hope,” mixed policy ideas and personal reflections to become a vital part of his successful 2008 presidential campaign.

Ross, now president of the Steve Ross Agency LLC, said the quality of the writing is key to a campaign book’s success. If a book is well-written, he said, “it’s like selling out a theater with a two-hour biopic about your life that’s directed by you and starring you, the politician.”

There are a lot of advantages for both the publisher and for the candidate to have a book as a narrative product,” he added. “They can’t control what The Washington Post and The New York Times and Fox News is going to say about them, but they can control what's between the covers.”

With book authorship comes the opportunity for would-be candidates to travel to promote not only their book but also their strategy for the country, said Michael Steel, who was an adviser to former House Speaker John Boehner and to Jeb Bush’s 2016 Republican presidential campaign.

“Particularly for the higher profile potential candidates, it’s an opportunity to get out there and talk about your vision and your record — and it’s particularly good because in addition to political news outlets, you can talk to softer-edged media outlets,” Steel said. “You can go on ‘The View,’ you can go on the ‘Today’ show, you can go on radio stations across the country and talk about the book.”

Gillibrand appeared on “The View” earlier this month to promote her book.

Steel drew a distinction between the flurry of books that are being released as candidates consider launching campaigns and the books that are released before a presidential run is officially in the works.

“The books that are written before a candidate decides to run are often far more revealing about their actual character and personality and background,” Steel said. “Those are also the ones that can occasionally reveal things that the person probably wouldn’t have revealed if they were planning to run for president.”
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Climate talks face ‘impossible’ task

BY FRANK JORDANS AND MONIKA SCISLOWSKA
Associated Press

KATOWICE, Poland — Three years after sealing a landmark global climate deal in Paris, world leaders are gathering again to agree on the fine print.

The euphoria of 2015 has given way to the sober realization that getting an agreement among almost 200 countries, each with their own political and economic demands, will be challenging — as evidenced by President Donald Trump’s decision to pull the United States out of the Paris accord, citing his “America First” mantra.

“Looking from the outside perspective, it’s an impossible task,” Poland’s deputy environment minister, Michal Kurtyka, said of the talks he will preside over in Katowice on Dec. 2-14.

The top of the agenda will be finalizing the so-called Paris rule book, which determines how countries have to count their greenhouse gas emissions, transparently report them to the rest of the world and reveal what they are doing to reduce them. Seasoned negotiators are calling the meeting, which is expected to draw 25,000 participants, “Paris 2.0” because of the high stakes at play in Katowice. Forest fires from California to Greece, droughts in Germany and Australia, tropical cyclones Mangkhut in the Pacific and Michael in the Atlantic — scientists say this year’s extreme weather offers a glimpse of disasters to come unless warming continues unabated.

A recent report by the International Panel on Climate Change warned that time is running out if the world wants to achieve the most ambitious target in the Paris agreement — keeping global warming at 2.7 Fahrenheit. The planet has already warmed by about 1 degree since pre-industrial times and it’s on course for another 2-3 degrees of warming by the 2030s unless drastic action is taken.

The conference will have “quite significant consequences for humanity and for the way in which we take care of our planet,” Kurtyka said.

Experts agree that the Paris goals can be met only by cutting emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases to net zero around 2050.

But the Paris agreement lets countries set their own emissions targets, and some, such as the United States under the Trump administration, have withdrawn from the deal. Others aren’t. Overall, the world is heading in the wrong way.

UK government: Brexit to make country poorer

BY JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

LONDON — Britain will be poorer after leaving the European Union than if it had stayed in, no matter what sort of trade deal it has with the bloc, the government said Wednesday — unwelcome news for Prime Minister Theresa May as she tries to sell her Brexit divorce deal to a skeptical nation.

A government assessment estimated that 15 years from the day of departure on March 29, the country’s GDP will be 0.6 percent lower than it would have been if Britain had stayed in the EU — and that’s if the U.K. maintains frictionless trade with the bloc.

If Britain leaves the EU without a Brexit deal and there are significant barriers to trade, the British economy would be up to 9.3 percent smaller, economists from the Treasury and other government departments said.

“This analysis does not show that we will be poorer in the future than we are today,” May insisted — correctly, since the data say the economy is still growing, albeit less robustly than if Britain remained in the EU.

May told lawmakers that her Brexit agreement “is the best deal available for jobs and our economy that allows us to honor the referendum and realize the opportunities of Brexit.”

The analysis looks at a range of options, from leaving without a deal to staying in the EU’s single market for goods and services.

It did not analyze the specific deal agreed upon between Britain and the bloc last week. But it estimated that under similar terms, involving no tariffs but some non-tariff barriers to trade, the economic hit would be at the lower end of the range — a decline in GDP of between 2.5 and 3.9 percent.

Independent experts have said that 3.9 percent of Britain’s GDP will amount to about $128 billion a year by the 2030s.

“If you look at this purely from an economic point of view, there will be a cost to leaving the European Union, because there will be impediments to our trade,” said Treasury chief Philip Hammond.

But he said the deal agreed on between May’s Conservative government and the European Union, which will take effect if the U.K. seeks continued close economic ties, would minimize the economic damage.

Supporters of Brexit argue that leaving the EU will bring economic benefits that the forecasts do not show, such as the power to control immigration and to strike new trade deals.

Putin: Ukrainian politics to blame in new standoff

BY NATALIYA VASILYeva AND YURAS KARMANOV
Associated Press

KIEV, Ukraine — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday blamed the latest standoff with neighboring Ukraine on the presidential ambitions of Ukraine’s leader as the Russian military announced it was boosting its defenses in Crimea.

Ukraine, for its part, released what it said was the exact location where its ships were fired on by Russia, showing that they were in international waters approaching the Kerch Strait from the west, not from the east, as Putin suggested.

Russia and Ukraine are still reeling from their first overt military confrontation since the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, a clash Sunday in the Kerch Strait near Russia-occupied Crimea. Russian border guards fired on three Ukrainian ships, seizing them and their 24 crewmembers. Ukraine insists its vessels were operating in line with international maritime rules, while Russia says they had failed to get permission to pass through a Russia-controlled strait.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed that detained Ukrainian officers from one of the confiscated boats secretly sought to break through the Russian-controlled strait.

Speaking Wednesday after a bilateral U.N.-backed conference on Afghanistan in Geneva, Lavrov said Russian border agents and interrogators turned up documents that “clearly show that these ships had been ordered to not inform the authorities of Kerch Strait and to try and break into the Sea of Azov secretly.”

The strait links the Black Sea with the Sea of Azov and is where Russia has built a long new bridge — the only land link between Crimea and the Russian mainland.

