Unmoved by the findings

A mover packs a truck in Kaiserslautern, Germany. According to an Inspector General investigation, almost half of military household-goods shipments arrive late and 20% are damaged.

IG says military should get tough on companies for late, lost, damaged deliveries of household goods

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Nearly half of military household goods shipments arrive late and one in five are damaged in transit or lost, an audit by the Defense Department Inspector General has found.

Some Defense Department personnel, meanwhile, may be venting their frustration with what they say are poor moving services by filing wildly inflated damage estimates, the audit suggested.

One person filed a claim of $1 million for a busted trash can and another tried to claim $1 trillion for unspecified damages, the IG report said. Both claims were denied.

The IG made many recommendations on how the military can improve moving services, which have vexed service members for years. The IG reviewed 9,852 shipments handled by four joint shipping offices in 2018 to determine the extent of problems with household goods shipments and whether proper actions were taken when goods were damaged, lost or arrived late during a move.

More than 4,000 of those shipments, or 41%, didn’t arrive by the agreed-upon delivery date, the audit found. The delays were caused by problems with scheduling and equipment at the moving companies, the IG said.

Military household-goods shipments lost or damaged, according to an audit by the Department of Defense Inspector General.

$33.1M

Amount late deliveries from four joint shipping offices cost the military in 2018.

1 in 5

Military household-goods shipments lost or damaged, according to an audit by the Department of Defense Inspector General.
Startup to launch Hollywood-backed short videos

BY MAE ANDERSON
AND RACHEL LERMAN
Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A startup heavily backed by Hollywood is wagering that you’ve ready to set aside YouTube and TikTok to watch star-studded short videos on your phone — for a price.

The company behind this billion-dollar bet is Quibi (KWHI-bee), which is preparing to offer its form videos designed for viewing in short bursts on mobile devices. It’s an enormous gamble, especially considering that several earlier efforts in mobile entertainment — most notably Verizon’s ill-fated Go90 service — fell flat.

Founded by former Disney studio chief and DreamWorks co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg and helmed by former Hewlett-Packard Enterprise CEO Meg Whitman, Quibi is heavy on big ideas and Hollywood muscle. It has backing from all the major movie studios and entertainment companies, $1 billion invested in original programming and star power in the form of creators and producers from Steven Spielberg to Chrissy Teigen.

Quibi plans to launch on April 6. It will charge $5 a month for an ad-supported service, and $8 a month for an ad-free version. “Paid premium short-form (video) has never been in the same sentence. It has never really been proven,” said Seth Shapiro, managing partner at Pacific Strategy Partners. “That’s the challenge.”

The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
Brain injuries in combat linked to PTSD

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

Service members who suffered moderate to severe traumatic brain injury in combat have significantly higher incidences of mental health disorders in following years as compared to warfighters who sustained other traumatic injuries, a study found.

The study, published in the current issue of the journal Military Medicine, examined almost 5,000 cases of traumatic injury experienced by Marines, soldiers, airmen and sailors during combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan from February 2002 to February 2010.

Among the study’s findings is a clear relationship between moderate and severe brain injury and a greater risk for fear, lead to stress disorder, a link that contradicts a theory postulated by some previous researchers.

Traficbrain injury has been the scourge of U.S. combatants during the extended war on terrorism, particularly during the decade after the September 2001 World Trade Center attack. Immediate diagnosis and treatment were critical for the escape of the weapon of choice by enemy guerrilla fighters in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Improvements in body armor and medical treatment saved the lives of many blast victims who would have died in earlier conflicts. By 2010, 7,832 warfighters had survived severe traumatic brain injury.

The new research compared two groups—one that sustained moderate to severe brain injury, is otherwise experiencing normal critical injury—and looked for associations with anxiety and depression, sleep disturbances, posttraumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, cognitive disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

The study found that most of these patients, 70.6%, were diagnosed with at least one of these five mental health conditions during multiyear follow-up periods. That is “considerably higher” than the 42% found in a much smaller 2012 study, “even though our mental health diagnoses were defined more narrowly,” the study said.

However, patients who suffered traumatic brain injury were at “consistently greater” risk for diagnosis of those five conditions than the group of patients suffering general trauma, the study found.

“If you have severe TBI, you are at risk of having something undesirable,” said David Chin, the study’s co-author and a professor at the School of Public Health and Health Sciences, University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Previous studies found links between mild and moderate traumatic brain injury and adverse mental health outcomes in combat veterans, but such research was usually limited to examining only a one-year post-injury period and primarily focused on PTSD and loss of mental function from physical injury.

The new study includes patients from all four service branches and examines mental health outcomes over longer periods of time, a median length of just over four years.

Chin said the study likely underestimates mental health outcomes for a few reasons.

Health records were available for care provided within a Defense Department health care facility or tied to the DOD’s TriCare program. Encounters with health care providers outside that were not available for the analysis, he said.

The culture of underreporting mental health issues among service members likely skews the data, he said.

Finally, an examination using longer follow-up periods would probably reveal more mental health diagnoses, he said.

“I think this illustrates that we just don’t have enough information to really get at how big the problem of mental health care actually is for these patients,” he said.

The study’s findings contradict a hypothesis by earlier investigators theorizing that patients with moderate and severe traumatic brain injury could not develop PTSD because impaired consciousness confers a sort-of “amnesiac effect” that precludes “encoding” the memories necessary for PTSD development, Chin said.

Wing upgrades for Warthogs in Korea nearing completion

By Matthew Keeler
Stars and Stripes

OSAN AIR Base, South Korea — All but one of nearly two dozen Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt IIs in South Korea have completed wing upgrades that should extend the service life of the close combat support jet well into the 2030s.

The new wings are designed to last up to 10,000 flight hours without a major inspection. The upgrade includes a new wiring harness created for easier wing removal and is expected to reduce the chance of damaging the wing during the process.

Most of our airplanes (at Osan) have between 9,000 to 12,000 airframe hours. They are old, but this upgrade is helping us to keep going. I wouldn’t be surprised to see some of the airplanes go 16,000 hours,” Senior Master Sgt. Dustin Schwartz, lead production superintendent for the 25th Aircraft Maintenance Unit, 51st Fighter Wing, told Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

“As 8,000 hours approached the Air Force started to realize the wings were cracking,” he added. “These wings were not designed to go this far.”

In 2007, Boeing Co. was awarded $1.1 billion under the Enhanced Wing Assembly replacement program to manufacture 173 sets of wings to replace the original components, which were designed for 8,000 flight hours. In August, the Defense Department awarded the company a second contract for an indefinite number of wings with a ceiling of $999 million through 2030, according to Boeing’s website.

