US attacks
American strike kills top Iranian general Soleimani

US plans to deploy 3,000 additional troops to region

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

IRBIL, Iraq — A U.S. airstrike killed the general in charge of Iran's elite Quds Force early Friday in Baghdad, a move that prompted threats from Iran and plans for the deployment of 3,000 additional U.S. troops to the Mideast.

"At the direction of the President, the U.S. military has taken decisive defensive action to protect U.S. personnel abroad by killing [Qassem] Soleimani," the Pentagon said in a statement. "Soleimani was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region."

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei declared three days of mourning for Soleimani, stating "severe revenge awaits the criminals who bloodied their foul hands with his blood and other martyrs' in last night's incident," according to news reports.

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Iran vows ‘harsh’ response

By Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Zeina Karam
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iran vowed "harsh retaliation" for a U.S. airstrike near Baghdad's airport that killed a top Iranian general who had been the architect of its interventions across the Middle East.

The killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's elite Quds Force, marks a major escalation in the standoff between Washington and Iran, which has careened from one crisis to another since President Donald Trump withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal and imposed crippling sanctions.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned that "harsh retaliation is waiting" for the U.S. after the airstrike, calling Soleimani the "international face of resistance." Khamenei declared three days of public mourning and appointed Maj. Gen. Esmail Ghaani, Soleimani's deputy, to replace him as head of the Quds Force.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani called the killing a "heinous crime" and vowed his country would "take revenge."

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Titans’ Henry ready to carry the load » NFL playoffs, Back page
Some flavors exempt from Trump’s vaping ban

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — U.S. health officials will begin cracking down on most flavored e-cigarettes that are popular with underage teenagers, but their plan includes major exceptions that benefit vaping manufacturers, retailers and adults who use the nicotine-delivery devices.

The Trump administration announced Thursday that it will prohibit fruit, candy, mint and dessert flavors from small, cartridge-based e-cigarettes favored by high school and middle school students. But menthol and tobacco-flavored e-cigarettes will be allowed to remain on the market.

The targeted flavor ban will also entirely exempt large, tank-based vaping devices, which are primarily sold in vape shops that cater to adult smokers.

Together, the two exemptions represent a significant retreat from President Donald Trump’s original plan announced four months ago, which would have banned all vaping flavors — including menthol — from all types of e-cigarettes. The new policy will spare a significant portion of the multimillion-dollar vaping market. And the changes mark a major victory for thousands of vape shop owners who sell the tank-based systems, which allow users to mix customized nicotine flavors.

Anti-tobacco advocates immediately condemned the decision, accusing the administration of caving to industry pressure.

EXCHANGE RATES

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The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
Trump takes gamble with death of Soleimani

By TRACY WILKINSON, MELISSA ETHEHAD AND CHRIS MEGREIAN
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — In ordering the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, one of Iran’s highest-ranking officials, President Donald Trump has taken one of the biggest gambles of his presidency — a step that appears to lead the U.S. on a path toward escalated warfare and that could spark a sharp break from his often-stated desire to pull American forces out of conflicts in the Middle East.

Throughout his presidency, Trump has made fiery statements but has typically resisted dramatic belligerent actions. He has promised his supporters that he would use decisive violence against U.S. enemies, but he also promised to stay out of wars in the Middle East and to bring U.S. troops home.

Outside analysts — and some of Trump’s former advisors — have repeatedly warned that the president’s pledges could not be reconciled.

Until now, when his goals clashed, Trump has typically pulled back. In June, for example, he gave a last-minute order to stop an airstrike against Iran planned in retaliation for Tehan’s shooting down of an unmanned American drone. Nor did he order a military response to attacks on Saudi oil installations in the fall that U.S. and Saudi officials blamed on Iran.

The decision to kill Soleimani, the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps’ elite Quds Force, who was sometimes described as the second-most-powerful official in the Islamic Republic, would mark a radical shift. It appears to represent a bet that Iran, faced by a decisive military threat, will back down, not escalate.

Iran will now have to “reexamine the limitations of the violence they can bring to the table,” said one senior congressional Republican official, speaking on condition of anonymity. The official predicted “some face-saving retaliation in Yemen or Lebanon, maybe Afghanistan,” but not more.

Others were deeply skeptical of such assertions. While the U.S. undoubtedly has overwhelming superiority in conventional military power, the Iranians, even without Soleimani, will be able to launch guerrilla-style operations throughout the Middle East and possibly beyond, they said.

Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said in a statement waiting. “The U.S. and Iran have been engaged in a dangerous tit-for-tat for months now, but this is a massive walk up the escalation ladder,” said Charles Lister, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington. “There really is no underestimating the geopolitical ramifications of this.”

While U.S. forces have killed leaders of al-Qaida and other militant groups, targeting high-ranking officials of other governments has been a line that American officials have seldom crossed except during wars. Not since President Ronald Reagan ordered an airstrike against Libya in 1986 that came close to killing that country’s leader at the time, Moammar Gadhafi has the U.S. taken an action comparable to the attack on Soleimani.

To heighten the political risk, Trump appears to have acted without advance consultation with Congress, breaking with longstanding practice. Congressional Democrats quickly criticized the president for acting unilaterally.

Administration officials say that Trump authorized the strike because Soleimani, who has long directed the actions of Iranian-backed militia groups that have attacked U.S. forces in Iraq and elsewhere, was planning further attacks on American personnel.

Critics, however, accused Trump of recklessness. The immediate chain of events leading to the strike began late in December when a missile attack against an Israeli military base killed an American contractor. U.S. officials blamed the attack on Iranian-backed militia groups and responded with airstrikes that killed 25 people.

That, in turn, led to the storming this week of the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad by pro-Iranian militia members. At that point, a senior administration official said Thursday, the “game has changed.” Administration supporters said the strike would be a major setback to Iran.

Soleimani’s “death is a huge loss for Iran’s regime and its Iraqi proxies, and a major operational and psychological victory for the United States,” said James Carafano of the conservative Heritage Foundation, which often advises Trump on foreign policy.

Ariane Tabatabai, a Middle East expert at Rand Corp., said Soleimani “single-handedly controlled Iran’s relationships with various militia groups and terrorists in the region.” From Afghanistan to Lebanon and Yemen and Syria, he played a key role in building Iran’s network of allied groups across the Middle East, which included Shiite militias in Iraq and much of Lebanon.

Soleimani was a major figure in the highest levels of Iranian decision making, reporting directly to the supreme leader and overseeing military training and financing as well as weapons sales and transfers. He also took a highly public role as an Iranian symbol, often photographed on regional battlefields to underscore Iran’s support for its allies.

“He would run around the battlefield with a microphone and tell his fighters and try to boost their morale,” Tabatabai said.

As a result, killing him sent a strong message to Iran and its allies, she said.

Congress divided over US strike on Iranian commander

By HANNAH KNOWLES
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The U.S. airstrike that killed a powerful Iranian commander Thursday has sharply divided Washington lawmakers and revitalized a debate over presidential powers.

Republicans praised President Donald Trump for a decisive blow against a general the United States regards as a war criminal responsible for hundreds of American deaths.

Democrats expressed concerns that killing Soleimani — who with Iran is a dangerous step toward war and complained that Trump ordered the strike against Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani without congressional input.

In a display of resolve and strength, we struck the leader of those attacking our sovereign U.S. territories.

House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., offered his congratulations to President Trump on his decisive action and successful outcome and said in a statement that “the U.S. will always vigorously defend our interests and allies in the face of terrorist conduct and provocations.”

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Eliot Engel, D-N.Y., had a different outlook. Soleimani “had the blood of Americans on his hands and I won’t grieve his death,” he said in a statement.

“But many will consider him a martyr and I’m deeply concerned about the repercussions of tonight’s strike.”

Echoing Pelosi, Engel added that the strike “went forward with no notification or consultation with Congress. To push ahead with an action of this gravity without involving Congress raises serious legal problems and is an affront to Congress’s powers as a coequal branch of government. Even if this strike was in self-defense and to current presidential authorization covered it and the President needs to notify Congress within 48 hours pursuant to the War Powers Resolution. The law requires notification so the President can’t just show up to Congress and claim constitutional authority and the House and Senate need to vote on the authorization.”

SOURCE: THE WASHINGTON POST
Response: Iranian council conducts special session to make ‘appropriate decisions’

FROM FRONT PAGE

Irans twice summoned the Swiss envoy, the first time delivering a letter to pass onto the United States.

Thousands of worshippers in the Iranian capital Tehran took to the streets after Friday Muslim prayers to condemn the killing, waving posters of Soleimani and chanting “Death to deceitful America.”

The targeted strike, and any retaliation by Iran, could ignite a conflict that engulfes the whole region, endangering U.S. troops in Iraq, Syria and beyond. Over the last two decades, Soleimani had assembled a network of heavily armed allies stretching all the way to southern Lebanon, on Israel’s doorstep.

However, the attack may act as a deterrent for Iran and its allies to delay or restrain any potential response. Oil prices surged on news of the airstrike and markets were mixed.

The killing promised to further strain relations with Iran’s government, which is allied with both Washington and Tehran and has been deeply worried about becoming a battleground in their rivalry. Iraq’s political system is too divided to consider Iran for the country to order U.S. forces out.

The Defense Department said it killed Soleimani, 62, because he “was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service members in Iraq and throughout the region.” It also accused Soleimani of approving the orchestrated violent protests at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

The strike, on an access road near Baghdad’s airport, was carried out Friday by an American drone, according to a U.S. official.

Soleimani had just disembarked from a plane arriving from either Syria or Lebanon, a senior Iraqi security official said. The blast tore his body to pieces along with that of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, deputy commander of the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq known as the Popular Mobilization Forces. A senior politician said Soleimani’s body was identified by the ring he wore. Iran’s state TV said Friday 10 people were killed in the airstrike, including five Revolutionary Guard members and Soleimani’s son-in-law, whom he did not identify.

While Iran’s conventional military has suffered under 40 years of American sanctions, Iran can strike asymmetrically in the region through its allied forces like Lebanon’s Hezbollah, Israeli militias and Yemen’s Houthi rebels. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah called on “the resistance and the world over” to avenge Soleimani’s killing. Frictions over oil shipments in the Gulf could also increase, and Iran’s elite Revolutionary Guard has built up a ballistic missile program.

Iran’s Supreme National Security Council said it in a statement Friday that it had held a special session and made “appropriate decisions” on how to respond, though it didn’t reveal them.

Strike: US plans to deploy troops from 82nd Airborne to Middle East

FROM FRONT PAGE

The Associated Press reported later Friday that the U.S. planned to deploy nearly 3,000 more troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the Mideast, citing defense officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a decision not yet announced by the Pentagon.

