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STARS AND STRIPES.®

Volume 78, No. 210

©SS 2020

CONTINGENCY EDITION

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2020

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Free to Deployed Areas

President Donald Trump holds up a newspaper reporting the outcome of his impeachment trial at the National Prayer Breakfast on Thursday at the Washington Hilton.

EVAN VUCCI/AP



Trump takes victory lap

After acquittal, president unleashes fury at impeachment

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US-Iraqi military alliance not broken, but showing strain

BY SAMYA KULLAB
AND QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A new watchtower rose over an American military base in northern Iraq, and cranes lifted hefty slabs of concrete to reinforce the barricades in beefed-up protections. The danger, soldiers

there said, came not from the constellation of militant sleeper cells embedded in the landscape but further afield in Iran.

U.S. forces in Iraq have been on guard for retaliation by Iran or its Shiite militia allies since the U.S. killed Iran's top general in Iraq with an airstrike in Baghdad last month. The Jan. 3 strike also fueled a wave of outrage among Iraq's Shiite leadership

and intensified demands that American troops leave the country.

Since then, Iraqi leaders have scaled back the saber-rattling rhetoric. But behind closed doors, the bitterness has poisoned the partnership. The government told the Iraqi military not to seek U.S. help in operations fighting Islamic State, two senior Iraqi military officials told The As-

sociated Press — a sign that authorities are serious about rethinking the strategic relationship.

At stake are vital U.S.-provided weapons, military technologies and aircraft that have been key in countering the threat of ISIS militants trying to make a comeback in northern and western

SEE ALLIANCE ON PAGE 7

BUSINESS/WEATHER

Barnes & Noble cancels classics with new covers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Barnes & Noble is withdrawing a planned line of famous literature reissued with multicultural cover images that has been met with widespread criticism on social media.

"We acknowledge the voices who have expressed concerns about the Diverse Editions project at our Barnes & Noble Fifth Avenue store and have decided to suspend the initiative," Barnes & Noble announced in a statement Wednesday.

The author Adriana Herrera had called the books, scheduled to be launched this week, "the classics in blackface."

"Diverse Editions," a joint project between Barnes & Noble and Penguin Random House, featured 12 texts, including Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein" and L. Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz." The words are the same, but on the cover, major characters are depicted with dark-skinned illustrations by artists of "different

ethnicities and backgrounds," according to Barnes & Noble.

The decision comes in February, which is Black History Month.

"They could have Googled, chosen a dozen books by actual Black authors that are classics and sent those out with fresh covers & a big event," author Mikki Kendall tweeted.

In its statement Wednesday, Barnes & Noble acknowledged that the new covers were "not a substitute for black voices or writers of color, whose work and voices deserve to be heard."

EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates		Commercial rates	
Euro costs (Feb. 7)	\$1.1279	Bahrain (Dinar)	0.3770
Dollar buys (Feb. 7)	60.8866	British pound	\$1.2954
British pound (Feb. 7)	\$1.33	Canada (Dollar)	1.3293
Japanese yen (Feb. 7)	107.00	China (Yuan)	6.9686
South Korean won (Feb. 7)	1,153.00	Denmark (Krone)	68008
		Egypt (Pound)	15.7698
		Euro	\$1.0987/0.9101
		Hong Kong (Dollar)	7.7530
		Hungary (Forint)	306.84
		Israel (Shekel)	3.4393
		Japan (Yen)	109.93
		Kuwait (Dinar)	0.3042
		Norway (Krone)	9.2410
		Philippines (Peso)	50.75
		Poland (Zloty)	3.87
		Saudi Arabia (Riyal)	3.7515
		Singapore (Dollar)	1.3856
		South Korea (Won)	1,184.18
		Switzerland (Franc)	0.9751
		Thailand (Baht)	31.13
		Turkey (Lira)	5.8882

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

INTEREST RATES

Prime rate	4.75
Discount rate	2.25
Federal funds market rate	1.50
3-month bill	1.53
30-year bond	2.13

WEATHER OUTLOOK

FRIDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST



FRIDAY IN EUROPE



SATURDAY IN THE PACIFIC



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

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MILITARY

DOD mulls name for Space Force members

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The newly established Space Force will grow from one member to an estimated 15,000 to 16,000 troops in the coming years, but it remains unclear what Space Force members will be called.

Space Force planners are taking the naming of their troops very seriously, said Air Force Lt. Gen. David Thompson, who is assigned as the vice commander of the Space Force.

"It's something we've spent some serious time and energy on," Thompson told reporters Wednesday at the Pentagon. "There are a couple of really strong options on what we might be called and some pretty strong opinions. What we'd like to do is ensure we've thought as broadly as we can ... and consider what that ought to be before we land on it."

Planners have sought guidance

from the language department at the Air Force Academy, from the Defense Language Institute and they have conducted crowdsourcing with troops expected to transfer into the Space Force to determine what their service's equivalent will be to soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen.

They have made a few determinations on what Space Force members will not be called. Thompson ruled out naming them "spacemen" or "space cadets." He declined to identify names that officials are considering.

It is just one aspect of many unknowns that remain in the development of the first new military service established since the Air Force's creation in 1948. The service aims to be much smaller than the others, built almost exclusively of forces focused entirely on space operations. It will rely heavily on the Air Force to provide support troops, such as



SETH ROBSON/Stars and Stripes

A space operations occupational badge.

medical, logistics and security troops, Thompson said.

But it will still be months before the Space Force has actual troops. Now, about 16,000 personnel — about 3,400 Air Force officers, 6,200 enlisted airmen and some 8,000 civilians — are assigned to the Space Force but remain a part of the Air Force.

To date, only one person has been officially transferred into the Space Force — the Chief of Space Operations Gen. Jay Raymond. But officials expect about 6,000 troops from the Air Force's

space operations to officially transfer into the new service by the end of 2020, according to the report provided to Congress on Monday and obtained by Stars and Stripes. The officials expect space operators now serving in the Army and Navy will begin transferring into the Space Force in fiscal year 2022.

The transfer process is somewhat complicated, and Thompson said it will take some time to sort it out to ensure it is done smoothly and "everyone gets paid," once it is completed.

The report lays out the transfer process for troops who will join the Space Force. "To do so, those members will formally resign their commission or terminate their enlistment with the Air Force, Army, or Navy, and re-commission or re-enlist into the Space Force," the report states. "Planners are actively developing specific processes and conditions that must be met before begin-

ning transfer processes."

Thompson also said planners are deciding on criteria for how Space Force members will be judged for promotion, as airmen will compete with longtime members of the Army and the Navy, which use different criteria for advancing their troops.

While troops working in space operations, which include space intelligence, space engineering, space communications, and space acquisition, among other jobs, will be expected to transfer into the Space Force, they will not be forced to do so, Thompson said.

"As a general principle, if you are in space operations — officers or enlisted members — the assumption and the expectation is that you will transfer into the Space Force," he said. "For those who may not want to for various reasons we'll have mechanisms in place."

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MICHAEL MURPHY/U.S. Air Force

A B-52H Stratofortress from the 69th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron prepares to depart Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, on Tuesday.

Air Force B-52 bombers train with fighters and Japanese allies

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A pair of B-52H Stratofortress bombers flew alongside Japanese and American fighters in a collective show of force Monday near Misawa Air Base in northeastern Japan.

The strategic bombers from Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, and Minot Air Force Base, N.D., trained with six Misawa-based 35th Fighter Wing F-16s and 45 Japan Air Self-Defense Force planes, including F-2s, F-4s and F-15s, Pacific Air Forces officials said in a statement Wednesday.

The bombers are part of a combined Continuous Bomber Presence and Bomber Task Force mission, the officials said. U.S. Strategic Command's bomber forces regularly train with allies and partners, demonstrating U.S. capability to command, control and conduct bomber missions around the world.

"This mission demonstrates the flexibility, long reach and responsive nature of our bomber force as we continue to assure our allies and deter aggressors globally," said Maj. Gen. James Dawkins Jr., 8th Air Force and Joint-Global Strike Operations

Center commander. "Joint and multinational integration provides an excellent opportunity for our Airmen to maintain their readiness and hone their global strike capability."

The Guam-based bombers are assigned to the 69th Expeditionary Bomb Squadron out of Minot and deployed to the region as part of the 15-year-old continuous presence mission, officials said.

"These missions routinely operate throughout the region in accordance with international law and norms," the statement said.

U.S. Strategic Command has conducted bomber task force missions since 2014 as a sign of commitment to collective security, and to integrate with combatant commands. The first such mission included B-52Hs and B-2 Spirits traveling from the continental United States to Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam in April 2014, officials said.

"Strategic bomber missions enhance the readiness and training necessary to respond to any potential crisis or challenge across the globe," officials said in the statement.

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Submarine builder to hire thousands as production ramps up

Associated Press

WARWICK, R.I. — Defense contractor General Dynamics Electric Boat will need to hire thousands more employees over the next decade as it ramps up submarine production, the company's president said Monday.

Electric Boat President Kevin Graney met with elected officials in Connecticut and Rhode Island for an annual legislative update. The company's headquarters is in Groton, Conn., and its manufacturing facility is in North Kingstown, R.I.

At the Warwick, R.I., meeting, Graney said the company currently has nearly 17,000 employees, of which 70% are based in Connecticut — a level of employment not seen since 1993. Electric Boat will need about 20,000 employees around 2030 to build two classes of submarines. That will require hiring about 18,000 people to increase the headcount and account for attrition, he added.

Electric Boat currently builds Virginia-class fast-attack submarines under a teaming agreement with Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia. The U.S. Navy awarded the largest shipbuilding contract in its history in December, ordering nine more attack submarines for a total of \$22.2 billion.

Electric Boat is the prime contractor for a new class of ballistic-missile submarines, the Columbia class. Construction is expected to begin on the first ship, out of 12, in October.

With both submarine classes under construction, it will be a level of submarine production not

seen since the Cold War, Graney said.

As the company has grown in recent years, some attack submarines have been delivered to the Navy late and there was a welding issue in 2018 with a subcontractor.

Electric Boat is focused on the training of new employees and supervisors to emphasize the company's culture, and reaching out to the growing supplier base to ensure quality, Graney said. Because it will be challenging to hire the number of employees the company needs, with the right mindset and attention to detail for the work, it is doing more outreach to schools to get students interested in shipbuilding, beginning in elementary school, he added.

"It is a generational challenge when you think about what we are all doing," he said after the meeting. "We're pushing this enterprise faster than it has been pushed in 40 years. And so it is absolutely the challenge of a lifetime for anybody who's really involved with these programs."

Graney seemed confident in Electric Boat's ability to meet the challenge, saying that "failure is not an option."

Democratic Gov. Gina Raimondo, who attended the meeting, promised to continue helping Electric Boat find the talent it needs, using the state's job training programs and partnerships with local schools. Rhode Island Democratic U.S. Reps. Jim Langevin and David Cicilline said they'd continue advocating for submarine funding in Congress.

MILITARY



David Sewell

Army veteran David Sewell, seen after surgery in 2013, said he was diagnosed that year with mesothelioma from asbestos. He believes he was exposed to asbestos during remediation work at Camp Walker, South Korea.

Vets: Asbestos removal to blame for health problems

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Former soldiers who say they were sickened by a botched asbestos remediation project in South Korea two decades ago want the Army to find and warn others who may have been exposed to the carcinogen.

A 1996 inspection of U.S. bases on the peninsula found asbestos in 200 buildings.

"Experts say dozens of buildings on bases across South Korea might be contaminated with broken pieces of asbestos, resulting in crushed, airborne fragments that can be deadly if inhaled," said a Stars and Stripes report published May 28, 2000.

Twenty years later, veterans who worked in a building at Camp Walker, where the Army removed asbestos, believe they may have been exposed to toxic dust.

David Sewell, 59, worked in the building as a noncommissioned officer with the 36th Signal Battalion from 1994-2000 and was still working there as a network security civilian contractor when the asbestos was removed, he said.

Sewell said that he was diagnosed with mesothelioma from asbestos exposure in 2013.

"I'm lucky I am not dead," he said in a telephone interview last month.

Treatment for the disease involved the removal of his gall bladder and about 450 tumors from his stomach and liver, eight chemotherapy sessions and a month in a hospital, said the disabled retiree living in Cumming, Ga.

Sewell believes that he was exposed to asbestos during the Camp Walker remediation work. He said that the Army should reach out to U.S. and South Korean personnel who were working in the building during the asbestos removal.

"All the people who worked in that building need to know they were exposed to asbestos and be checked," he said.

The asbestos abatement happened from October 2000 to May 2001, said U.S. Army Garrison

Daegu spokesman Cameron Porter.

"Prior to being contacted by Stars and Stripes, we were not aware of any individuals who were expressing specific health concerns related to that project," he said in an email Jan. 16.

Porter recommended that veterans who suspect they have been affected by the program should contact their local Veterans Affairs medical facility.

Sewell said that between 60 and 70 U.S. and South Korean workers were still in the building, which included a large room full of computers and communications equipment known as the Theater Network Operations Support Center, when workers started to remove the asbestos.

"There was white powder all over the floor and desks," he said.

"Halfway through the project, they moved employees from the back of the building into a tent because we complained that we couldn't breathe."

The asbestos was stacked in front of the building after it was removed, Sewell said.

"Dust blew across the base into family housing," he said. "It's pretty scary stuff."

Carl Turnbow, 61, of Sweetwater, Texas, who did several tours of duty in South Korea between 1980 and 2000 as an Army NCO, was working for a contractor in the Camp Walker building when the asbestos was removed.

The signals personnel found themselves surrounded by plastic sheeting, but their workspaces were full of dust from the work, he recalled.

"We were sitting there coughing," he said.

Partway through the work, the staff moved to a tent beside the building, Turnbow said.

Turnbow, who still works in the Camp Walker signals building, has had his own health issues, although it's not clear whether they were caused by asbestos exposure. He's had a kidney removed and several cases of skin cancer in recent years, he said, and doctors have also found nodules on his lungs.

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By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

After accusing officials in charge of the military's Exceptional Family Member Program of "happy talk," but no action, Rep. Jackie Speier vowed Wednesday to bring them back to Capitol Hill every three months until they've met all the recommendations made by a government watchdog two years ago.

"We are going to be hawks on this," said Speier, a Calif., chairwoman of the subpanel on military personnel for the House Armed Services Committee.

Wednesday's hearing was the first time in more than a decade that the committee had heard about the program, which is a mandatory enrollment program for service members who have a family member requiring specialized medical care, treatment programs or educational services.

While the program is meant to ensure that those service members receive duty assignments to locations where those special needs can be met, testimony from two military spouses with children in the program and three representatives from military advocacy groups depicted that the program is failing in several ways. About 135,000 military family members are enrolled in the program, as of April 2019.

Army spouse Austin Carrigg described in her testimony how her husband was assigned to Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., and the couple was told that the services needed for her two children who are in the program would be available. Once they moved there, the family learned the wait list for some services was more than a year.

"When a baby is 3 months old, 18 months is a very long time to wait," she said.

A 2018 Government Accountability Office report found that the Defense Department needs better oversight of the program and provided three recommendations. While the Defense Department allows each service branch to implement its own EFMP, there is no standardization or performance measurement structure, said Jackie Nowicki, director of K-12 education for GAO and the report's author. Her testimony focused on the report and the variations in support between each service branch.

"DOD relies on each military service to implement its policy on support for families with special needs," she said. "In doing so, they all rely on each military service to determine the extent to which its assistance to families with special needs complies with this policy."

Based on data in the report and testimony provided during the hearing, the Marine Corps moved for EFMP was held up as the one that should be implemented across the other services.



Austin Carrigg



Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif.

It provides many support services, including relocation services, outreach with stakeholders and has staff attend meetings to create education plans with area school systems.

Speier told Carolyn Stevens, director of the Defense Department's Office of Military Family Readiness Policy, that doing so would "solve a lot of our problems," because "they obviously get it."

While the Marine Corps only has about 11,000 families enrolled in the program, it has 107 full-time staff members dedicated to it. Meanwhile, the Army has 119 employees for about 54,000 families.

The Marines provide families special education attorneys to help when public schools deny federally mandated services and also ensure that EFMP staff communicate with families in the program quarterly. No other branch has a blanket communication requirement.

Engaging families remained an important aspect to repairing the program for lawmakers as they grilled officials. Speier pledged to fix the program this year, beginning with town halls that would draw people from the overflow crowd in attendance for Wednesday's hearing to share their own stories about EFMP.

"We're going to change this system so it's responsive to the families," she said. "Words don't have any weight unless they are followed up with actions. You can all say you're here for families, but unless we're going to show it with action, we're not going to achieve that result."

The ranking Republican on the subcommittee, Rep. Trent Kelly of Mississippi, agreed that families are the most important aspect of the program — not processes.

"What we're talking about are people," he said. "And we're talking about those very most vulnerable people we should be helping. We shouldn't be making it harder. We should be making it easier."

Kelly then quizzed the six Defense Department and service branch officials to see whether they had personally spoken to a

military family enrolled in the program in the last three months. Only Jennifer Stewart, manager of the Marine Corps' EFMP had.

Kelly also agreed with recommendations to get families placed on the wait list for services before they move to a new location and to grant additional pay to service members who choose to leave their families behind to take assignments that advance their careers, but in an area located too far from the treatments their special needs family members require.

These are "easy fixes," he said.

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EUROPE

Aviano to receive more COLA, others less after survey

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY
Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — Aviano airmen got a boost in their living allowance this month, while most other service members in Italy will see theirs cut next month.

The adjustments in the cost-of-living allowance, the nontaxable payment designed to offset higher overseas prices of goods and services, ranges from a negligible amount to hundreds of dollars a month.

The increase began Feb. 1 for Aviano-based troops. The decreases for troops in Gaeta, Sigonella, Livorno and Vicenza will be effective March 1, an Office of the Secretary of Defense memo stated.

Defense Department civilian post allowance, which is based on State Department data and calculated differently, is not affected.

Gaeta was hit hardest with a six-point decrease in the COLA index, followed by Vicenza, down four points, both because of "significant (price) decreases in the groceries, clothing, phone and transportation categories," the memo said.

Aviano's index increased two points, largely because of a cost increase in "the telephone/Internet category."

Livorno and Sigonella were each down two points. Ghedi and Naples had no change.

Each point corresponds to a different dollar amount depending on a service member's rank, length of service and number of family members.

One COLA point for an E-6 with 10 years of service and three dependents for this year is about \$34.50 a month, OSD said. One COLA point for an O-3 with 10 years of service and three dependents is about \$44.

The adjustments mean that an Aviano E-6 would see an extra \$69 a month and the officer would see \$88 more a month.

The Vicenza E-6 would see \$138 less a month, and the officer would receive \$176 a month less.

Service members receiving an increase will receive the full amount in the first eligible pay period, while decreased will be phased into paychecks.

The changes come after troops and family members completed the Living Pattern Survey, which is generally done every three years, this fall.

The survey asks service members or spouses which local stores they shop in, what they bought and the percentage of goods they buy there or from the commissary and exchange.



NANCY MONTGOMERY/Stars and Stripes

Vicenza commissary shoppers said that convenience and brand names were primary reasons they did most of their shopping on base.

That survey is coupled with an annual market basket survey that prices about 120 goods and services bought off base. The prices are then compared with average U.S. costs for equivalent items.

If the overseas market basket cost is greater than the average U.S. cost, a COLA is paid.

"While decreases are not desired, all COLA changes ... are data-based and calculated using the same methodology," the OSD memo stated.

Some Vicenza commissary shoppers said Thursday that they were unaware of the changes.

"It's going down?" said Michelle Ortiz, the base librarian.

"When are they going to tell us?" Abbey Halley said that she was unsure how much she and her staff sergeant husband were getting in their COLA, but that it sounded like the adjustment would cost them "a little chunk."

Neither woman nor two others in the commissary had taken the Living Pattern Survey, which compiled data that reduces the allowance, they said.

They said that in their experience, Italian groceries, clothes and other items' prices hadn't gone down. But all said that they shopped mostly on base because

of the convenience.

"It's just easier," said Georgia Emmons, a military spouse.

Officials with OSD and Command Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia, the COLA Italy Allowance Coordinator, did not return emails and phone calls for comment, including on how many surveys were filled out.

The OSD memo said that "overall minimum sample sizes to statistically validate the survey results were attained."

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MILITARY

Esper sets focus for 2021 budget request

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars And Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon's proposed budget for fiscal year 2021 is meant to ensure the Defense Department can compete militarily with its great-power competitors China and Russia, Defense Secretary Mark Esper told senior leaders in a memorandum.

The budget request, expected to be unveiled Monday, "supports irreversible implementation of the [2018] National Defense Strategy" by building a path to a more modern, combat-ready force, Esper wrote in the Jan. 27 memo. The memo was sent to the civilian secretaries of the Pentagon's three military departments and their top deputies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the four-star commanders of the 11 combatant commands.

Esper singled out four primary areas for those individuals to focus on during congressional testimony to defend the forthcoming budget request:

- It would invest heavily in increasing military combat readiness and modern weaponry needed against a near-peer adversary.

- It would strengthen and build military partnerships and alliances around the world.

- It would reform the Pentagon for "greater performance and accountability."

- It would support troops and their families.

"Each component should ensure that [those] themes are incorporated into oral and written statements to our oversight committees," Esper wrote in the memo, which was obtained by Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

The Pentagon on Monday is expected to unveil its fiscal year 2021 budget proposal and the budgets for each of its military services as part of the White House's budget proposal rollout. The overall budget is expected to be about \$740 billion, which was agreed to last year by Congress as part of a two-year budget deal. The enacted Pentagon budget for fiscal year 2020 was about \$730 billion.

The 2018 National Defense Strategy directs the Pentagon to prioritize power competition with rivals China and Russia over other global threats, including international terrorism — long the top focus of the U.S. military. It outlines a need for modern weapons to deter aggression from those nations, which have spent heavily in recent years to build forces more capable of competing with American troops and closely watched U.S. tactics in the long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Esper wrote the forthcoming budget request would prioritize new spending to modernize the U.S. nu-

clear forces, seen as the country's No. 1 deterrent. It would also focus on strengthening missile defense for the U.S. homeland.