The incident has drawn strong criticism of Russia by the United States and its allies and has fueled fears of wider fighting in the region. It’s part of the long-simmering conflict between the two countries, in which Russia annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and supported separatists in Ukraine’s east with clandestine dispatches of troops and weapons. That fighting has killed at least 10,000 people since 2014 but eased somewhat with a 2015 truce.

Putin on Wednesday broke his silence on the maritime clash, blaming it on Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko’s desire to get re-elected.

“That was a provocation which was certainly organized by the sitting officials, including the president.”

Vladimir Putin
Russian president

“That was a provocation which was certainly organized by the sitting officials, including the president,” ahead of Ukraine’s presidential election in March, Putin said.

Putin’s original proposal — to impose martial law in Ukraine for two months after the clash with Russia — would have meant the March presidential vote would have to be scrapped due to electoral rules. He later halved the martial law time frame to a month, which would allow the election to go ahead as planned.

The Kremlin has warned that Ukraine’s declaration of martial law in areas that border Russia could reignite the fighting in eastern Ukraine.

Putin also claimed the Ukrainian vessels refused to communicate with Russian border guards and were in violation of the Russian territorial waters off the country’s south, which, unlike the Crimean coast, is Russia’s internationally recognized border. That runs counter to the claims of the Ukrainian government, which said the ships were approaching from another direction and were firmly in international waters.

Kurt Volker, the U.S. special envoy to Ukraine, told reporters in Berlin that Washington sees no reason to doubt the information from Kiev that its vessels were operating in line with international maritime rules.

Putin insisted that the Russian border guards were acting in line with the usual protocol when they decided to fire on the Ukrainian ships.

U.S. authorities, however, believe that there was “no conceivable justification … for the use of force in this scenario.”

Earlier Wednesday, the Russian military announced it would be boosting the defenses of the occupied Crimean Peninsula with more anti-aircraft missiles in the wake of the standoff.
Chinese scientist defends gene editing

BY GERRY SHIH AND CAROLYN Y. JOHNSON
The Washington Post

HONG KONG — He Jiankui, the Chinese researcher who claimed this week to have helped produce the world’s first genetically altered babies, said Wednesday there was another “potential pregnancy” involved in his study as he defended a procedure that has shaken the scientific world.

Appearing in public for the first time since claiming he had successfully altered the DNA of twin girls while they were embryos to make them resistant to HIV infection, the Stanford-trained bioengineering professor said he felt “proud” of his work and its implications for public health in the face of nearly universal condemnation.

“We should, for millions of families with inherited disease, show compassion,” he told a packed audience at the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing in Hong Kong. “If we have this technology, we can make it available earlier. We can help earlier those people in need.”

His scientific talk chronicled the development of his line of research, from early mouse experiments to primates and eventually a human clinical trial. He said that eight couples were enrolled in the trial but one dropped out. All had fathers with well-controlled HIV and mothers who were not infected.

There were 31 embryos created through in vitro fertilization, and 70 percent were successfully edited. He showed data indicating that he had not detected unintended genetic changes caused by CRISPR/Cas-9, the gene-editing tool that he used — although it remains to be seen whether outside scientists will find the evidence convincing.

The disclosure this week of He’s research — carried out in southern China mostly under a shroud of secrecy — has sparked urgent debate about the ethics of gene-editing and raised the prospect of a future in which parents produce “designer babies” with selectively improved traits like intelligence or strength.

Report blames crash on poor safety plans

BY NINIEK KARMINI AND DAVID KOENIG
Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia — Faulty equipment and Indonesian carrier Lion Air’s own safety failures had pilots fighting for control of their Boeing 737 MAX 8 as it plunged into the Java Sea on Oct. 28, killing all 189 people aboard, investigators said Wednesday.

Briefing reporters on the aircraft’s black box data, the investigators said they were still struggling to understand why the plane crashed but cited multiple factors centered on faulty sensors and an automatic safety system that repeatedly forced the plane’s nose down despite the pilots’ efforts to correct the problem.

Based on the number of problems with the aircraft beforehand, they suggested the jet should not have been in service.

The National Transportation Safety Committee’s Nurcahyo Utomo said investigators were trying to figure out from interviews with engineers why they deemed the Boeing 737 airworthy.

“We need to compare the statements of the engineers with the required procedures,” he said.

Once the jet was airborne, the pilots appeared to have been overwhelmed, said another of the crash investigators, Ozy Suryo Wibowo. “The problem is if multiple malfunctions occur all at once, which one should be prioritized?” Wibowo said.

UN report says fragile climate is undermining global food systems

BY ELAINE KURTENBACH
Associated Press

BANGKOK — Feeding a hungry planet is growing increasingly difficult as climate change and depletion of land and other resources undermine food systems, the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization said Wednesday as it renewed appeals for better policies and technologies to reach “zero hunger.”

Population growth requires supplies of more nutritious food at affordable prices, but increasing farm output is hard given the “fragility of the natural resource base” since humans have overstretched Earth’s carrying capacity in terms of land, water and climate change, the report said.

About 820 million people are malnourished.

The FAO and International Food Policy Research Institute released the report at the outset of a global conference aimed at speeding up efforts to achieve zero hunger around the world.

“The call for action is very clear. It is possible in our lifetime and it is also realistic to end hunger and malnutrition,” Inonge Wina, vice president of Zambia, told the gathering.

Food security remains tenuous for many millions of people who lack access to affordable, adequately nourishing diets for a variety of reasons, the most common being poverty.

But it’s also endangered by civil strife and other conflicts. In Yemen, where thousands of civilians have died in airstrikes by a Saudi-led coalition, the aid group Save the Children says 85,000 children under 5 may have died of hunger or disease in the war.

In Afghanistan, severe drought and conflict have displaced more than 250,000 people, according to UNHCR, the U.N. refugee agency.

FAO Director-General Jose Graziano da Silva noted that the number of hungry and malnourished levels has risen to levels last seen a decade ago.

“After decades of gains in fighting hunger, this is a serious setback,” da Silva said. “Together, with member governments and other partners, we must redouble our efforts to end hunger and malnutrition.”

Security fears halt Huawei upgrade in New Zealand

BY NINIEK KARMINI
Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — New Zealand’s international spy agency on Wednesday halted mobile company Spark from using Huawei equipment in its planned 5G upgrade, saying it posed a “significant national security risk.”

The action follows a ban in Australia, where the Chinese telecommunications giant was blocked in August from rolling out Australia’s 5G network due to security concerns.

In New Zealand, Huawei has previously helped build mobile networks. In March, Spark and Huawei showcased a 5G test site across the street from the Parliament in a publicity move that was attended by then-Broadcasting Minister Clare Curran.

The latest development could have diplomatic and economic implications for New Zealand, which relies on China as its largest trading partner but which is also part of the “Five Eyes” security alliance that includes the U.S., Britain, Canada and Australia.
Historical society sorry for insensitive greeting

MA — A neighborhood historical society in Boston is apologizing for an awkwardly worded holiday greeting card that some people interpreted as insensitive.