The troops are in addition to about 700 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne who deployed to Kuwait earlier this week after the storming of the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad by Iran-backed militias and their supporters.

Also reportedly killed in Friday morning’s attack was Abu Mahdi Muhandis, a senior leader of a paramilitary wing of Iraq’s security forces and founder of Kataeb Hezbollah, an Iran-backed Shiite militia group with a long history of fighting American forces in Iraq. The Pentagon blamed the group for a rocket attack in Kirkuk that killed a U.S. civilian contractor last week.

Defense Department officials accused Soleimani of orchestrating last week’s Kirkuk attack, as well as many others in recent months that have killed and wounded both American and coalition service members.

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps confirmed the deaths in a statement to the country’s state-owned Tasnim news agency.

The attack reportedly happened at about 1 a.m. Social media users said they heard explosions, followed by sounds of military aircraft.

The strike was confirmed about 45 minutes later by the Iraqi government’s security information cell, which posted photos of burning vehicles near the airport on its Facebook page, attributing the damage to a rocket attack.

A drone actually conducted the strike, a security official with knowledge of the event who spoke on condition of anonymity told Stars and Stripes.

Seven people were killed in Friday’s strike, an official with an Iran-backed paramilitary force told the AP.

Also among the dead was Mohammed Redha, a senior member of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units — an umbrella group of paramilitary forces that Muhandis was deputy commander of, and which included Kataeb Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militias, as well as other groups that have fought the Islamic State since 2014.

A State Department security alert Friday urged all Americans to leave Iraq immediately due to the “heightened tensions in Iraq and the region,” restating an advisory issued Wednesday after Iran-backed militias attacked the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad.

The militia members breached the embassy gates on New Year’s Eve, withdrawing from the area the next day after a contingent of about 100 Marines arrived from Kuwait to bolster the diplomatic mission.

The attack on Soleimani came hours after Defense Secretary Mark Esper urged Iran and its proxies to stand down.

“We will not accept continued attacks against our personnel and forces,” he said in a statement Thursday. “Attacks against us will be met with responses in the time, manner, and place of our choosing.”

Soleimani’s Quds Force trains, funds and equips Iranian proxy groups, including Kataeb Hezbollah and others that fought American forces after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Both the Quds Force and Hezbollah are U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations.

After rocket attacks on bases housing American troops in early December — some of the 11 carried out in the past two months that have mostly wounded Iraqis — U.S. officials called on the Iraqi government to do more to prevent them and warned of decisive action if they continued.

Then, last Friday, a barrage of rockets hit the K1 base in Kirkuk, killing an American civilian contractor and wounding four U.S. and two Iraqi service members. The Defense Department countered with airstrikes targeting five Kataeb Hezbollah sites in southern Iraq.

The air raids killed at least 25 and wounded dozens more, which spurred the U.S. Embassy militia attack.

“General Soleimani also approved the attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad,” the Pentagon said in its statement confirming the attack that killed him.

“This strike was aimed at deterring future Iranian attack plans,” said the U.S. prime minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi, whom Esper had warned of the strikes on Kataeb Hezbollah shortly before they were carried out, criticized the Pentagon’s strikes as a violation of the country’s sovereignty.

Mahdi, who is acting in a caretaker role after recently resigning his post, has called for a review of Iran’s relationship with the United States. Iran-backed militia groups also promised to press the Iraqi parliament to move to evict the U.S. military from Iraq in the fight against ISIS.

The U.S. has sent roughly 14,000 troops to the Middle East since last summer. In response to the embassy siege, Esper ordered some 750 infantry troops from the Army’s 82nd Airborne Division to deploy to the region.

The first wave of the troops from the division’s 1st Brigade Combat Team arrived at Kuwait’s Al Asad Air Base on Thursday.

“The United States will continue to take all necessary actions to protect our people and our interests wherever they are around the world,” the Pentagon said in a statement Friday.
Iranian commander blamed for US deaths

Gen. Qassem Soleimani crafted policy in Syria, Iraq for more than a decade

BY NASSER KARIMI AND JON GAMBRELL
Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — For Iranians whose icons since the Islamic Revolution have been stern-faced clerics and dour soldiers, Qassem Soleimani widely represented a figure of national resilience in the face of four decades of U.S. pressure.

For the U.S. and Israel, he was a shadowy figure in command of Iran's proxy forces, responsible for fighters in Syria backing President Bashar Assad and for the deaths of American troops in Iraq.

Soleimani survived the horror of Iran's long war in the 1980s with Iraq to take control of the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, responsible for the Islamic Republic's foreign campaigns.

Relatively unknown in Iran until the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Soleimani's popularity and mystique grew after American officials called for his killing. A decade and a half later, Soleimani had become Iran's most recognizable battlefield commander, ignoring calls to enter politics but becoming as powerful, if not more, than its civilian leadership.

"The warfront is mankind's lost paradise," Soleimani recounted in a 2009 interview. "One type of paradise that is portrayed for mankind is streams, beautiful nymphs and greeneries. But there is another kind of paradise...The warfront was the last paradise of the human beings, indeed."

A U.S. airstrike killed Soleimani, 62, and others as they traveled from Baghdad's international airport early Friday morning. The Pentagon said President Donald Trump ordered the U.S. military to take "defensive defensive action to protect U.S. personnel abroad by killing" a man once referred to by Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as a "living martyr of the revolution."

Soleimani's luck ran out after being rumored dead several times in his life. Those incidents included a 2006 airplane crash that killed other military officials in northwestern Iran and a 2012 bombing in Damascus that killed top aides of Assad. More recently, rumors circulated in November 2015 that Soleimani was killed or seriously wounded leading forces loyal to Assad as they fought around Syria's Aleppo.

Iranian officials quickly vowed to take revenge amid months of tensions between Iran and the U.S. following Trump pulling out of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. While Soleimani was the Guard's most prominent general, many others in its ranks had spent years, decades even, in asymmetrical, proxy attacks for which Iran has become known.

"Trump through his gamble has dragged the U.S. into the most dangerous situation in the region," Hessameddin Ashena, an adviser to Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, wrote on the social media app Telegram. "He never put his foot beyond the red line should be ready to face its consequences."

Born March 11, 1957, Soleimani was said in his homeland to have grown up near the mountaineous and the historic Iranian town of Rabor, famous for its forests, its apricot, walnut and peach harvests and its brave soldiers. The U.S. State Department has said he was born in the Iranian religious capital of Qom.

Little is known about his childhood, though Iranian accounts suggest Soleimani's father was a peasant who received a piece of land under the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, but later became encumbered by debts.

By the time he was 13, Soleimani began working in construction, later as an employee of the Kerman Water Organization. Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution swept the Shah from power and Soleimani joined the Revolutionary Guard in its wake. He became one of the regime's most valuable assets, leading forces that put down Kurdish unrest following the revolution.

Soon after, Iraq invaded Iran and the bloody eight-year war. The fighting killed more than 1 million people and saw Iran send waves of lightly armed troops into minefields and the fire of Iraqi forces, including teenage soldiers. Soleimani's unit was one of the few groups under attack by Iranian chemical weapons as well.

Amid the carnage, Soleimani became known for his opposition to "meaningless deaths" on the battlefield, while still weeping at times with fervor when exhorting his men into combat, embracing each individually.

After the Iraq-Iran war, Soleimani largely disappeared from public view for several years, something analysts attribute to his wartime disagreements with then-Supreme Leader Hashemi Rafsanjani, who would serve as Iran's president from 1989 to 1997. But after Rafsanjani, Soleimani became head of the Quds force. He also grew so close to Khamenei that the Supreme Leader officiated the wedding of the general's daughter.

As chief of the Quds — or Jerusalem — Force, Soleimani oversaw the Guard's foreign operations and soon would come to the attention of Americans following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

In secret U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, U.S. officials accused Soleimani of efforts to reach out to Soleimani to stop rocket attacks on the highly secured Green Zone in Baghdad in 2009. Another cable in 2007 outlines then-Iraqi President Jalal Talabani offering a U.S. official a "dynamic" al-Quds commander acknowledging having "hundreds" of agents in the country while pledging, "I swear on the grave of the late Ayatollah Khomeini I haven't authorized a bullet against the U.S."

Trump, the time the dismissed Soleimani's claim as they saw Iran as both an arsonist and a fireman in Iraq, controlling some Shi'ite militias while simultaneously stirring dissent and launching attacks. U.S. forces would blame the Quds Force for an attack in Karbala that killed five American troops, as well as for training and supplying the Islamic State, whose use of air explosive devices made IED — improvised explosive device — attacks a dreaded acronym among soldiers.

In a 2010 speech, U.S. Gen. David Petraeus recounted a message from Soleimani explaining the scope of Iran's powers.

"He said, 'Gen. Petraeus, you should know that I, Qassem Soleimani, control the policy for Iran with respect to Iraq, Lebanon, Gaza and Afghanistan,'" Petraeus said.


The attention the West gave Soleimani only boosted his profile at home. He sat at Khamenei's side at key meetings. He famously met Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman together with the supreme leader — but without Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif being present, sparking a momentary resignation by the top Iranian diplomat.

Polling data routinely showed Soleimani rated more favorably than other public figures, according to the Center for International Studies at the University of Kent land. But Soleimani always relened entreaties to enter politics. Soleimani's greatest notorious would arise from the Syrian civil war and the rapid expansion of the Islamic State. Iran, a major backer of Assad, sent Soleimani to Syria in 2012 to help into Syria several times to lead attacks against ISIS and others opposing Assad's rule. While a U.S. airstrike in 2017 hit Soleimani's forces, several ground victories for Iraqi forces came with politically focused efforts, including supporting Iraqi forces that were leading, never wearing a flak jacket.

"Soleimani has taught us that death is the beginning of life, not the end of life," one Iraqi militia commander said.
Dems call for key witnesses after release of report

**By John Wagner and Felicia Sonmez**
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Democrats on Thursday seized on a new report citing unredacted emails that bolster the case that President Donald Trump was directly involved in withholding military aid to Ukraine as he was seeking investigations that could benefit his reelection bid.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., joined Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., in pressing for key witnesses and documents to be included in a Senate impeachment trial of Trump after the report’s release.

Senators leaders remained at an impasse Thursday over the scope of a trial, and aides to Schumer and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said the two men had not spoken over the holidays about the standoff. Pelosi has yet to send the articles of impeachment — alleging abuse of power and obstruction of Congress — to the Senate as Democrats seek guarantees about witnesses and documents that would be subpoenaed regarding Trump’s conduct toward Ukraine.

The report by Kate Brannen, published by Just Security, referenced an email from Michael Duffey, associate director of national security programs at the Office of Management and Budget, to Elaine McCusker, the acting Pentagon comptroller, on Aug. 30, a little more than a month after Trump pressed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy for investigations during a phone call.