Korean Air Lines, the country’s largest commercial airline, under contract has completed 10 of 11 wing upgrades for Osan’s A-10s, which are also known as Warthogs. The final aircraft is expected to be completed in early spring.

The remaining jets were flown to Hill Air Force Base, Utah, for the installation and have since returned to South Korea.

Most of the Air Force’s A-10s had their new wings installed and have since returned to the 51st Fighter Wing, getting all of its Warthogs to Utah for the upgrade now and a vast amount of manpower.

“Having Korean Air Lines here on the peninsula do our upgrades is a real opportunity to fly the time and effort trying to fly an airplane from here to Utah,” Schwartz said. “These guys are good at what they do — every jet that they have put for us has been really good. Having them here helps us keep our jets in the fight here.”

The 45-year-old A-10 has proven its value and continues to garner the support of many politicians in Washington.

In late June, following his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, President Donald Trump commented briefly on his support for the A-10 and spoke of the need to keep them in the fight. “I’ve got more people asking us to keep the Warthog. We are going to keep them as long as we can,” Trump said. “People love them. Sen. Martha McSally flew Warthogs, and every time I see her, she says please don’t let the Warthog go, it’s just a very great machine.”

The Arizona Republican’s efforts contributed to the Air Force awarding the new contract to Boeing, according to a statement on McSally’s website.

“As a former A-10 pilot and commander of an A-10 squadron in combat, I know how critical the Warthog is to our military’s success in the air and on the ground,” she said in the statement. “Our troops rely on the A-10’s outstanding and unique ability to provide close air support and combat search and rescue. The A-10 was specifically designed for these types of missions, so having it in the fight can make the difference between lives lost and lives saved.”

Tweets by @MatthewKeeler1231

At top: A technician sits in the cockpit of an A-10 Thunderbolt II while testing the aircraft’s new wings at Hill Air Force Base, Utah, in June. Above: A 51st Fighter Wing A-10 Thunderbolt II with new wings from the Enhanced Wing Assembly program is parked inside a hangar at Osan Air Base, South Korea, on Wednesday.
Afghan airstrike kills Taliban faction leader

By J.P. Lawrence
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A U.S. drone strike killed a regional leader of a breakaway faction of the Taliban in western Afghanistan Wednesday and may have killed several civilians, officials and militants said.

“U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, at the request of Afghan Security Forces, conducted a coordinated defensive airstrike in support of Afghan forces in Shindand, Herat on January 8, 2020,” said a statement sent to Afghan media by U.S. military officials.

The statement did not comment on casualties and a spokesman for Afghan forces in Shindand, Herat said the strikes did not occur in the region.

“Taliban forces in Shindand, Herat directed further questions to the Afghan defense ministry,” U.S. military statement.

U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan directed further questions to the Afghan defense ministry.

The ministry confirmed that airstrikes had occurred in the province, which borders Iran, and said an investigation has been launched to determine if any civilians were killed.

The strikes killed Mullah Mohammad Nangyalai, a regional commander of an insurgent faction led by Mullah Mohammad Rasool that split from the mainline Taliban in 2015, the breakaway militant group said in a statement.

The splinter group’s fighters will continue to fight against “the U.S. and other foreigners” in Afghanistan, the statement said.

The attack began at 4 p.m. Wednesday in an area controlled by the government, Tolo News reported.

The drone strikes were launched as the Rasoul faction was planning to attack a government checkpoint, said Abdul Hakim, a resident of the district.

“A few civilians were killed and injured” when a second strike hit as they gathered dead bodies after the initial strike, Hakim said.

An official from the area, TOR Sadaqat, a regional commander, said several civilians were brought from Shindand to the regional hospital in the city of Herat, about 90 miles away, said Dr. Abdul Hakim Taman.

The attack, at least 10 people were brought from Shindand to the hospital. A spokesman for the governor of Herat, Jailani Farhad, confirmed that there were airstrikes.

The Rasoul group, which has operated with the tacit support of the Afghan government, continues to fight the mainline Taliban in Herat, but the clashes between the two groups are not as frequent or heavy as in previous years, a source within the group said.

White House welcomes new court ruling on its border wall spending

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House says construction of the U.S.-Mexico border wall will move forward after a federal appeals court ruling that frees up construction money.

The 2-1 ruling on Wednesday halted a federal judge’s ruling in December that had prevented the government from spending $3.6 billion diverted from the military to pay for 175 miles of border wall.

The ruling freed up $1.27 billion diverted from 127 military construction projects to pay for 52 miles in Laredo, Texas, and 60 days old and contact claimants to review shipment status, the IG recommended.

The audit was prompted by an online petition, which had been signed by 107,000 people as of October, calling for moving companies to be held accountable for losses and damages incurred during the military move process, the report said.

The IG suggested issuing warnings or letters of suspension to moving companies within 14 days of a missed delivery date. Warning letters would impact moving company ratings, which determine what future shipments will be offered, it said.

The Defense Department is the largest customer in the personal property shipping industry, representing about 15% of all domestic and international moves, the IG said. U.S. Transportation Command is in charge of administering the military’s household moves.

The IG suggested issuing warnings or letters of suspension to moving companies within 14 days of a missed delivery date. Warning letters would impact moving company ratings, which determine what future shipments will be offered, it said.

The IG also urged TRANSCOM to contact personnel who failed to complete a customer satisfaction survey within one month of receiving their shipment of household goods, and help members file inconvenience claims with moving companies within 14 days of a missed delivery date.

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Deliveries: DOD IG suggests issuing warnings, suspension letters to moving companies

FROM FRONT PAGE

Those late deliveries alone cost the military $331 million, the IG said.

“Additionally, moving companies did not provide an explanation for delivering some of the shipments after the delivery date,” the IG said.

That means DOD personnel and their families had the hassle of filing claims for lodging, food, rental and other costs, the IG reported.

At least one claim was filed in 21% of all domestic household goods shipments, the IG said.

A review of 311 of those shipments found that the moving companies resolved 94% of the claims for around $8.4 million. Forty claims remained unresolved because they weren’t filed through the proper channels, the IG said.

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Read online at stripes.com
WASHINGTON—Navy surface warfare officers soon will be issued new leather jackets to wear and show their expertise and create a sense of pride.

The new jacket is similar to the famous aviation bomber jacket and is “meant to build esprit de corps” and symbolize the “tactical warfighter expertise” of being a qualified surface warfare officer, the Navy said in an announcement Thursday.

The jacket will be available starting in June.

“The surface warfare community has a long-standing history of excellence and an uniquely identifiable item is one way to signify the outstanding achievement and professionalism of our surface warfare officers,” Vice Adm. Richard Brown, commander of Naval Surface Forces, said in the announcement. “Those who wear the jacket will be easily identified as a part of a long lineage of professional ship drivers and maritime warfighters.”