The Dorchester Historical Society in a postcard promotion for its annual Christmas open house featured the phrase “We’re dreaming of a white Dorchester” along with a picture of a building inside a snow globe.

The image drew rebukes on social media and the organization quickly issued an apology via Twitter.

The slogan was meant to be a play on the classic holiday song “White Christmas,” but the organization said it did not “think it through properly.”

4 puppies taken in armed robbery

CA — A 22-year-old Southern California man was arrested in connection with an armed robbery that netted four puppies.

The Riverside County Sheriff’s Department said the victims had agreed to meet the suspect Nov. 22 at a Perris shopping center to sell him an 8-week-old English bulldog.

When the victims arrived, they were confronted by two suspects, and one had a weapon. The robbers took four puppies and fled.

A Sheriff’s Department statement said investigators identified Alexxys Octavio Jimenez as a suspect and arrested him at his Moreno Valley residence where all four puppies were recovered.

Crews haul away junk from problem property

AK — Anchorage crews have hauled away hundreds of thousands of pounds of junk from a property in Bear Valley as part of the city’s efforts to address neighborhood blight.

Crews recently removed 343 tons of junk, five drums of waste and 21 junk vehicles from the property over a week, the Anchorage Daily News reported.

The cleanup cost $54,800 and was the largest in the city’s history, said Jack Frost, chief code enforcement officer.

The cleanup comes more than a year after a group of residents pleaded with the Anchorage Assembly to take action on the property.

Military, tree farm work to ship trees overseas

NY — The New York state Army and Air National Guard, alongside area military veterans, worked with an upstate tree farm to send more than 100 trees to military bases around the country and overseas.

Now in its 14th year, “Trees for Troops” has delivered more than 200,000 trees to servicemembers and their families in every branch of the military at nearly 65 bases in 17 countries. Elms Family Tree Farm in the village of Ballston Spa helps provide the trees to be shipped to members of the military who are not able to come home for the holidays.

 Stranger returns lost wallet, adds extra cash

SD — A South Dakota man has his lost wallet back with some extra cash thanks to a stranger.

Hunter Shamatt thought he’d never see the wallet again when he lost it on a flight to Las Vegas. He was pulled over, and he had a Bluetooth so has no reason to hold a cellphone when driving.

The agent in charge of the sale said an additional trove of personal items was discovered in the attic. They included phone numbers for Frank Sinatra and Richard Nixon, Rizzo’s gold watch, and a Bible.

Agent John Romani said those new items will go up for auction Jan. 29.

Second auction for mayor’s stuff to be held

PA — An estate sale at the home of former Philadelphia Mayor Frank Rizzo went like gangbusters last weekend — and some new treasures were found afterward.

The agent in charge of the sale said an additional trove of personal items was discovered in the attic. They included phone numbers for Frank Sinatra and Richard Nixon, Rizzo’s gold watch, and a Bible.

Agent John Romani said those new items will go up for auction Jan. 29.

Top sellers over the weekend were Rizzo’s single-digit license plate, which went for $5,000, and a Rolex watch that went for $2,500.

A number of billy clubs were up for grabs and went for $1,250 to $1,500.

Cited driver: I was eating a hash brown

CT — A Connecticut man who said he was eating a hash brown a McDonald’s hash brown for a cellphone is continuing his legal fight.

The Hour reported that Westport police gave Jason Stiber a $300 distracted driving ticket in April. The Westport man challenged the charge and lost in court.

Stiber said the officer thought a hash brown he was eating while driving was a cellphone.

He was granted a retrial that’s scheduled to start Dec. 7.

Prefhistoric reptile left tracks at Grand Canyon

NV — A Nevada geology professor said he recently identified fossilized tracks from a reptile along a popular trail in Grand Canyon National Park.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported that University of Nevada, Las Vegas, professor Steve Rowland said the tracks belong to a primitive reptile the size of a baby alligator and date back about 315 million years.

The 28 footprints run diagonal-ly across a boulder on the edge of the Grand Canyon’s Bright Angel Trail.

Rowland first saw the prints last year during a family vacation to the park after hearing about them from another geologist.

Guide escapes serious injury in avalanche

CO — A tour guide in the Aspen Mountain Powell Tours permit area on Richmond Ridge was unharmed after being buried by an avalanche.

The Aspen Daily News reported the Aspen Skiing Co. employee was rescued Saturday by his skiing partner. The company said the staff members were scouting terrain prior to Sunday’s season opening.

Company Vice President of Communications Jeff Hanle said neither employee was seriously injured, and both staff members have returned to work.

A report from the Colorado Avalanche Information Center said the first skier, whose name has not been released, was carried at least 20 yards and buried at the base of a tree.

From wire reports

Lighting check

Odessa Parks and Recreation employee Alex Payen checks the LED light bulbs on a Poinsettia Candles display while making final adjustments to Starbright Village at McKinney Park in Odessa, Texas, on Monday. Payen said it takes a crew around two hours to check the 7,330 bulbs on this display.

THE CENSUS

5 — The number of cars a bear in Colorado broke into in three days. The Steamboat Pilot and Today reported that two cars broken into Thursday night were the latest targeted by the same black bear. Colorado Parks and Wildlife Manager Kris Middledorf said he believes a single bear is responsible for the break-ins because they all occurred in the same area of Steamboat Springs. Wildlife officials said they likely will remove a bear trap they had set if they do not catch the bear soon.
“SpongeBob SquarePants’ creator Hillenburg dies

‘SpongeBob SquarePants’ creator Stephen Hillenburg died Monday after a battle with ALS. He was 57.

Hillenburg was diagnosed with ALS in March 2018, but said at the time that he would continue working on “SpongeBob,” the beloved series he created in 1999.

A former marine biologist, Hillenburg blended his love of the sea and an interest in the groundbreaking show, which featured a yellow sponge living in a pineapple under the sea. His voice was something that stuck with me growing up,” said the late actor of the popular animated series.

The show premiered in 1999, and is currently in its 12th season, with more than 500 episodes. “SpongeBob” inspired a feature-length film, one Emmy-awarded show, and a Broadway musical, which debuted in 2017 to critical acclaim.

National Board honors film ‘Green Book’

“Green Book” has been named the year’s best picture by the National Board of Review.

The film recounts the friendship that developed between an ex-tea- memusician (Viggo Mortensen) and his driver (Jared Harris) as they drove through the American South in the early 1960s.

Other top awards went to Bradley Cooper, Lady Gaga, Sam Elliott, Regina King, Paul Schrader, Barry Jenkins, Bob Burnham and the cast of “Crazy Rich Asians.”