The request includes funding for the expected build out of the Space Force, which was established in late 2019 with plans to grow to more than 10,000 troops through the next five years. It also funds efforts to create a "Joint Warfighting Concept," meant to allow the military services and their weapons systems to work better together on the battlefield.

The request would divert funding from older "legacy" weapons systems that the U.S. military has used for decades in order to better fund emerging technology, including hypersonic and directed energy weapons, artificial intelligence and autonomous platforms.

In the memo, Esper calls for growing American partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, considered critical to counter China's growing economic and military influence across the globe. He also commits to "forming an enduring Middle East coalition."

The proposed budget supports ongoing audits and reviews of the Defense Department meant to "free up time, money and manpower," Esper wrote. It includes reforms to the so-called Pentagon Fourth Estate, organizations within the Defense Department not directly tied to the military departments. Esper wrote it would "constrain the growth" of the department's non-warfighting agencies and activities to find savings "to put back into lethality."

The 2021 budget proposal would also advocate for "robust pay" and benefits needed to attract and retain the best people for the military, Esper wrote. It would include improvements to and increased oversight of privatized, on-base military housing. It also would support on-base child care facilities and professional licensing and education programs for military spouses, he wrote.

Esper's memo makes no mention of President Donald Trump's border wall initiative. Last year, Trump moved about \$7.2 billion from Pentagon counterdrug and construction coffers to be used to fund a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border. The issue, strongly opposed by Democrats, was among the primary reasons the 2020 Pentagon budget was not approved by Congress until December, three months into the fiscal year.

The Department of Homeland Security last month asked the Pentagon to build about 270 miles of border wall this year, but officials at DHS and the Pentagon have not identified publicly how much that is expected to cost.

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JASON ISAACS/U.S. Navy

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Rafael Peralta fires its Mark 45 5-inch gun last month during a scheduled deployment to the Indo-Pacific.

Navy swaps sub for destroyer in change of spending plan

By TONY CAPACCI
Bloomberg

The Pentagon is bolstering the number of warships the Navy will seek in its fiscal 2021 budget request after the White House complained an initial proposal was too low to meet President Donald Trump's long-term target, according to officials.

In the budget proposal expected Monday, the Navy will request funding for eight ships, up from seven in a draft service request in mid-December. The new request for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1 includes two Arleigh Burke-class destroyers built by General Dynamics Corp., one more than the service proposed seeking in the December draft.

The Navy's proposal indicates it was unable to add a second Virginia-class submarine, for a total of two, instead of the additional guided-missile destroyer. That move to swap the sub for the destroyer came after the Pentagon, under pressure from the Office of Management and Budget to bolster funding for the agency that manages nuclear weapons, shifted about \$1.6 billion in proposed funding away from the submarine program for that effort, according to officials.

The overall request will help the Navy get marginally closer to Trump's long-term goal of creating a 355-ship fleet. The service was pressed by the White House budget office in December to accelerate its ship-building plans to show it could achieve a fleet of that size "including manned and unmanned ships, by 2030."

That's about four years earlier than the Navy's public plan and more than 20 years earlier than a previous schedule.

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly and Defense Secretary Mark Esper reached agreement on the new budget proposal, which came as Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe, an Oklahoma Republican, spearheaded a successful effort to boost funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration by about \$2.5 billion to nearly \$20 billion. To meet that goal, the Pentagon shifted about \$1.6 billion of the proposed funds away from the submarine program. The remaining defense dollars were shifted from other areas.

The funding shift likely won't sit well with Armed Services Democrats Jack Reed of Rhode Island, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Tim Kaine of Virginia. The Virginia-class submarine is made jointly in Connecticut and Virginia by General Dynamics and Huntington Ingalls Industries Inc.

A significantly expanded naval fleet was a key campaign promise of Trump's in 2016. The Navy's proposal in December targeted a 287-ship fleet by fiscal year 2025 — the last year of a potential second Trump administration, according to the budget office. But that level, which included the decommissioning of 12 warships to save money, would be well below the long-term 308-ship target set by the Obama administration, the budget office said in a memo obtained by Bloomberg News.

The service currently has 293 deployable vessels.

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MIDEAST

Alliance: Iraqi officers say full US withdrawal would bring a setback in military capabilities

FROM FRONT PAGE

Iraq. The prospect of losing that help is one reason why Iraqi politicians have cooled their demands for American forces to go immediately. Senior Iraqi military officials oppose a withdrawal.

"To us the American presence is like the electricity network in a house," said a brigadier general stationed in western Iraq, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media. "If the light is turned off the whole place goes dark."

In the wake of the U.S. strike that killed Iran's Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and a senior Iraqi militia commander, Iraq's parliament passed a nonbinding resolution demanding the government force out the Americans. Tens of thousands marched in an anti-U.S. rally inspired by a radical cleric, while Iraq's outgoing premier, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, openly stated that the troops must go.

American forces had to halt joint operations with the Iraqi military against ISIS after the strike, a pause that would last for three weeks. In the interim, the U.S. troops fortified bases against potential retaliation by Iran or Iraqi Shiite militias — like the new tower and beefed-up barricades at a base visited recently by the AP in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil.

About 5,200 U.S. soldiers are stationed in Iraqi bases to support local troops fighting ISIS militants, part of a larger international coalition invited by the Iraqi government in 2014.

But since then, Western officials say Iraqi authorities have taken no concrete measures to hasten a withdrawal plan.

"I'd say with virtually all of the Shiite political party leaders there's been behind closed doors and in private meetings a much more thoughtful approach on how they deal with this and a desire on their part to maintain a relationship and a coalition partnership that they regard as essential for Iraq," said a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

In a Cabinet session, Abdul-Mahdi said it was up to the next government to see through Parliament's resolution. Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Allawi, a former communications minister, has not made his policy known.

Western diplomats were told that Iraq had formed a committee to study the issue of America's troop presence in Iraq, but two Iraqi officials said there was no official sign off from Abdul-Mahdi formally creating such a committee. James Jeffrey, special envoy for the global coalition to defeat ISIS, said, speaking of the committee, "there has not been any real engagement," in remarks to reporters in Washington on Jan. 23.

Washington has responded to Iraq's requests to initiate troop withdrawals with blunt refusal, even threatening sanctions that

could cripple Iraq's economy.

Instead of directly pushing for U.S. withdrawal, Iraq's government appears to be quietly distancing itself on the ground. Though the U.S. announced joint operations against ISIS had resumed, Iraq has been unclear. The Iraqi military announced the end of the pause on Jan. 30, but a military spokesman rescinded the claim in remarks to state television. It was not followed up with a clarification. On at least two occasions in January, U.S. officials said they expected the pause would be lifted imminently.

Two Iraqi military officials and a militia commander said this week that the government told its military not to seek assistance from the U.S.-led coalition in anti-ISIS operations and to minimize cooperation. The three spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the press.

"Until now, we have not asked the Americans to provide assistance, we rely on our capabilities to pursue [ISIS] elements. The presence of the Americans in the joint operations is only formal," a senior military intelligence official told The Associated Press.

Another of the officials, a commander in Iraq's elite U.S.-trained Counter-Terrorism Services in western Anbar province, said some training continues, but "as for military operations and carrying out operations, there is no support."

No coalition airstrikes have been carried out against ISIS since the killing of Soleimani, said coalition spokesman Myles Caggins. In contrast, 45 strikes were conducted in Iraq in October and November. "The Iraqis have not requested assistance with airstrikes in recent weeks while our operations are paused," Caggins said.

U.S. Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie, the top American commander for the Middle East, met Tuesday with Iraqi leaders and acknowledged that joint military operations and training have been scaled back, although he said U.S. special operations forces are doing some missions with Iraqi commandos.

"We're still in a period of turbulence. We've got a ways to go," he said.

A full-scale U.S. withdrawal would bring a major setback in Iraqi capabilities to fight ISIS that Iraqi military officials acknowledge. The U.S. withdrew from the country in 2011, only for the Iraqi military to collapse in the face of the 2014 blitz by ISIS that overran the north and west. As a result, the government invited the Americans back.

"The Iraqi forces present in western Iraq need continuous air support and logistical support," said the CTS official. "These are provided to us by coalition forces, especially the U.S. If they are taken out, we will be paralyzed."

"The battle against [ISIS] is becoming increasingly technological, and we don't own any of these technologies. Only the Americans

do," said a senior army intelligence official.

The Iraqis also rely on U.S. military expertise to maintain their American-made F-16 fighter aircraft.

Iraq's Kurdish and the majority of Sunni factions oppose an American withdrawal. Many Sunnis consider the U.S. presence as a bulwark against both ISIS and Iranian power.

"If the Americans go out then we will be attacked by everyone, and by everyone I mean [ISIS], the government, the militias and the parties," said Abu Ahmad, a grocery shop owner in the Old City of Mosul, which was overrun by ISIS in 2014. "It is the U.S. that keeps them away from swallowing Mosul."



ADRIAN WEALE/DOD

U.S. soldiers provide armed overwatch at the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad last month. Instead of directly pushing for U.S. withdrawal, Iraq's government appears to be quietly distancing itself on the ground.

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MILITARY

Report: Heavy forces better at deterring strife

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Ground troops based overseas with tanks and artillery are better at preventing conflict than their light infantry counterparts, a study said after examining more than 70 years of military deployments to determine what best deters adversaries.

In its report — “Understanding the Deterrent Impact of U.S. Overseas Deployments” — the research group Rand Corp. also found that when the military surges forces toward a flashpoint, it’s rare for fighting to break out.

“Despite these risks, the historical record suggests that very few crises escalate when the United States deploys forces to the crisis region ... These effects are particularly strong for ground forces, where no crises have escalated to major confrontation or war, and for air forces, where only one crisis has escalated,” the report said.

The clearest evidence for

achieving deterrence was connected to “heavy ground forces,” which included armored units and those with air defense capabilities.

“The effects of these two types of forces were almost consistently positive, strongly statistically significant, and robust to multiple model specifications,” the report said.

There was less evidence to show that mobile, rotational forces deter as effectively. A possible reason is they “represent a lesser degree of high-level or long-term U.S. commitment or possibly because measuring their effects is more difficult,” the report said.

Light ground forces, which include airborne and special operations units stationed inside the borders of the ally or partner to be defended, could be counterproductive to deterrence, Rand said.

Those units were “associated with an increased likelihood of militarized disputes, including those of both lower and higher intensity, though not including



MARTIN EONASH/Stars and Stripes

The U.S. tank team fires at targets from its M1A2 Abrams tanks during the Strong Europe Tank Challenge in Grafenwoehr, Germany, in 2018. Heavy ground forces based overseas are the best at deterring conflict, according to a new Rand Corp. study.

war,” the report said.

Rand said more analysis is needed to understand why that could be the case, but one possibility is that light forces represent “a more rapidly deployable capability that provokes U.S. adversaries without representing sufficient capabilities to deter.”

The analysis also showed “little, if any, evidence for the deterrent impact of air and naval forces,” the report said.

“Because air and naval forces can be relatively easily redeployed between theaters, their presence represents a weaker

signal of commitment,” Rand said. “Similarly, ground forces’ vulnerability when stationed overseas also represents a strong signal of resolve.”

The Rand report comes as the Pentagon is reviewing whether commands overseas are resourced to deal with the military’s top priority of countering China and Russia, even as thousands of troops remain on alert in the Middle East amid tensions with Iran.

For decades, the value of basing large numbers of troops overseas has been a source of fierce debate

among security analysts, policymakers and some lawmakers, who have questioned the costs of maintaining big bases abroad.

In military circles, the discussion centers on whether it’s better to rely on a rotational model that moves large numbers of U.S.-based troops back and forth overseas, or to instead support permanent bases.

Other analysts contend that long-range strike capabilities are enough to deter aggressors.

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Chico finds home with US troops in Poland

By IMMANUEL JOHNSON
Stars and Stripes

BEMOWO PISKIE TRAINING AREA, Poland — Two years ago, he was a no-name stray who’d bark from a distance at American soldiers every time they’d stop off this base in northeastern Poland.

Today, the friendly mongrel has a name, all of his shots, a place of his own, all the food he can eat and plenty of service members to pat and play with him.

“Chico always brings joy to the soldiers, and during every rotation there’s a different group that takes care of him,” said Gosia Sobolewska, a linguist who works with the NATO Enhanced Forward Presence mission that the U.S. troops are supporting.

Chico came into the lives of the U.S. soldiers at Bemowo Piskie around two years ago, said Cpl. Zachary Foote with the 3rd Squadron, 2nd Cavalry Regiment sniper section, supporting the EFP.

“We were taking part in a com-



IMMANUEL JOHNSON/Stars and Stripes

Chico poses for a photo at Bemowo Piskie Training Area in Orzysz, Poland. He is allowed into barracks on base where he is treated like a distinguished guest.

petition and as soon as we stepped off base, there was a little white dog in the distance barking. It looked like Chico from the movie ‘Friday,’” he said.

The mutt of indeterminate parentage now had a name. A personalized doghouse near one of the barracks soon followed.

The dog is allowed to enter the barracks and is recognized by higher leadership as a distinguished guest.

“I have heard from some of the soldiers that Chico reminds them of home, of their own pets,” Sobolewska said.

He also helps soldiers maintain their fitness levels. “When ever he sees someone running, he

will run with them until they are done,” Foote said.

When the time comes for the sniper section to leave Bemowo Piskie, they’ll pass the torch for taking care of Chico to the incoming unit.

Around 700 U.S. troops began a six-month rotation at the Bemowo Piskie Training Area last month as part of a mission to strengthen NATO’s eastern flank and deter Russian aggression in Europe. The training area is in the village of Orzysz, about 50 miles from the Russian military exclave of Kaliningrad.

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Man charged with hiring Marines to get immigrants

By ALEX RIGGINS
The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — Federal prosecutors have filed a conspiracy charge against a man accused of recruiting and paying Marines and other United States citizens to transport unauthorized immigrants throughout San Diego County shortly after they crossed from Mexico into the U.S.

The charge against Francisco Saul Rojas-Hernandez is connected with a scheme that entangled some two dozen Camp Pendleton Marines, at least 13 of whom left the Corps in the wake of human trafficking and drug accusations. Military prosecutors dropped most of the charges in the high-profile case late last year after a judge ruled the mass arrest of 16 Marines in front of their 800-person battalion last summer was unlawful.

Rojas-Hernandez is accused of conspiring with the Marines and others to transport the unauthorized immigrants within the U.S. “for financial gain,” according to a criminal complaint filed last month in U.S. District Court. NBC7 first reported the charge against Rojas-Hernandez on Wednesday.

An attorney for the defendant did not immediately respond Wednesday night to a message seeking comment.

According to prosecutors, investigators first became aware of the scheme involving the Camp Pendleton personnel on July 3, when U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested two Marines for allegedly picking up three unauthorized immigrants near Jacumba Hot Springs.

During questioning, those two Marines said a man they knew as “Rojas” had paid them, “recruited” them and organized the smuggling operation,” according to a probable cause statement written by Katelyn Thompson with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

One of the Marines identified Rojas-Hernandez when shown a photo lineup, according to the document.

Over the next few months, Border Patrol agents arrested several other U.S. citizens who gave the name “Rojas” when identifying who had recruited and paid them to pick up unauthorized immigrants near the border, according to the statement. In some cases, those people also picked Rojas-Hernandez out of a photo lineup.

WAR/MILITARY

Ramped up raids net 8 ISIS members in Syria

By CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

U.S.-backed forces in Syria captured eight Islamic State group fighters and affiliates, along with weapons, documents and military equipment, during a large-scale operation alongside American special operations troops last week, the military said Thursday.

The coalition and Syrian Democratic Forces have stepped up efforts to stop a potential ISIS resurgence in the country's northeastern provinces of Deir al-Zour and Hassakeh, conducting "multiple raids each week," Special Operations Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve said in a statement.

The news came as U.S. Central Command warned that ISIS "remains cohesive," with a war chest of hundreds of millions of dollars available to it following the October killing of ISIS founder Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

In last week's clearance op-

eration, hundreds of Kurdish-led SDF commandos and coalition forces raided several compounds Jan. 31 to isolate and capture an ISIS sleeper cell, the coalition said.

But first, they danced. A 19-second military video shows the troops kitted up and performing a "motivational, pre-mission amp up," said Army Capt. Charlie Boiser, a spokesman for the task force.

Footage also shows U.S. mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles alongside SDF armed trucks, and a bearded man in what looks like a U.S. uniform with an American flag patch interviewing a detainee.

Air Force Maj. Gen. Eric T. Hill, commander of the coalition's special operations task force, credited the SDF with conducting "intelligence-driven operations" to take ISIS fighters off the battlefield and "keeping pressure on ISIS networks."

"The defeat ISIS mission in

Syria has proceeded uninterrupted in recent weeks," Hill said in the statement.

About 500 American troops remain in Syria, mostly in the northeast, to help combat a potential ISIS resurgence. The U.S. troop presence is about half of what it was in October before the U.S. pulled out of northern areas near the border with Turkey in advance of a Turkish incursion.

That move did not significantly affect ISIS capabilities, CENTCOM officials told the Defense Department Inspector General in a report published this week.

Still, based on its online claims, the group appeared to increase its attacks from about 55 a month to 66 after the incursion, the Defense Intelligence Agency told the IG.

On Wednesday, Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, the U.S. special representative on Syria and envoy to the anti-ISIS coalition, pushed back on reports of increased ISIS activity, saying that despite a



DVIDS SCREENSHOT

U.S.-backed forces in Syria captured eight affiliated with the Islamic State group, along with weapons, documents and equipment, during an operation Jan. 31, the military said Thursday.

"slight increase," the attack levels remain "fairly low."

"We are not concerned beyond our normal level of concern about the need to defeat ISIS," said Jef-

frey, who last month said that 14,000 to 18,000 ISIS fighters remain.

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Afghan media outlets protest curtailed info access

By RAHIM FAIEZ
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — An Afghan media watchdog urged the government on Wednesday to heed a demand for more media freedoms after local media outlets said in a statement that authorities were increasingly curtailing their access to information.

Sayed Ikram Afzali, the head of Integrity Watch Afghanistan, said that there is a good law in place guaranteeing the media's ability to work and access information, but that the government has failed to provide enough funding and institutional support to implement it.

The joint media statement, unveiled at a protest rally in Kabul on Tuesday, comes against the backdrop of relentless violence across the country. Afghan forc-

es, backed by United States allies, continue to fight the Taliban, who today control or hold sway over nearly half of Afghanistan.

The Taliban stage near-daily attacks targeting government forces and officials, as well as those seen loyal to the government, and scores of civilians get killed in the crossfire, as well as in anti-Taliban operations by the Afghan forces. The U.N. has called for all sides in the protracted conflict to take better care to avoid civilian casualties.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is engaged in on-again-off-again talks with the Taliban, led by U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad, to find a negotiated end to Afghanistan's 18-year war that would allow the U.S. to bring home about 13,000 American soldiers.

"Throughout my tenure as the

chief information commissioner, I have witnessed the media's access to information being restricted by key government institutions," said Afzali. "Unfortunately, the trend continues."

Abdul Mujeeb Khalvatgar,

head of the Nai Supporting Open Media group, said that access to information has been worst in the last five years and that the situation is now critical.

Even as authorities concur that access to information remains a

pervasive challenge for Afghanistan, they justify existing limitations by the persistent dangers and violence the country faces, and warn that a return of the Taliban regime could do away with many hard-won freedoms.

US conducts test of unarmed Minuteman 3 missile system

Associated Press

VANDENBERG AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — An unarmed Minuteman 3 intercontinental ballistic missile was launched from California early Wednesday on a test flight to a target in the Pacific Ocean, the Air Force Global Strike Command said.

The missile blasted off at 12:33 a.m. from Vandenberg Air Force Base and its reentry vehicle traveled 4,200 miles to the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands as part of a developmental test, the command said from Barksdale Air Force Base, La.

Developmental tests use a

spare missile from storage to validate flight worthiness of new or replacement components. That differs from test launches that use randomly selected operational missiles.

Modernization programs are essential to sustaining the aging Minuteman 3 weapon system, Col. Omar Colbert, the 576th Flight Test Squadron commander, said in a statement.

The launch was conducted from the 341st Missile Wing at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont., the 90th Missile Wing at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyo., and the 91st Missile Wing at Minot Air Force Base, N.D.

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NATION

Trump unleashes fury in wake of acquittal

By JILL COLVIN, JONATHAN LEMIRE
AND ZEEKE MILLER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Exulting in his impeachment acquittal, President Donald Trump took a scorched-earth victory lap Thursday, unleashing his fury against those who tried to remove him from office while looking ahead to his reelection campaign.

Trump, speaking to a room full of supporters at the White House, declared the impeachment proceedings a “disgrace” and complained anew that it was “a very unfair situation,” echoing his broadsides hours earlier that stunned the crowd at an annual prayer breakfast.

“It was evil, it was corrupt,” Trump declared at the White House. “This should never even happen to another president, ever.”

“We went through hell, unfairly. We did nothing wrong,” he continued.

As Trump spoke, nearly every inch of the East Room was packed with supporters. Among them: Republican senators who cast some of the votes to acquit him, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Rep. Chuck Grassley, several Cabinet members, including Attorney General William Barr



President Donald Trump pauses as he speaks in the East Room of the White House on Thursday.

and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, and staunch House allies including Reps. Jim Jordan, Devin Nunes and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

Earlier, speaking from a stage where he was joined by congressional leaders, including Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who led the impeachment charge against him, Trump shattered the usual veneer of bipartisanship at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington.

“As everybody knows, my family, our great country and your president have

been put through a terrible ordeal by some very dishonest and corrupt people,” Trump said at the annual event. His airing of grievances came hours before his East Room address.