The jacket is black leather and features knitted cuffs and waistband, a pointed collar and will be fully lined. It also has two front pockets with flaps and a Velcro name tape patch on the left side.

Surface warfare officers will primarily wear the jacket while at sea with their at-sea uniforms, according to the Navy. They can be worn when officers are ashore as an optional outer jacket but only with the service uniform.

Active, Reserve, and full-time support officers who have earned the surface warfare officer qualification will be allowed to wear the jacket. Officers who later move to a different job specialty outside of surface warfare can still wear the jacket and can also wear it when they leave the Navy.

The Washington Post

Army says text messages about draft are a hoax

The message seems urgent: The “United States Official Army Draft” has repeatedly tried to reach the recipient via email. The unwitting recipient has been marked “eligible” and now must report to the nearest branch for “immediate departure to Iran.” Failure to respond could spell a six-year jail sentence.

The bizarre message is also entirely false, military officials reassure.

“U.S. Army Recruiting Command has received multiple calls and emails about these fake text messages and wants to ensure Americans understand these texts are false and were not initiated by this command or the U.S. Army,” the agency said in a statement Tuesday.

It’s unknown how many messages have been disseminated and to whom, but individuals from around the U.S. have been sending Army recruiters screenshots text messages saying they’ve been drafted or are eligible for the draft, U.S. Army Recruiting Command Spokeswoman Kelli Bland told The Washington Post.

“Some [messages] have included fake names claiming to be Army recruiters, and others have used real names of leaders within our command,” Bland wrote in an email Wednesday. “Army security personnel are looking into the origin of the messages.”

At least two versions of the hoax messages with slightly varied wording appear to target individuals in Florida and New Jersey.

The Selective Services, the federal agency tasked with maintaining a database of young men aged 18-26 who could be called up to serve should a crisis necessitate a military draft, hasn’t had a draft since 1973, notes the Tuesday statement from USAREC. “The military has been an all-volunteer force since that time. Registering for the Selective Service does not enlist a person into the military.”

But among young Americans — particularly young men born decades after the last draft and who fall into the age range for mandatory Selective Service registration — anxieties around conscription for service have grown in the days a U.S. airstrike killed one of Iran’s top military commanders, Maj. Gen. Qasem Soleimani, in Baghdad.

Even as tensions escalate between the U.S. and Iran, Congress and the president would have to pass legislation in order to reactivate the draft.
Defense Secretary Mark Esper had convened the meeting with Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, along with senior civilian leaders of the Defense Department. Esper was pulled out of the meeting when military commanders notified him that strikes were underway.

“There was a lot of concern,” the senior defense official said. “It was anxious, wanting to get updates.” Early reports did not mention any U.S. casualties, “so there was some optimism after the initial rounds.”

The advance warning gave the military commanders time to get U.S. troops into safe, fortified positions at the bases. According to military officials, troops at bases in Iraq were ordered into bunkers, donned protective gear and were told “to shelter in place.”

The troops remained in their protected positions for hours, including after the strike. One official said at least some left al Asad Air Base in western Iraq before the attack. That base was targeted, along with a facility in Irbil, in northern Iraq.

“It’s not luck that no one got killed,” a second senior defense official said. “Luck always plays a role. But military commanders on the ground made good judgments, and had a good response.”

In an address from the White House on Wednesday morning, President Donald Trump credited an “early warning system” for helping prevent loss of life. A defense official later said the president was referring to the radar network the military has searching for potential enemy missiles.

At least two sources of intelligence gave the U.S. time to prepare. First, there were indications before the launch that Iran was preparing to strike at targets in Iraq, officials said. It was not clear whether that information came from a person or some technical means, such as intercepted communications. A defense official said the U.S. military reported “indications” of a strike prior to launch from information “internal to [the] U.S. government.”

Military officials assessed that Iran would attempt some kind of retaliation at the end of the offices, memorializing Soleimani.

The Pentagon “fully expected a retaliation from Iran,” the senior defense official said. “There was no other issue, the official said. “But we fully expected some sort of attack.”

A second source of warning came from what one official described as technical means. The U.S. military has satellites that can detect a missile shortly after it is launched. U.S. officials alerted allies to the launches shortly after they occurred, according to one Western official.

Iran launched 16 ballistic missiles, including 11 that landed at al Asad Air Base and one in Irbil. Esper told reporters at the Pentagon on the helicopters and from a person or some technical means, whether that information came from a person or some technical means, whether that information came from a person or some technical means, whether that information came from a person or some technical means.

Several sources reported the attack came from what one official described as technical means. The U.S. Consulate, according to residents who live nearby, saw smoke rising from the area.

As a precaution after the strike, U.S. military officials deployed a brigade of about 4,500 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C., to the Middle East and also shuffled some forces within the region.

Commanders on the ground, overseen by Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, head of the U.S. Central Command, also moved some service members off small bases in the region and scattered equipment and people on installations to make them harder to find.

“Let’s get people out of less defensible areas and put them in more easily defended or better defended areas,” a defense official said, describing the thinking after the Soleimani killing. “But it’s not just missile attacks. It’s not only not war on our personnel as a single target.”

U.S. officials began alerting reporters to the possibility of Iranian strikes beginning at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, an hour before they occurred. Vice President Mike Pence was scheduled to conduct a television interview that evening but canceled earlier in the day. President Trump had heard the radar alert and had positioned himself for a public messaging campaign. Late Tuesday afternoon, after service members assessed the wreckage and made reports, the White House had briefed Trump and were “able to pretty clearly say we don’t think any Americans are going to be killed,” the senior administration official said. “We knew that no Americans were hurt, either.”

But U.S. officials were not sure, once the missiles were launched, which locations Iran had targeted.

It was hard to tell at the Pentagon which bases were under attack “until actual impact on two specific bases,” a senior U.S. military official said. “This was spread out for more than an hour... It was more than an hour from the time of the first attack to the last attack.”

“This was not a ‘boom’ and all of this hit at once,” the senior defense official said. “This was launch, launch, launch...”

Once the bases were taking incoming fire, there was constant communication among the White House, CENTCOM and two other combatant commands: Northern Command and Strategic Command. The senior defense official said. They were called in because of their expertise in monitoring and tracking ballistic missile threats.

After the missiles hit, U.S. military officials began to assess the damage. Pentagon officials called several al- ler partners and allies right after the Iraqi attack, part of a concerted effort to communicate with them in the wake of the Soleimani killing. “I hope that is true,” the senior administration official said. “I hope that is true.”

“We actually believe this will be a show of force for domestic purposes.”