The board’s taste often devi- nates from that of the majority of critics and opinion-makers. The NBC last picked the same best picture as the Academy of Mo- tion Picture Arts and Sciences in 2008, when “Slumdog Millionaire” won the Oscar. Last year, the great elect- ion for “The Shape of Water.”

Chen returns to ‘Big Brother’ host job

Julie Chen will return as the host of the CBS reality show “Big Brother: Celebrity Edition” in the aftermath of her husband’s departure from the network.

CBS officially announced Chen’s return in a press release Tuesday, referring to her as “Julie Chen Moonves” in the announcement.

Chen’s husband stepped down from his role of CEO of CBS Corp. in September after numerous accusations and a sexual misconduct.

Moonves has denied the allegations.

Chen, who’s been married to Moonves since 2004, has stood by her husband since the accusations emerged. She announced she was leaving another CBS pro- gram, “The Talk,” in September, but Chen’s recent return as “Big Brother” host was uncertain.

Other news

Steve Wonder wants to raise money through a benefit concert for California wildfire victims.

The Rock legend announced his plan Tuesday to be a fundraiser and first responders who assisted with the fires at the 22nd annual House Full of Toys Benefit Concert on Dec. 9.

The charity billed as “The Stevie Wonder Song Party: A Celebr- a Zation of Life, Love & Music” will be held at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

Martin on tour

Comedians talk about their friendship, new material

BY LINDSEY BAKER

Associated Press

Steve Martin and Martin Short are back on the road again for their new tour “Now You See Them, Soon You Won’t.”

The two comedy legends spoke to The Associated Press recently about the tour, which kicks off its 2019 leg on Jan. 12 in Atlanta, their friendship and when they knew that each would be a success.

AP: Is “Now You See Them, Soon You Won’t” mostly new material?

Martin: A lot of it is. It’s very hard for us to judge what is new because a lot of it is new but it’s in the same framework. What we tried to do is salvage or keep what we suspected the audience wanted to see again, but we try to replace lines and do a little different. If somebody saw the show, they’d say, “That’s a lot of new shows.”

What’s your process for determining what to cut and add?

Martin: OK. It’s trial and error. We work with writers, we work on our own and we put things in, we take things out, and every night after the show we walk off stage and we go, “What should we do, how should we fix that, should we move that line up front?”

Do you allow for spontaneous moments?

Short: You absolutely allow. What a set gives you is the confidence to go out because you know you’re prepared, and you have lots of great material.

Why aren’t all the singing and banjo playing in this go-around?

Martin: Absolutely. We describe the show as a lot of comedy and a little bit of music.

It is incredible that singing and the banjo are ‘side talents for you two.

Short: You know, Marty would never do this, but he could make a serious album and I would listen to it all the time. I find his voice so beautiful.

Martin: It’s very natural for people in comedy to do it. I think it’s very natural for friends, close friends, to do it. And we probably started doing it playing scrubby in the trailer while making ‘Three Amigos.’

Martin: The first day we met, Marty zinged me. He came to my house to pick up the script to ‘Three Amigos’ and he saw all of the paintings and he said, ‘How did you get this rich? I’ve seen the work.’

Short: And I was looking for the script for ‘Three Amigos’ and they said, ‘Can you give this to Martin Short, please?’

You said the previous tour was not a nostalgia tour. Is that still true, and why was that important to specify?

Short: A nostalgia tour would be if I came out as Ed Grimley and we did the ‘Wheel of Fortune’ sketch and hope that that would get some nostalgia. If a singer comes out and sings all old hits, then that is a nostalgia tour and there’s nothing wrong with that and that’s great.

Martin: I think a nostalgia tour implies that you’ll come out and say, “You know, ladies and gentlemen, when I first started, I did a little movie called ‘The Jerk.’” And then you stand there and wait for applause.

Short: And I’d love that show.

What are the goals of this tour?

Martin: Our goal, and sometimes we achieve it, but it’s awfully fun to have a goal.

Will there still be singing and banjo playing in this go-around?

Short: Totally agree. And you don’t always achieve it, but it’s awfully fun to have a goal.

Martin: How could I possibly achieve it with you next to me?

By Lindsey Baker

Associated Press

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Do you allow for spontaneous moments?

Short: You absolutely allow. What a set gives you is the confidence to go out because you know you’re prepared, and you have lots of great material, but then you go out there and you’re so loose that other things happen and sometimes they’re the most delightful.

Do you use one another as a test audience?

Martin: Well, I think each other is our first test audience. And then I tend to just try out mate- rial on my wife and on my dog and on the band. And finally on the audience, who, of course, has the ultimate say. When I first started out, people would say, ‘You have a great sense of humor.’ And I would say, really, the audience has the great sense of humor.

When did you figure it was OK to roast each other?

Martin: Day one.

Short: It’s very natural for people in comedy to do it. I think it’s very natural for friends, close friends, to do it. And we probably started doing it playing scrubby in the trailer while making ‘Three Amigos.’

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Pitch perfect. Beautiful tone. He sings ‘Send in the Clowns’ in the show, and it’s just gorgeous.

Short: Well, thank you. I of course have all Steve’s albums, and one day plan to listen to them.

Was there a moment when you realized this was more than a showbiz friendship?

Martin: Yeah, I would say very early on. We per- severed. When you finish doing a movie, mostly everyone drifts away from each other. We just went and had dinners and saw each other.

Short: I think you make that choice. You have to be conscious and say, you know what? I don’t want to lose that person.

Is there anything else you want people to know about the show?

Martin: Our goal, and sometimes we achieve it, I think, maybe I’m a little arrogant, but we want it to be one of the best shows the audience ever saw. We want to give the audience their money’s worth and really make them laugh and make them really have a good time and leave that theater feeling better than they did when they came in.

Short: Totally agree. And you don’t always achieve it, but it’s awfully fun to have a goal.

Martin: How could I possibly achieve it with you next to me?

Steve Martin and Martin Short, shown in 2017, kick off a comedy tour in the U.S. in January.

ASSOCIATED PRESS
End of the trail?

By David Montero

Los Angeles Times

SPRINGDALE, Utah — The two of them walked slowly in the middle of the ice-cold river, bundled in layers and using their walking sticks to probe the rocky bed for safe footing.

Annie Kitchen had wanted to go on this hike for years. So had Rama Rauitalai.

“Nature. Solitude. Quiet,” Rauitalai said in a voice so soft it was nearly drowned out by the water’s steady current. Above them, the sky was periwinkle and the sun promised more warmth than it was delivering.

They had begun the top-down hike of the Narrows at Zion National Park in Utah in early November because permits were easier to obtain. During the summer, it’s a lottery system. Only 90 people are allowed through the hike daily, and the permits are reserved months in advance. During the winter, snow and cold make access to the trailhead at Chamberlain Ranch mostly inaccessible to hikers.

“We’d been to Zion before, but never done the Narrows,” said Kitchen, 34, of Phoenix. “I heard stories and seen pictures and it looked amazing.”