In the email, which followed a meeting with Trump that included senior administration officials, Duffey told McCusker, “Clear direction from POTUS to hold.”

A redacted version of that email, and several others cited in the report by Brannen, a veteran Pentagon reporter — had previously been made public as the result of Freedom of Information Act litigation.

“The newly-revealed unredacted emails are a devastating blow to Senator McConnell’s push to have a trial without the documents and witnesses we’ve requested,” Schumer said in a statement Thursday. “These emails further expose the serious concerns raised by Trump administration officials about the propriety and legality of the president’s decision to cut off aid to Ukraine to benefit himself.”

Schumer has sought guarantees from McConnell that several administration officials will be subpoenaed to testify in a Senate trial who declined to participate in House impeachment proceedings, including acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, former national security adviser John Bolton and Duffey. McConnell has said the Senate should decide on what if any witnesses to call after hearing opening statements from House impeachment managers and Trump’s lawyers.

Schumer said the unredacted emails raise “questions that can only be answered by having the key Trump administration officials ... testify under oath in a Senate trial.”

“The American people deserve a fair trial that gets to the truth, not a rigged process that enables a cover-up,” Schumer said.

Trump looks to boost evangelical support despite searing editorial

By Jonathan Lemire and Elana Schor

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — In his first campaign move of the 2020 election year, President Donald Trump on Friday will visit a mega-church in Miami to highlight his support among evangelicals as he aims to shore up and expand support from an influential piece of his political base.

The president will host the kickoff meeting of “Evangelicals for Trump” just days after he was the subject of a scathing editorial in Christianity Today magazine that called for his removal from office. But Trump’s campaign believes that his record in office, including the installation of two Supreme Court justices, will cement the votes of religious conservatives this year.

“I think his record in the past three years is rock-solid in things that the faith community cares about ...,” said Jentezen Franklin, a pastor to a megachurch in Georgia. “We used to see politicians once every four years but this one is totally different in consistently reaching out to the faith community and we even get a chance to tell him when we disagree.”

Campaign officials said the Miami event was in the works well before the Christian- ity Today op-ed that raised fresh questions about the durability of his support among the conservative evangelicals who have proven to be a critical component of his political base.

The magazine’s editorial, written by editor-in-chief Mark Galli, envisions a message to those evangelical Christians who have remained stalwart Trump backers “in spite of his blackened moral record.”

“Remember who you are and whom you serve,” Galli’s editorial states. “Consider how your justification of Mr. Trump influences your witness to your Lord and Savior. Consider what an unbelieving world will say if you continue to brush off Mr. Trump’s immoral words and behavior in the cause of political expediency.”

The piece, which comes in a magazine founded by the late Rev. Billy Graham, was denounced by Trump, who tweeted “No president has done more for the evangelical community.”

Graham’s son, Franklin Graham, a major Trump supporter, also criticized his father’s former magazine. But most political observers doubt it will cause many evangelicals to desert Trump, who received more than 80% of their vote in 2016.

More than 5,000 people are expected to attend the event.

Video edited to suggest former VP Biden made racist remark

**By Beatrice Dupuy**

Associated Press

A video of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden that was selectively edited to falsely suggest he made racist remarks during a recent speech made the rounds Thursday on social media, raking in more than a million views on one tweet alone.

Experts have been warning about the dangers of selectively edited videos being used as a misinformation tactic ahead of the 2020 presidential election. They are easier to make and do not require the sophisticated technology needed to produce deepfake videos, which are fabricated to look realistic.

In the edited clip, which was less than 20 seconds long, Biden says, “Our culture is not import- ed from some African nation or some Asian nation.” Social media users paired the video with comments like “It’s almost like Joe Biden is a Racist.” Posts with the video surfaced across social media platforms on Wednesday.

The clip was taken from ABC News coverage of Biden speaking for more than an hour in Derry, N.H., on Monday. A review of the full video shows that Biden was commenting on changing the culture around violence against women. In discussing the difficul- ty victims face reporting sexual assault on college campuses, he said, “Folks, this is about changing the culture, our culture, our culture, it’s not import- ed from some African nation or some Asian nation. It is our English jurispudential culture, our European culture that says it is all right.”

Earlier in the discussion, Biden, when asked about his work with women and sexual assault victims, talked about the need to change an entrenched “cultural problem,” that dates back cen- turies, noting that in the 1300s many wives were being beaten to death by their husbands without repercussions.

Biden’s campaign confirmed to The Associated Press that the presentation in the edited video was inaccurate.

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**Image:**

Former Vice President Joe Biden, a Democratic presidential candidate, speaks during a community event Thursday in Anamosa, Iowa. An edited video of Biden seemingly spouting racist remarks was seen across the internet.
Calls reveal rough conditions before sinking

5 crew members of Alaska fishing boat feared dead; Coast Guard ends search

BY BECKY BORHER AND MARTHA BELLISE
Associated Press

JUNEAU — Calls to loved ones in the lead-up to the sinking of a crab boat in the cold waters off Alaska revealed the rough conditions the crew faced, including icing that did not seem to rattle the boat’s captain.

Gary Cobban Jr., the captain, was among five fishermen missing and feared dead after the Scandies Rose sank late Tuesday. Two others aboard were rescued. The Coast Guard did not release details Thursday on a possible cause, saying that talking to the survivors is part of the investigation.

Cobban’s ex-girlfriend, Jeri Lynn Smith, told the Anchorage Daily News she called her in North Carolina about two hours before the boat sank to wish her a happy new year. She said the conditions hadn’t seemed to worry him.

“When I talked to him, he told me the boat was icing and it had a list to it, but he didn’t sound alarmed. He didn’t sound scared,” Smith said. “I wanted to get them out of the water because of the icing, the boat ices every winter. It’s just something they deal with. I didn’t worry about it.”

Smith said she wouldn’t have hung up if she thought he was in a crisis.

Others listed as missing were David Lee Cobban, Arthur Garcia, Brock Rainey and Seth Rousseau-Gano, according to the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard said it used helicopters, planes and a boat as part of a search effort that covered 1,400 square miles and ended Wednesday evening.

Ashley Boggs of Peru, Ind., said Rainey called her shortly before the ship sank and said conditions were bad. The two had planned to marry after Rainey returned.

“I’m just praying and hoping they find him on land or something,” Boggs told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Those rescued told authorities they were the only ones who made it into a life raft, the Anchorage Daily News reported. Dean Gribble Jr., who’s appeared on Discovery Channel docuseries “Deadliest Catch,” and John Lawler suffered hypothermia but were released from a hospital.

The boat was carrying a load of crabbing pots for the start of the winter season, Dan Mattson, a partner in the vessel managed by Seattle-Based Mattson Management, told the Seattle Times.

The 130-foot Scandies Rose was traveling in an area with warnings about strong winds and heavy freezing spray, said Louise Fode, a warning coordination officer for the National Weather Service.

Its last known position was 170 miles southwest of Kodiak Island, and it sank about 10 p.m. Tuesday.

The Coast Guard said it had sent out a mayday call.

Rescue crews battled winds of more than 40 mph, 15- to 20-foot seas and visibility that was limited to a mile, Petty Officer 2nd Class Melissa McKenzie said.

“That’s rough conditions,” she said. “The Coast Guard did its very best. It’s just something they deal with. It’s something they deal with every year.”

The boat sank to wish her a happy new year. The boat ices every winter.

“that’s rough conditions,” she said.

The coast guard did its very best. It’s just something they deal with. It’s something they deal with every year.”

Fishing boats and boats used for other purposes are shown parked near the Seattle Fisherman’s Memorial on Thursday. Items left at the memorial Thursday included a ball cap with the name of the crab fishing boat Scandies Rose, from Dutch Harbor, Alaska, that sank on New Year’s Eve.

Conservatives seek purge of Wis. voters

BY SCOTT BAUER
Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — A conservative law firm on Thursday asked a judge to find the Wisconsin Elections Commission in contempt and impose $12,000 a day in fines until it purges more than 200,000 voters from the rolls, a move Democrats are fighting in the key battleground state.

A judge last month ordered the purge of voters who may have moved and didn’t respond within 30 days to notification sent by the elections commission in October. The bipartisan commission has deadlocked twice on attempts by Republicans to do the purge immediately while an appeal to the court order is pending.

Rick Esenberg, leader of the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty that brought the lawsuit, said the commission must purge the voters now.

The judge in December ruled that the commission was breaking state law by not removing voters who did not respond to the October mailing asking that they confirm their address.

“Court orders are not suggestions,” Esenberg said on WIBA-AM. “They are not rendered inoperative by the fact that you filed an appeal.”

Eisenberg filed a motion Thursday in Ozaukee County Court asking the judge to fine the commission and five of the six commissioners $2,000 each, or $12,000 total each day, for being in contempt of the order. The motion does not name one of the three Republicans on the commission who was not on the panel when the legal fight began.

Democratic Attorney General Josh Kaul, who is representing the elections commission in the case, said it “strongly disagrees” with arguments in the contempt motion.

“This case should not effectively be ended before the appeals process plays out,” Kaul said in a statement.

Democrats fear forcing voters whose registration was nullified to re-register would create a burden on them and hurt turnout. Republicans argue that removing the voters would ensure that the rolls are not full of people who should not be voting.

Eisenberg’s group has asked that the conservative-controlled Wisconsin Supreme Court immediately take the state’s appeal of the case. The case is currently before a state appeals court. The commission has asked the appeals court to put the original ruling on hold, but it has not yet acted. The Supreme Court has not said yet whether it will take the case.

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin also has filed a federal lawsuit to stop the purge. That lawsuit argues that it would be a violation of constitutional due process rights to deactivate the registrations of the voters without proper notice.
PHOENIX — The U.S. government on Thursday began sending asylum-seekers back to Nogales, Mexico, to await court hearings that will be scheduled roughly 350 miles away in Juarez, Mexico.

Authorities are expanding a program known as Remain in Mexico that requires tens of thousands of asylum seekers to wait out their immigration court hearings in Mexico. Until this week, the government was driving some asylum seekers from Nogales, Ariz., to El Paso, Texas, so they could be returned to Juarez.

Now, asylum-seekers will have to find their own way through dangerous and often bumpy roads.

About 30 asylum seekers were sent to Nogales, Mexico, on Thursday, said Gilda Loureiro, director of the San Juan Bosco migrant shelter in Nogales, Sonora.

Loureiro said the migrants hadn’t made it to the shelter yet but that it was prepared and has a capacity of about 400.

“We’re going to take up to the capacity we have,” she said.

Critics say the Remain in Mexico program, one of several Trump administration policies that have all but ended asylum in the U.S., puts migrants who fled their home countries back into dangerous Mexican border towns where they are often kidnapped, robbed or extorted.