“They have done everything possible to destroy us and by so doing very badly hurt our nation,” said Trump, who triumphantly held up copies of two newspapers with banner “ACQUITTED” headlines as he took the stage.

His remarks were especially jarring and whip-lash-inducing coming after a series of Scripture-quoting speeches, including a keynote address by Arthur Brooks, a Harvard professor and president of a conservative think tank, who had bemoaned a “crisis of contempt and polarization” in the nation and urged those gathered to “love your enemies.”

“I don’t know if I agree with you,” Trump said as he took the microphone, and then he proceeded to demonstrate it.

“I don’t like people who use their faith as justification for doing what they know is wrong,” he said in an apparent reference to Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, a longtime Trump critic who cited his faith in becoming the only Republican to vote for Trump’s removal.

“Nor do I like people who say ‘I pray for

you’ when you know that is not so,” he said, in a reference to Pelosi, who has offered that message for the president when the two leaders have sparred publicly.

The House speaker shook her head at various points during Trump’s remarks, but did not appear to interact with Trump personally. Earlier she had offered a prayer for the poor and the persecuted.

She said later that Trump’s remarks were “so completely inappropriate, especially at a prayer breakfast.” She took particular issue with his swipe at Romney’s faith and said that yes, she does pray for the president.

His comments were a clear sign that the post-impeachment Trump is emboldened like never before as he barrels ahead in his reelection fight with a united Republican Party behind him.

And it stood in stark contrast to the apology offered by Bill Clinton in the aftermath of his own impeachment acquittal in 1999.

Clinton said then in a White House address: “I want to say again to the American people how profoundly sorry I am for what I said and did to trigger these events and the great burden they have imposed on the Congress and on the American people.”

Impeachment takeaways

By MATTHEW DALY
AND ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Republican-controlled Senate acquitted President Donald Trump on two impeachment charges Wednesday amid Republican complaints about what they called a rushed process and Democratic claims that Trump is a threat to democracy. The, three-week trial proceeded largely

ANALYSIS

along partisan lines, with just one senator — Republican Mitt Romney of Utah — breaking with his party.

Takeaways from just the third impeachment trial of a president in U.S. history:

Iron grip on GOP

Some Republican senators expressed reservations about Trump’s conduct; some even went so far as to say that House Democrats successfully made their case against him. Nonetheless, Trump’s acquittal was never in doubt in the Senate. Even Republicans who disapproved of Trump’s dealings with Ukraine — the heart of the House impeachment charges — said his conduct did not merit making him the first president ever removed from office.

In ways unimaginable when he was first elected as a political newcomer, Trump has come to utterly dominate the GOP. Republican lawmakers bow to his overwhelming popularity with the party’s base. “It’s not a party of ideas or ideology anymore. It’s a cult of personality,” tweeted Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn. Republicans insisted they were

acting in the interests of their constituents and their conscience, and they reacted with outrage when Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff, the lead impeachment manager, cited a media report claiming that a person close to Trump had warned Republicans their “head will be on a pike” if they voted against the president.

Trump has already shown his power to cast out dissenting Republicans. Former Sens. Bob Corker of Tennessee and Jeff Flake of Arizona decided not to run for reelection rather than face voters after clashing with Trump.

McConnell delivers

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., again proved himself Trump’s most important ally. He led a drive to deny Democrats any opportunity to call witnesses before the Senate and worked closely with the White House in shepherding the case to acquittal, fulfilling a pledge he made before the trial to “take my cues from the president’s lawyers.”

McConnell slammed House Democrats’ drive to impeach Trump as “the most rushed, least fair and least thorough” in history. He said the two impeachment charges against Trump — that he abused his power and obstructed Congress’ ensuing investigation — are “constitutionally incoherent” and don’t “even approach a case for the first presidential removal in American history.”

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York accused McConnell and his GOP colleagues of sweeping Trump’s misconduct under the rug. “The administration, its top people and

Senate Republicans are all hiding the truth,” Schumer said, adding that Trump tried to “blackmail a foreign country to interfere in our elections.”

Not impeachable

Republicans voted to acquit Trump, but many wanted to go on record as frowning on his conduct. Perhaps the most prominent example was retiring Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, who voted against hearing from witnesses but called out Trump’s actions as “inappropriate.”

Other Republicans followed suit, insisting that their votes against witnesses or in favor of acquittal should not be interpreted as approval of his actions.

“I do not believe that the House has met its burden of showing that the president’s conduct — however flawed — warrants the extreme step of immediate removal from office,” said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine.

“Our country is already too deeply divided and we should be working to heal wounds, not create new ones. It is better to let the people decide,” added Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio.

Romney stands alone

In an unlikely twist, Romney, the GOP’s unsuccessful 2012 presidential nominee, was the only Republican senator to break ranks in the impeachment trial and favor removing Trump from office. The well-mannered patrician Romney stood alone in his vote to oust a Republican president who seldom hides his contempt for the senator and the establishment Romney symbolizes.

Romney’s support for remov-



SUSAN WALSH/AP

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell walks through the Capitol following a vote in the Senate to acquit President Donald Trump on both articles of impeachment.

ing Trump on a charge of abuse of power also denied Trump’s campaign a frequent talking point of asserting that he had full support of Republicans in the House and Senate during a strictly partisan drive to remove him.

Romney voted to acquit Trump on the second article of impeachment, obstruction of Congress, joining his 52 GOP colleagues.

Romney, a Mormon, cited his religious faith and the significance of the impeachment oath taken by senators to render “impartial justice” on impeachment. “The grave question the Constitution tasks senators to answer is whether the president committed an act so extreme, so egregious, that it rises to the level of a high crime and misdemeanor,” Romney said in a floor speech. “Yes, he did.”

Let voters decide

Many senators who voted to acquit Trump said they were dis-

appointed in his conduct or disappointed, but that it was up to voters to decide Trump’s fate in November.

Alexander said House prosecutors had proved the charges against the president, but said they didn’t rise to an impeachable offense.

“The question is not whether the president did it,” but whether the Senate should decide what to do about it, Alexander said last week in becoming the decisive vote against witnesses and documents.

“I believe the Constitution provides that the people should make that decision in the presidential election.”

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, called the president’s actions “shameful and wrong.” But she said the proper response to Trump’s behavior was “not to disenfranchise nearly 63 million Americans” — who voted for Trump in 2016 — by removing him from the ballot.

NATION

DNC calls for 'recanvass' of Iowa results

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the Democratic National Committee called on Thursday for a "recanvass" of the results of Monday's Iowa caucus, which was marred by technical problems and delays.

"Enough is enough," party leader Tim Bernz wrote on Twitter. He said he was calling for the recanvass in order to "assure public confidence in the results."

With 97% of precincts reporting, Pete Buttigieg, a former mayor of South Bend, Ind., and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders are nearly tied.

The technical glitches plaguing the first contest on the 2020 nominating calendar have made an already complicated candidate selection process even more complicated, forcing state officials to apologize and raising questions about Iowa's traditional prime spot in picking nominees.

The caucus crisis was an embarrassing twist after months of promoting Iowa as a chance for Democrats to find some clarity in a jumbled field. Instead, after a buildup that featured seven rounds of debates, nearly \$1 billion spent nationwide and a year of political jockeying, caucus day ended with no winner and no official results.

Iowa marked the first contest in a primary season that will span all 50 states and several U.S. territories, ending at the party's national convention in July.

At issue was an app that the Iowa Democratic Party used to



MARY ALTAPFER/AP

Democratic presidential candidate former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, center, poses for photographs with attendees during a town hall Wednesday in Concord, N.H.

tabulate the results of the contest. The app was rolled out shortly before caucusing began and did not go through rigorous testing.

A coding error yielded problematic results Monday. And backup phone lines for reporting the outcomes were jammed, with many placed on hold for hours in order to report outcomes.

President Donald Trump's campaign seized on Perez's an-

nouncement and tried to inject an added dose of chaos. Trump and his allies have repeatedly insinuated, without offering proof, that the Democratic establishment wants to deny Sanders a victory at any cost.

Trump campaign communications director Tim Murtaugh tweeted that Perez's announcement "translated" to "Bernie looks like he's taking the lead and

we can't have that."

Much of the political world has already shifted its attention to next-up New Hampshire, which holds the first primary election in the Democrats' 2020 nomination fight on Tuesday.

The chaos surrounding the reporting breakdown has undermined the impact of Iowa's election, which typically rewards winners with a surge of momen-

tum heading into subsequent primary contests.

The two early leaders are separated by 40 years in age and conflicting ideology.

Sanders, 78, a self-described democratic socialist, has been a progressive powerhouse for decades. Buttigieg, 38, a former municipal official, represents the more moderate wing of the Democratic Party. Buttigieg is also the first openly gay candidate to earn presidential primary delegates.

Campaigning in New Hampshire, Sanders on Thursday called the Iowa Democratic Party's management of the caucuses a "screw-up" that "has been extremely unfair" to "all of the candidates and their supporters."

Both Buttigieg and Sanders have declared victory. The Associated Press has not called the race.

Updated results released Wednesday showed Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, former Vice President Joe Biden and Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar trailing.

The deadlocked contest gives both Buttigieg and Sanders a burst of momentum as they seek to pull away from the crowded field.

Their strength in Iowa put them in the crosshairs of rivals as the race shifted to New Hampshire. Biden, who fell far short of expectations in Iowa, cast both Buttigieg and Sanders as risky choices for Democrats, given the former mayor's relative inexperience and the senator's descriptions of himself as a socialist.

Sanders: Campaign raised \$25M in January

Associated Press

MANCHESTER, N.H. — Bernie Sanders says he raised a whopping \$25 million in January and will use his presidential campaign's flush bank account to increase television and digital advertising in 10 states.

The Vermont senator spent \$50 million during the final three months of 2019 and finished the year with \$18.2 million in cash on hand, putting him in a stronger position than many of his rival candidates even before his latest bonanza last month. Partial results show Sanders in a near tie for first with Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Ind., in Monday's leadoff Iowa caucuses. New Hampshire holds its primary next Tuesday.

Sanders' campaign manager, Paiz Shakir, announced Thursday that his candidate will immediately increase staffing in states that vote during the Demo-



STEVEN SENNE/AP

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., kisses his wife Jane O'Meara Sanders at a rally Wednesday in Derry, N.H.

cratic primary's Super Tuesday, on March 3. The campaign also plans to spend \$5.5 million on television and digital ads in eight new states voting then: Arkansas, Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Utah.

And Sanders will expand ad buys the campaign already made in California and Texas, the two largest states voting on Super Tuesday.

"Bernie's multiracial, multigenerational, people-driven movement for change is fueling

2020's most aggressive campaign for president," Shakir said in a statement, saying the campaign is "in a strong position to compete in states all over the map."

January was the Sanders campaign's best fundraising month to date, featuring donations from 648,000 people, including 219,000 new donors, the statement said. Since announcing his presidential campaign in February 2019, Sanders has raised more than \$121 million, built on donations from more than 1.5 million people.

In New Hampshire, Biden seeks to be 'Comeback Kid'

Associated Press

SOMERSWORTH, N.H. — Joe Biden entered the Democratic presidential race as a favorite, the candidate with the longest resume, a network of establishment donors and a pitch that he could win the kind of voters who would defeat President Donald Trump.

Now, humbled by a disappointing showing in the Iowa caucuses, Biden is hoping for something quite different: that New Hampshire will make him the second coming of "the Comeback Kid."

New Hampshire is known for knocking down front-runners, usually with candidates carrying an insurgent torch, like Gary Hart in 1984, John McCain in 2000 and Bernie Sanders in 2016, instead of steyding a slipping candidate's fate. Hillary Clinton was an exception in 2008, but she lost the nomination to Barack Obama.

The former vice president made light of the Iowa results as he campaigned in New Hampshire on Tuesday. But he told voters in Somersworth on Wednesday that he wouldn't sugarcoat the

impact of Iowa on his 2020 effort. He began to more aggressively criticize his rivals as he sought a rebound.

The campaign, he said, "took a gut punch," but it would be premature to write him off.

"I'm not going anywhere," Biden said. "And I'm counting on New Hampshire. We're going to come back."

His word had echoes of Bill Clinton in 1992, when he declared himself "the Comeback Kid" after finishing second to Democratic Sen. Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts.

Biden has a number of hurdles in New Hampshire if he wants to make a comeback a reality.

His campaign event Wednesday was only his fifth in the state since the start of the year. Last month, Biden had the fewest New Hampshire events of any of the candidates regarded as being in the top four in the race.

The 77-year-old Biden also hasn't been making time in recent weeks for one of the traditions New Hampshire voters are most fond of: asking questions from the audience in town hall settings.

NATION

Governors warn of Medicaid cuts from Trump rule

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Governors of both major political parties are warning that a little-noticed regulation proposed by President Donald Trump's administration could lead to big cuts in Medicaid, reducing access to health care for low-income Americans.

The arcane fiscal accountability rule proposed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS, would tighten federal oversight and approval over complex financing strategies states have long used to help pay for their share of the \$600 billion program. Also targeted are certain payments to hospitals that treat many low-income patients. Public comments closed last week amid a chorus of criticism from hospitals, nursing homes, insurers, doctors, and advocates for the poor.

Against the backdrop of an election year, governors are warning the administration of potentially dire consequences.

"States may be unable to adequately fund their Medicaid programs, which could lead to unintended consequences that would negatively impact Medicaid beneficiaries across the country," wrote Govs. Kate Brown, D-Ore., and Charlie Baker, R-Mass., in official comments on behalf of National Governors Association.

But CMS administrator Seema Verma says the vast health care program needs closer scrutiny and has expressed concerns about "shady" financing schemes that abuse the system and drive up taxpayer costs.

In a statement Wednesday, Verma said her agency recognizes the "critical importance"

of the state financing but said it has to lead to better value and improved care for Medicaid beneficiaries. Under the proposed rule, "we are increasing transparency, integrity and clarity," she said.

An agency spokesman said the rule is not intended to reduce Medicaid payments.

But the policy comes from an administration that has repeatedly moved to scale back Medicaid. Trump has tried to repeal the program's Obama-era expansion, supported block grants that would cap federal spending, and allowed states to impose work requirements on Medicaid recipients.

The latest proposal could lead to cuts of \$37 billion to \$49 billion a year in total Medicaid spending, or 6% to 8% of program funds, according to a study by Manatt Health consultants for the American Hospital Association. Payments to hospitals could be cut as much as 17%.

A CMS spokesman said the agency doesn't believe those estimates are credible. In the rule, CMS says that the fiscal impact of its plan is "unknown." Critics say the agency did not do a full analysis.

If the federal government curtails financing methods states now rely on, governors would have to seek broad tax increases, cut payments to hospitals and doctors, reduce benefits, restrict eligibility, or some combination of such measures. States can set their own Medicaid policies within federal requirements.

The Trump administration says it is closely reviewing some 4,000 comments and will consider feedback before it decides on next steps. No timetable has been announced for a final decision.



MARK LENNihan/AP

Model Lauren Marie Young arrives to testify at Harvey Weinstein's rape trial, on Thursday, in New York.

Prosecutors rest case after Weinstein accuser returns

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Prosecutors in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial rested their case Thursday after more than two weeks of testimony punctuated by harrowing accounts from six women who say he ignored pleas of "no, no, no" and excused his behavior as a Hollywood norm.

"The people rest, judge," Assistant District Attorney Joan Illuzzi-Orbon said, moving the closely watched celebrity trial one step closer to a verdict.

Now Weinstein's lawyers will start calling witnesses of their own. They haven't said whether Weinstein himself will testify. Doing so could bring big risks because prosecutors would be able to grill him about each of the allegations that jurors have already heard about in vivid detail.

Among the witnesses the defense is expected to call is a psychologist who specializes in human memory. The defense is looking to raise doubts about the

women's recollections of encounters that in some cases are more than a decade or two old.

Weinstein, 67, maintains that any sexual encounters were consensual.

The criminal charges at the trial in New York City are based on two allegations: that Weinstein raped a woman in March 2013 and that he forced oral sex on another woman in 2016.

The allegations against Weinstein helped fuel the #MeToo movement. If convicted, he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

Prosecutors ended their case after the last of the other accusers allowed to testify finished telling jurors about an encounter with the disgraced movie mogul in 2013.

Lauren Marie Young, a model from suburban Philadelphia, testified that Weinstein invited her to his Beverly Hills hotel room, lured her to the bathroom, stripped off his clothes, pulled down her dress and groped her breast.

Additional women, including Young, have been allowed to testify as prosecutors attempt to show there was a practiced method to Weinstein's attacks, including inviting women to his hotel room to discuss business, then disrobing and demanding sexual favors.

Her testimony bookended that of the first accuser to testify, actress Annabella Sciorra, who alleges Weinstein barged into her apartment in the mid-1990s, threw her on a bed and raped her as she tried to fight him off by kicking and punching him.

In between, jurors heard similar stories of Weinstein ingratiating himself with much younger women, appearing to show interest in helping their careers before getting them into a hotel room or an apartment and violating them.

Most were aspiring actresses. Sciorra was a star on the rise. Another, the 2006 accuser Mimi Hales, was looking at the time to get more involved in behind-the-scenes aspects of the entertainment business.

Feds investigate Mississippi prisons conditions after string of deaths

BY MICHAEL BALSAMO
AND EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS
Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — The Justice Department has opened a civil rights investigation into the Mississippi prison system after a string of inmate deaths in the past few months, officials said Wednesday.

Federal prosecutors are looking into conditions at four state prisons after the deaths of at least 15 inmates since late December. The investigation is examining whether state corrections officials are adequately protecting prisoners from physical harm and will look into whether there

'Mississippi's prisons are overcrowded, understaffed, and aren't safe for anyone.'

Lisa Graybill
deputy legal director for Southern Poverty Law Center

are adequate health care and suicide prevention services.

The investigation by the Justice Department's civil rights division will focus on conditions at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, the South Mississippi Correctional Institution, the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility and the Wilkinson County Correctional Facility, the Justice Department said.

The Wilkinson facility holds state prisoners, and the state pays a private company, Management & Training Corporation, to operate it.

The use of such investigations examining the patterns and practices of law enforcement agencies has been curtailed under the Trump administration compared with their use during the Obama administration.

Some of the inmate deaths in recent weeks happened during confrontations between inmates. Some were suicides.

Violence is a recurring problem in Mississippi prisons, where many jobs for guards are unfilled. Officials with the state Department of Corrections have said for years that it's difficult to find people to work as guards because of low pay, long hours and dangerous conditions.

The deputy legal director for Southern Poverty Law Center, Lisa Graybill, said in a statement Wednesday that Mississippi prisons "have a brutal history rooted in slavery and convict leasing."

"It is time for the federal gov-

ernment to step in and do what the Mississippi Department of Corrections has failed to: end the violence and ensure humane living conditions," Graybill said. "Dozens have died and hundreds of others live in squalid conditions with standing sewage in freezing temperatures as a result of... Mississippi's neglect. Mississippi's prisons are overcrowded, understaffed, and aren't safe for anyone."

Health department inspections show Parchman has had longstanding problems with broken sinks and toilets in cells, holes in cell walls, widespread mold and mildew in showers, and sanitation problems in kitchens.

NATION

Photos of global 'king tides' show changing climate

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

DEPOE BAY, Ore. — Tourists, nature lovers and amateur scientists are whipping out their cameras to document the effects of extreme high tides on shorelines from the United States to New Zealand, and by doing so are helping better predict what rising sea levels will mean for coastal communities around the world.

A network of volunteer photographers fans out around the globe during so-called king tides to capture how high the waterline gets and where the water goes. They then upload the images — many with geolocation data embedded — for use by scientists, policymakers and even city planners as they study and prepare for the effects of climate change. The photos show where flooding occurs on specific roads, or give clues about whether it's safe to build new housing, for example, near an eroding bluff.

"For us, the king tide offers a look at where the water will be in about 2050, about a foot to a foot and half above normal water levels," said Skip Stiles, executive director of Wetlands Watch, a nonprofit that helped recruit 700 people to document a king tide in Norfolk, Va., for the first time

there in 2017.

The group's efforts have since grown into a smartphone app that uses crowdsourcing to gather images and pinpoint flooding.

"What we're finding is there's a real appetite for this data. A lot of the localities here are putting together comprehensive plans for sea-level rise, and I'm getting calls from them saying, 'Do you have data? Do you have photos? That's what we're going for.'"

The first of these King Tide Projects involving the public began in 2009 in Australia. The idea has since spread to more than a dozen coastal states in the U.S., British Columbia, New Zealand, Mauritius and beyond.

King tides occur about twice a year in coastal areas worldwide when the sun and moon align to enhance the gravitational pull that produces normal, daily tides. These super-high tides came into sharp focus in January, when one arrived in Oregon on the same day as a major winter storm, creating 15- to 20-foot waves and a massive swell that sucked a man and his two young children out to sea. The woman who called 911 had been photographing the tides from her yard for the Oregon King Tides Project. The children, ages 4 and 7, died.

Citizen scientists are preparing



GILLIAN FLACCUS/AP

An extreme high tide floods parts of the harbor in Depoe Bay, Ore., on Jan. 11, during a "king tide" that coincided with a big winter storm.



BEN SHEERAN, KING TIDES AUCKLAND/AP

Boats sit swamped by flooding from a king tide in February 2018, in Milford Marina, Auckland, New Zealand.

to document this winter's final king tide Feb. 8-10 off the U.S. West Coast, followed by one in New Zealand on Feb. 12.

Flooding from king tides is a preview of how sea level rise will

affect coastal communities — and warmer oceans and bigger storms could amplify those changes, said Peter Ruggiero, interim executive director of the Oregon Climate Change Research Institute.

Modeling shows Oregon could experience sea-level rise of as little as a foot or as great as 6 feet in a worst-case scenario, he said.

Some of these King Tide Projects, like the one in Oregon, are run by nonprofit groups, while others are in partnership with state and local governments. They all have the same goal: to educate the public and provide a clear-eyed assessment of how climate change will affect everyday life, from flooded intersections to cows grazing in knee-high salt water, to popular beaches swallowed by waves.