But Kitchen and Rauitalai, also from Phoenix, could be among the last few people to hike the top-down 16-mile route through the Narrows unless a dispute between a private property owner and the federal government is resolved by a Dec. 31 deadline.

Local resident Scott Bulloch owns hundreds of acres of land that is cut by the Virgin River and, for about 30 years, he and his family have allowed hikers to traverse it on their way to the Temple of Sinawava, one of the park’s most popular destinations.

Bulloch’s attorney, Barry Clarkson, said the family had wanted a permanent solution to the public-private land issue and a few years ago called on the federal government to help purchase it or set up a conservation easement.

Government officials were agreeable to the idea.

The property includes Simon Gulch, a spectacular canyon of walls smoothed by millions of years of wind and river water. There are tall trees and hidden wildlife that include mountain lions, bighorn sheep and ringtail cats.

It’s a place that was made for photography before cameras were ever imagined, but years ago it became the Bullochs’ backyard.

Christopher Hansen, a Park City-based appraiser who was commissioned by the Trust for Public Land, a nonprofit group, to come up with a price for the 880 acres, spent time at Simon Gulch and surveyed the raw land during the summer.

Hansen factored in the most spectacular scenery as well as acreage best used by grazing cattle. He thought he’d nailed down a price everyone would agree upon and delivered the dollar figure in the summer.

The U.S. Forest Service, which had the final say, rejected it, startling Hansen, who has decades of appraisal experience. The Trust for Public Land was chagrined the process had stalled. The Bulloch family was not happy either.

“That was upsetting to my clients,” Clarkson said.

Up went signs warning about trespassing and down went hopes of an immediate resolution.

National Park Service officials stopped issuing permits for the top-down hike. Springdale-based companies that shuttled people up to the Chamberlain Ranch trailhead for the hike worried about lost revenue amid a prolonged closure.

Eager to resolve the issue, officials from Washington County offered to help mediate the dispute, and Bulloch agreed to take down the signs, meaning access through Simon Gulch would be permissible through the end of the year.

A new firm is doing an appraisal of the Bulloch property and is expected to provide its findings in mid-December. Because the Hansen appraisal wasn’t accepted by the Forest Service, its dollar figure was not made public.

Susanne Tracy, spokeswoman for the Forest Service, said in an email that her agency had completed a technical review of Hansen’s appraisal to determine whether it complied with the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions and found it did not.

“The Forest Service … disapproved the appraisal as the basis for acquisition of the Simon Gulch easement,” Tracy wrote.

Hansen said in a phone interview that the government was smearing his reputation and making the Bullochs out to be unreasonable and unwilling sellers.

“They aren’t, he said.

“I view the government as being oppressive in this process and don’t want to pay the fair price,” Hansen said.

Zion National Park, which celebrated its 99th birthday this year, was established as Utah’s first national park by President Woodrow Wilson, but it has long had some access point disputes.

Greg Hiner, southwest director of land protection for the Trust for Public Land, said the organization has been trying to assist in establishing conservation easements throughout Zion National Park’s 147,000 acres for several years. Last month, the trust announced a donation to the National Park Service of a 35-acre inholding known as Firepit Knoll in the Kolob Terrace. That purchase will protect it from future development.

Hiner said access to the Narrows is a high priority for everyone, given its popularity. In 2013, the trust worked out a conservation easement deal with the owners of the Chamberlain Ranch trailhead to provide access into the canyon. He said he remains hopeful a deal can be worked out with the Bullochs.

“I think everybody wants to see it done — and I include the Bulloch family in that,” Hiner said.

The Bullochs say they too want the public to be able to access the Narrows through the top-down hike. Scott Bulloch, who declined an interview with the Los Angeles Times, told the Salt Lake Tribune last month that the issue involves a matter of fairness.

“When the Forest Service people came down and looked at the (Simon Gulch) property, they said this land is priceless. Yet they don’t want to give us anything for it,” Bulloch said. “You can’t compare it with neighboring ranch land because it is the only property with the Zion Narrows.”

Knaus advises hiker Annie Kitchen, of Phoenix that she and her companion are hiking on private land.
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Midterm voter turnout strong, but still not stellar

**By Amy Eskind**

Special to the Los Angeles Times

Our democracy just won the trophy for most lackluster. Voter turnout among the 18-24 year-olds was only 26 percent, with only slightly over 40 percent of the electorate voting at all. Still, 6.9 million voters abstained.

Starting from 2016, Rock the Vote, Vote.org and other nonprofits and PACs used texting, social media, seminars, press conferences, partnerships to disseminate information on how to register and vote. Celebrities, politicians, influencers and even country music star Swift took a stand on social media. Rihan-na wrote on Instagram: “Who is awake this morning? I am”

Increased turnout among young people is a conundrum. Research shows those contacted directly by candidates or other outreach campaigns are more likely to vote, but campaigns understandably focus their efforts on likely voters, not first-timers. Two-thirds of this age group were never contacted, according to researchers at Tufts University.

Outreach to the Latino community did a little better. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee spent $30 million on reaching Latino voters this cycle. Voto Latino and others helped register voters in key states. The College Democrats put students in评议 with regulators, local communities and labor unions. But that America vanished decades ago, and GM can’t afford to try where what’s good for big business is the only priority.

The United States has long professed the merits of democracy around the world, but it does not do better overseas. Truly, we should aspire to rank among the top in turnout in developed countries. Believing that election cycle was over, 65 percent of Latino voters who cast a ballot is a reasonable goal for us. For the U.S. to deserve a Democracy trophy, and not just Most Improved, we want it aim higher. Yes, more than 116 million voted, but almost 120 million didn’t.

Megan McArdle, a Washington Post opinions columnist, is a former columnist for Bloomberg View and author of "The Up Side of Down: Why Failure Is the Key to Success."
Cloud 9: Microsoft stock soars past rivals

By Matt O’Brien
Associated Press

Wall Street investors are enamored with a newly emergent tech company. It has nothing to do with posting selfies or finding a soul mate. The company is making billions of dollars selling cloud-computing and other technical services to offices around the world.

Say hello to Microsoft, the 1990s home-computing powerhouse that has a renaissance moment — eclipsing Facebook, Google, Amazon and other tech darlings of the late decade.

Now it is close to surpassing Apple as the world’s most valuable publicly traded company. As other tech giants stumble, its steady resilience is paying off.

That Microsoft is even close to eclipsing Apple — and did so briefly a few times this week — would have been unheard of just a few years ago.

But under CEO Satya Nadella, Microsoft has found stability by moving away from its flagship Windows operating system and focusing on cloud-computing services with long-term business contracts.

“They’ve finally turned the corner and have become a viable cloud player,” said Daniel Morgan, senior portfolio manager for Synovus Trust. “They’ve made a very strong transition away from the desktop.”