A Human Rights First report released in December documented at least 636 public reports of violence against asylum-seekers returned to Mexico including rape, kidnapping and torture.

Human Rights First said that was a steep increase over October when the group had identified 343 attacks, and noted the latest figure is surely an under-count because most crime victims don’t report.

The government calls the program Migrant Protection Protocols.

Nogales is now the seventh border crossing through which U.S. authorities return migrants to Mexico to await court hearings. The policy was introduced in January 2018 in San Diego.

More than 56,000 people were sent back to Mexico by the end of November, according to Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse. Of the more than 24,000 cases that have been decided, only 117, or less than 1%, have been granted asylum or some other form of relief allowing them to stay in the United States.

But U.S. authorities have labeled the program, saying it’s helped to significantly reduce illegal border crossings. The Border Patrol apprehended just over 33,000 people along the Southwest border in November, compared to 144,000 in May, when border crossings peaked.

In a statement, acting Department of Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf said the program has been “an extremely effective tool.”

“I am confident in the program’s continued success in adjudicating meritorious cases quickly and preventing fraudulent claims,” Wolf wrote.

A three-judge appeals court panel heard arguments Oct. 1 in San Francisco on a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union to block the policy. The court has yet to rule.

4th inmate killed within a week in Miss. prison system

By JEFF AMY AND EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS

JACKSON, Miss. — Another Mississippi inmate has died at the hands of a fellow inmate, bringing the death toll to four in disturbances over the past week in the state prison system.

The violence comes even as a federal judge has banned throughout the country, “except as punishment for crime whereof the party has been duly convicted.”

In a statement, acting Deputy Corrections Commissioner Chris May said the program was a “major disturbance” Sunday at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution in Greene County.

A three-judge appeals court panel heard arguments Oct. 1 in San Francisco on a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union to block the policy. The court has yet to rule.

The violence came even as U.S. District Judge William Barbour ruled Tuesday that while conditions may have previously been poor at East Mississippi Correctional Facility near Meridian, there’s no longer any evidence that the privately run prison is violating inmates’ rights.

A lawsuit filed in 2013 alleged that inmates were being systematically denied health care and mental health care, were in danger of violence from guards and other prisoners, and were forced into long stretches in solitary confinement, where cells were often dark and where inmates often set fires.

Change sought for Minn. constitution’s approval of slavery for convicts

By ASTRID GALVAN

ST. PAUL, Minn. — A Minnesota police chief said he wants to change the state’s constitution to remove a pre-Civil War reference to slavery being an acceptable form of punishment.

Even though slavery has been illegal throughout the country for more than a century, St. Paul Police Chief Todd Axtell wrote in a Facebook post Tuesday that his goal is to “end the movement” to have the reference dropped from the Minnesota Constitution.

“For some time now, I’ve been troubled by a clause in the Minnesota State Constitution. It involves the word slavery, which doesn’t reflect our state values,” Axtell said, referring to a section of the state constitution that reads: “There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the state otherwise than as punishment for a crime of which the party has been convicted.”

It is “beyond time to move forward together and strike out slavery from our shared constitution,” he wrote.

The phrase is among the first sentences in the 134-article constitution that ushered Minnesota into statehood in 1858. It drew Axtell’s attention a few months ago when he read about other states confronting slavery passages in their constitutions.

Axtell’s campaign got off to a fast start. Minnesota Rep. John Lesch responded that he intends to draft a document to remove the slavery reference and give it a hearing in the House Judiciary Committee.

Although Axtell and Lesch are pushing to remove slavery references from the Minnesota Constitution, the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, features similar language, stating that slavery is banned throughout the country, “except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”

Steve Linders, a spokesman for Axtell, said the chief “is focused on the state constitution but would support any effort that helps ensure that the U.S. Constitution reflects our country’s shared values.”

Lesch said he hopes to see the document pass through the Legislature and appear on the 2020 general election ballot.
The Rockland County District Attorney’s Office declined to comment on the request.

Marine Corps officials said Tuesday that Thomas also had begun boot camp but was separated from the service a month later for “fraudulent enlistment.”

A Marine Corps spokeswoman would not provide details. “Those specifics are administrative in nature and therefore information we are required to keep private,” Capt. Karoline Foste said.

Military law defines fraudulent enlistment as a “knowingly false representation or deliberate concealment as to” a recruit’s qualifications. That could involve a recruit failing to disclose certain medical conditions, past drug use or an arrest record, including cases that are sealed because the recruit was a juvenile or for other reasons.

Sussman said he learned more about Thomas’ history of mental health problems after visiting Thomas’ former residence in Sullivan County and finding “rambling writings” and unopened bottles of psychotropic medication.

He said none of the writings contained signs of anti-Semitism, though he added he has not seen the materials federal authorities seized from Thomas’ home in Greenwood Lake.

Authorities have said Thomas, 37, had handwritten journals containing anti-Semitic references and had recently used his phone to look up information on Hitler and the location of synagogues.

Sussman described Thomas as a man with “tremendous mental derangement who never received the care and treatment he needed.” He provided new details about a September 2018 incident in which Thomas was arrested at his mother’s home after refusing to put down a knife that a police officer ordered him to drop.

Thomas did not undergo a psychological evaluation following that arrest, Sussman said, though mental-health treatment was made a condition of the case’s dismissal.

Sussman said Thomas had been “mischaracterized” as an anti-Semite by elected leaders who do not yet know all the facts.

“There’s something here that’s seriously wrong,” he said, referring to Thomas’ lack of sufficient treatment. “How it manifested is a great tragedy.”

Sussman spoke hours after a daughter of a man gravely wounded in the Hanukkah attack made an emotional plea to end hatred and anti-Semitism.

“We want our kids to go to school and feel safe,” Nicky Kohen, the daughter of Josef Neumann, told reporters in front of her home in Rockland County. “We want to go to synagogues and feel safe. We want to go to grocery stores and malls and feel safe.”

Neumann, 72, has been unconscious since Saturday’s attack remains in intensive care at Westchester Medical Center, where he was undergoing surgery Thursday.

The family released a statement this week saying Neumann, a father of seven, may have permanent brain damage. They also released a photograph of Neumann showing his head injuries.

“The doctors do not have high hopes for him,” Kohen said. “If he wakes up he may never be able to walk, talk or even process speech again.”

“We hope he wakes to a changed world with peace, unity and love,” she added. “Let’s stand up together and stop the hatred.”

“Affluenza teen” jailed for parole violation

FORT WORTH, Texas — A Texas man who used “affluenza” as a defense at his trial for killing four people while driving drunk was arrested Wednesday after he tested positive for THC, the psychoactive compound in marijuana.

Ethan Couch, 22, was booked into a jail in Fort Worth after he tested positive for THC and had recently used his phone to look up information on Hitler and the location of synagogues.

Couch’s attorneys, Scott Brown and Reagan Wynn, said their client has been intensely monitored for alcohol and illegal substance use for more than 20 months and “has never been positive for the use of any substance before.”

Couch cannot make any further statement until we have the opportunity to conduct an investigation to determine if, in fact, Ethan ingested THC and, if so, if it was a voluntary act on his part,” Brown and Wynn said in a statement.

Jail records did not indicate whether his bond had been set Thursday afternoon.

Couch, a high school student known as “the affluenza teen” during his manslaughter trial for the 2013 crash, is facing new charges. Police said he was critically injured while walking in his small Texas town with two female friends.

The crash took place after a Nov. 20 stabbing in which a man named Thomas was arrested at a synagogue.

That attack came as police in the same town were investigating a Nov. 20 stabbing in which a man was critically injured while walking in a synagogue.

The police chief’s remarks came as local prosecutors were preparing to present evidence to a grand jury that will be asked to indict Thomas in connection with the Hanukkah attack.

Thomas’ defense attorney, Michael Sussman, said he asked the district attorney to delay that proceeding and allow Thomas to undergo an inpatient psychiatric evaluation.
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Hosted by: Air Force Veteran Desmon Farris and Army Reserve Warrant Officer Rod Rodriguez
Ward off weight gain this winter

By JILL U. ADAMS

These cold, dark winter days make me want to curl up with a book, perhaps while munching on holiday cookies.

One could describe my conduct this way: sedentary behavior combined with snacking on sugary treats. A regular practice of these things might well lead to weight gain.

Is winter weight gain a thing? Yes, says Larry Cheskin, who chairs the nutrition department at George Mason University in Northern Virginia. “There is good evidence that it is a thing.”

On average, research shows that people gain one to two pounds over the winter months. For instance, a study of 195 people at the National Institutes of Health found weight gain of about one pound between late September and March.

A study of 248 U.S. military personnel, who were enrolled in a weight-loss program, found that people added about two pounds from fall to winter. Here’s something else. There also is evidence that American adults gain one to two pounds each year, gradually accumulating weight over decades. Winter weight gain might be a major culprit, so perhaps we should view the season as a particularly risky time for adding excess padding.

Indeed, 165 subjects in the NIH study returned for a September weigh-in and, on average, were 1.4 pounds heavier than the year before.

A note: One to two pounds on average means that one to two pounds from fall to winter. Here’s something else. There also is evidence that American adults gain one to two pounds each year, gradually accumulating weight over decades. Winter weight gain might be a major culprit, so perhaps we should view the season as a particularly risky time for adding excess padding.

Warding off this weight gain starts with understanding it. Cheskin says it’s important to understand your own tendencies. When counseling patients who want to lose weight, he starts by asking them what they think has contributed to their weight gain.

Do you eat when you’re sad or bored? Do you plan your meals? Do social outings—or family—interfere with healthy eating? Are there medical issues involved?

“Ward off weight gain this winter

The holidays are not insignificant,” Cheskin says.

There are more social events, an increase in the variety of foods and more drinking. Alcohol adds calories and undermines self-control. But it’s not just overeating at holiday parties that’s to blame. When it’s cold and snowy—or slushy or icy—outside, people spend more time indoors, which in turn can mean getting less physical activity.

Research backs up the exercise slowdown. A review of 37 studies found that people are most physically active in spring and summer and least in winter. Also, it’s easy to feel bored when you’re cooped up inside—and boredom may lead you to snack more.

So what can you do? First, be aware that winter weight gain can happen. Pay attention to your diet and try to keep your activity level up.

Weighing yourself every day is key, says Margaret Fahey, a doctoral student at the University of Memphis and first author on the military personnel’s weight-gain studies. Study participants used electronic scales that sent data directly to the researchers. Fahey and her colleagues observed that during the winter months, people often skipped their daily weigh-ins.

The researchers also noticed that the participants who had most recently enrolled in weight-loss intervention gained the least weight. That suggests that when motivation is high, winter weight gain can be avoided.