"A lot of the conversation around climate change was what was happening far away and not about what people were going to be experiencing in their own lives," said Marina Psaros, who helped develop California's King Tides Project. "The goal of the project was to get people thinking more about climate change locally instead of just polar bears."

Vt. lawmakers propose bill to decriminalize prostitution

By LISA RATHKE
Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. — Some Vermont lawmakers hope to make prostitution safer and remove the stigma that often prevents sex workers from seeking police protection and health care.

A bill introduced last month by four female legislators would decriminalize prostitution, while the state would maintain its laws against sex trafficking.

Rep. Selene Colburn, the bill's lead sponsor, thinks a related proposal will have a better chance at movement this year. It would give immunity to people who were victims of or witnessed a crime while engaged in prostitution or sex trafficking so they can report it to law enforcement. The bill also calls for the creation of a panel to make recommendations on modernizing Vermont's prostitution laws. That bill was referred

to a committee on Wednesday.

"Right now sex workers really feel that they cannot access police protection," said Colburn, a Progressive from Burlington. "There are tons of statistics about the violence, the high levels of violence, and sex assault that people who engage in sex work experience."

The push in Vermont is part of a small but growing movement to decriminalize prostitution that advocates say will bring sex work

above ground, and help prevent sex workers from being assaulted, exploited and trafficked and keep them from facing punishment for breaking the law.

Advocates see the bills as starting a discussion and say that with more education there's a possibility for additional states and jurisdictions to propose decriminalizing prostitution.

"A lot of people doing sex work are trading sex out of circum-

stances: they're homeless, they're experiencing disabilities, they're trans and they're experiencing discrimination in the workplace," said Nina Luo, an organizer with Decrim NY, a group working to decriminalize the sex trades in New York City and the state.

Currently, prostitution is legal only in Nevada, where it's permitted in licensed brothels in eight counties.

Judge rules against women seeking admission to Yale fraternities

By DAVE COLLINS
Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — A federal judge has dismissed nearly all claims in a lawsuit that sought to force all-male fraternities at Yale University to admit women, saying both fraternities and sororities are specifically excluded from a federal law that bans discrimination against gender in

education.

U.S. District Judge Victor Bolden in Bridgeport issued the ruling Jan. 30 in the lawsuit filed last year by three women who attend Yale. They sued nine fraternities and Yale in response to alleged sexual assault, harassment and discrimination at the all-male social organizations.

The judge allowed only one claim against Yale to continue

forward toward trial: an allegation that school officials failed to act when informed by one of the plaintiffs that she and other women had been groped against them cited at a fraternity party in 2016.

Bolden cited an exemption in the federal Title IX gender equality law in dismissing most of the lawsuit's claims. The ruling came in response to motions to dismiss

filed by Yale and the fraternities.

"The gender exclusive nature of the Fraternity Defendants is at the root of the Plaintiffs' alleged hostile educational environment claim," Bolden wrote in his ruling. "But ... Congress has expressly limited Title IX and made the membership practices of the Fraternity Defendants beyond Title IX's scope."

Lawyers for the women have

said they believe this was the first lawsuit by students against a university seeking to "gender integrate" fraternities.

Messages seeking comment were left with the three plaintiffs, Ry Walker, Anna McNeil and Eliana Singer. Their lawyer, David Tracey, said, "We are disappointed with the outcome of the motion to dismiss and we are currently evaluating our next steps."

NATION

US dairy farmers looking for any tech edge

By IVAN MORENO
Associated Press

PICKETT, Wis. — At Rosendale Dairy, each of the 9,000 cows has a microchip implanted in one of its ears that workers can scan with smartphones for up-to-the-minute information on how the animal is doing — everything from their nutrition to their health history to their productivity. Feed is calibrated to deliver a precise diet and machines handle the milking. In the fields, drones gather data that helps bump up yields for the row crops grown to feed the animals.

Technology has played an important role in agriculture for years, but it's become a life and death matter at dairy farms these days, as low milk prices have rattled up pressure on farmers to seek every possible efficiency to avoid joining the thousands of operations that have failed.

"If I use 100 bags of seed on a field and I change the way I distribute the seed, I can yield more without a single extra dollar of input," said Matt Wichman, Rosendale's director of agronomy. Such tools "are becoming so economically viable that anybody that's of a decent scale is adopting these," Wichman said.

Technology can mean survival, but it involves a perilous gamble: While the machines produce savings fast enough to cover the debt they incur?

"The last five years have really been treacherous," said Randy Hallett, who has 85 cows in Casco, Wis., and has spent \$33,000 on new milking equipment. He would invest more if his operation could afford it.

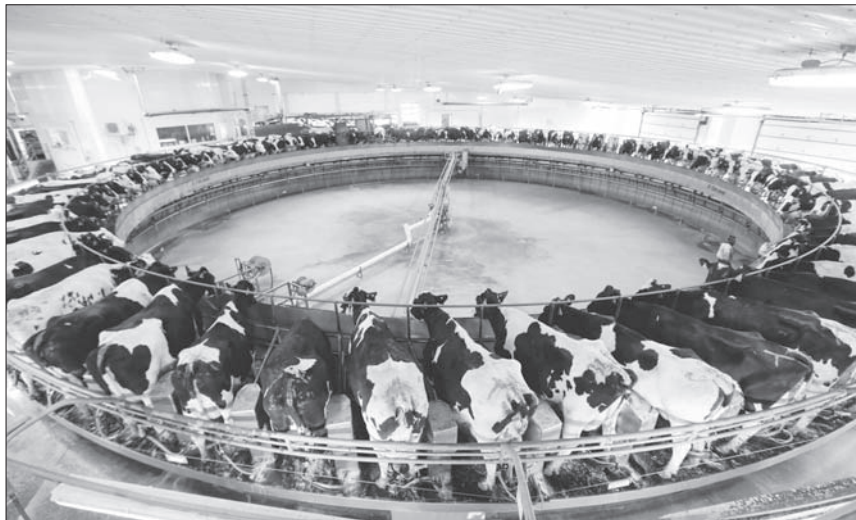
"I broke even, mostly," Hallett said.

The dairy industry is caught in a vise between consumer trends and competition. Americans are buying less milk as changing tastes steer them to milk substitutes from soy and almonds, or to entirely different drinks like flavored water. Two big milk processors, Dean Foods and Borden Dairy Co., filed for bankruptcy protection in the past three months, undone by declining demand and also pressured by big competitors like Walmart, which opened its own milk processing plant in 2018.

And then there are milk prices.

After hitting a historic high in 2014 of more than \$26 per 100 pounds on the strength of massive buying from China, the bottom fell out. When China stopped its milk-buying spree, there was already oversupply from both American and European Union producers, said Mark Stephenson, director of dairy policy analysis at the University of Wisconsin.

Prices fell to \$17.30 by the following year, and for producers, it's been mostly misery ever since. Nationwide, the number of dairy farms dropped from 40,198 in 2017 to 37,468 in 2018. In Wisconsin, a state that takes pride in its image as "America's



PHOTOS BY MORRIS GASH/AP

Cows are milked on a large carousel at the Rosendale Dairy in Pickett, Wis., where each of the 9,000 cows has a microchip implanted that workers can scan to track the animal's nutrition, health history and productivity.

Dairyland," the toll has been particularly severe. Though California produces more milk, Wisconsin has more dairy farms than any other state. And more than 1,600 of those have gone under in the past three years.



Wichman

But there are reasons to believe that the worst might be over, said Jim Ostrom, a partner at Milk Source, the company that owns Rosendale.

In November, milk prices in Wisconsin rose to \$22.40. Nationwide, they reached \$21, finally above the \$18 price point that Stephenson cited as a general benchmark for producers turning a profit.

With dairy prices outside of farmers' control, they have to focus on controlling costs. That's where technology comes in. A rotary milking parlor can handle 10 cows a minute and can sense when an udder is empty so that cows aren't overmilked, which can harm their health. But a robotic milking system can run more than \$200,000.

"It can be very difficult for a smaller farm to afford this technology because you need a larger operation to spread those expenses across," said Liz Bivensie, an agriculture educator in Brown County for the University of Wisconsin extension office. She said she knows of one farm that



Rosendale Dairy herd specialist Chema Ortiz looks at a cow's stats on his app.

went out of business because it couldn't find enough workers and could not afford a robotic milking system.

Wisconsin leads the nation in farm bankruptcies with 45 Chapter 12 filings from July 2018 through June 2019, according to the American Farm Bureau Federation. Minnesota was not far behind with 31 during that time.

Because of debt, the cost of producing milk varies among farms. While some farmers can break even at a price of \$18 per hundred

pounds, others need \$21 because of their debt load.

Sometimes the way to survive is to join forces with neighbors. Hallett shares some advanced machinery with a neighboring farmer, like a combine and planting equipment. And, fortunately, some technology isn't expensive.

Hallett's cows carry the same microchips as Rosendale uses, so he can know from his office the milk weight for each cow and whether a particular cow had less milk that day. The chips cost about 12

cents per month per cow.

Hallett said that he wishes he could afford to update his cow stalls, but that getting credit from banks is difficult because they consider bigger operations less risky.

"Who do you think they're going to work with to keep them afloat?" Hallett said.

The University of Wisconsin hopes to help with a project that would integrate all of the data that farms collect each day on cows' production, feed and health, among other things.

Integrating the data and using artificial intelligence and machine learning "would be very helpful to farmers making the best decisions every single time" in real time, said Victor Cabrera, the professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, who is leading the project. He's collecting data from five farms now and expects to have the project completed in three years.

Farmers could tell whether to keep breeding an animal or let it go.

"I'd use it yesterday if I had it," said Mitch Breunig, who is contributing data from his farm, Mystic Valley Dairy, where he has 460 cows.

He said that sometimes it's weeks before he can pinpoint how much milk a cow produced on a particular day and how much it ate.

"I think it doesn't matter what size your farm is, it's information you need to know," he said.

VETERANS

VA chief wants to re-examine sexual assault claim

By STEVE BEYNON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A high-profile case of a congressional staffer claiming she was sexually assaulted at a Department of Veterans Affairs hospital could be re-examined after VA Secretary Robert Wilkie said he is unhappy with the results of the investigation.

"I'm not satisfied with the resolution...I have to know, Ms. Goldstein has to know, our women veterans have to know our facilities are safe," Wilkie said Tuesday to reporters. "We're going to make a renewed push to get answers."

But the VA Inspector General's Office dismissed Wilkie's call for

a new investigation, saying there is no intention to reopen the case. "The investigation is closed," said Fred Baker, the IG's director of communications. "We have spoken to all relevant parties and have received all necessary information about the case. We are not working with anyone to seek additional information at this time."



Wilkie

Authorities declined to file charges after Andrea Goldstein, the senior policy adviser for Congress' Women Veterans Task Force, said she was sexually assaulted at the VA hospital in Washington D.C. This spurred an unexpected public brawl between Wilkie and Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., and the VA inspector general after the VA secretary questioned the veracity of Goldstein's allegations.

Goldstein, who serves in the Navy Reserve, said she was assaulted Sept. 20 by a man inside the front atrium at the VA hospital. Goldstein told The New York Times that a man slammed her below the waist and told her, "You look like you could use a good time."

Wilkie scolded Goldstein and Takano, chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, for making "unsubstantiated claims."

"We believe that VA is a safe place for all veterans to enter and receive care and services, but the unsubstantiated claims raised by you and your staff could deter our veterans from seeking the care they need and deserve," Wilkie wrote in a letter to Takano in January.

VA Inspector General Michael Missal said the secretary was wrong to characterize Goldstein's allegation as unsubstantiated.

"Neither I nor my staff told you or anyone else at the department that the allegations were unsubstantiated," Missal wrote in a letter to Wilkie immediately after

the secretary's letter to Takano went public. "Reaching a decision to close the investigation with no criminal charges does not mean that the underlying allegation is unsubstantiated."

Takano in his own statement said Wilkie calling out of a congressional staffer was "shockingly tone-deaf" and "outrageous" and an example illustrating how female veterans' concerns are often dismissed by the VA.

Wilkie's comments that he might take a second look at the case come amid a news report from Axios that VA Deputy Secretary James Byrne's firing Monday was due to the perceived botched Goldstein investigation.

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Cost, amount of use of VA Mission Act program still uncertain

By NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Eight months after the Department of Veterans Affairs launched a new program to connect veterans with private-sector doctors, the agency doesn't know how many appointments have been completed or how much it's costing taxpayers.

The VA Mission Act, a bipartisan measure intended to expand veterans' access to private doctors, was the subject of a congressional hearing Wednesday. Members of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee quizzed VA officials for nearly two hours about the program's cost, use and ongoing implementation.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., said

he was frustrated that the VA could not forecast the cost. Congress needs to know its funding requirements, he said, especially since President Donald Trump's budget proposal for the agency in fiscal 2021 is expected to be unveiled next week.

"Eight months into the new community care program, the VA has not provided — or cannot provide — the number of referrals that have become appointments," Tester said. "And thus, I don't see how we can figure out how many dollars are associated with those appointments and whether the usage is in line with what you estimated when this program was set up."

Congress provided about \$15 billion for community care in

the VA's latest budget. When Tester asked whether that would be enough, Richard Stone, executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, replied: "I think you asked the key question that keeps me up at night."

Stone said the VA is waiting to tally reimbursement claims from private-sector providers in order to determine how many appointments were completed and at what cost. He provided the committee with a rough estimate: about \$1 billion to \$1.1 billion each month spent on outside care. At that rate, the program should fall within its funding levels, he said. Stone promised Tester he would return every quarter with an update.

"I'm as frustrated as you are," Stone said. "But at this point, our budget looks solid."

Under the old Veterans Choice Program, which was replaced by the Mission Act, the VA repeat-

edly ran out of funding in its budget for community care. Then-VA Secretary David Shulkin went to Congress on three separate instances in 2017 asking for more money to keep it viable.

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Navy vet convicted for hiding mental health

By STEVE BEYNON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Navy veteran was found guilty for concealing his depression disorder from the Federal Aviation Administration on pilot medical certification forms, according to the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Nicholas Beyer, 34, of Discovery Bay, Calif., was convicted on two counts of making false statements to the FAA and two counts of falsifying, concealing, or covering up material facts.

In civilian pilot medical certification applications submitted to the FAA in 2016 and 2018, Beyer lied about never being diagnosed with mental health disorders, despite a major depressive disorder diagnosis from the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2016, for which he received disability pay. Beyer was also receiving disability compensation for knee and back injuries, which he did not disclose.

Beyer's lawyer argued he concealed his depression because he felt the VA over-diagnosed him, court records show. However,

the federal prosecutors said the medical forms, which are used to evaluate whether a pilot has credentials to fly, ask very clearly about mental health conditions not a pilot's opinion on the diagnosis or how severe they personally believe the condition is.

Beyer faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, plus restitution for each violation. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for April, 22.

Beyer faces up to five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine, plus restitution for each violation. His sentencing hearing is scheduled for April, 22.

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NATION

Sores, lower numbers likely not lionfish's end

By JANET MCCONNAUGHEY
Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A new disease has caused open sores that can eat into the muscles of invasive lionfish and appears to have contributed to an abrupt drop in their numbers in the northern Gulf of Mexico, scientists reported Tuesday. But they hasten to say that it's probably far from the end of the showy invader with long, venomous spines.

Lionfish may even be bouncing back already, said University of Florida doctoral student Holden Harris, lead author of the article published online in Scientific Reports. Numbers of the smallest lionfish taken by spearfishers were way down in 2018, indicating a possible reduction in spawning, but were rising late that year and in early 2019, he said.

"It's too early, really, to say if that'll become a full population recovery," he said.

It's an interesting development, said Matthew Johnston, a Nova Southeastern University researcher who has written scientific papers about invasive lionfish but had not known about the lesions or population changes.

"We've always been wondering if they're ever going to reach their limit in certain locations," he said. "To date, it seemed the populations just kept getting larger and larger."

One reason that lionfish are a problem outside of their native Indo-Pacific is that their hunting method was new to their adopted territory, so their prey hadn't evolved countermeasures.

"They've pretty much colonized the entire Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico and up the East Coast of the U.S. up to about Cape Hatteras," Johnston said. "But it's just about impossible to estimate how many there are. They're found very deep and in lots of places we can't look easily."

Researchers measured the Gulf of Mexico changes in a number of ways besides the proportion of little lionfish in spearfishers' tows. They analyzed videos taken by remotely operated underwater



PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER Q. FOGG/AP

Two lionfish in April 2019 at an artificial reef off of Destin, Fla. A disease that caused open sores on many lionfish in the Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean appears to have contributed to a drop in their numbers, according to a study published Tuesday.



A lionfish cooked for a lionfishing event in Florida.



An lionfish caught in Destin, Fla., with an open sore.

vehicles in a 7,700-square-mile area of the Gulf of Mexico that has been regularly surveyed for a wide variety of species since the BP oil spill in 2010. They looked at the weight of lionfish that landed in commercial fishing trips and at numbers of fish taken per reef in lionfishing contests.

And by all of those measures,

numbers fell in 2017 and 2018.

"The magnitudes of the declines were striking," Harris said.

The densities shown in underwater vehicle footage dropped about 75%, said co-author William F. Patterson III, an associate professor of marine fisheries ecology at the University of Flori-

da. Commercial landings fell 52% from 2017 to 2018. And, though lionfish tournament catches rose each year, spearfishers had to hunt more reefs to find them.

One of the spearfishers who first brought the lesions to light said that lionfish numbers on his hunting grounds have stayed low, although the sores seem "pretty

much nonexistent now."

Alexander Q. Fogg, a study co-author and marine resources coordinator for the Okaloosa County, Fla., Board of County Commissioners, regularly catches lionfish to help control their numbers and to sell as food. He said that his diving partner, Josh Livingston of Dreadknot Charters, first noticed sick or injured lionfish off of artificial reefs near Destin, Fla., on Aug. 5, 2017.

"He said he noticed a lot of fish had wounds. I dismissed it," Fogg recounted. But every dive that day brought up fish with lesions. Out of 503 lionfish, 201 had ulcers.

The University of Florida put a first report about the ulcers online in September 2018.

"We're still trying to figure out what's going on," said Roy P.E. Yanong, of the Tropical Aquaculture Laboratory at the university's program in fisheries and aquatic sciences. Tests for molds, bacteria and viruses didn't indicate a likely culprit, he said.

One problem, he said, is that the sores were open to microorganisms in the water and en route to a lab. Finding fish in a very early stage of the process would probably help, but that itself has been a problem, he said.

Environmental factors could also be a major cause, Yanong said. Other possible causes could include physical trauma and parasite infection, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration spokeswoman Allison Garrett said.

"It could be a combination," Johnston said. "They're overcrowded, they're competing for food ... and the gene pool's really shallow."

Harris said that researchers had two big worries when reporting about the sores: that people might think lionfish were unsafe to eat, and that they might think that nature had ended the invasion.

"The densities have gone down in some places," he said. "We don't know if they'll stay down."



RON MAGILL, ZOO MIAMI/AP

Two newborn meerkat pups walk around their habitat this week at the zoo in Miami.

Zoo Miami welcomes pair of baby meerkats

Associated Press

MIAMI — Zoo Miami is welcoming two meerkat pups born Jan. 18 and that are being raised by their mother, an 8-year-old named Yam Yam.

The pups opened their eyes last week and have been exploring their habitat, gradually moving further and further away, Ron Magill, the zoo's communications director, said in an email.

Meerkats are born blind and helpless, but zoo staff kept a hands-off approach to allow them to bond with their mother and three unrelated brothers

— Gizmo, Joe and Diego — who share the habitat, Magill said.

Yam Yam arrived at the zoo from Busch Gardens in 2012, and the brothers came to Miami from Brevard Zoo in 2018. Any one of the brothers could be the pups' father, Magill said.

Magill said the zoo's website has a meerkat webcam that allows people to catch a glimpse of the babies as they explore their habitat.

Meerkats are omnivores from the mongoose family and are found in desert and other arid environments of South Africa.

FACES

Shattering borders

'Honeyland' first film to receive both documentary, international Academy Award nominations

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

Ljubomir Stefanov and Tamara Kotevska were in a hard-to-reach area of Northern Macedonia — about as far from the Oscars as possible — when they came upon the beekeeper who would be their subject in their acclaimed documentary "Honeyland."

While working on a short video commissioned by a nature conservancy project, the filmmakers met Hatidze Muratova, a middle-aged woman who ekes out a hard-scrabble and solitary existence harvesting honey with ancient, sustainable methods across the craggy mountainous landscape of the former Yugoslav republic while caring for her half-blind and bedridden mother in a modest home without electricity.

In Muratova, they recognized not just a noble, almost timeless figure of environmental symbolism but an inspiring character deserving of attention. Muratova hadn't set out to live in near isolation, while her village dwindled, she stayed behind to care for her mother. "Honeyland" is, in a way, her liberation.

"This woman is somebody who is a true talent and a great lover of humans," Kotevska said in an interview by phone alongside Stefanov. "She's an extrovert. But life conditions brought her where she is. She was trapped in that life. When we showed up, it was a way of freedom for her. It was a way of expressing her life and her story to us."

Of all the personalities that will be coming to the Academy Awards on Sunday, few can hold a candle to Hatidze. She will be there, the filmmakers say, in what promises to be both an astounding culture clash and a triumphant moment for a humble, heroic woman who never sought the spotlight.

In Macedonia, Kotevska says, she's living the role of "a national hero." "People are obviously tired of fake heroes that are beyond everyone," says Kotevska.

"Honeyland" has already made history. It's the first film ever nominated for both best documentary and best international film, the category formerly dubbed best foreign language film. The dual honors make "Honeyland" a quietly revolutionary Oscar nominee, one that speaks to



NEON/AP

Hatidze Muratova of Macedonia is the focus of the Academy Award-nominated documentary "Honeyland."

both the increasingly boundless nature of documentary filmmaking and the specific greatness of "Honeyland."