“They want a show of force,” he said, “but they want this to end, because they are scared of the response.”

Matt Pottinger, the deputy national security adviser, told aides in a Roosevelt Room meeting with Trump at least two at a time to understand whether the U.S. strategy was working.

“Our initial reaction has been, this was a domestic effort from the Iranians to save face, not to go to war, so we have proceeded in that vein,” said another senior administration official with knowledge of the analysis. “Esper and Milley returned to the Pentagon about 9 p.m.”

Trump had told senior military officials Tuesday evening that he did not want to start a war with Iran and wanted a path to ease tensions, which had been escalating at a frantic pace since the strike on Soleimani, the senior administration official said. When Trump’s military advisers told him there was reason to believe the missile strikes were not designed to kill Americans, a way out appeared, the official said.

Even with the advance notice, U.S. military officials were still scrambling after the attack to assess the damage and determine Iran’s intentions. U.S. forces in the region remained on high alert after the strikes, but no significant troop movement was made in Syria or elsewhere, according to military officials.

The second senior defense official acknowledged that officials on Tuesday night intended to limit information released to the public until the extent of the damage and how Trump might respond became clearer.

“We all understood that if the Iranians were to respond next, we owned the shot clock after the official said. “So, you need to be very thoughtful, very deliberate.”

The Pentagon and State Department sent staffs to the White House early Wednesday to write Trump’s speech. He made some last-minute additions, including the decision to start his remarks by declaring, “As long as I am president of the United States, Iran will never be allowed to acquire a nuclear weapon.”

“Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned and a very good thing for the world,” Trump said.

A third senior administration official said there was a sigh of relief when Trump agreed to read from prepared remarks and not take questions. Some aides were concerned that Trump might deviate from the precise remarks and misphrase if he made extemporaneous remarks to reporters, the official said.

Some officials acknowledged that Iran was likely to continue attacks via proxies and other means. But there was a growing sense among administration officials that killing Soleimani had sobered Iran up to Trump’s willingness to act.

“We actually believe this will be a de-escalation,” the senior administration official said. “We’re obviously going to be on alert for proxies with one-off attacks. But we think this worked.”
Iran: Missile strikes on US bases ‘did not intend to kill’

By KAREEM FAHIM AND SARAH DADDOUCH
The Washington Post

ISTANBUL — An Iranian military commander said Thursday that a barrage of missiles fired at bases used by U.S. troops in Iraq was not aimed at inflicting casualties, in the latest sign that Iran was seeking to avoid any further escalation of hostilities with the United States.

After more than a dozen missiles crashed down on the bases on Tuesday, both sides, for now, appear to be stepping back from further conflict.

“We did not intend to kill,” said Brig. Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the head of the Revolutionary Guards Aerospace Force, according to Iranian state media. “We intended to hit the enemy’s military machinery.” He did, however, repeat the government’s claim that “tens of people were killed or wounded.” U.S. and Iraqi officials said the strikes caused no casualties.

Iran and the United States had been on a war footing since President Donald Trump approved the killing of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, one of Iran’s most prominent military commanders, last week. Iran retaliated with the missile strike. By Wednesday, Iranian officials were suggesting that Iran did not intend any further attacks and Trump said he would not respond militarily to the Iranian strikes.

The soaring tensions had alarmed officials in Iraq, the main stage for the conflict between Tehran and Washington, and spooked governments throughout the region who feared a widening war.

Rocket attacks in Baghdad late Wednesday, however, suggested the risk of escalation had not yet passed. The strikes highlighted fears that Iraqi militias, backed by Iran, could pursue revenge for the killing of one of their leaders in the same attack that killed Soleimani.

Two rockets struck Baghdad’s Green Zone, which hosts the United States embassy and other foreign diplomatic missions, but caused no injuries, Iraqi authorities said.

Jawad al-Talibawi, a spokesman for the network of Iraqi militias known as the Hashd al-Shaabi, or Popular Mobilization Forces, told the Iraqi News Agency that the network was not responsible for the attack.

The bombing of the Green Zone might be an individual reaction, or an attempt by some parties to distort the reputation of the Hashd and shuffle the cards,” he said. “We are calling on those behind the bombing to stop these actions that distort the reputation of Hashd factions.”

The tension in Iran, however, continues to affect the main mission of U.S. forces in Iraq — fighting the Islamic State. The coalition said Thursday that military operations against the extremist group in Iraq would remain “paused” while it focused on “protecting the Iraqi bases that host Coalition personnel.”

The conflict between the U.S. and Iran had sparked concern that operations against ISIS would be sidelined at a moment when the extremists, driven from the vast swath of territory they once held, try to regroup in parts of Iraq and Syria.

The same day, Iraq’s prime minister urged parliament to take “urgent measures” to force the withdrawal of foreign forces following the killing of Soleimani.

Lawmakers responded by passing a nonbinding resolution calling on the government to end the foreign troop presence in Iraq.

The coalition statement Thursday said it was awaiting “further clarification on the legal nature and impact of the resolution on foreign troops no longer being allowed to stay in Iraq.”

Its training and support of troops fighting ISIS had been suspended, though other activities, including countering the militant group’s propaganda, would continue, the statement said.

Iran: Missile strikes on US bases ‘did not intend to kill’

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon’s top leaders said Wednesday that they believe the ballistic missiles launched by Iran against U.S. military positions in Iraq was an unsuccessful strike meant to kill American troops in retaliation for an Iranian leader’s death.

Defence Secretary Mark Esper and Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the barrage of short-range ballistic missiles launched from three sites in Iran struck locations that would have likely hit U.S. and anti-Islamic State coalition troops had they not been prepared for the attack.

The Pentagon leaders said their early warning systems of the impending attack worked properly, allowing troops to take cover.

“Bottom line is, in my professional assessment, ... the points of impact were close enough to equipment and personnel that I believe, based on what I saw and what I know, they were intended to cause structural damage, destroy vehicles and equipment and aircraft, and to kill personnel.” Milley told reporters at the Pentagon late Wednesday after briefing members of Congress on recent tensions in the Middle East.

Esper said intelligence officials would work to determine whether the missiles were meant to inflict casualties on American troops. Some officials, who spoke anonymously because they were not authorized to talk publicly, suspected earlier Wednesday that Iran might have intentionally avoided hitting locations likely to kill Americans.

Reports earlier Wednesday indicated the United States had received verbal warning of the imminent attack from the Iraqis, who said they were warned about an hour before the bombardment. Esper and Milley declined to confirm if such a warning was issued.

The attack did leave damage on Al Asad, Esper said, but the impacts were “not major.” He said missiles damaged structures, aircraft taxiways, a parking lot and a helicopter.