A brief period of trading Monday was the first time in more than eight years that Microsoft was worth more than Apple. Microsoft surpassed Apple again briefly Tuesday before Apple closed on top with a market value of $827 billion, just 0.5 percent behind.

Apple’s friends with long-term business customers in recent years.

Just a few years ago, Microsoft’s prospects looked bleak.

Microsoft became a contender in large part because Apple’s stock has fallen 25 percent since early October, while Microsoft hasn’t done as well.

The fact that it hasn’t done poorly is a reflection of its steady focus on business customers in recent years.

But a turnaround began when the Redmond, Wash., company promoted Nadella as CEO in 2014. He succeeded Microsoft’s longtime CEO, Steve Ballmer, who initially scoffed at the notion that people would be willing to pay $500 or more for Apple’s iPhones.

Windows is now a fraction of Microsoft’s business. While the company still runs consumer-focused businesses such as Bing search and Xbox gaming, it has prioritized business-oriented services such as its Office line of email and other workplace software, as well as newer additions such as LinkedIn and Skype.

And its biggest growth has happened in the cloud, particularly the cloud platform it calls Azure. Cloud computing now accounts for more than a quarter of Microsoft’s revenue, and Microsoft rivals Amazon as a leading provider of such services.

Being less reliant on consumer demand helped shield Microsoft from holiday season turbulence and U.S.-China trade war jitters affecting Apple and other tech companies.

President Donald Trump amplified those tariff concerns when he announced earlier this month amid fears about how the technology industry will fare in the face of such threats as rising interest rates, increased government regulation and Trump’s escalating trade war with China.

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella looks on during a video as he delivers the keynote address at Build, the company’s annual conference for software developers, in Seattle in May. Microsoft is threatening to overtake Apple as the world’s most valuable publicly traded company.
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**PAGE 23**

**Thursday, November 29, 2018**

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NEW YORK — The 151 remaining free agents presented the following information to clubs qualifying-offering.

FREE AGENTS

Wilson Ramos, c.
Joakim Soria, rhp.
Austin Jackson, of;
Jose Lobaton, c;
Ryan Madson, rhp.
Matt Wieters, lhp;
Daniel Murphy, 2b;
Bobby Wilson, c;
Mauricio Herrera, 1b

College basketball

Pro soccer

MLS plays

BOSTON (8) — Adam Jones, of
Chicago Cubs (10) — Ryan Sadowski, rhp
CINCINNATI (1) — Tony Barnette, rhp
Cleveland Indians (9) — Jose Bautista, of
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Arkansas (9-2)
Southern (12-0)

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NFL

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College football

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NFL

College basketball

Pro soccer
Top 25 roundup

Louisville upends No. 9 Michigan St.

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — No matter what line he shot from behind against No. 9 Michigan State, Louisville junior guard Ryan McMahon was feeling it. The Cardinals fed off his energy to not only give first-year coach Chris Mack a significant win, but a gutsy one at that.

McMahon made two free throws with 7.1 seconds remaining in overtime before Jordan Nwora made another from the line with 3.1 seconds left to seal it as Louisville upset the Spartans 82-78 on Tuesday night in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

McMahon scored all seven of his points in the extra session from the foul line to finish with a career-high 24. Highlighting that total was 12-for-13 free-throw shooting and four three-pointers to top his previous best of 15 points last tied in January against Pittsburgh. He missed his one two-point attempt, but that was forgotten as he converted frequent opportunities at the line.

"I would say it's being aggressive," McMahon said. "It really helps when I'm knocking down shots, too, because then guys have to play me a little bit tighter, they've got to run out at me a bit longer and I can get a step on them and cause help to come over or the guy on me has to foul me." Nwora's clinching free throw followed his three-pointer with 2:05 left that gave the Cardinals (4-2) the lead for good in an exciting matchup that ended a two-game slide and followed a 77-76 loss to Marquette in OT on Friday in Brooklyn, N.Y.

No. 3 Duke 90, Indiana 69: Zion Williamson scored 25 points, RJ Barrett added 22 and the host Blue Devils routed the Hoosiers in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

No. 5 Nevada 79, Loyola-Chicago 65: Caleb Martin had 21 points, twin brother Cody Martin scored 20 and the visiting Wolf Pack beat the Ramblers in an NCAA Tournament rematch.

Loyola beat Nevada by one point in the NCAA South Regional semifinals last season.

Penn State 63, No. 13 Virginia Tech 62: Myreon Jones scored 13 of his 18 points in the second half to lead the Nittany Lions to an upset win of the visiting Hokies.

No. 14 Iowa 69, Pitt 68: Freshman guard Joe Wieskamp had 18 points and 11 rebounds, Nicholas Baer scored 14 of his 16 points in the second half and the host Hawkeyes held off the Panthers for their third win over a ranked team.

No. 22 Wisconsin 79, N.C. State 75: Ethan Happ had 19 points and 11 rebounds, D'Mitrik Trice hit a long jumper with 23.6 seconds left and the host Badgers withstood the Wolfpack's in-your-face defense to rally for a win.

"But I think he's himself. I don't think there's any person in the league who's like Elias Pettersson. He brings his own element to the game." Virtanen is struck by Pettersson's savvy and intelligence.

"His IQ on the ice is beyond mine and beyond our team's," he said. "I think. It's pretty funny. When you see him out there, he's just thinking of stuff to do that no one else would really think of."

Vancouver Canucks rookie Elias Pettersson broke up the Vaxjo Lakers in Sweden last year. He says everyone knew right away he was a "special talent" with an insatiable work ethic.

"He's a perfectionist. When he sets his mind to something, he will accomplish it," Calof wrote in an email to The Canadian Press from Russia, where he plays in the Kontinental Hockey League.

Virtanen said being mentioned alongside Gretzky is a great honor, though it's one he isn't entirely comfortable with.

"I don't think anyone should be compared to him because he's the greatest ever," he said.

In October, Pettersson was named the league's rookie of the month despite missing two weeks because of a concussion from a hit by Florida's Mike Matheson on Oct. 13. In early November, he became the youngest Canuck to have a five-point game when he helped Vancouver edge Colorado 7-6 in overtime.

The 6-foot-2, 176-pound Swede is quiet and humble off the ice. On it, he has shown he is more than an offensive juggernaut. He blocks shots and delivers hard back checks.

"I see shades of (former Detroit Red Wing) Pavel Datsyuk and those type of players in him," Vancouver center Bo Horvat said. "Just his hands, the way he moves out there.

The Winnipeg Jets' Josh Morrissey, left, and the Canucks' Elias Pettersson collide during the second period of Monday's game in Vancouver, British Columbia. Pettersson, a rookie, already has 13 goals.