The film tracks Muratova's life, including astoundingly intimate scenes with her mother, Nazife, and her sustainable methods of wild beekeeping. Muratova takes half of the honey and leaves the other half for the bees, a balance

'Life conditions brought her where she is. She was trapped in that life. When we showed up, it was a way of freedom for her. It was a way of expressing her life and her story.'

Tamara Kotevska

on beekeeper Hatidze Muratova of Macedonia

that allows the combs to continue and flourish. But when a chaotic and unruly family of nine moves in next door and tries to crudely practice beekeeping with less patience, "Honeyland" becomes a starkly simple environmental allegory.

Stefanov believes this elemental conflict is why their

film, which won several top prizes at last year's Sundance Film Festival, has so resonated. The neighbors — Hussein Sam, his wife and their seven children — aren't exactly villains; they're doing their best while saddled with debts and many mouths to feed.

"It shows how greediness works on a very basic level," says Stefanov. "It's a community of three people. It would be the same if you had thousands with an optimal livelihood and somebody came and said, 'Hey, I will give you more.' That sentence is the strongest reason why we are facing what we are today."

"What we found in this community is something that is everywhere in the world," he adds.

It took an unusual amount of dedication to capture that community. Stefanov and Kotevska used an off-road vehicle to reach Muratova's home and in two- to three-day stretches stayed in tents nearby while shooting. In winter, it was too cold the stay the night. They spent three years filming and accumulated more than 400 hours of footage.

Most strikingly, Muratova often spoke Turkish, including in the scenes with her mother, a language that the Macedonian filmmakers don't speak. They were often shooting purely from a visual standpoint.

"Honeyland," which is currently streaming on Hulu and available to rent on Amazon, has tried to funnel some of its success back to its subjects. Jars of honey are for sale with proceeds going to Muratova and the Sam family.

'Spartacus' star Kirk Douglas dies at 103

By DENNIS McLELLAN
Los Angeles Times

Kirk Douglas, the dimple-chinned screen icon who was known for bringing an explosive, clenched-jawed intensity to a memorable array of heroes and heels in films such as "Spartacus" and "Champion," and for playing an off-screen role as a maverick independent producer who helped end the Hollywood blacklist, has died. He was 103.

Douglas, who continued to act occasionally after overcoming a stroke in 1966 that impaired his speech, died Wednesday in Los Angeles, surrounded by family, his son Michael said in a statement.

"To the world he was a legend, an actor from the golden age of movies who lived well into his golden years, a humanitarian whose commitment to justice and the causes he believed in set a standard for all of us to aspire to," Michael Douglas said on Instagram.

The stage-trained Douglas earned the first Oscar nomination of his long acting career playing one of the post-World War II era's antiheroes: the ruthlessly ambitious

bomber in the 1949 drama "Champion."

Douglas later received Oscar nominations for his performances as an opportunistic movie mogul in the 1952 drama "The Bad and the Beautiful" and as tormented artist Vincent van Gogh in the 1956 biographical drama "Lust for Life."

"I have never felt any need to project a certain image as an actor," Douglas wrote in "The Ragman's Son," his bestselling 1988 autobiography. "I like a role that is stimulating, challenging, interesting to play. That's why I'm often attracted to characters that aren't likable."

Never a fan of the Hollywood studio system — he likened the standard seven-year studio contract to slavery — Douglas launched his own independent production company in 1955.

Named after Douglas' immigrant mother, the Bryna Co. produced a number of films in which Douglas starred, including director Stanley Kubrick's landmark antiwar film, "Paths of Glory," "The Vikings" and "Spartacus."

As executive producer of "Spartacus," Douglas helped end the Hollywood black-

list by giving blacklisted writer Dalton Trumbo screen credit under his own name for his work on the 1960 Roman-Empire epic that starred Douglas as the gladiator-trained slave revolt leader.

In acknowledgment of a career that spanned more than 60 years and more than 80 films, Douglas was honored late in life with numerous major awards: The American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award, a Kennedy Center Honor, a Screen Actors Guild Life Achievement Award and an honorary Oscar for his "50 years as a creative and moral force in the motion picture community."

As a child, Douglas developed an early sense of the direction his life might take.

"I have always wanted to be an actor, I believe from the first time I recited a poem in kindergarten about the Red Robin of Spring. They applauded. I liked that sound. I still do," he wrote in his autobiography.

After serving in the Navy during World War II, Douglas replaced Richard Widmark in the role of an Army lieutenant in the Broadway comedy "Kiss and Tell." He had a few more brief appearances on



AP

Father-son actors Kirk Douglas, left, and Michael Douglas are shown in New York in 1976. Kirk Douglas died Wednesday.

Broadway before receiving a call from Hollywood for the 1946 melodrama "The Strange Love of Martha Ivers."

Parts in a half-dozen films followed, and then came his Oscar-nominated starring role as ambitious fighter Midge Kelly in the 1949 drama "Champion."

Among Douglas' more than 20 film credits in the '50s are "Young Man With a Horn," "The Glass Menagerie," "Ace in the Hole," "Detective Story," "The Jugger," "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea" and "Gunfight at the O.K. Corral" (with frequent co-star Burt Lancaster).

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Bag Full of Drugs' label leads to arrests

FL MIAMI — Two men charged with drug trafficking could have done a better job hiding their wares than using a package labeled "Bag Full of Drugs," Florida authorities said.

Ian Simmons and Joshua Reinhardt, both 34, were pulled over in Santa Rosa County after a trooper clocked them going 95 mph, according to a Florida Highway Patrol arrest report.

The trooper determined that Reinhardt was the subject of an active felony warrant for violation of probation in Orange County. He requested backup.

A Santa Rosa County Sheriff's deputy arrived to assist, and a K-9 alerted to the presence of contraband in the vehicle, the arrest report said. Authorities found approximately 75 grams of methamphetamine, 1.36 kilograms of the date-rape drug GHB, 1 gram of cocaine, 3.6 grams of fentanyl, 15 MDMA tablets and drug paraphernalia.

Man accused of stealing from scholarship fund

MI BLOOMFIELDTOWN-SHIP — A man was charged with stealing \$697,000 from a scholarship fund for cadets at one of Michigan's most exclusive golf clubs, authorities said.

Problems were discovered last summer during a review of the Oakland Hills Caddie Scholarship Trust, the Oakland County sheriff's office said.

Craig Maass, 60, was president of the trust. He was charged last week with six counts of embezzlement and remains in jail on a \$700,000 bond.

School removes dolls of black figures from racks

MI EAST LANSING — A performing arts center at Michigan State University removed a gift shop display featuring dolls depicting prominent black figures that were hanging from a tree-like rack, said school officials, who added that they will provide racial bias training for workers and volunteers.

University spokeswoman Emily Gerkin Guerrant apologized in a statement, adding that "people were hurt and offended" regardless of the intent of the display at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts.

The felt ornaments hung from the tree-shaped rack depicted figures such as former President Barack Obama, first lady Michelle Obama and Prince, Graduate student Krystal Rose Davis-Dunn, who came to the center for a jazz concert after a day of meetings with university leaders to discuss boosting equality and diversity on campus, asked employees if they saw anything wrong with the displays, but they did not.

Police: Man stole \$17K in goods on solo shift

CT HAMDEN — Police in Connecticut are trying



ALAN WARREN, THE (OWENSBORO, KY.) MESSENGER-INQUIRER/AP

Here is the steeple

Matt Hayden, left, of Hayden Precision Welding, directs Patrick Wilson and Nathaniel Krampe as they position a copper-plated 45-foot church steeple onto a truck flatted after its removal from the bell tower at St. Martins Catholic Church in Owensboro, Ky. The steeple will be replaced with a 16-gauge high-polished stainless steel steeple in about two months, according to the Rev. Pat Bittel.

to identify a man they say got a job at a gas station and proceeded to steal \$17,000 worth of merchandise and cash on his first, and only, solo overnight shift before disappearing.

The man also stole his employment folder, which contained his personal information, so the store's owner does not even know the worker's name, Hamden police said in a statement.

The owner told investigators he used an app to view the store security cameras and noticed that the new employee had left.

The owner went to the store and determined that the worker had stolen lottery tickets, 89 boxes of cigarettes and money worth a total of more than \$17,000.

Animals safe after a fire in zoo building

MO KANSAS CITY — The Kansas City Zoo said all animals are "safe and accounted for" after a fire in a building that houses bat-eared foxes, meerkats and other small African animals when they aren't in their outdoor enclosures.

Zoo spokeswoman Sarah Gay said the zoo's security team was notified after the blaze started in an external heating source outside the building. She said that crews responded quickly and the animals were moved to another building, where they will be mon-

THE CENSUS

1.4K

The weight in pounds of shark fins seized at a Miami port, officials said. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said the shipment of dried fins arrived in 18 boxes and was believed to have originated in South America, and likely bound for Asia. Officials estimated the total commercial value to be between \$700,000 and \$1 million. The fins are often turned into shark fin soup, considered a Chinese delicacy.

itored by the veterinary team.

Thieves target property in self-storage units

AK FAIRBANKS — Thieves targeting self-storage units in Fairbanks stole more than a half-million dollars in property in the last three months, according to Alaska State Troopers.

Ten to 15 units were hit at multiple storage facilities, KTVF-TV reported. In one case, thieves took precious metals valued at more than \$300,000.

At one storage business, thieves broke into one storage unit and knocked down walls to access other units, said trooper Sgt. Brian Zeisel.

Prison guards find liquor ahead of Super Bowl

CA DUBLIN — Deputies at a San Francisco Bay

Area jail confiscated 200 gallons of prison-made liquor that inmates were making for a Super Bowl party, a sheriff's official said.

Deputies found the liquor Saturday at the Santa Rita Jail in Dublin before Super Bowl Sunday when the San Francisco 49ers lost 31-20 to the Kansas City Chiefs, Sgt. Ray Kelly, spokesman for the Alameda County Sheriff's Office said.

Known as "pruno," the illicit alcoholic beverage is fermented from leftover fruit, sugar and juice with a little bread to provide the yeast and made in sealed plastic bags.

Police arrest man they say set woman on fire

NC KINSTON — Police in North Carolina arrested a man accused of dousing a woman in flammable liquid and lighting her on fire while she drove alone in her car.

Venice Taylor, 41, was taken into custody hours later, during a traffic stop in Kinston, news outlets reported.

Khloe McNeal, 24, of Kinston was found on a sidewalk with severe burns on her upper body after a bystander flagged down a police officer, interim Kinston Police Chief Tim Dilday said.

McNeal was able to tell police that she was driving and came to a stop when a man approached her car, threw a flammable liquid on her and set her on fire. Investigators said they don't think Taylor knew the victim.

Man sues police, city for forced urinal lighting

HI HONOLULU — A homeless man is suing the Honolulu Police Department and the city after he said officers forced him to lick a urinal in a public restroom.

Samuel Ingal was seeking shelter in the restroom in January 2018 when one of the officers told him in an "aggressive tone" that the "only way he could avoid arrest was by licking the urinal in the bathroom," the lawsuit said.

Another officer stood in the doorway, propping open the door, then closed it so they wouldn't be caught on video, according to the lawsuit.

From wire reports

PACIFIC

China opens 2nd hospital, deaths top 560

By KEN MORITSUGU
Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Thursday finished building a second new hospital to isolate and treat patients of a virus that has killed more than 560 people and continues to spread, disrupting travel and people's lives and fueling economic fears.

A first group of patients was expected to start testing a new antiviral drug, as China also moved people with milder symptoms into makeshift hospitals at sports centers, exhibition halls and other public spaces.

The health care system in the central city of Wuhan, where the outbreak was first detected in December, has been overwhelmed with the thousands of ill patients. A new, 1,500-bed hospital specially built for virus patients opened days after a 1,000-bed hospital with prefabricated wards and isolation rooms began taking patients.

Other treatment centers had tight rows of simple cots lining cavernous rooms. And Wuhan had another 132 quarantine sites with more than 12,500 beds, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Chinese health authorities reported 563 deaths and another sharp jump in the number of confirmed cases to 28,018. Outside mainland China, at least 260 cases have been confirmed, in-



CHINATOPX/AP

A medical worker in a protective suit walks by patients who have been diagnosed with the coronavirus as they settle in at a temporary hospital on Wednesday, in Wuhan in central China's Hubei province.

cluding two deaths in Hong Kong and the Philippines.

Hospital workers in Hong Kong demanding a shutdown of the border with the mainland were on strike for a fourth day. Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam announced a 14-day quarantine of

all travelers entering Hong Kong from the mainland starting Saturday, but the government has refused to seal the border entirely.

A Hong Kong medical union warned that its 20,000 members could resign en masse if the city's Hospital Authority refuses to

speak with them over their demands. It estimated 7,000 were on strike and said those who were working were worried about their safety.

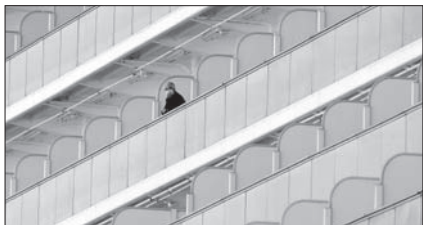
Xinhua said clinical trials for the antiviral drug Remdesivir have been approved and the first

group of patients is expected to start taking the drug on Thursday. Word of the trials had boosted the stock price of the drug's maker, American biotechnology company Gilead Sciences Inc.

Antivirals and other drugs can reduce the severity of the virus, but "so far, no antivirals have been proven effective," said Thanarak Pilpat, a doctor and deputy director-general of Thailand's Disease Control Department of the Health Ministry. He said there were a lot of unknowns, "but we have a lot of hope, as well."

China's National Health Commission said the number of infected patients who were "discharged and cured" stood at 1,153 as of Thursday. Details weren't given, but milder cases have been seen in younger, healthier people. The new virus is in the coronavirus family that includes MERS and SARS, and it causes fever, cough and shortness of breath, and in severe cases, pneumonia.

China has strongly defended its epidemic control measures, including locking down several cities in central Hubei province, where the outbreak has been concentrated. More than 50 million people are under virtual quarantine in Hubei, but outlying cities, towns and villages have enacted varying restrictions and other countries have severely restricted travel to and from China.



EUGENE HOSHIO/AP

A passenger stands outside on the balcony of the cruise ship Diamond Princess anchored at the Yokohama Port on Thursday, in Yokohama, near Tokyo.

Luxury cruise ends in quarantine

Associated Press

YOKOHAMA, Japan — David Abel's 50th wedding anniversary luxury cruise began with him eating his fill and enjoying the sights of East Asia.

It's ending with him quarantined in his cabin aboard the Diamond Princess for two extra weeks, eating a "lettuce sandwich with some chicken inside" and watching 20 infected people escorted off the ship, heading for hospitals for treatment.

Abel is among hundreds of passengers on two cruise ships in

Japan and Hong Kong who are caught in the drama and fear about the fast-spreading new type of coronavirus. Tests are still pending on some passengers and crew who have symptoms or had contact with infected people.

"It's not going to be a luxury cruise; it's going to be like a floating prison," Abel said on Facebook from the ship in the port of Yokohama, outside Tokyo.

As Japanese officials loaded the ship with supplies Thursday to make the quarantine as bearable as possible, passengers took

to social media to highlight kindnesses by the crew and to complain about dwindling medicine, the quality of the food and the inability to exercise or even leave their cabins.

On the World Dream ship quarantined in Hong Kong, its more than 3,600 passengers and crew were being screened because eight passengers on an earlier voyage had the virus.

Hong Kong officials said more than 5,000 passengers on three voyages beginning Jan. 19 may have been exposed.

Nebraska base is 6th approved to house quarantined travelers

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Camp Ashland in Nebraska was approved by Defense Secretary Mark Esper as the sixth military base that can be used to house quarantined travelers due to the coronavirus, the Pentagon announced Wednesday.

The Department of Health and Human Services sent Esper a request for assistance to house up to 75 people at Camp Ashland, a National Guard base located about 30 miles from Omaha, for overseas travelers who might need to be quarantined when they arrive from China, according to a Pen-

tagon statement. Esper approved the request Monday.

Other military bases approved to house evacuees are: March Air Reserve Base, Calif.; The 168th Regiment, Regional Training Institute at Fort Carson, Colo.; Travis Air Force Base, Calif.; Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Calif. There are now 98 people who were evacuated from China at March Air Reserve Base.

On Wednesday, about 350 people on two planes that the State Department evacuated from Hubei province were taken to Travis Air Force Base and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar,

according to Army Lt. Col. Chris Mitchell, a Pentagon spokesman. Camp Ashland is a Defense Department-owned installation leased to the state of Nebraska, according to the Pentagon.

The site is used as a state National Guard training area for personnel from the National Guard, active-duty Army troops and Army Reserve, according to Maj. Scott Ingalsbe, the state public affairs officer for the Nebraska National Guard.

There are about 180 soldiers at Camp Ashland — mostly active-duty troops with some National Guard and reservists — attending a 23-day basic leader course for Army specialists who want to

be promoted to sergeant, Ingalsbe said. The course takes place about once a month on the installation.

During the winter months, Camp Ashland conducts less training than it does during the summer months.

Ingalsbe said he believes this, as well as the installation's availability of buildings, might be a reason why it was picked to house evacuees.

Service members would be separated from the areas where evacuees are planned to be housed and the agencies will be operating, Ingalsbe said. He did not know exactly when evacuees will arrive.

Esper also approved a building

at Camp Ashland for passenger briefings, as well as office space for HHS.

Personnel and equipment through the end of the month.

The evacuees will be housed in three buildings, while HHS personnel will use three smaller buildings for administrative and logistical work, Ingalsbe said.

HHS personnel are responsible for the care, transportation and security of evacuees at all the military bases, and Defense Department personnel will not be in direct contact with them, according to the Pentagon statement.

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WORLD

Passengers cite fast descent in Istanbul crash

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Passengers who lived through the crash landing in Istanbul that killed three people and left a Turkish plane crumpled into pieces say the plane's descent felt unusually fast.

Engin Demir, who was injured in the crash, told NTV television that he really noticed the speed as the Boeing 737 operated by low-cost Pegasus Airline landed at Sabiha Gokcen Airport on Wednesday evening.

Coming in amid strong winds and heavy rain, the plane overshot the runway. It skidded about 165 to 200 feet before it dropped into a 98-foot high ditch, according to the city's governor, Ali Yerlikaya. The 11-year-old plane broke into three pieces, forcing passengers to squeeze out through cracks and climb out onto its damaged wings. In addition to the deaths, 180 people were injured, authorities said.

"With the speed, I think it was not able to stop. It all happened in 2-3 seconds," Demir said from his hospital bed in Istanbul.

Demir said he was trapped for a while by plane debris falling from the luggage compartment.

"There were screams and shouts. I tried to calm people around me. Help soon arrived," he said.

Another survivor, Alper Kulu, told the DHA news agency the flight was "abnormal from the start to the finish."

"It was a very turbulent flight. The plane touched down with difficulty. It was very speedy compared to other flights," he said, adding that "a 'Welcome to Istanbul' announcement was made after the wheels touched down."

He said the plane suddenly swayed left and right, then dipped to the left to fall into the steep ditch. He said the impact flipped the seats in front of him completely around. He said he pressed to get out since he feared the plane could explode.

"There was panic and shouting. Everyone was calling for help. I got out of the plane on my own, with a broken arm, I (climbed) 30-40 meters. I heard announcements that the plane could explode," he said.

The plane, carrying 177 passengers and six crew members from the western Turkish city of Izmir, included people from 12 countries. Yerlikaya, speaking early Thursday, said all the injured were stable but four had significant injuries. He did not elaborate. The three dead were Turkish citizens.

Pegasus Airlines CEO Mehmet T. Nane told a press conference in Istanbul that the black boxes were retrieved and were being deciphered.

"It's not easy to speak here when there are deaths, damages, injuries," Nane said, choking up. He said Pegasus will work to heal the wounds caused by the deadly landing.

Merkel condemns governors' election with far-right help

Associated Press

BERLIN — Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned as "inexcusable" the election of a new German state governor with the help of the far-right as well as her own party, and said Thursday that the result must not stand.

Wednesday's surprise election of Thomas Kemmerich, a member of the small pro-business Free Democrats, to lead the eastern state of Thuringia has turned into a major embarrassment for Germany's mainstream center-right parties and revived questions about the future of the country's governing coalition.

Kemmerich narrowly defeated a left-wing incumbent after the far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, voted for him instead of its own candidate in the state legislature. Left-leaning parties

and many on the center-right said that accepting votes from AfD — whether or not they were solicited — broke a taboo and was unacceptable. Kemmerich was holding out Thursday against mounting pressure to resign.

The state legislature elects the governor. The Left Party finished first in the election, followed by AfD and Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union. Kemmerich's Free Democrats, who are traditional allies of the CDU, only just mustered enough support to enter the legislature, with five of its 90 seats.

CDU leaders called for a new election in Thuringia. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who succeeded Merkel as party leader in 2018, said local CDU lawmakers acted against instructions from the national leadership in voting for Kemmerich.



ANTONIO CALANCA/AP

A firefighter inspects a derailed train carriage, near Lodi, northern Italy, on Thursday.

High-speed train derails in Italy

Associated Press

OSPEDALETTO LODIGIANO, Italy — A high-speed passenger train derailed in northern Italy before dawn Thursday and its detached engine slammed into a work train car on an adjacent track, ripped away part of a building wall and flipped around. Two train workers were killed and 28 people were injured, authorities said.

The state-railway Freccia Rossa train went off the rails on the heavily used Milan-Bologna line about 5:30 a.m. while traveling at a speed of nearly 180 mph. Civil Protection chief Angelo Borrelli told state radio.

Girolamo Fabiano, a railroad police official, said work had been done during the night on the stretch of track where the derail-

ment happened. He said it was unclear if that was a factor in the train going off the tracks. Prosecutors and railroad experts are investigating.