The Pentagon said its troops remained on high alert throughout the region, and cautioned that the missile strike was seeking to avoid any further conflict.

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, accompanied by Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley arrive to conduct briefings in Washington, on Wednesday. Esper and Milley say Iran’s missile attack on U.S. bases were meant to kill American troops.

DOD: Iran attack meant to kill US troops
Lawmakers briefed, split along party lines on Iran

By Steve Beynon
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Democratic lawmakers who came out of a closed-door briefing Wednesday with national security officials said they heard no evidence of an “imminent threat” that justified the killing last week of Iran’s top general by a U.S. airstrike.

“It’s not what I consider to be an imminent threat,” Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, told reporters.

“I was deeply surprised at the lack of information” presented of an imminent threat, said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who is also on the committee.

Democratic lawmakers largely agreed the briefing was too short and lacked improper information and had vague justification for the Jan. 3 drone strike in Baghdad that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran’s elite Quds Force and a chief advisor to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader.

“The briefing] raised more questions than it answered,” said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., told reporters after the meeting.

Shortly after the national security officials briefed lawmakers, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi announced the House will vote Thursday on a resolution to rein in President Donald Trump’s war powers against Iran.

However, Republican lawmakers came out of the briefing in support of Trump’s actions to kill the Iranian general and the president’s restraint after Iran’s missile attack Tuesday against American military bases that house American troops.

“The guy is a designated terrorist. I find this whole idea that the national security team didn’t have a good reason to hit this guy is ridiculous,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., one of Trump’s top allies in the Senate.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., also told reporters that Soleimani presented a “clear” and “ongoing threat” against the United States.

Democrats have argued Trump was acting outside his constitutional powers when he authorized the attack on Soleimani without consulting Congress. However, Republicans dispute Trump needs to consult Congress for limited and targeted engagements.

“That is silly,” Rubio said of re-examining Trump’s power to attack Iranian targets under the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists, which allows the president to go after any terrorist associated with the execution of the 9/11 attacks. “It is ridiculous.”

Rubio said there’s no need for a new war powers measure because Trump is “not planning an invasion.”

While Republican lawmakers applauded Trump’s efforts against Iran, many of them stopped short of backing further military action. However, Graham said he thinks the United States should increase its troop presence in the Middle East, even after the 82nd Airborne Division’s recent deployment to the region.

Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, speaks to reporters following a Senate briefing on last week’s targeted killing of Iran’s senior military commander, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani. He stopped short of calling for further military escalation with Iran.

By John Vander Vlag
Stars and Stripes

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Thursday the alliance can do more in the Middle East but stopped short of detailing how allies might satisfy President Donald Trump’s demand that they become more involved in the region.

“NATO has the potential to contribute more to regional stability and the fight against international terrorism,” Stoltenberg told reporters at the alliance’s headquarters in Brussels.

A day earlier, Trump called on NATO to get more involved in the Middle East, where tensions have soared after the U.S. killed an Iranian general last week.

Trump and Stoltenberg spoke by phone Wednesday after the U.S. president, in an address to Americans following Iranian retaliatory strikes for the killing of Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, urged allies to step up.

NATO has about 500 troops in a training mission in Iraq, but that effort has been suspended in light of security concerns in the country. The allies have said the mission could resume in the future.

It was not immediately clear what Trump wants from NATO or what more the alliance, already heavily involved in deterring Russian aggression in Europe, could do. It was too early to go into specifics, Stoltenberg said.

Trump has made increasing defense spending by NATO allies a top foreign policy priority but he also has called on the organization to focus more on terrorism threats and play a role in countering Islamic State.

In 2017 NATO formally joined the U.S.-led coalition to counter ISIS. Stoltenberg said the priority for NATO in general is training local forces to fight against terrorism.

“What President Trump called for yesterday was more NATO involvement and we are looking into what more we can do,” he said. “I will not speculate about the outcome.”

— Vander Vlag@stripes.com
Twitter: @JohnVander

Senators divided on whether Trump’s actions exceeded war powers authorized by the 1973 War Powers Resolution, which forms the basis of the Democratic resolution, is unconstitutional. “It reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how the Constitution allocated foreign affairs authority between the president and Congress” and should be repealed, Bolton tweeted Thursday.

The House vote was scheduled shortly Iran retaliated for the Soleimani killing by launching missiles at two military bases in Iraq that house American troops.

“Congress hereby directs the President to terminate the use of United States Armed Forces to engage in hostilities in or against Iran or any part of its government or military” unless Congress declares war on that country or enacts legislation authorizing use of force to prevent an attack.

The five-page resolution says, “I am very a top Iranian general last week.

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Pelosi will send impeachment articles ‘soon’

**By Lisa Mascaro, Alan Fram, and Andrew Taylor**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said Thursday she will “soon” transmit the articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, but warned that Senate Republicans are rushing to acquittal without a fair trial.

Pelosi brushed back GOP claims that Democrats are afraid to send the impeachment case to the Senate. And she said she has no concerns about the anxiety some House and Senate Democrats are showing over the stand-off with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell over the terms of the delayed trial. It’s now more than three weeks since the House impeached Trump on charges of abuse and obstruction.

“Ev-er-y-o-n-e n-o-t-h-i-n-g i-n de-fi-n-i-t-e-ly,” Pelosi told reporters at the Capitol. “I’ll send them over when I’m ready. That will probably be soon.”

Pelosi said she’s waiting for what she wanted from the start — “to see the arena” and “terms of the engagement” that McConnell will use — before sending her House managers to present the articles of impeachment in the Senate.

“We are proud of our defense of the Constitution of the United States,” Pelosi said. “We are concerned the senators will not be able to live up to the oath they take.”

The standoff over Trump’s impeachment trial deepened this week as McConnell said there will be “no haggling” with Democrats as Pelosi demands for more details and witnesses.

McConnell said on Thursday if Pelosi and House Democrats are “too embarrassed” to transmit the articles of impeachment, the Senate will simply move on next week to other business.

“They do not get to trap our entire country into an unending groundhog day of impeachment without resolution,” McConnell said as he opened the Senate.

McConnell’s Senate majority has the leverage Republicans need to launch Trump’s trial toward swift acquittal of the charges, but Pelosi’s reluctance to tractal ads as a crime is part of the rare impeachment trial, only the third in the nation’s history.

As Pelosi headed toward a early release Thursday, Pelosi told reporters, “I know exactly when” she plans to send the impeachmen t articles over, but, “I won’t be telling you right now.”

Trump tweeted Thursday that “Pelosi doesn’t want to hand over The Articles of Impeachment, which were fraudulently produced by corrupt politicians like Shifty Schiff in the first place, because after all of these years of investigations and persecution, they show no crimes and are a joke and a scam!” Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Calif., led the House impeachment inquiry.