Motivation can help you stick to good weight maintenance behaviors, such as daily weigh-ins, as well as tracking diet and activity. There are a number of apps that can make it easier to track what you eat and how much you move.

“Winter weight gain is common,” Fahey says. “Which might indicate that weight maintenance strategies are important to implement during winter.”

Gavin recommends being mindful of your eating habits, but not overly restrictive. Don’t try to avoid cookies altogether, he says, but limit yourself to one or two cookies.

Cheskin says it’s important to understand your own tendencies. When counseling patients who want to lose weight, he starts by asking them what they think has contributed to their weight gain.

Do you eat when you’re sad or bored? Do you plan your meals? Do social outings—or family—interfere with healthy eating? Are there medical issues involved?

“You hear about lots of factors relating to weight,” Cheskin says. “You don’t need to attend to all of them, he says—just the ones that are specific to you.”
The last 10 years will probably go down as the decade of Marvel’s domination and Netflix’s ascension. But despite all the tumult and the perpetual rumors of cinema’s supposed demise, good stuff — no, great stuff — kept getting made.

It can be harder to find. Mega-blockbusters suck up most of the big screens and the small ones are increasingly crowded with infinite choice. Yet the medium is as vibrant as ever, thanks to the influx of new voices (though still not enough of them) and the undying need of filmmakers to tell stories with light and sound. The movies abide.

The impossibility of an exercise like this is only a reminder of just how very alive cinema is. The next 50 movies on our list, or yours, might be just as good.

2. ‘Phantom Thread’

Paul Thomas Anderson was already having an incredible decade with “The Master,” from 2012 and “Inherent Vice,” from 2014. Then, three years later, “Phantom Thread” came along and with its lush haute couture, blushing heroine, ornery genius and poison mushrooms, he somehow blew all the others out of the water. Anderson made a black romantic comedy for his eighth feature but imbued it with enough prestige dressings to elevate it above such a “pedestrian” form.

— Lindsey Bahr

3. ‘Margaret’

Kenneth Lonergan’s other two, also exceptional, features (“You Can Count on Me,” “Manchester by the Sea”) are better known partly because “Margaret” was tied up for years in a legal battle and an editing nightmare. But Lonergan’s longer cut (not what was briefly released in theaters but what’s available on DVD) is a New York masterwork of great depth and scope. A teenager (Anna Paquin) comes to question everything after witnessing a traffic death. Culininating with an embrace in a theater (with an extraordinary J. Smith-Cameron), “Margaret” is about a self-centered young woman awakening to the dramas all around her.

— Coyle

4. ‘Lady Bird’

A Sacramento teen navigating her senior year of high school in the early aughts doesn’t necessarily sound like “important cinema,” but that’s exactly why Greta Gerwig’s semi-autobiographical solo directing debut is so great. The naivete and angry restlessness of young adulthood is given a crackling form in Christine “Lady Bird” McPherson (Saoirse Ronan), a perfectly imperfect heroine who clashes with her mother and desperately yearns for something — anything — that takes her away from the familiar, whether that’s a boy on the nice side of town or a college on the other side of the country. It is, ultimately, a loving look at a young woman who hasn’t yet become her fully realized self and the town that, despite her best efforts, has shaped her to her core.

— Bahr

5. ‘Moonlight’

Barry Jenkins’ coming-of-age tale is separated into three sections — “Little,” “Chiron” and “Black” — but its lyricism, beauty and ache is undivided. There’s a haunting, even radical intimacy to “Moonlight.” Years later, Chiron feels like someone you once met and will know forever. The movie’s soft blue light shines and shines and shines.

— Coyle

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13
Stephen Dorff and Elle Fanning, right, are shown in a scene from Sofia Coppola’s “Somewhere.”

6. ‘Somewhere’

Writer-director Sofia Coppola has always been able to see the dreamy banality in the sensational, whether it’s in the life of Marie Antoinette, the suicides of five sisters, or, in the case of “Somewhere,” the life of a movie star (Stephen Dorff) living in the most tabloid-ridden hotel in Los Angeles: the Chateau Marmont. Quiet and restrained and with the roads and cars and excess of Los Angeles as the backdrop, “Somewhere” gazes in on a father coming to the realization that very soon his almost teenage daughter (Elle Fanning) won’t need him at all. It’s neither cold nor depressing, however, but a warm-hearted look at the isolation, the silliness and even the universality of this rarefied world.

— Bahr

7. ‘Cold War’

Paweł Pawlikowski made two staggering masterpieces in the last decade, both expressively black-and-white, both devastatingly taut. First was ‘Ida,’ then came ‘Cold War.’ It’s a stunning back-to-back. The two films, so austere yet so expressive, feel like they come from another time. Choosing one isn’t fair, but I gravitate more to “Cold War” for the sensual performances of Joanna Kulig and Tomasz Kot as lovers brought together and torn apart in postwar Poland. It’s a romantic and bleak portrait of love and art under totalitarianism.

— Coyle

8. ‘Certified Copy’

Can a fiction be truth? That’s the heady question behind the great Abbas Kiarostami’s “Certified Copy,” in which an antiques dealer (Juliette Binoche) and a writer (Willem Dafoe) debate the essence of cinema and while the answers remain elusive, the experience and ideas are those that nine-plus years on have continued to provoke.

— Bahr


Stephen Dorff and Elle Fanning, right, are shown in a scene from Sofia Coppola’s “Somewhere.”

9. ‘Inside Llewyn Davis’

As they were in the two previous decades, the Coen brothers were as vital as any filmmaker over the past 10 years. Their output: “True Grit,” “Hail, Caesar!,” “The Ballad of Buster Scruggs” and, most of all, this melancholy gem set in the Greenwich Village folk scene in the winter of 1961. The title character (Oscar Isaac) is a musician, recently made solo by the death of his singing partner, whose talent isn’t quite enough, whose luck is lacking and whose cat-wrangling abilities are definitely insufﬁcient. Llewyn never catches a break. Thank God the Coens did.

— Coyle

10. ‘Grand Budapest Hotel’

 Wes Anderson’s precise and beautiful aesthetics have a way of becoming the only thing people talk about or seem to remember from his films, which is unfortunate because it’s also something that can be weaponized against him. But “The Grand Budapest Hotel’s” mastery is undeniable. Within this fun and sumptuous caper confection about a dandy concierge, Gustave H. (Ralph Fiennes), who presides over a splendid old-world hotel that is quickly becoming as much of a relic as his aristocratic-servant values, is an unexpectedly moving commentary on the last vestiges of civilization in a time between two dehumanizing world wars. It’s the kind of film that has the audience yearning for and mourning something that never even really existed.

— Bahr

Female-led ‘Black Widow,’ ‘Wonder Woman 1984’ are among ’20’s most anticipated

By Nardine Saad

Los Angeles Times

The future is female ... at least when it comes to the cineplex.

For the first time, four films starring and directed by women — “Wonder Woman 1984,” Marvel’s “Black Widow” and “Eternals” and Disney’s live-action “Mulan” — topped a Fandango audience survey of the most anticipated movies of the new year, the film hub announced Dec. 27. The movies, helmed by Patty Jenkins, Cate Shortland, Chloe Zhao and Niki Caro, respectively, were selected in an online survey conducted in the last weeks of December. More than 2,000 millionennial film fans cast their votes for the top movies and performances they were most looking forward to seeing on the big screen in 2020. Scoring out the top 10 are a bevy of sequels, spin-offs and adaptations, including the next James Bond installment (“No Time to Die”), John Krasinski’s “A Quiet Place II,” the female superhero team-up flick “Birds of Prey,” the musical “In the Heights,” Pixar’s animated ﬁlm “Soul” and the ninth chapter of the “Fast & Furious” franchise. “Soul,” about a middle-school music teacher who dreams of playing at a New York jazz club, appears to be the only original fare. But it’s the “Wonder Woman” sequel that fans seem particularly stoked about, topping the most anticipated actress (Gal Gadot), actor (Chris Pine) and villain (Kristen Wiig) categories as well.

Here’s how those four films fared and the other releases moviegoers can expect in the new year:

MOST ANTICIPATED MOVIE
“Wonder Woman 1984” (directed by Patty Jenkins, June 5)
“Black Widow” (Cate Shortland, May 1)
Marvel’s “Eternals” (Chloé Zhao, Nov. 6)
“Mulan” (Niki Caro, March 27)
“No Time to Die” ( Cary Joji Fukunaga, April 10)
“A Quiet Place Part II” ( John Krasinski, March 20)
“Birds of Prey” ( Cathy Yan, Feb. 7)
“In the Heights” ( Jon M. Chu, June 26)
Pixar’s “Soul” ( Pete Docter and Kemp Powers, June 19)
“Fast & Furious 9” ( Justin Lin, May 22)

MOST ANTICIPATED ACTRESS
Gal Gadot (“Wonder Woman 1984”)
Scarlett Johansson (“Black Widow”)
Emily Blunt (“A Quiet Place Part II”/ “Jungle Cruise”)
Margot Robbie (“ Birds of Prey”)
Zendaya ("Dune")

MOST ANTICIPATED ACTOR
Chris Pine (“Wonder Woman 1984”)
Paul Rudd (“Ghostbusters: Afterlife”)
Ryan Reynolds (”Free Guy”)
Daniel Craig (“No Time to Die”)
Robert Downey Jr. (“Dolittle”)

MOST ANTICIPATED FAMILY FILM
“Mulan”
Pixar’s “Soul”
“Sonic the Hedgehog”
“Dolittle”
“Jungle Cruise”

MOST ANTICIPATED VILLAIN
1. Kristen Wiig as Cheetah (“Wonder Woman 1984”)
2. Ryan Malek as Safin (“No Time to Die”)
3. Ewan McGregor as Black Mask (“Birds of Prey”)
4. Jim Carrey as Dr. Ivo Robotnik ("Sonic the Hedgehog")
5. Charlie Theron as Cipher (”Fast & Furious 9”)

MOST ANTICIPATED HORROR FILM
“A Quiet Place Part II”
“Halloween Kills”
“The Invisible Man”
“The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It”
“The Grudge”

MOST ANTICIPATED LIVE-ACTION COMEDY
“Ghostbusters: Afterlife”
“Bill & Ted Face the Music”
“Bad Boys For Life”
“Legally Blonde 3”
“The Lovebirds”

—the author’s note—

“We apologize for any omissions, and we appreciate any corrections.”

— Brian Chatsworth

Western wires
Police: Woman uses dog urine for screening

KY — A Kentucky woman gave her probation officer a dog urine sample during a drug screening, police said.

Julie Miller, 40, of Arjay, was arrested Monday on a charge of tampering with physical evidence, the Pineville Police Department said in a release on its Facebook page. She also was charged with a parole violation and trafficking in a controlled substance.