Italian news channel Sky TG24 said the work occurred on a track switch area not far from the derailment site.

State railways said the two fatalities were train engineers. Prefect Marcello Cardona said another railroad worker, part of the cleaning staff, was seriously injured. One passenger was seriously injured and 26 other passengers suffered less serious injuries, authorities said.

"The engine car kept going, 100 meters, at high speed," Cardona told reporters at the crash site, near the town of Ospedaletto Lodigiano.

Besides striking the isolated

work car, the out-of-control engine car clipped an unoccupied railways building in its runaway path, ripping away part of an exterior wall of a railways maintenance building, photos indicated. The engine car ended its fatal trajectory, flipped around 180 degrees.

Authorities said the crash occurred about 20 minutes after the train had left Milan heading south toward Bologna.

"The engine car derailed, detached completely and kept going," Girolamo Fabiano, a railroad police official told state radio. "Then the second car derailed, ending up almost on its side."

Cardona said it was fortunate that, due to the early hour, the train wasn't crowded. Police said it had about 30 passengers.

NASA's Koch, crewmates back from space

Associated Press

MOSCOW — NASA astronaut Christina Koch, who has spent nearly 11 months in orbit on the longest spaceflight by a woman, landed safely in Kazakhstan on Thursday along with two of her International Space Station crewmates.

The Soyuz capsule carrying Koch, along with station Commander Luca Parmitano of the European Space Agency and the Russian space agency Roscosmos' Alexander Skvortsov, touched down southeast of Dzhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, at 3:12 p.m.

Koch wrapped up a 328-day mission on her first flight into space, providing researchers the opportunity to observe the effects of long-duration spaceflight on a woman. The study is important since NASA plans to return to the moon under the Artemis program and prepare for the human exploration of Mars.

Koch smiled and gave a thumbs-



SERGEI ILNITSKY, POOL/AP

U.S. astronaut Christina Koch gestures shortly after landing in Kazakhstan on Thursday.

up as support crew helped her get out of the capsule and placed her in a chair for a quick post-flight check-up alongside her crewmates. Russian space officials said they were in good shape.

Koch, who grew up in Jacksonville, N.C., and now lives near the Gulf of Mexico in Galveston, Texas, with her husband, Bob, told The Associated Press last month that taking part in the first all-female spacewalk was the highlight of her mission.

Koch said she and fellow NASA astronaut Jessica Meir appreciated that the Oct. 18 spacewalk "could serve as an inspiration for future space explorers."

Parmitano and Skvortsov spent 201 days in space.

After preliminary medical evaluations, the crew will be flown by Russian helicopters to the city of Karaganda in Kazakhstan. Koch and Parmitano will then board a NASA plane bound for Cologne, Germany, where Parmitano will be greeted by European space officials before Koch proceeds home to Houston.

Skvortsov will be flown to the Star City Cosmonaut Training Center outside Moscow.

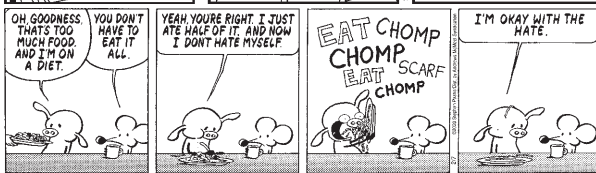
Frazz



Dilbert



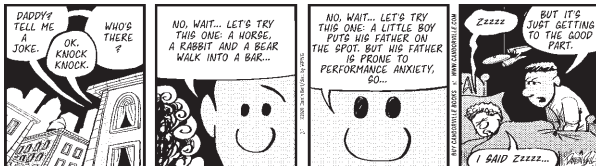
Pearly Before Swine



Non Sequitur



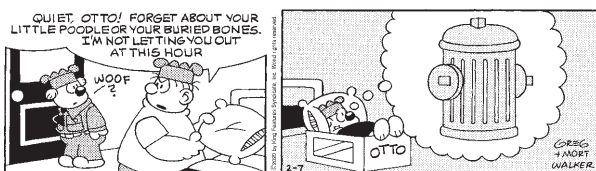
Candorville



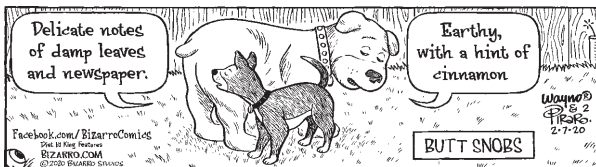
Carpe Diem



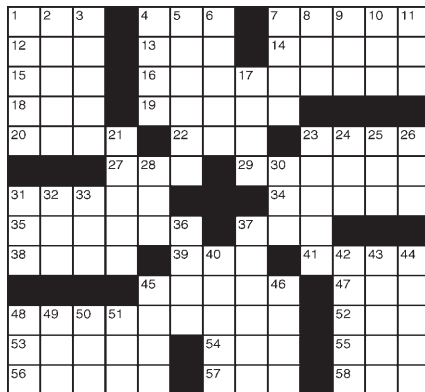
Beetle Bailey



Bizarro



Eugene Sheffer Crossword



- ACROSS**
- Shriver of tennis
 - Old map letters
 - More broad
 - Ms. Thurman
 - Mineral suffix
 - Worship
 - Box office purchases, slangly
 - Tooth-related branch of medicine
 - Numerical prefix
 - Really annoy
 - Splendor
 - Felon's flight
 - German river
 - Bakery treat
 - Humiliate
 - Corduroy feature
 - Church room
 - Spanish aunt
 - Dog food brand
 - Rushmore face
 - Bottle part
 - Brainy
 - Bikini half
 - Fortune-telling method
 - Corn spike
 - Pilifer
 - Short trip
 - Spinning abbr.
 - Nasser's successor
- DOWN**
- Erected
 - Acid type
 - Proverb
 - Faction
 - Takes the wrong way?
 - Oscar de la —
 - "Hold on ..."
 - Dog tags, e.g.
 - Speck
 - Goof up
 - Marina del —
 - Pack (down)
 - Green sauce
 - Thai or Korean
 - British "Inc."
 - Assoc.
 - 26 CBS logo
 - 28 Sea, to Henri
 - 30 "Entourage" role
 - 31 Actress Gardner
 - 32 Its cap. is Brussels
 - 33 Nile viper
 - 36 Orange veggies
 - 37 Extreme fear
 - 40 Get clean
 - 42 Critic Roger
 - 43 Vegas game
 - 44 Fate
 - 45 Winnow
 - 46 Ilk
 - 48 Score units (Abbr.)
 - 49 "Now I get it"
 - 50 Cover
 - 51 "Give — break!"

Answer to Previous Puzzle



2-7

CRYPTOQUIP

PQI EYY QC IDK CELKZ
EPTSKPI ZQTIQH'J OQHN OEJ
HKLEHNENGYK. HKLKLKGK

DSVVQTHEIKJ' LKZSQTHSISKJ.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WELL-KNOWN SOUTH AMERICAN CITY NAMED AFTER THE GREEK GOD OF MUSIC AND POETRY: SAO APOLLO.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals L

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0471900) is published weekdays (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents Monday through Thursday and for \$1 on Friday by Pacific Stars and Stripes, Inc. (45002, APN 963001-5002. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, Inc. 45002, APO AP 96301-5002.

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OPINION

Dems paving Trump's road to reelection

By DAVID VON DREHLE

The Washington Post

If, next January, Donald Trump takes the presidential oath for a second time — an unwelcome prospect to me — his road to reelection will have started in these busy, perhaps fateful, few days of early February, when Trump's audacious flair for self-promotion converged with the bumbling of Democrats to produce an explosive campaign launch.

There was the verdict on impeachment. No, not the Senate's verdict, which was as predictable as tomorrow's sunrise — especially after House Democrats made the disastrous decision to halt their investigation and present a gappingly incomplete report to unwelcoming Senate Republicans. There was just no time to seek court orders for further evidence, the Democrats urgently explained. And then they frittered away a whole month before presenting their articles of impeachment.

The key verdict is the one rendered by the court of public opinion. According to the venerable Gallup Organization, Trump's approval rating was a dismal 39 percent around the time news broke of his shady dealings with Ukraine. The last president below 40 percent at that point in his first term was Jimmy Carter, who was bounced after one term. By the end of the impeachment debate, though, Trump was at 49 percent, the highest level of his presidency so far and at least three points higher than Barack Obama could claim in early February of his reelection year.

Some on the left have talked about impeaching Trump again. You have to wonder if they're secretly on his payroll.

Onto this smoldering rubble the Iowa Democratic Party tossed a gasoline bomb. Their shocking inability to tabulate the

results of Monday's caucuses blew a giant hole in the party's claims to hyper-competence. Swing voters might be susceptible to the message that a party unable to count votes in Keokuk should not be encouraged to redesign the entire economy.

When, eventually, the votes are counted, Democrats should be chagrined by the mediocre turnout. All those candidates spending all those millions and all the talk about anti-Trump energy produced only the usual attendance on caucus day.

Then there's the Trump. His State of the Union speech was a lethally effective exploitation of the presidential bully pulpit. Did he overstate his accomplishments? Yes. Did he understate the record of his predecessor's Yes. Is that unusual in a campaign-year State of the Union? No.

But no previous address so cunningly adapted the ancient ritual of a formal speech to the visceral medium of television. A former TV star himself, Trump understands that people don't just listen to what the president says. They also watch the reactions in the room. He engineered the speech to force his opponents to react in potentially self-defeating ways.

Some examples. Rather than give the usual conservative lip service to school choice, Trump illustrated the issue by introducing a young African American girl in the audience and announcing that she was getting a scholarship to attend her preferred school. What would House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Calif., and her fellow Democrats do, applaud for the happy child and risk offending their public school-teacher base or sit on their hands and look like a bunch of Scrooges?

Rather than deliver the GOP boilerplate on abortion, Trump introduced a pro-life mom and her 2-year-old daughter, who was

born barely halfway to term. Advances in extreme neonatology kept her alive. How would Democrats react to this cute little darling whose existence blurs the distinction between life in and out of the womb?

Rather than poke the usual verbiage at the wing of the Democratic Party that embraces the label of "democratic socialism," Trump introduced Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaido, whose quest to unseat his country's socialist government had the entire Congress on its bipartisan feet. Now Democrats are left to explain why ousting socialists is good policy for Venezuela while electing them — the democratic variety, anyway — is right for the United States.

Viewers were left to wonder: Why wouldn't Pelosi applaud money for historically black colleges and universities? What's her beef with a service member who returns from deployment to hug his kids? Where's her feeling for the brother of a man killed by an undocumented criminal? All of these visuals could be explained in terms of Joe Biden, whose dog Reagan once confided to his diary, "If you're explaining, you're losing."

I won't be surprised if the next Gallup poll finds a Trump bump from the confluence of these events. If so, he'll be in positive territory for the first time — a position of relative strength for which Democrats will share a good portion of the blame. They misjudged impeachment, mismanaged Iowa and unwittingly co-starred in a Trump infomercial.

The great mistake of 2016 was to underestimate Trump as an innovative campaign force. Time is running out to avoid a repeat.

David Von Drehle is a Washington Post columnist. He is the author of "Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year."

Trump riding high, but it's a long way to Election Day

By CARL P. LEUBSDORF

The Dallas Morning News

If President Donald Trump seemed unusually expansive and his fellow Republicans especially exuberant at Tuesday night's State of the Union speech, it was certainly understandable.

After all, Trump was just hours away from Senate acquittal on two impeachment charges, armed with statistics reflecting continued economic strength, and buoyed by the mass Iowa's Democrats vote of Monday's caucuses and the defeat there of the rival he spent months trying to destroy, Joe Biden.

In addition, Democratic turnout in Iowa failed to reach predicted levels, and a new Gallup poll put Trump's job approval at 49%, the highest of his presidency. "The state of our union is stronger than ever before," Trump said in a speech that mixed genuinely impressive economic statistics with elaborate exaggerations of his administration's record.

Still, as the Dallas-Fort Worth lawyer-lobbyist-political guru Bob Strauss always said, in politics things are never as good or bad as they seem.

Regardless of ultimate Senate acquittal, Trump will forever be the third impeached American president, most Americans believe he improperly pressured Ukraine to investigate Biden, and the state of the economy may be slowing after a decade of growth. Meanwhile, the shape of the Democratic race to oppose Trump remains murky, though it's clear two candidates gained the most in Iowa, Pete Buttigieg, 38, and Sen. Bernie Sanders, 78.

Partial caucus results also on Tuesday showed them leading the field, and, while

the delay limited their ability to crow, Buttigieg claimed victory even before any votes were released.

Biden stressed, despite a disappointing showing, "we're in this for the long haul." But unless he can rebound in Tuesday's New Hampshire primary, or Buttigieg can match his Iowa showing there or elsewhere, the biggest long-term winner may prove to be Mike Bloomberg, whom Trump seems to dislike even more than Biden.

Polls show rising national and state support for the moderate former New York mayor, who entered too late for the first four contests but is spending millions on TV ads for March 3 primaries in states like California and Texas. A new Texas poll showed him tied for third. His first test may come in the Feb. 19 debate in Nevada. Polling and quick rebounding Tuesday's results may have temporarily obscured Biden's poor fourth-place finish. But finishing behind Sanders, Buttigieg and Sen. Elizabeth Warren renewed early doubts the erstwhile front-runner could meet expectations. If the former vice president's candidacy craters, the biggest question over the next month may be whether Buttigieg or Bloomberg can inherit his place as the leading moderate rival to Sanders, who seems likely to consolidate his position as the progressive front-runner by repeating his 2016 New Hampshire victory.

Based on Iowa network entrance polls, Buttigieg shows a lead over Sanders, but the Sanders nor Biden can match. Sanders scored strongly among younger voters but weakly among older ones; Biden did well among the elderly but poorly among younger ones; while the former South Bend, Ind., mayor did equally well across the spectrum. In Iowa, Sanders received fewer votes than Buttigieg from caucus at-

tendees whose initial favorites fell beneath the 15% threshold, prompting FiveThirtyEight's Nate Silver to observe it was "not a very great sign for Sanders' ability to expand his coalition beyond his base." But unless the Democrats' counting problems became another GOP weapon for Trump and top aides. "Nothing works, just like they ran the country," the president tweeted. In that context, Tuesday night's speech sounded like a convention acceptance speech, replete with attacks on socialism and Democratic lawmakers and chants from Republicans of "four more years." While GOP lawmakers greeted almost every Trump proposal or statement with applause, most Democrats sat glumly silent, looking down or, like Speaker Nancy Pelosi, shaking their heads.

Unsurprisingly, Pelosi said "the great American comeback" and he declared, "the years of economic decay are over." But overall economic growth last year slipped to 2.3%, the lowest since 2016. Along with promises, he repeated many past misstatements, like pledging to protect patients with low-back problems.

Trump made no explicit reference to the House-passed impeachment resolution, but may have alluded to it when he observed, "The only victories that matter in Washington are the victories that deliver to the American people."

Unsurprisingly, the speech of what Trump said was aimed at securing another victory — in November. At present, he is riding higher politically than at any point in his presidency, but the experiences of Jimmy Carter and George H.W. Bush are a reminder that the nine months from now to Election Day are a political lifetime.

Carl P. Leubsdorf is a former Washington bureau chief of The Dallas Morning News.

OPINION

What newspapers are saying at home

The following editorial excerpts are selected from a cross section of newspapers throughout the United States. The editorials are provided by The Associated Press and other statewide syndicates.

Trump's address did little to defuse charged atmosphere (Minneapolis) Star Tribune

Amid an impeachment effort meant to remove him from office and a re-election campaign meant to return him, President Donald Trump gave his third State of the Union address on Tuesday night.

The extraordinary circumstances were apparent in the setting. Over his left shoulder sat Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, who resisted impeachment until negotiations demanded Congress do its constitutional duty. In front of him was his right flank: Republican lawmakers defending the president, including a House minority that voted unanimously not to impeach him, and a Senate majority that acquitted the president the next day.

It was a night that laid bare the nation's deep partisan divide, with Trump not shaking Pelosi's hand and the speaker ending the evening by ripping up her copy of the address.

And it was hardly the combination of ingredients for the compromise, or even conciliation, that's needed for bipartisan action on key issues that are too pressing to await a presidential campaign, including work on lowering health care costs.

Like presidents preceding him, Trump appropriately declared the state of the union "stronger than ever before" — at least economically, if not politically. In particular, the record-low unemployment rate, especially for communities of color, is an accomplishment all should laud and look to build on.

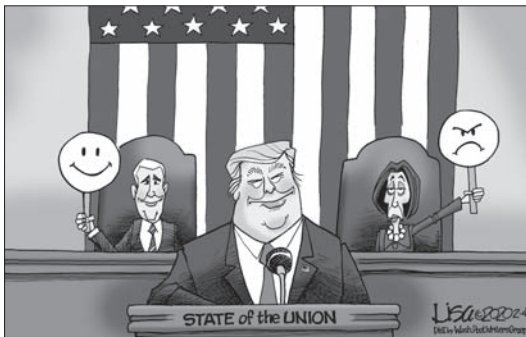
But in a speech touted by the White House as "the great American comeback," the president overstated the strength of the ongoing recovery and ignored the cost of the country's relatively tepid economic growth. Just last week, the Congressional Budget Office reported that 2019 GDP growth was 2.3%, its slowest since 2016 in an era Trump described in his inaugural address as "American carnage."

More troubling, the CBO reported that the annual budget deficit soared past \$1 trillion, a figure that will increase to an average \$1.3 trillion per year from 2021 to 2030. The Republican tax cut was a major contributor, and Trump is campaigning on a promise of even more cuts with no clear strategy for covering the lost revenue.

Alacrity over the deficit and other threats to America's security, like climate change, should create bipartisan consensus, not the gridlock gripping Washington. But the president, who has called global warming a "hoax," ignored it in his address just as he has in his administration. And while Trump is correct that the country must not take a "socialist" turn, capitalism's enduring scourge of increasing inequality threatens the nation's social fabric.

Rather than offering a vision for immigration reform that could fuel future economic growth, Trump continued to paint those not born in this country as a threat. Instead of searching for common ground on the Second Amendment, the president ignored the scourge of gun violence.

Security threats from nation-states and stateless actors alike are omnipresent, too, and while the commander in chief correctly credited the unrivaled U.S. armed forces, the soft power of diplomacy and alliances are more important than ever. And something the president should prioritize even if he gave the issue short shrift in



his speech.

Even beyond the military and economic might and rich alliances, America's greatest advantage is its system of governance, which when done right is still an idea and ideal for the world — a truth Trump and Congress must ensure. Otherwise, the great American comeback is just a slogan, not a reality.

Distraught Fla. father should receive forgiveness he seeks (Miami) Herald

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's act of rebellion during President Donald Trump's State of the Union address Tuesday night came from her sense of political savvy. Fred Guttenberg's act of rebellion came from the heart, a heart in pain, a heart irrevocably broken.

And it seemed particularly heartless for him to be removed from the balcony gallery by security after he shouted out in the name of his slain daughter when Trump failed to address any attempt on his part to confront gun violence in America.

Guttenberg's daughter Jaime was killed in the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. Pelosi had invited him to attend the State of Union speech.

The pain of Jaime's death has turned Guttenberg into a well-known gun control activist. He keeps his daughter's name alive by reminding us how senselessly she died in our own backyard.

Who can blame him. He speaks for the millions of Americans who have been affected by gun violence.

Tuesday, as Trump finished saying, "So long as I am president, I will always protect your Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms," Republicans began to cheer. Guttenberg, sitting with the South Florida delegation, likely fumed at the president's total dismissal of America's gun-violence problem.

As the cheers quieted, Guttenberg could be briefly heard in the chamber saying: "victims of gun violence like my daughter ..."

Security came and took Guttenberg away as the shocked delegation sitting around him watched him be led off.

As the commotion to remove Guttenberg played out, Pelosi can be seen looking in his direction.

By the end of Trump's address, Pelosi, who had apparently had enough, dramatically ripped up her copy of the speech, later telling reporters that it was "the courteous thing to do given the alternatives."

Trump had refused to shake Pelosi's hand earlier, she who, after all, initiated impeachment proceedings against him.

Obviously, tensions were raging like a teenager's hormones all evening.

A contrite Guttenberg apologized on Twitter early Wednesday:

"I disrupted the State Of the Union and was detained because I let my emotions get the best of me. I simply want to be able to deal with the reality of gun violence and not have to listen to the lies about the 2A as happened tonight."

I should not have yelled out. I am thankful for the overwhelming support that I am receiving. However, I do owe my family and friends an apology. I have tried to conduct myself with dignity throughout this process and I will do better as I pursue gun safety."

Guttenberg was immediately comforted by followers who assured him:

"No apology needed."

Except maybe one from the White House.

Adding 6 nations to travel limit list is politics as policy (The New York Times)

Last Friday, with Americans focused on President Donald Trump's impeachment trial, the coronavirus and the Iowa caucuses, the Trump administration announced it was adding six more countries to the list of those whose citizens face travel restrictions to the United States. The given reason was that those nations were not sufficiently screening people who sought to come to America.

The six countries affected when the travel ban takes effect on Feb. 22 are Sudan, Tanzania, Eritrea, Myanmar, Kyrgyzstan and Nigeria. All have sizable, if not majority, Muslim populations — in Myanmar's case, Muslims are a minority that is severely repressed. According to the acting secretary of homeland security, Chad Wolf, these countries fell short in new vetting criteria for "terrorists and criminals attempting to enter the United States."

The restrictions differed — Sudan and Tanzania are barred from the "diversity visa" lottery, while the other countries face a suspension of entry for immigrants. Travel for tourism and reasons other than immigration remains open — a curious gap if the purpose of the restrictions is to keep out potential terrorists.

It may be that the countries do somehow fall short in vetting would-be emigrants. And since the conservative-controlled Supreme Court upheld Trump's ban on travel from several predominantly Muslim countries — Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia and Chad (later removed from the list) — as well as Venezuela and North Korea in June 2018, the new ban would most likely survive legal challenge. But it doesn't take a lot of intuition to guess that security is not foremost on the president's mind.