Senators from both sides are eager to serve as jurors for Trump’s day in court. The trial will be conducted in the Senate, where Republicans have a thin majority.

The Senate floor Wednesday, Democratic leader Chuck Schumer promised he would force votes on witnesses, requiring senators to come up with “the next to hear from Trump former national security adviser John Bolton and others.

Some Senate Democrats have said the time has come for Pelosi to send the articles so the trial can begin. But aides downplayed any rift between the leaders, saying senators are simply eager to have their say.

Judge weighs bid to stop Trump’s cap on refugees

**By Michael Kunzelman**

Associated Press

GREENBELT, Md. — A federal judge on Wednesday pressed a government lawyer to explain why President Donald Trump signed an executive order allowing state and local governments to reject refugees, questioning whether the change was politically motivated.

U.S. District Judge Peter Mesitte in Maryland didn’t immediately rule on a request by three national refugee resettlement agencies for a preliminary injunction stopping the Trump administration from enforcing the order.

During a hearing on the request, the judge said the president’s order essentially changed a federal law governing the resettlement of refugees.

“On what authority is the president acting?” Mesitte asked Justice Department attorney Bradley Humphreys.

Humphreys said the 1980 Refugee Act gives the president “ample authority” to make such a change.

“Why change it now?” Mesitte asked. “Is it purely a political thing?”

Humphreys said the executive order is designed to enhance the involvement of state and local officials in the process of resettling refugees. But he insisted it doesn’t give them a “veto” over resettlement decisions.

The Trump administration announced in November that resettlement agencies must get written consent from state and local officials in any jurisdiction where they want to help resettle refugees by June 2020. And it still won’t fact check them, as it’s faced pressure to do that.

Instead, it is announcing much more limited “transparency features” that aim to give users slightly more control over how many political ads they see and to take out of its online library of political campaigns from both U.S. parties, political groups and nonprofits.

The company said it was guided by the principle that “people should be able to hear from those who wish to lead them, warts and all, and that what they say should be scrutinized and debated in public.”

Facebook again declines to limit political ad targeting

**By Barbara Ortutay**

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Facebook has decided not to limit how political ads can be targeted to specific groups of people, as its main digital-ad rival Google did in November to fight misinformation. Instead, it is announcing much more limited “transparency features” that aim to give users slightly more control over how many political ads they see and to take out of its online library of political ads outright, as Twitter did last October. And it still won’t fact check them, as it’s faced pressure to do that.

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Justice Department: Too late to pass Equal Rights Amendment

By Steve LeBlanc
Associated Press

BOSTON — The Justice Department has thrown a roadblock into efforts to revive the Equal Rights Amendment, finding that an expired pair of deadlines imposed by Congress on ratification of the measure means it’s too late for additional states to ratify it now.

The memo by Assistant Attorney General Steven Engel comes as Virginia is poised to become the 38th state to ratify the ERA, three short of the 38 needed.

“Because three-fourths of the state legislatures did not ratify before the deadline that Congress imposed, the Equal Rights Amendment has failed of adoption and is no longer pending before the States,” Engel wrote.

“Accordingly, even if one or more state legislatures were to ratify the proposed amendment, it would not become part of the Constitution,” he added.

Engel’s finding is unlikely to be the last word on the amendment. Democratic Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring said Wednesday he’s going to make sure the will of Virginians is carried out and the ERA is added to the Constitution.

“Women in America deserve to have equality guaranteed in the Constitution,” Herring said in a statement. “The fact that Republican attorneys general are supporting the ERA, and that they now have the support of the Trump Administration, is absolutely repugnant.”

But supporters of the ERA filed a federal lawsuit in Massachusetts aimed at clearing a legal path for adoption of the amendment.

The lawsuit argues that because the deadline was set forth in legislation authorizing states to ratify the amendment — and not in the three-sentence amendment itself — it’s not constitutionally binding and Virginia’s vote would put the amendment over the top.

“We are not surprised that the Trump administration acted swiftly to declare its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment,” said Wendy Murphy, a lawyer for Equal Means Equal, one of the groups that filed the lawsuit in Massachusetts. “This development makes our lawsuit even more urgent.”

Engel also said Congress may not revive a proposed amendment after a ratification deadline has expired. He said the only option is for Congress to begin the process again.

Efforts by ERA opponents are underway to block “a last-minute adoption as the Constitution’s 28th Amendment, including a lawsuit filed in federal court in mid-December by Alabama, Louisiana and South Dakota.

Conservative activists have depicted the ERA as a threat to their stances on abortion and transgen-der rights.

The language of the ERA states that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”

Minneapolis VA again cited for failures in patient’s suicide

By Nikki Wentling
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Minneapolis could have prevented the suicide of a patient in 2018 who repeatedly told staff, “I want to die,” according to a watch-dog report released Wednesday.

The VA Office of Inspector General faulted a dietitian, chaplain and service and nutrition staff for actions they took or did not take in those situations, the IG found. “The failure to involve treatment team members... resulted in missed opportunities for a clinical provider to further evaluate the patient’s condition and provide treatment that may have prevented the patient’s suicidal behavior,” the report states.

At the IG’s direction, Patrick Kelly, the hospital director, reviewed the case and determined not to take any disciplinary measures against the employees. The dietitian and chaplain no longer work at the hospital, the report notes.

The report was the second in recent years that cited the Minneapolis VA for failures in a patient’s suicide. In September 2018, the Office of Inspector General determined that the hospital’s mental health unit didn’t follow VA policies in February of that year, when staff discharged Iraq War veteran Justin Miller. Miller shot himself in the facility’s parking lot after leaving the mental health unit.

The IG did not identify the veteran in this latest report. The veteran was in his or her 60s and died in the spring of 2018, the report says.

The veteran suffered from a drug addiction for more than 30 years before achieving 10 years sober. However, medical issues in 2017 led to the veteran’s use of pain medications. Experiencing withdrawal symptoms from opioids and benzodiazepines, the veteran went to the emergency room at the Minneapolis VA in spring 2018.

The veteran was admitted to a medical unit in the hospital after telling ER staff about thoughts of suicide and homicide and a loaded gun at home. Over the next few days, the veteran told the hospital dietitian, chaplain and a medical resident, “I came here to die,” “I want to die” and, “I wish that someone could give me a dose of morphine so I could die.”

The same day the veteran died by suicide, a registered nurse overheard a phone conversation, during which the veteran gave away property and expressed feelings of impending death.