Miller admitted she tried to use the dog urine as her own sample given to officers at the Bell County Probation and Parole Office during a regular probation visit, the statement said.

Corvette speared by a flying highway sign

HALLANDALE — A flying highway sign gave a driver an unwelcome New Year’s Eve gift when it impaled the rear window of his Corvette during a highway mishap that left multiple vehicles damaged in south Florida.

The large highway merge sign speared the rear window of the car Tuesday afternoon on the northbound lanes of Interstate 95, about 20 miles from Miami, WSVN-TV reported.

Investigators think the sign flew into the air when it was struck by another vehicle and was launched into the Corvette’s windshield, authorities told the station.

Making a splash

Ashley Piskorski, right, tumbles off of siblings Cole, left, and Kayla Piskorski during the 43rd annual Ski Freeze at Mud Island River Park in Memphis, Tenn., on Wednesday. Hosted by Collierville Ski Club, water skiers, barefooters and wakeboarders braved the Wolf River’s cold water to raise money for The Dream Factory of Memphis, which grants wishes for critically and chronically ill children ages 3 through 18.

Couple heats up frozen pizza — and a snake

MI — A couple in North Carolina say they popped a frozen pizza into the oven only to discover that a snake was burning inside about 10 minutes later.

Amber Helm said the Raleigh News & Observer on Wednesday that her family had hoped to have an easy dinner on Monday night in Wake Forest. But Helm said the oven started smoking and smelling terrible as they waited for their pizza to cook.

“Things like this don’t happen to people like me,” server Danielle Franzoni told The Alpena News.

Franzoni, 31, got the tip while working Sunday at Thunder Bay River Restaurant in Alpena. The credit card receipt said “Happy New Year. 2020 Tip Challenge.” Franzoni, a single mother, couldn’t believe the number, but her manager assured her the tip was legitimate.

She said she was living in a homeless shelter a year ago. Franzoni plans to use the money to reinstate her driver’s license and build savings.

“They don’t know nothing about my story. They don’t know where I’ve come from. They don’t know how hard it’s been,” Franzoni said of the couple who left the tip. “They’re really just doing this out of the kindness of their heart.”

Franzoni later went to a restaurant and left a $20.20 tip.

Man flees solo car crash and gets stuck in ditch

CLEARWATER — A Florida man tried to flee a traffic accident only to require rescuing when he got stuck in a ditch, authorities said.

The Tampa Bay Times reported that the 42-year-old fled a single-vehicle crash scene but soon found himself in trouble Sunday night when he became trapped in a concrete retention ditch. He had to be rescued by the fire department and taken to a hospital.

“Open the oven and thought, ‘Is that part of the oven?’ I looked more closely and it was a snake,” she said.

She said she left the pizza behind and took her young sons out to eat. Her husband stayed behind to deal with the snake.

From wire reports
**OPINION**


**Killing Soleimani might’ve opened Pandora’s box**

By Daniel W. Drezner

Special to The Washington Post

I
traqi state television reports that an airstrike has killed Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani as well as Naim Qassem, the second-in-command of Lebanon’s Hezbollah, in Baghdad. The announcement confirms Soleimani’s death, and Newsweek’s James LaPorta reported that it was from a U.S. drone strike. The Defense Department announced that it was a strike “in support of the President.” Soleimani was a key official in Iran’s own special policy morass and I am loath to enter such a non-area expert to enter those waters. The third is that the variance of possible outcomes is huge.

So rather than make any confident predictions about what will happen, let me instead pose some questions that need to be answered:

1) Just how much planning has the Trump administration done for the aftermath? This was executed very quickly from the breach of the U.S. Embassy grounds in Baghdad. Two days before the attack, the Trump administration announced that any time this administration has increased pressure on the Iranian regime, there has been an asymmetric response that involves attacks on U.S. forces and the strategic assets of its allies. Soleimani was a key member of the network of loyalists around the region that could be activated for such an attack.

2) Does a decapitation strategy work on a state actor? Iran is a state with significant capacity to make mischief in the region. Iran is not a state actor in the standard sense. It’s an international terrorist organization. Iran is a state actor, yes, but a special one.

3) What are the limits of escalation? The Trump administration’s top cyber diplomat. He notes that the greater Middle East is its own special policy morass and I am loath to enter such a non-area expert to enter these waters. The third is that the variance of possible outcomes is huge.

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Thursday's basketball

Boston University 73, Lafayette 72
Brown 85, UMass 65
Bryant 67, St. Francis (Pa.) 63
Colgate 65, American 51
Dayton 64, George Washington 63
Duquesne 73, Saint Louis 59
Loyola (Md.) 76, Fordham 65
McNeese 68, South Alabama 62
Mississippi State 67, Vanderbilt 64
North Carolina 72, Georgia Tech 64
Southern Illinois 76, Stetson 64
St. John’s 86, Seton Hall 65
Temple 63, Xavier 60
The Citadel 83, College of Charleston 71
Texas 65, Wake Forest 64
Vanderbilt 73, Ole Miss 68
Villanova 76, Providence 71
Wayne State 72, Grambling 66
Xavier 77, Fordham 70

Thursday's women's scores

Albany (NY) 58, Vermont 49
American 69, Davidson 37
Bucknell 63, Army 53
Fairfield 66, Siena 37
Fairleigh Dickinson 62, St. Francis (Brooklyn) 48
George Mason 68, VMI 53
Iona 71, Quinnipiac 70
Loyola (Md.) 100, Lehigh 70
Loyola (Chicago) 70, Army 60
Miami (Ohio) 67, Canisius 55
Marist 78, Central 66
Mass.-Lowell 66, New Hampshire 58
Massachusetts 78, New Hampshire 53
Mount St. Mary’s 55, Canisius 52
Northeastern 65, Stony Brook 63
Notre Dame 66, Pittsburgh 52
Penn 90, Temple 67
Princeton 68, Columbia 50
Saint Joseph’s 101, St. Francis (NY) 53
St. Mary’s 83, Davidson 56
Stony Brook 73, UMBC 45
Stony Brook 70, Siena 55
Syracuse 81, Central Connecticut 66

College football

Bowl schedule

Fiesta Bowl / Arizona State / Oregon / Jan. 1
Rose Bowl / Oregon / Oklahoma / Jan. 1
Sugar Bowl / Alabama / Michigan / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Chicago / Jan. 2 / Cotton Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Georgia / Cincinnati / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Atlanta / Jan. 2 / Orange Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Arkansas / Oregon State / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Miami / Jan. 2 / Russell Athletic Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Mississippi State / Oklahoma / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Orlando / Jan. 2 / Citrus Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Notre Dame / Ohio State / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Tampa / Jan. 2 / Music City Bowl
Sugar Bowl / South Carolina / Florida / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Nashville / Jan. 2 / Outback Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Louisiana State / Washington / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Tampa / Jan. 2 / Emerald Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Ohio State / Alabama / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Orlando / Jan. 2 / Gator Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Oregon State / Alabama / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Atlanta / Jan. 2 / Peach Bowl
Sugar Bowl / West Virginia / Oklahoma / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Atlanta / Jan. 2 / Citrus Bowl
Sugar Bowl / Michigan / Florida / Jan. 1
New Year’s Day / Orlando / Jan. 2 / College Football Championship

Bowl roundup

Vols’ late TDs stun Hoosiers in Cator

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Tennessee sure knows how to get out of a huge hole.

The Volunteers scored twice in a 30-second span, including an onside kick to help escape a 13-point deficit, and then held on to stun Indiana 23-22 in the Gator Bowl on Thursday night.

The rally was indicative of Tennessee’s season, which started 1-6 and ended with six consecutive wins.

“Everybody in the country had given up on these guys,” second-year coach Jeremy Pruitt said.

Pruitt was talking about the season. He could have been talking about the Vols, too.

The Hoosiers (8-5) looked to be in control in the second half after taking a 22-13 lead on a 30-yard field goal with 1:08 to play.

Quavaris Crouch scored on a 1-yard plunge and then fellow running back Devine Ozigbo ran over the middle to give the Hoosiers a 30-26 lead with 1:38 to play.

Indiana was up 22-9 before Tennessee (8-5) knocked most of the ball out of Indiana’s hands.

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The Bulldogs closed the gap in the second half on Woolridge’s layup and three-pointer to pull to 47-46. Tillie’s layup and dunk gave Gonzaga back the lead at 50-47. Tillie’s free throws capped the 16-0 run, which made it 55-47.

Tillie’s three-point extension Gonzaga’s lead to 67-55. Five Zags finished in double figures.

“Listen, Portland, they did a good job. They took it to us in every facet of the game,” Few said. “They played harder than us, they were way tougher than we were, and they were executing better and stepping up and making tough shots and making free throws, and we weren’t. They deserve a lot of credit for that.”

Tillie and the Zags now face Colorado in Boulder on Saturday. Gonzaga is 8-1 on the road this season and 11-2 overall.

**Tough tests**

The Cardinals (11-2, 2-0 ACC) have one of the most formidable No. 13 San Diego State and No. 12 Michigan, but beat No. 22 Texas Tech.

Both teams have dynamic scorers. Penn State’s Lamar Stevens averages 16.4 points and 7.2 rebounds after matching the NCAA Tournament’s best game.

Payton Pritchard had 21 points to lead Oregon, and several other Top 25 teams up.

- Michigan State (11-3, 3-0 Big Ten) has won six straight and has won its first three conference games.
- Michigan (10-3, 1-1 Big Ten) has fallen back since matching a record by defeating No. 4 in the AP Top 25 on Dec. 2. The Wolverines lost to Louisville after the Michigan win over Oregon and followed with losses to Illinois and No. 4 Oregon.

Following a pair of easy victories, Michigan gets a huge test Sunday, facing rival Michigan State.

The Wildcats open Pac-12 play Saturday, playing at Utah State. Penn State’s Lamar Stevens and several other Top 25 teams up.

- The Mountaineers (11-1) are back to play double-digit games, including defense under Bob Huggins after missing the NCAA Tournament last season. West Virginia faces the Canyon Challenge by knocking off No. 24 Wichita State and pushed around No. 5 Ohio State.
- The Mountaineers are one of the most formidable No. 11-1) teams — with No. 8 Auburn and several other Top 25 teams up.
- The Jayhawks have losses to No. 13 San Diego State and No. 12 Michigan, but beat No. 22 Tech.

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Teams rising in the East

BY TIM REYNOLDS  
Associated Press

The Western Conference is used to being the West is used to being loaded at the top. The East, not so much. But a new year has arrived with a new look in the NBA’s Eastern Conference. The league woke up last week, it arrived with a new look in the East race last until April? And can what seems to be happening in the East race last until April? +

The basic structure of the standings in each conference has been the case on New Year’s Day since 1998. “This is a tough part of the country, a tough part of our country, a tough part of our league,” Philadelphia coach Brett Brown said. He didn’t say “finally,” but he could have.