Blocking the immigration of people of color, Muslims or non-English speakers has been among the most frequent of Trump's ploys to his base, and the timing for a new ban was propitious. It was the third anniversary of his first travel ban, the im-

peachment drama was sputtering to an end and the starting gun for the 2020 election season was about to go off in Iowa (or, as it happened, so pathetically misfire). With all the Democratic candidates opposed to Trump's immigration policies, what better time to remind his followers that Trump was still standing guard at the gates?

Yet the latest ban makes as little sense as the first one, and it stands to do far more harm than good. A 2018 study by the libertarian Cato Institute found that the Trump administration's "extreme vetting" of travelers and immigrants, of which the travel ban is a centerpiece, would not significantly reduce the already minuscule risk of imported terrorism achieved by visa reforms after 9/11, but would come at exponentially greater cost. The risk of any American being killed in the United States by a refugee or immigrant is negligible, Cato found.

Apart from the cruelty of barring thousands of family reunifications, the new restrictions could actually hurt the American economy. The ban is certain to strain relations with the newly listed countries. Five of them, including Nigeria, which has Africa's largest economy, are being avily courted by two of its "Belt and Road Initiative," and could well conclude that China is a more trustworthy and predictable partner than the United States.

Adding ignorance to insult, Trump has consistently misrepresented the diversity lottery program, from which he is now excluding Sudan and Tanzania, as a means for poor countries to dump people they don't want on the United States. In fact, the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program is administered by the State Department to increase immigration from countries with low rates of immigration, and candidates must have at least the equivalent of a high school diploma or two years of work experience to qualify.

The veneer of process and rationale over the latest travel ban cannot conceal its fundamental malice.

Black History Month still needed, still appreciated (Valdosta (Ga.) Daily Times)

Black History Month has a history of its own.

The commemorative month was founded more than 100 years.

In 1915, 50 years after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation that abolished slavery in America, Black History Month was created as a way to acknowledge black Americans.

Attempting to recognize all African Americans as heroes, great men in their field is impossible. The contributions of black Americans is as broad, as vast and as diverse as the nation.

Some people still like to deride the need for a Black History Month. Why don't we have a White History Month, they ask?

History books and curriculum have largely been written by white people, and thus reflect a homogeneous perspective that has excluded the contributions of blacks, women and other minorities. Arguably, every month is White History Month.

Still, eventually, our country might reach the point we no longer need to call attention to the achievements of any specific race or ethnic group. But we're not there yet.

For the fourth year, the newspaper's SoulLight Project team interviewed several community leaders and residents to discuss the importance of the civil rights movement, current race relations and other aspects that could easily fit into the character of Black History Month.

And while the stories are shared during the month, readers will hopefully realize an overriding truth.

These are not black stories. They are the stories of our neighbors and friends. They are American stories.

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NBA

Roundup

Raptors slip past Pacers for their 12th straight win

Associated Press

TORONTO — Serge Ibaka hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 30 seconds remaining and the Toronto Raptors rallied from 19 down to beat the Indiana Pacers 119-118 Wednesday night, setting a franchise record with their 12th consecutive victory.

Kyle Lowry had 32 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds, and Ibaka scored a season-high 30 as Toronto fought back after trailing by 11 with less than four minutes to play.

Pascal Siakam scored 25 points, Terence Davis had 11 and Fred VanVleet added 10 to help the Raptors earn their 12th straight home win over Indiana.

Malcolm Brogden scored 24 points and Justin Holiday added 22, but the Pacers lost their third straight. Domantas Sabonis had 15 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists.

Indiana guard Victor Oladipo started for the first time since returning from injury last week and scored a season-high 13 points in 25 minutes.

Clippers 128, Heat 111: Paul George and Landry Shamet each scored 23 points to lead eight other team in double figures as host Los Angeles beat Miami for its third consecutive win.

Shamet's points were a season high and he scored 14 off the bench in the fourth quarter, pouring in 10 straight for Los Angeles. Kawhi Leonard added 14 points, nine assists and seven rebounds

for the Clippers.

Derrick Jones Jr. paced six Heat players in double figures with a career-high 25 points and nine rebounds. Bam Adebayo added 22 points and 11 boards. The two of them combined to score all but six of Miami's 31 points in the fourth.

Celtics 116, Magic 100: Jayson Tatum scored 16 of his 33 points in the second half and host Boston held off Orlando.

Gordon Hayward added 23 points and Jaylen Brown finished with 18 to help the Celtics win their fifth straight.

The Magic pulled within 105-98 with less than three minutes to play on a basket by Nik Vucevic. Boston responded with back-to-back three-pointers by Hayward and Tatum that made it 111-98 with 1:46 left.

Nets 129, Warriors 88: Caris LeVert scored 23 points and host Brooklyn gave D'Angelo Russell a bruising welcome back with a rout of Golden State.

On the eve of the NBA's trade deadline, the Warriors held back Glenn Robinson III and Alec Burks, who had been two of their most productive players lately.

Those who did play were run off the floor, falling behind 20-4, missing 20 of their 22 three-point attempts in the first half and trailing by as many as 44 points.

Pistons 116, Suns 108: Andre Drummond had 31 points and 19 rebounds, and host Detroit handed Phoenix its fourth straight loss.



NATHAN DENETTE, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Fans react after Toronto Raptors center Serge Ibaka, right, scores the game-winning three-point basket to defeat the Indiana Pacers 119-118 Wednesday in Toronto.

Reggie Jackson added 25 points for the Pistons and Christian Wood had 21. Kelly Oubre Jr. led the Suns with 30.

Hawks 127, Timberwolves 120: Trae Young had 38 points and 11 assists and John Collins added 27 points and 12 rebounds to lead Atlanta to a win at Minnesota, as the teams braced for major roster shifts.

Collins had his fifth straight double-double for the Hawks.

Thunder 109, Cavaliers 103: Dennis Schroder scored 30 points to help host Oklahoma City beat Cleveland.

It was Schroder's eighth straight game with at least 20 points. He was a reserve in seven of those games, including this one.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 23 points and Danilo Gallinari added 15 for the Thunder, who have won eight of nine.

Grizzlies 121, Mavericks 107: Ja Morant scored 21 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. and Tyus Jones added 19 apiece, and short-handed Memphis won at Dallas.

Dillon Brooks had 18 points for the Grizzlies, who played without forwards Ja Crowder and Solomon Hill.

NBA scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	37	14	.725	—
Boston	35	15	.700	1½
Philadelphia	31	20	.608	6
Brooklyn	23	27	.460	13½
New York	15	36	.294	22

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Miami	34	15	.694	—
Orlando	22	29	.431	13
Washington	17	32	.347	17
Charlotte	16	35	.314	19
Atlanta	14	38	.269	21½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Milwaukee	43	7	.860	—
Indiana	31	20	.608	12½
Chicago	19	33	.365	25
Detroit	19	34	.358	25½
Cleveland	13	39	.250	31

Western Conference

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	32	18	.640	—
Dallas	26	25	.510	6½
San Antonio	22	28	.440	10
New Orleans	20	31	.392	12½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Denver	36	16	.692	—
Utah	32	18	.640	3
Oklahoma City	29	21	.578	4½
Portland	23	28	.451	12½
Minnesota	15	35	.300	20

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	38	11	.776	—
Phoenix	35	15	.700	1½
Sacramento	20	31	.392	19
Golden State	12	40	.231	27½

Tuesday's games

Milwaukee 120, New Orleans 108	
Houston 125, Charlotte 110	
Denver 127, Portland 99	
L.A. Lakers 129, San Antonio 102	

Wednesday's games

Brooklyn 129, Golden State 88	
Toronto 119, Indiana 115	
Boston 116, Orlando 100	
Atlanta 127, Minnesota 120	
Oklahoma City 109, Cleveland 103	
Memphis 121, Dallas 107	
Denver 88, Utah 95	
L.A. Clippers 126, Miami 111	

Thursday's games

Orlando at New York	
New Orleans at Chicago	
Philadelphia at Milwaukee	
San Antonio at Portland	
Atlanta at L.A. Lakers	

Friday's games

Dallas at Washington	
Memphis at Philadelphia	
Atlanta at Boston	
Detroit at Oklahoma City	
Toronto at Indiana	
Houston at Phoenix	
Miami at Sacramento	
Portland at Utah	

Saturday's games

Milwaukee at Orlando	
Dallas at Charlotte	
New York at Detroit	
Brooklyn at Toronto	
New Orleans at Indiana	
San Antonio at Minnesota	
L.A. Lakers at Golden State	
Phoenix at Phoenix	
San Antonio at Sacramento	

Leaders

Scoring

	FG	FT	PTS	AVG
Harden, HOU	47	885	1684	35.8
Curry, GSW	46	791	1587	34.7
Lillard, POR	49	458	1453	29.7
Beal, WASH	46	292	1384	30.1
Young, ATL	46	421	1341	29.2
Dorcic, DAL	43	408	1238	28.6
Leonard, LAC	38	363	1040	27.4
Booker, PHX	47	430	1121	26.8
Westbrook, HOU	42	406	1107	26.4
Davis, LAL	42	384	1086	26.4
Jamal, LAL	47	415	1081	25.2
Ingram, NOP	45	396	1154	25.1
LeVine, CHI	52	449	1097	24.9
Michell, TOR	48	437	1191	24.6
Siakam, IND	39	343	1153	23.7
Beltozan, SAC	59	434	1285	11.7
Wiggins, MIN	41	342	145	9.17

Rebounds

	FG	DEF	TOT	AVG
Drummond, DET	47	173	756	16.2
Robert, UTA	47	173	507	10.8
Whiteside, POR	47	188	465	13.9
Capela, HOU	39	188	369	13.8
Antetokounmpo, MIL	46	111	497	10.8
Simon, MEM	153	153	296	12.7
Vucevic, ORL	39	104	320	12.4
Thompson, MIA	48	159	385	10.4
Thompson, CLE	41	342	145	9.17

Assists

	FG	AST	AVG
James, LAL	47	502	10.7
Young, LAL	46	471	10.0
Dorcic, DAL	43	373	8.7
Rubio, PHX	42	361	8.6
Simmons, PHI	49	401	8.2
Lillard, POR	49	389	7.9
Griffin, LAL	31	391	7.1
Westbrook, HOU	42	310	7.4
Brogden, IND	36	265	7.4

FG Percentage

	FG	FGA	PCT
Drummond, DET	279	406	.687
Gobert, UTA	204	309	.660
Holmes, SAC	204	309	.660
Allen, HOU	244	368	.663
Capela, HOU	244	368	.663
Simon, MEM	244	368	.663
Whiteside, POR	307	504	.609
Adams, OKC	198	330	.599
Beltozan, MEM	327	560	.584
Simmons, PHI	298	514	.580
Adebayo, MIA	298	514	.580

Jokic powers short-handed Nuggets past Jazz



RICK BOWMER/AP

Denver Nuggets center Nikola Jokic, left, and Utah Jazz guard Jordan Clarkson battle for position for a rebound. Jokic had a triple-double in a 98-95 win in Salt Lake City on Wednesday.

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — The Denver Nuggets had seven healthy players to face the Utah Jazz and believed they had nothing to lose.

Thanks to a noteworthy performance by Nikola Jokic, the tired Nuggets overcame significant obstacles and recorded an improbable 98-95 victory over the Utah Jazz on Wednesday night.

"We were believing and we didn't want to let this game go. We have excuses. We have seven guys ... but we wanted to give ourselves a chance and give 100% of ourselves," said Jokic, who finished with 31 points, 21 rebounds and 10 assists.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Jokic is the 10th player with a 30-point, 20-rebound, 10-assist triple-double in NBA history and just the second in 35

years (joining DeMarcus Cousins) to achieve the statistical feat in a win.

Jokic made 13 of his 14 field-goal attempts with Rudy Gobert as his primary defender.

"Joker was amazing. He was playing cat-and-mouse with Gobert all game," Jamal Murray said.

The Nuggets had such a short bench due to their part in a four-team, 12-player deal a day before the trade deadline and a cascade of injuries.

"This was our best win of the year," Denver coach Mike Malone said.

That showed as the players, including all the injured Nuggets, celebrated on the court after the final buzzer.

Murray scored 31 points and the Nuggets held the Jazz to just one field goal over the final 7:08.

NBA/NFL/MLB

Memphis shipping Iguodala to Miami

Associated Press

MIAMI — A person familiar with the negotiations says Andre Iguodala is headed to Miami after the Heat and Memphis Grizzlies agreed Wednesday night on his long-awaited trade.

As part of the deal, Iguodala agreed to a two-year extension, with the second of those years being a team option, according to the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the trade has not been finalized.

The person also said Miami and Memphis were still working to complete terms of what the Heat are giving up in the deal, and that a third team — Oklahoma City, in a package that would include Danilo Gallinari potentially headed to the Heat — was still in play. Off-injured forward Justise Winslow said he was part of the deal and was headed to Memphis, the former Heat starter reaching out to fellow former Duke players Tyus Jones and Grayson Allen with a message.

Jones and Allen are both members of the Grizzlies. Winslow has missed much of this season with a bone bruise in his back.

In other NBA news: ■ A person familiar with the trade says the Philadelphia 76ers have acquired Glenn Robinson and Alec Burks from the Golden State Warriors in exchange for draft picks.

Expected to contend for an Eastern Conference championship, the Sixers have slumped and are in sixth place in the standings entering Thursday's games. The Sixers hope to strengthen their bench with the move. The Sixers will send Golden State a 2020 second-round pick via Dallas, a 2021 second-round pick via Denver and a 2022 second-round pick via Toronto.

Robinson, in his second stint with the Sixers, averaged 12.9 points and shot 40% from three-point range. Burks averaged 16.1 points and shoots 37.5% from three-point range. The move puts the Sixers roster at 15, meaning two players will have to go before the trade deadline to fit in Robinson and Burks.

■ A person familiar with the negotiations says center Dewayne Dedmon is returning to the Atlanta Hawks in a trade that sends center Alex Len and forward Jabari Parker to the Sacramento Kings. The Kings also are giving the Hawks two second-round picks.

Dedmon is returning to Atlanta, where he enjoyed his two most productive seasons, from 2017-19. The trade also satisfies his wish to leave Sacramento. Dedmon was fined \$50,000 on Jan. 2 for making public his desire to be traded by the Kings.

Dedmon has averaged 5.1 points and 4.9 rebounds while starting in only 10 games for the Kings this season. He averaged a career-best 10.8 points with 7.5 rebounds for Atlanta in the 2018-19 season.



JEFF SENER, CHARLOTTE OBSERVER/TNS

In happier times, Carolina Panthers quarterback Cam Newton rushes toward the stands with a football for a fan following a touchdown in Charlotte, N.C. Panthers GM Marty Hurney has declined to answer questions about Newton's future with the team or the comments the QB made recently at the Super Bowl in which Newton said he's "absolutely" certain he'll be back in Carolina.

Panthers mum on Newton

Team remaining mostly silent on quarterback's future

By STEVE REED
Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — While Cam Newton remains optimistic about his chances of playing for the Carolina Panthers next season, the team is remaining mostly silent on the quarterback's future.

"He's rehabbing, that's all I can say," Panthers general manager Marty Hurney told The Associated Press in reference to the foot injury that caused Newton to miss the final 14 games last season.

Hurney refused to answer several follow-up questions about Newton's future with the team or the comments the QB made recently at the Super Bowl where he said he's "absolutely" certain he'll be back in Carolina.

Newton described on the Tiki & Tierney radio show last week an "unbelievable conversation" with Panthers owner David Tepper, new coach Matt Rhule and Hurney.

"I left that meeting inspired," Newton said on the show "I told them, 'You won't find another person in that locker room with more to prove — not only to you, but I got to prove to myself'."

But Hurney isn't discussing that meeting — or much else.

The Panthers haven't given any assurances they plan to bring Newton back next season. And the reality is they might not know at this point what direction they're headed with the 31-year-old former MVP. Tepper has previously said the team would wait to see how Newton responds to rehabilitation following surgery on his foot before making any decisions about the QB. Hurney declined to say how that rehab is going or when the team expects Newton to be healthy.

The Panthers are embarking on a major rebuilding process after hiring a college head coach in Rhule and a young offensive coordinator in Joe Brady. At LSU, Brady was the Tigers passing game coordinator. Quarterback Joe Burrow helped lead the team to a national title.

The Panthers have also lost perennial Pro Bowl linebacker Luke Kuechly to retirement and released 34-year-old veteran tight end Greg Olsen.

Newton has struggled in recent years, losing his last eight starts for the Panthers while battling shoulder and foot issues. He played only two games last season, failing to throw a

touchdown pass, and was a non-factor in the run game.

There is a huge financial element to consider, too.

Newton is entering the final year of a five-year, \$103.8 million contract extension. He's scheduled to cost \$21.1 million under this season's salary cap, but the team could free up \$19 million in cap space by trading or releasing the league's 2015 Most Valuable Player. So if the team parts ways with Newton, they'd only be on the hook for a \$2 million cap hit in 2020.

The Panthers don't have much proven depth behind Newton at quarterback.

Kyle Allen struggled in Newton's absence with more turnovers than touchdowns passes, while rookie Will Grier failed to impress after starting the final two games of the season, although the Panthers were plagued by injuries at the time.

A's Fiers eager to move on from Astros scandal

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Mike Fiers and his Oakland Athletics might have reason to be downright mad.

They won 97 games each of the past two seasons to finish as the second-place team in the AL West behind the Houston Astros, whom Fiers called out in November in a story by The Athletic for a sign-stealing scheme that led to season-long MLB suspensions for Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow and manager AJ Hinch. The Astros then fired both. Fiers said the team had used a camera in center field to steal signs.

Alex Cora was dismissed by the Boston Red Sox after Commissioner Rob Manfred identified him as "an active participant" in the cheating scandal as then-Astros bench coach. Cora led Boston to a title the following year, in 2018.

The Mets also cut ties with manager Carlos Beltran, who played for the Astros in 2017. Hired this offseason, Beltran was let go before ever managing a game for New York.

A's manager Bob Melvin and teammates applauded Fiers.

"As time goes on, he'll be revered for doing this, for making the game a better place," Melvin said.

Fiers insisted at Fan Fest that he is moving forward, declining to address anything regarding what he did by speaking out or



BEN MARGOT/AP

Pitcher Mike Fiers and the Athletics might have reason to be downright mad. They won 97 games each of the past two seasons to finish as the second-place team in the AL West behind the Houston Astros, whom Fiers called out in November in a story by The Athletic for a sign-stealing scheme that led to season-long MLB suspensions for Astros general manager Jeff Luhnow and manager AJ Hinch.

even his role cleaning up the sport.

He said he owes that to his teammates. "I want them to be ready for the season," Fiers said. "For me it's all about getting ready for the season, playing baseball and not being a distraction to this team."

Shortstop Marcus Semien will look to build momentum from a career season that included being top three in the AL MVP voting. He was rewarded with a new \$13 million, one-year contract to avoid arbitration, a raise of \$7.1 million.

NHL

Roundup

Bruins win 5th in row on OT goal by McAvoy

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Charlie McAvoy pointed to Jake DeBrusk in appreciation. DeBrusk then tackled McAvoy, sending the duo to the ice before they were mobbed by the rest of the Boston Bruins.

The Chicago Blackhawks also celebrated a big goal Wednesday night, but their party was cut short in a hurry.

McAvoy scored 1:19 into overtime, and the Bruins beat the Blackhawks 2-1 for their fifth straight victory.

"That was special," McAvoy said.

McAvoy finished a pretty passing sequence for the defenseman's first goal since he scored in Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final against St. Louis. David Krejci threw the puck outside to a streaking DeBrusk, who made a perfect pass to McAvoy for the tap-in on the right side of the net.

"I would say the last six, seven games we've been the better team most nights," Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said. "Our analytics back that up. I think just the eye test backs that up. The score backs it up."

McAvoy picked up his 15th career goal, and then waited patiently for the jubilant Bruins to let him up from the winning huddle.

"After about 30 seconds, I'm just, 'I guess we're staying in Chicago tonight,'" a grinning McAvoy said.

The Blackhawks thought they had taken a 2-1 lead with 1:05 left in regulation when it looked as if Drake Caggeula beat Jaroslav Halak for a short-handed goal. But it was waved off because one of the officials blew his whistle.

Both Chicago captain Jonathan Toews and coach Jeremy Colliton said the official told them he made a mistake.

"Caggy scores a big goal, and I don't know what happened there," Toews said.

Cassidy said he also wasn't sure what happened.

"I just heard the whistle. I don't know why," he said.

Rangers 5, Maple Leafs 3: Chris Ziller and Mika Zibanejad scored in a 6-second span late in the first period to lead host New York past Toronto.

Kreider and Zibanejad each had a goal and an assist, Pavel Buchnevich had a goal and two assists and Filip Chytil and Greg McKegg also scored for the Rangers. Rookie rookie Igor Shesterkin made 27 saves to win the fourth in five starts this season.

Auston Matthews had two goals and John Tavares also scored and added an assist for the Maple Leafs, who are in a tight race for the playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.



GRAHAM HUGHES, THE CANADIAN PRESS/AP

Since assuming the starting role, Blue Jackets goaltender Elvis Merzlikins is 12-2-0, including four shutouts.

Blue Jackets climbing in Metro

By MITCH STACY
Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The Columbus Blue Jackets were tanking fast two months ago.

They were 11-14-4, had lost four in a row and timely goals were as scarce as winter sunshine in Columbus. Hopes for a fourth straight playoff appearance were slipping away. Coach John Tortorella was exasperated, and the organization was starting to look to developing next year.

Near the bottom of the Metropolitan Division and 11 points from a playoff spot on Dec. 9, the Blue Jackets walloped the division-leading Washington Capitals 5-2. That started an 18-2-5 run that has fans hopeful of a potential playoff run.