"I think he's possibly one of the best players in the NHL already," Canucks right wing Jake Virtanen said. "He's very fun to watch and obviously a treat to have on our team."

Wayne Gretzky recently spoke about Pettersson on a Vancouver radio station, saying he sees similarities in how they both play.

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Sabres stretch win streak to 10

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Perfect it wasn’t. The Buffalo Sabres still made it to 10.

After squandering a 2-0 lead in the third period, Jeff Skinner scored 1:41 into overtime to seal a 3-2 win over the San Jose Sharks on Tuesday night.

“Well, you can count the gray hairs on the back of my head,” coach Phil Housley said with a chuckle. “But the guys dug in.”

Buffalo matched its longest winning streak in franchise history, and is enjoying the NHL’s best run since the Columbus Blue Jackets won 10 in a row from Nov. 29, 2016, to Jan. 3, 2017.

None of the 10 games have been decided by one goal, and this marked the seventh one decided after regulation — and third in a row.

“When it’s a tight game, we feel confident. If we’re down we don’t panic,” said defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, who was driving Evander Kane to the loose circle. Skinner followed by beating Carter Hutton to the five-hole, lifting visiting Ottawa to the win in Philadelphia’s first game since it fired general manager Ron Hextall.

The Ottawa Senators’ Ben Harpur, top, fights the Flyers’ Dale Weise. (AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar)

Golden Knights, Blackhawks: Cody Eakin and Shea Theodore each had two goals and an assist, and visiting Vegas picked up its season-high fourth consecutive victory by beating Chicago.

Avalanche, Predators: Nathan MacKinnon scored a career-best winning streak to eight, and Semyon Varlamov made 36 saves for steering Colorado into its opening-round matchup against Buffalo.

Tyson Jost had the other goal for the Avalanche, who have won five straight.

The play began when Sharks goalie Martin Jones poke checked the puck away from Sharks defenceman Rasmus Dahlin, who was driving to the net from the right point. Skinner followed by beating Evander Kane to the loose puck, faked going to his forehand and backhanded a shot behind Jones.

“I lost sight of it, but Rass made a great play, made their goalie complicate it,” Skinner said. “I just kind of walked into one that was in the slot.”

Nathan Beaulieu also scored for Buffalo. Carter Hutton stopped the first 32 shots he faced and 36 overall to extend his personal-al best winning streak to eight, during which he’s allowed just 15 goals.

Senators, Flyers: Brady Tkachuk scored twice in the first period and Matt Duchene scored the eventual winner with 2:59 left, lifting visiting Ottawa to the win in Philadelphia’s first game since it fired general manager Ron Hextall.

Pucks 3, Lightning 1: Ryan Miller made 34 saves and Nick Ritchie had a goal and an assist to lead visiting Anaheim past Tampa Bay.


Golden Knights, Blackhawks: Cody Eakin and Shea Theodore each had two goals and an assist, and visiting Vegas picked up its season-high fourth consecutive victory by beating Chicago.

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NUGGETS ROLL OVER LAKERS

Associated Press

DENVER — The Denver Nuggets have never been better against the Lakers.

Paul Millsap, Jamal Murray and Malik Beasley scored 20 points apiece, and the Nuggets rolled to their most lopsided victory ever over Los Angeles, a 117-85 rout on Tuesday night.

The 32-point margin surpassed the Lakers 135-119 win at Madison Square Garden on Nov. 14, 1961, the previous record.

The Nuggets scored a season-high 31 points in the first quarter to beat host Memphis.

Nikola Jokic added 14 points and 17 rebounds, and Paul Millsap, Jamal Murray and Brandon Ingram each scored 20 for the Nuggets, who won their 11th of 14 games this season.

The Lakers, who handed the Nuggets a 28-point loss on Nov. 8, face another poor shooting night as they fell to 9-16 in their last 16 games.

The Lakers had a brutal first quarter, and it got no better as the night went on.

Dwane Casey, although nine of their victories have been against good teams and really good play-ers. Tonight was another example of that.”

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Teams add game lost to Florence

By Pete Iacobelli
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, S.C. — Hurricane Florence and the impending bowl season have South Carolina and Virginia Tech closing their football seasons against teams that won't be on the field Saturday.

Both schools canceled games on Sept. 15 because of the storm heading for the Virginia and Carolina coastlines. Now they've scheduled replacement games.

The Gamecocks (6-5) will host Akron (4-7) on Saturday looking to improve their bowl standing, while the Hokies (5-6) play in Blacksburg to take on Virginia Tech.

The Gamecocks and Hokies were eliminated from conference titles after losing to Florida State and Notre Dame, respectively, in the first week of the season.

Mullens cited Oklahoma's historic offense. The Sooners are on pace to set an FBS record for yards per play, averaging 8.92. "They have had a challenge, their offense has been superior," Mullens said.

The top three teams in the selection committee's rankings held steady for a fourth straight week. Alabama, Clemson and Notre Dame — all of whom are ranked Nos. 1, 2 and 3. Georgia moved into the fourth spot that was previously occupied by Michigan, heading into its SEC championship game against Alabama on Saturday in Atlanta. That leaves one spot very much in play.

No. 3 Notre Dame faces No. 2 Clemson on Saturday in Indianapolis and the winner's conference championship game will likely be the Sugar Bowl. That leaves the ACC's Atlantic Coast Conference championship game.

The Sooners are ranked No. 5 in the CFP rankings, the Buckeyes No. 6 and the Sooners want to avoid playing Ohio State. "We know what it's like not to be in the ACC conference championship game," he said. "It's definitely nothing to be taken lightly."
Broncos don’t worry about getting credit

BY ARNIE STAPLETON
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. — First, Keenan Allen disses Denver. Then, John Smith-Schuster says the Steelers beat themselves.

Seems nobody wants to give the resurgent Denver Broncos any credit, and that’s just fine with them.

“This defense is built to stop anybody in this league,” safety Darian Stewart said in the aftermath of Denver’s second straight win over a team that hadn’t lost since September.

In the past two weeks, the Broncos (5-6) have snatched six-game winning streaks by the Chargers (8-3) and the Steelers (7-3-1) despite allowing a whopping 1,006 yards and watching Pittsburgh and Los Angeles outgain them through the air by a staggering 425 yards.

They’ve clawed their way back into the AFC playoff conversation, however, by piling up seven takeaways and committing zero turnovers.

Allen refused to give any credit to his AFC West rivals after Philip Rivers threw for 401 yards and the Chargers controlled the clock for nearly 38 minutes two weeks ago in a last-second loss to the Broncos.

“No, I don’t think they played well at all,” Allen snapped. “We dominated the game. Turnovers, we gave them some points and that’s what happened. They sucked.”