About two hours after that phone call, the veteran was not in the hospital room. Nurses and VA police searched for the veteran, and then received a call that their patient had attempted suicide and was pronounced dead at an off-site ER. But in that call, the suicide, such as the method and location, were not included in the IG’s report.

The inspector general found that the VA emergency room did not notify the hospital’s suicide prevention coordinator about a suicidal patient, as VA policy requires. In addition to mistakes by the dietitian, chaplain and registered nurse, the medical resident attending to the veteran didn’t provide proper care after receiving notes about the patient’s suicidal thoughts.

Since the veteran’s death, the hospital has hired a suicide program manager and has offered more training to the chaplain service and nutrition staff, in addi-

Other areas of focus include security and cybersecurity, ensuring privacy and data security and enhancing mobility and accessibility.

But the guidelines offer few specifics on how the government will accomplish the goals or put the principles into force.

While the guidelines say that the U.S. government “will promote voluntary consensus standards,” there are few details on what the standards should say. The government’s Trump administration is asking companies not make deceptive claims about the capabilities or limitations of autonomous vehicle technology, according to the document.

Wendy Murphy, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit, called AV 4.0 a “regurgitation” of voluntary standards that have not held the industry accountable.

“This is a science experi-mental that got out in real life on our roadways without any safeguards or assurances,” she said Wednesday.

AV 4.0 comes less than two months after the NTSA critiqued another federal agency, the Na-tional Highway Traffic Safety Administration, for failing regulate autonomous vehicle testing on public roads. The criticism came just before the board found that a distracted human safety driver was the main cause of a fatal 2018 Arizona crash involving an Uber autonomous test vehicle that ran down a pedestrian.
Twisted tale involves cult rumors, death

Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — Two dead spouses, two missing children and rumors of a cult. Con- fusion is growing around a series of mys- terious deaths and the disappearances of a 7-year-old boy and 17-year-old girl that tie back to a couple who have since vanished themselves. Joshua “JJ” Vallow and Tylee Ryan haven’t been seen since September.

Lori Vallow and her husband, Chad Daybell, never reported them missing and disappeared soon after being questioned about the children. What has followed is a twisted tale span- ning two states that revealed the deaths of both their previous spouses, the couple’s doomsday beliefs and children who slipped away from relatives who are des- perate to find them.

“All I want before I go is just to see those children, and especially — and I’m being greedy — especially my boy JJ. My little man,” said grandfather Larry Woodcock Tuesday at a press conference in Idaho an- nouncing a $20,000 reward for information leading to the kidnap.

Kay Woodcock’s brother, Charles Vallow, adopted JJ when he was a baby. Charles and his wife, Lori Vallow, also raised Lori’s daughter from a previous relationship at their home in suburban Phoenix.

Lori Vallow was a hairdresser, always keeping JJ’s hair trimmed and styled, Larry Woodcock said. The Woodcocks, whose other grandson is Lakewood, 10-year-old, visited and sold their grandson often and shared frequent phone calls and video chats when they couldn’t be there in person.

But this isn’t the first time that Lori always had the best, the absolute best interest in heart for JJ. She and Charles were the absolute best parents,” he said.

But things began to change a few years ago, Kay Woodcock said. Her brother con- fided that he feared Lori was cheating on him with Chad Daybell, an author of sev- eral religious-themed fiction books about prophecies and the end of the world.

Charles Vallow eventually filed divorce documents in an Arizona court last Febru- ary. That month, Lori moved to Rexburg, Idaho, with their children.

Kay Woodcock said Lori acted strangely when she told the family about Charles’ death, not mentioning the cause.

“He was highly concerned about it: Her emotional state, her mental state, and the fact that she had made threats about him,” Kay Woodcock said Tuesday. “It all culmi- nated into that cult that she’s in.”

Lori Vallow and Daybell did Preparing a Prophecy videos by Color My Media, which says it’s not a cult or even a group to join and which distances itself from the couple’s beliefs. It advertises its lectures, podcasts and videos as readying people for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Charles and Lori Vallow’s divorce was not yet complete when Charles was killed in July by Lori’s brother, Alex Cox. Cox told authorities that the shooting was in self- defense after Charles Vallow hit him with a baseball bat, but the case is unsolved. Whatever the findings, Cox won’t stand trial.

“Murder was indeed believed she in De- cember. Toxicology results could take weeks.

Kay Woodcock said Lori acted strangely when she told the family about Charles’ death, not mentioning the cause.

“We knew it was a murder, we knew of natural causes on Oct. 19. Police ques- tioned that and had her body exhumed for an autopsy. The results have not been released.

Chad Daybell married Lori Vallow two weeks after Tammy’s death.

In July, John Biskinis, relatives were grow- ing more concerned about the children. Larry and Kay Woodcock said they have left voice messages, emails and texts for JJ since August but haven’t heard back.

Investigators later determined JJ and Tylee had not been seen since September, but Lori Vallow and Chad Daybell never reported them missing.

Two days after Thanksgiving, officers visited Lori and Chad to check on the chil- dren after getting calls from worried family members.

Investigators said the couple claimed JJ and Tylee were visiting relatives in Arizo- na. After discovering the lie, investigators returned to the home the next day — only to find Lori and Chad had left town.

Man accused of killing his missing, estranged wife

Associated Press

A Connecticut man was ordered de- tained Wednesday on $8 million bail on charges that he killed his estranged wife — a crime investigators say stood to ben- efit him financially as the couple went through bitter divorce and child custody proceedings.

Fotis Dulos, 52, of Farmington, Conn., was arraigned in Stamford Superior Court, along with two other people au- thorities say helped him cover up the killing of Jennifer Dulos. Fotis Dulos may be able to post bail Thursday, his at- torney said. If he is released, he will be placed under house arrest and barred from contact with his children.

Jennifer Dulos, 50, a mother of five from New Canaan, has not been seen since she dropped her children off at school on May 24.

Police have not commented on the murder charges, but the arrest warrants hint at a financial motive. Fotis Dulos had debt totaling $7 million and would have expected some access to his children’s trust funds if Jennifer Dulos disappeared and he got custody of the children, the warrants said. Jennifer Dulos’ mother has custody of the children.

Fotis Dulos has denied any role in her disappearance. His lawyer, Norman Pat- tis, noted at the arraignment that Jenni- fer Dulos’ body has not been found.

“What we have is a suspicious disap- pearance and an entirely circumstan- tial case,” Parris told reporters after the court hearings.

Also arraigned Wednesday were Fotis Dulos’ former girlfriend, Michelle Troconis, and his friend, attorney Kent Mawhinney, who are each charged with conspiracy to commit murder. Police ac- cuse them of helping Fotis Dulos cover up the killing, including by drawing up a bogus alibi for him.