The way it happened made the turnaround even more improbable.

The Blue Jackets were plagued by injuries in December and January, with as many as 10 regular players sidelined. Lines were patched together with players who started the season in Cleveland with the team's AHL affiliate.

Then came more bad luck. Goaltender Jonas Korpisalo, who had gotten hot enough to be selected for the NHL All-Star Game, injured his left knee during a shootout with Chicago on Dec. 29. That set the stage for rookie Elvis Merzlikins, who was 0-4-4 and ensconced on the bench.

Merzlikins helped provide the fireworks on New Year's Eve when he turned in a 36-save performance in a 4-1 win over Florida and former Blue Jackets star goalie Sergei Bobrovsky. Since assuming the starting role, he's 12-2-0, including four shutouts, and has become a fan favorite.



JAY LA PRATE/AP

The Blue Jackets' Oliver Bjorkstrand, left, has been on a scoring tear, with five goals and one assist in the past 10 games. He leads Columbus with 17 goals and has 28 points.

The Blue Jackets returned from their NHL-mandated break by picking up three points in a road back-to-back and moved into third place in the rugged Metropolitan Division. Oliver Bjorkstrand, previously a steady presence but far from a star, is on a scoring tear.

"I think winning breeds confidence," Columbus captain Nick Foligno said. "I think when you're a team finding ways to win or at least feeling positive about your game, it's amazing what that does for you. You don't feel like you're carrying a piano on your back and your confidence comes with that."

Aside from Merzlikins, rookies Emil Menstrom, Eric Robinson and Vladislav Gavrikov have emerged as key contributors. So has 5-foot-5 NHL journeyman Nathan Gerbe, who since sign-

ing with Columbus in January 2018 had spent most of his time in Cleveland.

"That's the most enjoyable part of coaching, when you're developing people and you're pushing and you're tugging and you're kicking and you're hugging and you're doing all the things to try to help people to perform," said Tortorella, who is being talked about as a candidate for his third Jack Adams Award as coach of the year.

He keeps warning, though, that there is still much work to be done with this team.

"What happened is we win a few games and you think we have all the answers," he told reporters recently. "We don't have all the answers. This year is no different from any other. Every year brings different problems."

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division						
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF GA
Boston	55	33	10	12	78	135 138
Tampa Bay	53	33	15	5	71	192 147
Florida	52	29	17	6	64	188 171
Toronto	54	28	19	7	63	194 181
Montreal	55	25	23	7	57	172 170
Buffalo	53	23	23	7	53	151 167
Ottawa	53	18	24	11	47	144 179
Detroit	54	12	38	4	28	111 207
Metropolitan Division						
	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF GA
Washington	52	33	14	5	77	197 160
Pittsburgh	52	33	14	5	71	176 142
Columbus	54	29	16	9	67	144 135
N.Y. Islanders	51	30	15	6	66	150 139
Philadelphia	51	29	17	6	65	170 157
Carolina	52	26	22	4	66	169 145
N.Y. Rangers	52	26	22	4	66	169 145
New Jersey	52	18	24	10	46	141 199

Metropolitan Division

Washington	54	36	13	5	77	197	160
Pittsburgh	52	33	14	5	71	176	142
Columbus	54	29	16	9	67	144	135
N.Y. Islanders	51	30	15	6	66	150	139
Philadelphia	53	29	17	7	65	170	157
Carolina	53	30	20	3	63	169	145
N.Y. Rangers	52	26	22	4	56	171	169
New Jersey	52	18	24	10	46	141	190

Western Conference

Central Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
St. Louis	54	32	14	8	72	174	153
Dallas	53	30	18	5	65	142	136
Colorado	51	29	16	6	64	188	150
Chicago	54	25	21	8	58	161	168
Nashville	52	25	20	7	57	171	172
Winnipeg	54	26	23	5	57	159	166
Minnesota	52	24	22	6	54	160	174

Pacific Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Vancouver	53	28	19	5	65	177	163
Edmonton	53	28	19	5	62	170	165
Vegas	55	27	21	7	61	170	166
San Jose	53	27	21	6	60	167	165
Calgary	54	27	21	6	60	147	166
San Jose	54	23	27	4	50	139	178
Anaheim	53	22	26	5	49	137	163
Los Angeles	53	22	26	5	48	133	171

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division advance to the playoffs. The conference advance to playoffs.

Pacific Division

Thursday's games

Anaheim at Montreal
Detroit at Buffalo
Los Angeles at N.Y. Islanders
New Jersey at Philadelphia
Pittsburgh at Tampa Bay
Vegas at Florida
Colorado at Ottawa
Vancouver at Minnesota
Winnipeg at St. Louis
Carolina at Arizona
Nashville at Calgary

Thursday's games

N.Y. Rangers 5, Toronto 3
Boston 2, Chicago 1, OT

Friday's games

Anaheim at Toronto
Buffalo at N.Y. Rangers
Dallas at St. Louis
Minnesota at Dallas

Saturday's games

Ottawa at Winnipeg
Arizona at Boston
Colorado at Columbus
Los Angeles at New Jersey
Islanders at Tampa Bay
Nashville at Edmonton
Philadelphia at Washington
Pittsburgh at Florida
Toronto at Montreal
Dallas at St. Louis
Calgary at Vancouver
Carolina at Vegas

The Olympics have been canceled during wartime, and faced boycotts in 1980 and 1984. The event has grown rapidly in the decades since, driven by multi-billion dollar television contracts and billions more from sponsors.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL SIGNING DAY

Too big to fail: Powerhouse programs load up

Six schools sign 22 of the 31 5-star recruits

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

McKinley Jackson, a huge and talented defensive tackle from Mississippi, was one of the few five-star recruits whose college choice was a mystery going into signing day.

"I'll keep this short, simple and sweet," Jackson said during a news conference Wednesday at George County High School in Lucedale, Miss. "For the next three or four years, I'll be attending Texas A&M."

The five-star prospect picked the Aggies over Alabama and LSU, allowing one more school to break into a small group that landed the majority of the top available players. Signing day is typically about the rich getting richer, and this year the best classes were especially top-heavy.

According to 247 Sports' composite rankings, there were 31 five-star prospects in this year's class. Six schools signed 22 of those players. Clemson led the way with five as part of the highest-rated class coach Dabo Swinney has ever signed. Alabama and Georgia each landed four five-star players. National champion LSU, Ohio State and Oregon each had three.

For the second time in three seasons, 247 Sports crowned Georgia the recruiting champion, with Alabama and Clemson close behind.

Looking at the top 100 players rated by 247, again a handful of schools cleaned up. Georgia (11), Alabama (10), Clemson (10), LSU (9) and Ohio State (7) signed 47 of them.

By landing Jackson, Texas A&M became the sixth school with more than four top 100 players in its new freshman class. The Aggies came away with six, which means 53% of the top 100 players signed with just six schools.

Last year, seven schools signed at least five of the top 100 for a total of 48 players. Five more schools landed four top-100s.

In 2018, eight schools had at least five top-100 signees and five schools (Georgia, Ohio State, LSU, Clemson and Texas) signed 46 of those players. That year, 12 of the 29 five-star signings with either Georgia (7) or Clemson (5).

There was one notable player who is leaving people guessing.

Five-star defensive end Jordan Burch committed to South Carolina during the



KEN RUINARD, THE (ANDERSON, S.C.) INDEPENDENT MAIL/AP

Clemson head football coach Dabo Swinney got commitments Wednesday from five five-star recruits. It is the highest-rated class Swinney has had.

early signing period, but never actually signed a national letter of intent.

At a signing day ceremony Wednesday at Hammon School in Columbia, S.C., Burch had only a Gamecocks hat. South Carolina coach Will Muschamp, whose son plays on the same high school team with Burch, was

sitting just a few feet away.

Burch never made an announcement nor did any interviews, simply saying: "For the next three or four years I'll be with my friends." When South Carolina posted a list of 21 signees a few hours later, Burch's name was not among them.

SEC

Georgia leads conference: The Southeastern Conference dominated the recruiting landscape even more than usual this year.

As the remaining unsigned football prospects finalized their college plans Wednesday, the SEC had six of the nation's top eight classes, according to composite rankings of recruiting sites compiled by 247Sports.

The rankings included No. 1 Georgia, No. 2 Alabama, No. 4 LSU, No. 6 Texas A&M, No. 7 Auburn and No. 8 Florida. Only Clemson at No. 3 and Ohio State at No. 5 broke things up.

The SEC last had as many as six teams in the top eight in 2014, when it had seven of the top nine classes. The SEC had seven of the top 10 classes this year, with Tennessee moving up during the late signing period to grab 10th place. **Holding the line:** Georgia needed to replenish the depth on its offensive line. Left tackle Andrew Thomas, right tackle Isaiah Wilson and guard Solomon Kindley left school early to enter the NFL Draft. Versatile lineman Cole Mays transferred to Tennessee.

The Bulldogs signed offensive tackle Frederick Jones and center Sedrick Van Pran on Wednesday. Although both already had verbally committed to Georgia, they visited other schools after former offensive line coach Sam Pittman was named Arkansas head coach.

Evans' uncertainty: Five-star running back Zachary Evans, ranked 16th in the 247Sports composite, remained unsigned late Wednesday after being linked to a few different SEC programs.

Georgia never confirmed whether he signed with the Bulldogs in December. Evans also visited both Tennessee and Ole Miss.

BIG TEN

Ohio State, Penn State and Nebraska dominate: The Buckeyes are back on top in Big Ten recruiting, with Ryan Day wrapping up his first full signing class Wednesday with a letter of intent from the two-time Michigan high school player of the year.

Michigan, Penn State and Nebraska followed Ohio State in the Big Ten composite rankings compiled by 247Sports.

The conference has nine teams among the top 40 nationally for the first time, including five in the top 25 — Ohio State (No. 5), Michigan (No. 11), Penn State (No. 15), Nebraska (No. 20) and Wisconsin (No. 25).

Last year was the first time since 2010 that Ohio State's class was not judged best in the Big Ten. The Buckeyes were transitioning from Urban Meyer to Day and slipped to third behind Michigan and Penn State.

Dantonio fallout: Three-star running back Jordan Simmons of Power Springs, Ga., delayed his signing a day after Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio announced his retirement after 13 seasons.

The Spartans signed 19 players in December and added two more Wednesday to what, at No. 10 in the Big Ten, is their lowest-ranked class since the 2007 group assembled during the John L. Smith-to-Dantonio transition.

Fear the turtle: Maryland has a top-six class in the Big Ten for the second time in three years, largely because of the surprise December signing of five-star wide receiver Rakim Jarrett.

The 6-foot, 208-pound Jarrett, out of St. John's College High in Washington, D.C., is the top slot receiver prospect in the country. He de-committed from LSU in what was then a big surprise.

BIG 12

Oklahoma adds two 4-star defenders: The Conference champions Sooners got the signatures of a pair of four-star defenders, and new Baylor coach Dave Aranda signed a two-spot player that plans to throw and hit for the Bears.

While Big 12 teams were like most Power Five schools in securing most of their classes during the early signing period about seven weeks ago, there were still a few spots to fill Wednesday on what used to be the biggest recruiting day.

Oklahoma, which in December signed 21 players after its fifth Big 12 title in a row and before its fourth College Football Playoff appearance, added defensive end Reggie Grimes from Tennessee and cornerback Joshua Eaton from Houston to its 2020 class.

Aranda has been on the job in Waco, Texas, for only three weeks after Matt Rhule's departure from the Big 12 runner-up Bears for the NFL. The first-time head coach got an assist from Baylor baseball coach Steve Rodriguez for one of his five signees.

Quarterback Blake Shapen is also a top shortstop prospect from Evangel Christian Academy in Shreveport, La. The nephew of pro golfer Hal Sutton also plans to play baseball for the Bears.

Texas has elite class: Even though the Longhorns lost out Wednesday on a big in-state cornerback recruit who picked Missouri, Texas had the Big 12's highest-ranked recruiting class by 247Sports. Texas was ninth nationally, and Oklahoma 11th.

TCU was listed third among Big 12 teams by 247Sports, followed by West Virginia, Oklahoma State, Iowa State, Texas Tech, Kansas State, Baylor and Kansas.

ACC

Miami lands top safety: Avante Williams was committed to the Hurricanes three years ago, then decommitted, then seemed like he would ultimately be headed to Florida.

And then he pulled off a signing-day shocker on Wednesday. Williams, the No. 2-ranked safety in the nation according to most rankings, is headed to Miami after all as a caper to a big offseason of movement by the Hurricanes. Miami had chased Williams — a four-star player from Deland, Fla. — for years and in the end the relationships forged by Hurricanes assistants such as Ephraim Banda won out.

Orange insurance: Syracuse finally has some insurance behind starting quarterback Tommy DeVito with the signings of 6-foot-4 prospects Jacobian Morgan, of Canton, Miss., and Dillon Markiewicz, of McKinney, Texas.

The Orange were hurting behind DeVito, especially after the departure of backup Clayton Welch, a junior college transfer who exhausted his eligibility.

Leaving Virginia: Virginia Tech added two players to its class, which is ranked at or near the bottom of the conference by many recruiting services.

Coach Justin Vaught welcomed running back Raheem Blackshear of Philadelphia and wide receiver Dallan Wright of Saluda, S.C., to a now 17-member incoming class.

The Hokies' class, however, includes just one player from Virginia, long a stronghold of the school in Blacksburg, in 6-foot-4 defensive back Lakeem Rudolph from Virginia Beach.

Virginia coach Bronco Mendenhall signed 13 players in the early period and two more Wednesday, but none from the state.

PAC

Oregon gets boost by adding Jones: The Ducks locked up most of their stellar recruiting class during the December early signing period.

Oregon got a huge boost Wednesday when Jayson Jones, a 6-foot-6, 340-pound defensive lineman, announced he signed with the Ducks after initially committing to Alabama.

Jones, from Calera, Ala., opted not to sign with the Crimson Tide in December to explore his options. He decided the best one was to play for Mario Cristobal in Eugene.

"The journey has been long, 3 years to be exact," Jones said on Twitter. "It's been a lot of fun, but everything comes to an end. I've done a lot of meditating, praying and I've made my decision. I will be attending the University of Oregon."

Herm's touch: Herm Edwards and Arizona State had another solid recruiting run in 2019-20, landing the nation's 24th recruiting class and fourth in the Pac-12. The Sun Devils signed a program-record 10 top-100 recruits and had a superb recruiting year in California, landing 12 players from the neighboring state.

"Home base is Arizona. First base is California," co-defensive coordinator and recruiting coordinator Antonio Pierce said.

The Sun Devils got a boost on Wednesday's signing day, when tight end Jake Ray flipped on his commitment to UNLV to head to the desert.

Stumbling Trojans: Southern California was once one of the top recruiting programs under former coach Pete Carroll.

The Trojans slipped this year under Clay Helton, landing a 13-player class that was 34th nationally and 10th in the Pac-12.

AUTO RACING

Looming: '20 schedule adjustments just the start

FROM BACK PAGE

shifts: Phoenix will host the championship-deciding finale in November, Martinsville Speedway got both a night race and the penultimate playoff race, Daytona weekend to up its traditional July Fourth weekend to Indianapolis Motor Speedway (and will now host the final regular season race) and Pocono Raceway is going to host two Cup Series races in one weekend.

NASCAR was able to make those changes despite five-year contracts that had given track owners stability. But fans have complained about the stale schedule and



France

Speedway Corp., giving Jim and his niece, Lesa France Kennedy, the power to do just about anything they want.

"It makes a big difference," Jim France said of the merger. "It gives us an opportunity to respond quicker to the changing environment out here with the economy and all the things that are going on that impact motorsports. It was a major big step that we needed to make probably for quite a while."

NASCAR this year will debut a new sponsorship model in which the elite Cup Series will not have a single entitlement partner. The Winston Cup/Nextel Cup/Sprint Cup/Monster Energy Cup will be just the Cup Series going forward, with "premier partners" Busch Beer, Coca-

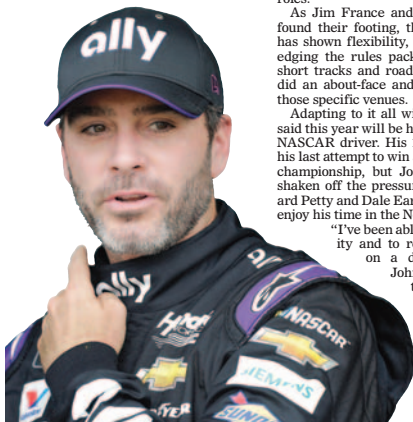


Above: Christopher Bell, seen celebrating in Victory Lane after winning NASCAR Xfinity Series race in November, will be in a race for top Cup rookie alongside two-time Xfinity Series champ Tyler Reddick and Cole Custer. The trio competed for the Xfinity title the last two seasons.



Left: 2017 Cup champ Martin Truex Jr. is congratulated by team owner Joe Gibbs, right, in Victory Lane after winning a Cup Series race last spring. NASCAR's season officially opens Sunday, Feb. 16, with the Daytona 500.

AP PHOTOS



Seven-time Cup champion Jimmy Johnson

Cola, GEICO and Xfinity taking on large roles.

As Jim France and Lesa France have shifted their footing, the stock car series has shown flexibility, too. After acknowledging the rules package was a bust at short tracks and road courses, NASCAR did an about-face and made changes for those specific venues.

Adapting to it all will be Johnson, who said this year will be his last as a full-time NASCAR driver. His 19th season will be his last attempt to win a record eighth Cup championship, but Johnson said he has shaken off the pressure of chasing Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt and plans to enjoy his time in the No. 48 Chevrolet.

"I've been able to have some clarity and to really understand it on a deeper level," said Johnson, now 44. "One thing that I've come to grips with and I'm enjoying letting go of is: I feel like I've been a bit out of

character and a bit focused on a number, a statistic — and I've never in my life been that way. I've never raced that way."

"I'm out there one final time," he added. "This is just one final time, and it feels so good to be able to let go of that chasing part."

The chase will be on for drivers hoping to fill Johnson's seat at Hendrick Motorsports. Alex Bowman is also in a contract year driving Rick Hendrick's No. 88, meaning two top seats at an elite team are in rare play.

Among the drivers in a crowded free agent pool are former series champion Brad Keselowski and teammate Ryan Blaney, who were both involved in a major Team Penske offseason shakeup. Looking for a spark after failing to get any of its cars into the championship-deciding finale, Penske swapped the crew chiefs for all three of its drivers, two of whom are in contract years.

"I personally needed to be challenged," Keselowski said. "A lot of us were pretty comfortable and this certainly removes any feeling of comfort."

Kyle Larson is considered the top free agent in this year's pool and he likely has three options: He can stay with Chip Ganassi, who lets him race sprint cars;

move to Stewart-Haas Racing and drive for Tony Stewart, who may be even more lenient than Ganassi has been; or he can scale back the extracurricular racing and drive for Hendrick.

Larson has won just six career Cup races, but is considered to be the best of NASCAR's next generation and is only 27. His courtship and ultimate decision will likely impact all other major driver negotiations.

It's a full house at Joe Gibbs Racing, which put three Toyotas in the final four last season and returns its entire lineup, with Christopher Bell finally earning his promotion to the Cup Series in a satellite ride for Levine Family Racing. It was the only place to put Larson's sprint car-loving buddy, who was ready for the big leagues but stuck in Gibbs' crowded system.

Bell will be in a race for top Cup rookie alongside two-time Xfinity Series champion Tyler Reddick and Cole Custer. The trio raced each other for the Xfinity title the last two seasons.

The race for the final four slots at Phoenix is wide open, assuming teams figure out how to mesh Gibbs on the track. But hasn't missed a beat and spent a decent part of January in a sports car, making his debut at the prestigious Rolex 24 at Daytona in his own attempt to stay sharp.

His push for title No. 3 begins with the Daytona 500, a race he has never won. Busch was second to teammate Denny Hamlin in last year's 1-2-3 Gibbs sweep, and he very much wants to win the race himself.

Busch gets to show what he's got starting Sunday with both an exhibition race and qualifying for the Daytona 500.

SPORTS



Cam still Carolina's QB?
Panthers GM mostly silent on former MVP's future » **NFL, Page 27**

NASCAR

Looming change

2020 season will bring long overdue tweaks as Joe Gibbs Racing pursues another year of remarkable success

By JENNA FRYER
Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — he sky isn't falling — or at least it doesn't feel that way — as NASCAR heads into the first of two seasons full of change.

In the three months since Kyle Busch won his second championship, NASCAR took its awards ceremony to Nashville, Tenn., and was eagerly embraced. The Hall of Fame ceremony last month focused on Joe Gibbs and his elite organization, which won a record 19 of 36 races last season as Busch earned Joe Gibbs Racing its fifth Cup Series title.

Drivers will return to the track at Daytona International Speedway on Saturday and the season-opening Daytona 500 is Feb. 16.

"We're coming off of a very good year, I felt like last year, where we're really getting some momentum back," NASCAR Chairman Jim France said. "It's exciting now, going into this coming year."

Since replacing his nephew as head of the fam-

ily business in August 2018, Jim France has been a steady guide for a series trying to stop a slide in every important metric. Attendance and television ratings may have finally bottomed out, but

'We're really getting some momentum back. It's exciting now, going into this coming year.'

Jim France
NASCAR Chairman

sponsorship dollars are as hard to find as ever and cost cutting is a major priority across the entire industry.

So the last full season for seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson is also the last year for the current race car. The "Next Gen" car is on schedule to race in 2021, and the project is expected to trim millions from team budgets because its parts and pieces will require a smaller workforce.

Even before that, NASCAR for 2020 made long overdue tweaks to the schedule with a few seismic

SEE LOOMING ON PAGE 31

Above: Team owner Joe Gibbs. JGR won a record 19 of 36 races last season, with driver Kyle Busch, below, earning the team its fifth Cup Series title.

AP photos



Powerhouse programs load up on 5-star recruits » College football, Page 30