Just last spring, Brooklyn got the No. 6 seed in the East play-offs at 42-40. This season, it won’t be inconceivable if two teams in the East reach 50 wins and start the play-offs on the road anyway — which would be amazing, considering that every 50-win team possibly.”

Going into 2020, the basic structure of the standings in each conference has been the case on New Year’s Day since 1998. “This is a tough part of the country, a tough part of our country, a tough part of our league,” Philadelphia coach Brett Brown said. He didn’t say “finally,” but he could have.

On the historical player leading a team to a fifth seed in their first day of 2020 — with six East teams with winning percentages of 600 or better, the first time that’s been the case on New Year’s Day since 1998.

“Things seem different now. “It’s really competitive and you have to like this,” Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said. “You have to enjoy it as a competitor. People have been disappearing the Eastern Conference for so long. You have some really good teams here in the East and the teams are proving it.”

Decade in review

There were seven franchises with at least one NBA championship in the 2010s. Golden State led the way with three, followed by Miami with two.

San Antonio was one of the five clubs with one — but a case could be made for the Spurs being the team of the decade.

The Spurs had the most wins in the 2010s, whether just counting the regular season or adding the regular season and the play-offs together. Oklahoma City was No. 2 in regular-season wins, followed by Golden State, Houston and Miami.

The fewest wins? That would be Sacramento, followed by Minnesota, Brooklyn, Brooklyn and New York. But a special Decade Award for futility should go to Detroit — the only team in the NBA that didn’t win a playoff game in the 2010s. The Pistons have lost 14 consecutive post-season contests since winning Game 4 of the 2008 Eastern Conference finals.

Top pick Williamson returns to practice

**METairie, La. — Zion Williamson returned to practice with the New Orleans Pelicans on Thursday for the first time since he had arthroscopic knee surgery shortly before the season began. The NBA’s top overall draft choice out of Duke cannot yet say when he’ll make his regular-season debut. “I felt really good out there,” he said. Williamson, 6-foot-6 and 285 pounds, hung his head in response to the “assessments” by team medical staff before the decision can rest solely with him.**

Thomas Bryant is expected to play Friday or Saturday. The practice wasn’t particularly strenuous. Gentry said Williamson is not expected to play Friday or Saturday.

Doncic, Antetokounmpo lead voting

Dallas’ Luka Doncic received more fan votes than any other player in the opening week of balloting for the NBA All-Star Game. The NBA released the first voting totals Thursday. Miami’s Jimmy Butler was one of five teams outing leaders in the Western Conference frontcourt. Doncic and Houston’s James Harden also are off to tremendous starts in the West.

In the East, Antetokounmpo, Philadelphia’s Joel Embiid and Toronto’s Pascal Siakam are the leaders for the starting frontcourt spots. Atlanta’s Trae Young has been the only player to lead all the guard spots in the East guard race, about 11,000 ahead of Brooklyn’s Kyrie Irving.

Heat edge Raptors in defensive battle

MIAMI — Bam Adebayo had 15 points and 14 rebounds and the Miami Heat put together their best defensive performance of the season in an 84-76 victory over the Toronto Raptors on Thursday night. The Raptors’ total was their lowest in more than four years — also coming in a game at Miami on Nov. 8, 2015 — and the second-lowest by any team in the NBA this season.

“We took it to heart,” Adebayo said. “We needed to defend and that’s what we did tonight.”

Tyler Herro and Goran Dragic each scored 13 for Miami. The Heat are 2-0 against the Raptors this season and improved to 9-0 after a loss. Miami and Milwaukee are the only teams to lose consecutive games this season.

Derrick Jones Jr. scored 10 points and Jimmy Butler finished with eight points, 12 rebounds and seven assists for Miami. Serge Ibaka had 19 points and 10 rebounds for Toronto. Kyle Lowry scored 15 points, Rondae Hollis-Jefferson added 13 and OG Anunoby had 12 points and 12 rebounds. The Raptors shot 31.5% and were 6-for-42 from three point-range.

Nuggets 124, Pacers 116

Michael Porter Jr. scored a career-high 25 points and Jamal Murray added 22 in visiting Denver’s victory over Indiana. The Nuggets have won three of four and earned this one despite having Nikola Jokic in serious foul trouble all night. Jokic finished with 22 points, 12 in the fourth quarter, and seven rebounds.

Clippers 126, Pistons 112

Montreal Harrell scored 23 points and Los Angeles survived without Paul George in the second half to beat visiting Detroit, winning consecutive games for the first time since Dec. 13.

George didn’t return after half-time because of left hamstring tightness. He scored 12 points.

Thunder 109, Spurs 103

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 25 points and Oklahoma City overcame 30 by DeMar DeRozan to beat the Spurs, snapping a nine-game skid in San Antonio.

Chris Paul had 10 of his 16 points in the fourth quarter to help Oklahoma win its fourth straight.

Timberwolves 99, Warriors 84

Shabazz Napier and Robert Covington each scored 20 points to help host Minnesota beat Golden State in a matchup of injury-ravaged teams.

Heat 129, Cavaliers 106

Devonte’ Graham hit a three-pointer with 26 seconds left to break a tie and cap visiting Charlotte’s late rally against Cleveland.

Kings 128, Grizzlies 123

De’Aaron Fox scored 10 of his 27 points in the final five minutes and host Sacramento overcame a 20-point deficit in the first half to beat Memphis, ending an eight- game losing streak.

Nets 123, Nets 111

Luka Doncic scored 15 of his 31 points in the fourth quarter as host Dallas beat Brooklyn.

Jazz 102, Bulls 98: Bojan Bogdanovic scored 19 points and visiting Utah held off Chicago.
DENVER — With a big offensive push, the Colorado Avalanche turned the page on a tough stretch at home and against the St. Louis Blues in particular.

Nazem Kadri scored twice, Nathan MacKinnon added a goal and three assists, and the Avalanche beat the Blues 7-3 Thursday night to snap a four-game skid at home.

Rookie defenceman Cale Makar added a power-play goal and an assist for the Avalanche, who also ended a six-game losing streak to the Blues, including two losses earlier this season in St. Louis. Mikko Rantanen J.T. Compher also had power-play goals, and Joonas Donskoi also had the goal for Avalanche.

Girard finished with four assists. “Everybody was going in the right direction,” said Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar.

Avalanche right wing Joonas Donskoi, left, battles Blues center Brayden Schnarr during the second period on Thursday in Denver.

Avalanche goalie Philipp Grubauer, who had 24 saves. “Everybody was going. We need that. (The Blues) are a real good team, so luge points for us. We didn’t do well the last couple games against them. It was a good game for us. We need to keep collecting points and playing the right way. You miss a point here and there, it’s going to cost you in the end.”

MacKinnon said he liked the way the Avalanche responded with a big third period after the Blues had fought back from a three-goal deficit to make a game of it.

“I think we were just due, honestly,” MacKinnon said. “We were giving all the opponents their goals in the third, we had bad breakaways. Something just felt kind of different tonight when they made it 3-2. There was no panic from Cale had a big goal and that kind of iceked it. We knew we needed some maturity from everybody at that time.”

Bednar had two goals and Alex Pietrangelo also scored for St. Louis, which lost its second in a row after winning the previous eight.

Sabres 3, Oilers 2: Jack Eichel scored on a penalty shot 1:09 into overtime and lost to an offside call on a two-goal deficit to beat Edmonton.

Eichel was awarded the penalty shot after Edmonton’s Oscar Klefbom interfered with the Sabres’ captain as he attempted to break in alone across the Oilers’ blue line.

Eichel then scored when he drove in right from the left corner and snapped a shot inside the far post.

Reinhart and Curtis Lazar also scored for Edmonton, which snapped a four-game skid.

Sharks 3, Penguins 2 (OT): Brent Burns scored the winner with more than two minutes into overtime to give San Jose a win over Pittsburgh.

Burns picked up his seventh goal of the season when his slap shot from high in the slot beat Tristan Jarry 2:02 in the extra period to give the Sharks only their third win in 14 games.

Thornton got the primary assist to move past Adam Oates for seventh place with 1,080 career assists.

Patrick Hornqvist scored twice for Pittsburgh, which lost for just their fourth straight at home.

Sonny Milano also scored for the Penguins, the team lost its third straight.

Dubois won it by finishing off a 2-on-1 rush with Seth Jones.

Sonny Milano also scored for the Blue Jackets, who improved to 22-13-4, who improved to 22-13-4, who improved to 22-13-4, who improved to 22-13-4, who improved to 22-13-4.

Sergei Bobrovsky made 28 saves.

Los Angeles 2, Coyotes 1: Los Angeles won their third win in 14 games. Joe Pavelski scored the game-winner 2:02 into the extra period.

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Some made memorable by blown calls

BY PAUL NEWBERRY
Associated Press

The New Orleans Saints advanced to the Super Bowl with an adrenaline win against the Saints that would not have been possible without an egregious mistake by the officials in the closing minutes of regulation.

Los Angeles corner Nickell Robey-Coleman committed a blatant interference penalty with a helmet-to-helmet hit on Tommylee Lewis well before the pass arrived inside the 5, forcing the Saints to settle for Wil Lutz’s 31-yard field goal.

“I got away with one,” Robey-Coleman conceded.

Jared Goff had enough time to lead the Rams down the field for Greg Zuerlein’s tying field goal with 15 seconds left and in need of a touchdown to win the game.

Game over? Nope.

“We kind of thought we had it sealed,” Auburn’s Bryce Brown said. “I just didn’t agree with the call.”

Pavelski payback

Auburn and New Orleans weren’t the only teams to gripe about the officiating.

The NFL season ended for the Vegas Golden Knights with a 5-4 overtime win over the Philadelphia Flyers in Game 7.

As for the Golden Knights, they had to deal with a call from the NHL, derogating for a penalty that was too costly.

The Golden Knights tied the game with a goal in regulation, but Brayden McNabb’s overtime goal won it for the Saints. (4-4-4)

“The boys got together and said this is what we need to do,” said Vegas coach Peter DeBoer. “It’s a joke, that’s what it is.”

Follow the bouncing ball

Kawhi Leonard got the bounce. Then another. Then another. And, yes, one more.

Finally, the shot fell through, giving the Toronto Raptors a 92-90 victory that bounced the Philadelphia 76ers out of the NBA playoffs.

Leonard’s shot from the corner over Joel Embiid was the first winning buzzer-beater in a Game 7 in NBA history.