The Steelers dominated the clock Sunday, holding the ball for 35 minutes to Denver’s 25, and Ben Roethlisberger threw for 404 yards, including a 97-yard touchdown toss to Smith-Schuster that put Pittsburgh ahead 17-10 before the Broncos turned a 13-catch, 189-yard afternoon. “But ... I felt we beat the Steelers,” Joseph said. “I’ve seen in five years from that team.”

Although the Broncos are allowing more than 500 yards a game the last two weeks, they’ve only yielded 19.5 points with seven takeaways.

“People are going to make yards. Yesterday, we saw more RPOs from Pittsburgh than I’ve seen in five years from that team,” Joseph said. “That’s the league now. It looks like run but it’s pass. It’s almost impossible to defend, so you have to be a great tackling team and just keep the deep ball from beating you, get off the field on third downs and take the ball away. That’s the league, that’s where it’s going.”

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Broncos defensive end Shelby Harris celebrates his stop of Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger at the goal line during the second half on Sunday. Harris also had an interception.

“You do because they’re going to make yards. Yesterday, we saw more RPOs from Pittsburgh than I’ve seen in five years from that team,” Joseph said. “That’s the league now. It looks like run but it’s pass. It’s almost impossible to defend, so you have to be a great tackling team and just keep the deep ball from beating you, get off the field on third downs and take the ball away. That’s the league, that’s where it’s going.”

The Redskins fully understand the severity of the recent allegations made against Reuben,” Williams said. “If true, you can be sure these allegations are nothing our organization would ever condone.

“Let me be clear, Reuben will have to go through numerous steps including the full legal process, an investigation and potential discipline from the NFL, as well as meetings with counselors and the organization. He will not play any more games this season before he will ever have the opportunity to wear the burgundy and gold as a player.”

Colts short-handed for possible playoff push

BY MICHAEL MAROT
Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Andrew Luck might be playing the best football of his career.

He’s still going to need help reaching the playoffs with mounting injuries threatening to derail the Indianapolis Colts’ late season push.

One week after starting center Ryan Kelly escaped a serious knee injury and one day after coach Frank Reich announced tight end Jack Doyle would miss the rest of the season with an injured kidney, Luck and his teammates started preparing for the closing five-game stretch that will determine whether they end a three-year playoff drought.

“We’ve done it before,” tight end Eric Ebron said Tuesday after watching the quarterback’s status for Sunday’s game against San Francisco. “Everybody has to take on a heavier workload.”

Doyle was injured late in the third quarter or early in the fourth, returned for two plays before leaving for good and then wound up in the hospital Sunday night for what Reich called a “procedure.”

But the hits have come hard and fast for Indy (6-5), which has won five straight to jump back into the playoff conversation.

Kelly missed last week’s game with a strained medial collateral ligament and without him, the Colts allowed their first sack in six games. Luck went 249 consecutive drop-backs without being sacked, the longest streak of his pro career.

Kelly’s status for this week is now in question after the team announced Tuesday he felt much better and was running on the treadmill.

Running back Marlon Mack entered the concussion protocol during the fourth quarter Sunday, did not return and now his status also is in doubt this weekend.

If he can’t go, the Colts will be down to their two rookies — Nyheim Hines and Jordan Wilkins — and possibly Jonathan Williams, presuming nobody else is signed. Williams hasn’t played since Indy signed him to the practice squad Oct. 2. He was promoted to the active roster last week.

One saving grace for Indy: Rookie linebacker Darius Leonard escaped a serious knee injury that briefly knocked him out of Sunday’s game after the first offensive play. Leonard returned and finished the game, but the Indianapolis Colts continue to lead the NFL with 114 tackles despite missing one game in October.

Doyle’s absence leaves a big hole on the field — and in the locker room.

“Running,” Ebron said. “I’m more hurt because of the type of player he is and what he means to this team and to me. But we’ve already done it before. We just have to adjust a few things.”

Redskins claim ex-49er Foster

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
Associated Press

ASHBURN, Va. — The Washington Redskins claimed Reuben Foster off waivers Tuesday after the San Francisco 49ers released the linebacker following a domestic violence arrest, though it’s unclear if or when he’ll suit up for them.

The team announced the move in a statement from senior vice president of player personnel Doug Williams acknowledging the circumstances surrounding Foster.

“The Redskins fully understand the severity of the recent allegations made against Reuben,” Williams said. “If true, you can be sure these allegations are nothing our organization would ever condone.

“Let me be clear, Reuben will have to go through numerous steps including the full legal process, an investigation and potential discipline from the NFL, as well as meetings with counselors and the organization. He will not play any more games this season before he will ever have the opportunity to wear the burgundy and gold as a player.”

The NFL put Foster on the Commissioner Exempt list, and he can’t practice or attend games while the league continues to re-review his situation. It was not immediately clear if or when Foster would report to the team’s facility, where he is allowed to be for meetings, individual workouts, therapy and rehabilitation and other non-football activities.

The team says conversations with former Alabama teammates led to the decision to claim Foster. There are seven other Alabama products on the team.

“Nothing is promised to Reuben, but we are hopeful being around so many of his former teammates and friends will eventually allow him with the best possible environment to succeed both personally and professionally,” Williams said.

Foster was arrested Saturday night for an incident at the 49ers’ team hotel in Tampa, and he was released the next morning before their game against the Buccaneers. Reports emerged later Sunday that police had called on Oct. 12 for another incident between Foster and the woman in Santa Clara.
Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, center, links arms with players as they march on the field before the 2017 Atlantic Coast Conference championship game. The second-ranked Tigers will face Pittsburgh for the ACC title Saturday night. Swinney says previous title game experience will help the No. 2 Tigers.

Sticking to the routine

No. 2 Clemson settles into familiar ACC title game prep for Pittsburgh

BY PETE IACOBELLI
Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. Clemson safety Denzel Johnson is very familiar with the routine leading up to the Atlantic Coast Conference championship game. Like most of his Tigers teammates, he’s been through it before.

No. 2 Clemson (12-0, CFP No. 2) is seeking its fourth consecutive ACC crown and the Atlantic Division champ has a big edge in experience over first-time Coastal Division winner Pittsburgh (7-5). The Tigers topped North Carolina that year, Virginia Tech in 2016 and Miami a year ago.

Clemson co-offensive coordinator Tony Elliott often doesn’t have to tell players what to expect out of each other.

“The consistency in routine is something Clemson coach Dabo Swinney has built into his program since he got the full-time job after the 2008 season. Players can’t perform at their best each game if they think some games are bigger than others, Swinney believes. So he’s kept the focus on the Tigers and not on the opponent, the start time or how high the stakes might be. All of that, though, is magnified for Clemson in this one.

A victory over Pitt would make Clemson the ACC’s first ever with four consecutive championship game victories. It would also

SEE ROUTINE ON PAGE 29

Sabres match record with 10-game streak

OU over OSU

Sooners up to 5th, Buckeyes 6th in new CFP rankings » Page 29