The ball danced on the rim four times before dropping. It was quite a capper to Leonard’s 41-point masterpiece.

The Raptors went on to claim their first NBA title by beating the defending champion Golden State Warriors.

“Was great,” Leonard said. “It was a blessing to be able to get to that point and make that shot and feel that moment.”

Megan’s moment

Megan Rapinoe capped a remarkable year of sporting excellence and social activism by leading United States to its second straight Women’s World Cup title.

Rapinoe broke a scoreless tie in the final with a second-half penalty kick, and the Americans went on to beat the Netherlands 2-0.

Rapinoe won the Golden Ball as top player and the Golden Boot as top scorer in the monthlong tournament, but her impact went far beyond the field.

She sparred with U.S. President Donald Trump and was one of the leading voices on a squad that loudly demanded equal pay with the men’s team.

“We’re such a proud and strong and defiant group of women,” Rapinoe said.

Her trademark victory pose, looking skyward with arms outstretched, also became a worldwide sensation.

Brave blossoms

In the wake of Typhoon Hagibis, host Japan turned in a thoroughly inspiring performance at the Rugby World Cup in its final group stage match against Scotland.

A brilliant display by the team known as the “Brave Blossoms” gave them a big halftime lead. Then they held off a furious Scottish comeback to preserve a 28-21 victory.

Japan advanced to the quarterfinals for the first time. Even though they lost to eventual champion South Africa, their tournament run was just what their battered nation needed after the ferocious storm.

Burrow busts Tua

Joe Burrow propelled LSU to the College Football Playoff and himself to the Heisman Trophy with a dazzling display against Tua Tagovailoa and Alabama in college football’s game of the year.

Burrow passed for 393 yards and three touchdowns, answered challenge after challenge, and helped end LSU’s eight-year waiting period for a title.

“We finally got the tools that we need to beat those guys,” coach Ed Orgeron said. “To have a championship team, you’ve got to have a championship quarterback.”

Angel on the pitcher’s mound

In their first home game after the death of pitcher Tyler Skaggs, the Los Angeles Angels honored his memory with a combined no-hitter from Taylor Cole and Felix Pena in a 13-0 victory over Seattle.

The Angels played a practically perfect game on the day before what would have been Skaggs’ 28th birthday.

“It’s all looking good tonight,” said Mike Trout, who contributed a 454-foot homer and six RBIs.

Later, officials ruled that Skaggs’ death was caused by an accidental drug overdose, prompting Major League Baseball to start testing for cocaine and opioids.

Members of the Los Angeles Angels place their jerseys with No. 45 in honor of pitcher Tyler Skaggs on the mound after the team combined for a no-hitter on July 12 against the Seattle Mariners.

GAMES OF THE YEAR

YEAR IN REVIEW
This Bill is now due: Allen comes into his own in his second season

By John Wawrow  
Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Whatever bad memories Bills quarterback Josh Allen had of his first and only game NFL at Houston have been pushed aside some 14 months later.

There’s no need to remind the second-year player of leaving the game in the third quarter with a sprained throwing elbow that eventually led to him missing five weeks. And Allen doesn’t need to hear of the telltale rookie awkwardness he displayed after being just a starting role ahead of schedule as a result of Nathan Peterman’s turnover-prone issues.

However raw Buffalo’s first-round draft pick looked in the weeks leading up to a 20-13 loss to the Texans on Oct. 14, 2018, Allen believes he’s made considerable strides in preparing to make his playoff debut in an AFC wild-card game at Houston on Saturday.

“Obviously, going through that game there’s not many great memories. Nobody likes getting hurt,” he said following practice Tuesday.

“I feel like a different player from last year ... just as far as seeing things, seeing defenses, trusting the guys around me and not trying to make the big play all the time.”

Allen’s progress has been apparent during a season in which he’s posted five fourth-quarter comebacks and helped Buffalo (10-6) to its best finish in 20 years. He’s doubled his touchdown passing total to 20; his completion percentage has jumped by 6 points to 68.6; and his 3,089 yards passing are the most by a Bills player since Ryan Fitzpatrick had 3,400 in 2012.

Having shown a flair for performing in national settings by beating the Cowboys at Dallas on Thanksgiving and the Steelers in Pittsburgh in prime-time, Allen can appreciate how the playoffs represent the next step in his development.

“It’s a new game. It’s a different situation,” he said. “All the marbles are on the table.”

No pressure, said Allen, who can become Buffalo’s first-quarter backer to win a playoff game since Hall of Famer Jim Kelly oversaw a 37-22 wild-card victory over Miami on Dec. 30, 1995.

“I don’t have to be the best quarterback out there,” Allen said. “I have to be the best quarterback for this team to help us win a football game regardless of the circumstances.”

Allen’s comments echo what his coaches have emphasized on maintaining an even keel.

“The juices get flowing, it’s a competitive time of year and you’ve got to do a good job of trying to stay as level-headed as you can,” offensive coordinator Brian Daboll said. “You want to win it so bad, but you’ve got to stay consistent with your routine and the things you’ve done all throughout the year.”

If there’s a concern, it’s Allen acknowledging he’s experienced early game jitters, most recently following a 24-17 loss at New England two weeks ago. It was a game in which he went 6-for-13 for 62 yards and a touchdown in the first half, before finishing 13-for-26 for 208 yards and two touchdowns.

Slow starts have been an issue this season.

Buffalo’s game-opening drives have produced just one touchdown and four field goals. And the Bills have combined to score just 12 points in the first quarter of their past eight games, and 43 overall.

“That’s on my shoulders. We’ve got to go and start faster,” Allen said.

As for the jitters? “Just got to ride it,” he said.

“That’s OK to be hyped at times. It means that you care.”

Backup Matt Barkley credited Allen for showing growth and maturity. Barkley noted how Allen is no longer scrambling out of the pocket at the first sign of pressure, and has cut down on trying to force plays which lead to negative gains or turnovers.

That’s different to the player Barkley saw when he first arrived in Buffalo two weeks after Allen was hurt against the Texans.

“I do think there was a drastic change from the first half of the season and when he came back,” he added.
**NFL Playoffs**

**Scoreboard**

- **Playoff glance**
  - **Wild-card Playoffs**
    - **Saturday, Dec. 21**
      - **Buffalo Bills (10-6)** at **Houston Texans (10-6)**
      - **AFN-Sports**
      - **2 p.m. Sunday CET**
      - **10 a.m. Sunday JKT**

- **Divisional Playoffs**
  - **Saturday, Jan. 11**
    - **Philadelphia, Seattle or Minnesota at San Francisco**
    - **Buffalo or Tennessee at Baltimore**
    - **Sunday, Jan. 12**
      - **New England, Houston or Buffalo at Kansas City**
      - **New Orleans, Philadelphia or Seattle at Green Bay**
      - **Conference Championships**
      - **Sunday, Jan. 19**
        - **AFC East champions vs. AFC West champions**
        - **NFC East champions vs. NFC West champions**

- **NFL injury report**

- **Tennessee Titans (9-7)** at **New England Patriots (12-4)**
  - **AFN-Sports**
  - **Sunday, Jan. 12**
    - **2 p.m. Sunday CET**
    - **10 a.m. Sunday JKT**

- **Minnesota Vikings (10-6)** at **New Orleans Saints (13-3)**
  - **AFN-Sports**
  - **Sunday, Jan. 19**
    - **7 p.m. Sunday CET**
    - **6 a.m. Monday JKT**

- **Seattle Seahawks (11-5)** at **Philadelphia Eagles (9-7)**
  - **AFN-Sports**
  - **Sunday, Jan. 19**
    - **10:30 p.m. Sunday CET**
    - **6:30 a.m. Monday JKT**

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**Carrying: Titans rank third in rushing yardage**

**FROM BACK PAGE**

Coach Mike Vrabel told his Titans before they clinched the AFC’s second wild card that being able to run is how teams win in the postseason. Tennessee (9-7) ranks third in averaging 138.9 yards a game.

“You control the ball, control the tempo,” Vrabel said. “I would say there’s probably less turnovers on running plays than there are on passing plays, and turnovers at this point in the year are critical. The last game the Patriots lost was Jan. 20, 2013 in the playoffs, and they had three turnovers and the Ravens had zero. So, that’s a telling stat.”

How well Tennessee runs Saturday night against the Patriots will hinge on their star, Henry, who averaged 20.2 carries in 15 games played this season. He is averaging 5.1 yards per carry, and also has had three touchdowns on runs of 53 yards or longer this season.

Henry knows that.

“Have you got a run to the ball to get to the Super Bowl, so I think running the ball effectively is a big key to winning games in the playoffs,” Henry said.

New England (12-4) finished sixth against the run, allowing only 95.9 yards a game. Patriots coach Bill Belichick said it’s impossible to mimic the 6-foot-3, 247-pound Henry’s blend of speed and physical play in practice, though there’s not many guys in the NFL like him.

“Coach Henry has been close up most recently during joint practices in the NFL, which helps,” Henry said.

“He can make you miss in space, he can drop his pads and run with power and run over you. He’s a good inside runner, good outside runner, and catches the ball well, and he’s got speed to go the distance. He doesn’t get caught much. He gets a step and then he’s able to finish it off,” Belichick said.

“He’s got a good stiff arm. He breaks a lot of tackles in the secondary from guys that just can’t get close enough to wrap him up — he just pushes them away.”

Henry’s best season yet is perfect timing. The running back who lasted until the No. 45 pick overall in the second round before Tennessee selected him out of Alabama in the final year of his rookie contract.

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NFL PLAYOFFS

CARRYING THE LOAD

League rushing leader Henry ready to take ball often against Patriots

By Teresa M. Walker
Associated Press

No one is a harsher critic of Titans running back Derrick Henry than himself. “I just want to do my job very well,” Henry said Wednesday. “If I don’t, I’m hard on myself. I just keep working until I get it right.” The NFL rushing leader and first-time Pro Bowl running back will get a chance Saturday night to improve on his last performance against the Patriots in the playoffs. Henry ran 12 times for 28 yards — a 2.3-yard average per carry — with nothing over 4 yards. He did catch three passes for 21 yards, but the Titans lost 34-14 in the divisional round on Jan. 13, 2018. He ran better the last time Tennessee played New England, averaging 5.3 yards on just 11 carries, as the Titans routed the Patriots 34-10 on Nov. 11, 2018, in Nashville. Since then, the 2015 Heisman Trophy winner has been punishing defenders, piling up yards in his best year yet. Henry capped his fourth season with 1,540 yards rushing and tied for the league lead with 16 rushing touchdowns, which he calls a “team accomplishment.”

SEE CARRYING ON PAGE 23

Blown calls factored into some of 2019’s biggest games

NBA, Page 19

New Year, new look
Eastern Conference has gotten tougher at the top