Judge Bruce Zupan set Troconis’ bail at $1.5 million and Mawhinney’s bail at $2 million. Both were arrested Tuesday after police took Fotis Dulos into custody at his home.

Lawyers for Troconis and Mawhin- ney have not publicly addressed the allegations.

Fotis Dulos had been identified months ago as the prime suspect in his wife’s disappearance. He and Troconis were charged with evidence tampering and hindering prosecution in June and pleaded not guilty.

Mothers demand answers in slayings at Miss. prisons

Associated Press

HATTIESBURG, Miss. — Manslaughter isn’t supposed to be a death sentence. Nor is burglary. Nor is armed robbery, selling con- caine or stealing a vehicle.

But that is what the mothers of three inmates say was ultimately given to their sons, all of whom were killed in prison violence last week. As they plan their chil- dren’s funerals, they are demand- ing answers. They want to know what happened, and why.

Three prison inmates were slain by fellow inmates at Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman last week. Two other inmates were killed in prisons elsewhere in the state. The outbreak of violence has brought national attention to problems that have plagued Mississippi’s over- stretched prison system.

The mothers were told by their sons’ fellow inmates that their deaths were gruesome.

“He was beat. He was stabbed. His chest, stomach. ... He has, well, he had, a lot of bruises and things on him,” says Jeffrie Hol- liman of Hattiesburg, mother of Roosevelt Holliman, 32, who died Jan. 8.

Rontonia Gates, mother of Wal- ter “Keon” Gates, 25, says she’s been told not to look at the body of her son after he was repeatedly stabbed on Dec. 31. But she says inmates with contraband cell- phones sent her graphic pictures and descriptions.

Denorris Howell’s body was so covered in blood that Sunflower County Coroner Heather Burton initially announced he had been stabbed on Friday, but later re- vealed that he had suffered a different kind of neck wound.

Relatives of all three inmates say they have few answers from prison officials , and they question whether guards acted properly.

“Keon is like they’re try- ing to hide something,” Rontonia Gates said.

“If he’s released, he will be placed under house arrest and barred from contact with his children.

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US-Iran tensions could alter Dem talking points

BY WILL WEISSERT
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democrat ic presidential candidates have spent the past year in a largely polite debate over domestic issues such as whether private health insurance should be eliminated in favor of a government-run pro gram. That could change follow ing escalating tensions this week between the U.S. and Iran.

The potential of open conflict involving the two countries was a reminder for many Democrats that for all the energy some pro gressive policy proposals have generated, the biggest decision a president makes is how to think about the economy and how to wage war. That could prompt some voters to reconsider which candidate they’ll back with just weeks to go before the Iowa caucuses formal ly usher in the primary season.

In the short run, there’s no question “that the developments could reshape the race, billion aire environmentalist and presi dential candidate Tom Steyer said in a phone interview. “If there are simmering tensions but no war, then I think Americans will go back to spending their time thinking about the economy and basic domestic issues.”

Last week, President Donald Trump ordered the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran’s elite Quds Force. Iran retaliated by firing more than a dozen missiles from its ter ritory at U.S. installations in Iraq. By Wednesday, both countries seemed to look for ways to de escalate the situation. Speaking frid ely, the top Democrat in Congress, including Biden, dared to do so.

Pete Buttigieg has recently faced pointed questions about his foreign policy as the former mayor of South Bend, Ind., pop ulation 103,000. But the 37-year old former intelligence officer in Afghanistan during 2014 gives him a unique perspective no other candidate in the field possesses.

Buttigieg said in an Assoc iated Press interview last week the majority of questions came as a mayor put him closer to the day-to-day impact of national se curity decisions affecting service members.

Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, meanwhile, spent months raising in the polls by promising to dramatically remake the political and economic system and deliver universal health care and clean student debt. Her support appeared to be leveling off in recent weeks, though, and a greater focus on national secu rity — an issue that hasn’t been at the forefront of her campaign — could make it tougher to recover.

All four have remained bunched near the top of many polls in Iowa and nationally, with no clear front-runner yet emerging. That’s why the next several weeks will be critical, especially if national security issues remain in the headlines.

History shows foreign policy developments have altered past Democratic primaries in the final stretch before voting begins with diverging results.

During the 2004 primary, for mer Vermont Gov. Howard Dean was thought to be surging and Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry floundering until U.S. forces’ capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003 helped redraw the contours of the race barely a month before the Iowa caucuses. Kerry subsequently blistered Dean and other opponents with less foreign policy experience.

He ultimately lost the general election to Republican George W. Bush. Still, by 2008, war fatigue helped Democrat Barack Obama score an upset win in Iowa as he offered a dovish alternative to his primary rival Hillary Clinton, who backed the invasion of Iraq as a New York senator.

The question heading into 2020’s Iowa caucuses is whether voters are in a 2004 or a 2008 mood.

California won’t fill Hunter seat until 2021

By Michelle Ye Hee Lee
The Washington Post

Democratic small-dollar do nors gave $1 billion through the online fundraising platform Act Blue in 2019, officials said Thursday, highlighting the explosion of online giving on the left heading into the presidential election year.

Of the 6 million donors who gave to Democratic candidates and organizations in 2019, half were first-time donors, officials said, pointing to the growing base of contributors who are giving online. Forty percent of the new donors gave multiple times, according to ActBlue, in a sign of the new donors’ sustained political interest and engagement.

Donors contributing in low in crements online gave $3.43 mil lion in the final three months of 2019, officials said.

The election of low-dollar donations points to the enthusiasm among Democratic voters and the increasing sophistication of campaigns and organizations in reaching donors on digital platforms and making it convenient for them to give.

More than half of the donations on ActBlue in 2019 were made on mobile, marking the first year the majority of small donors came through mobile devices, they said.

The Republican Party also stepped up its small-dollar online fundraising efforts in 2019 with the launch of WinRed, a donation platform modeled after ActBlue.

WinRed announced this week that it had raised $101 million since it launched in the summer of 2019, with almost $70 million in the final three months of the year.

WinRed officials credited House Democrats’ impeachment of President Trump for a surge of online donations on the platform in the final months of the year, thanks to donors showing their support for the president and the Republican Party amid the impeachment inquiry and vote.

All Republican state parties and the majority of GOP Senate and House campaign committees have now adopted WinRed, officials said.

Small-dollar donors have played an important role during the Democratic presidential pri mary in 2019, reshaping how candidates raise money in order to remain viable.

Erin Hill, ActBlue’s executive director, said in a statement that the record-breaking Democratic online donations are a positive sign for the party and for its eventual presidential nominee, who will face Trump and his formidable small-dollar online fundraising machine.

“Our nominee will need at least half of their funds from grassroots donors if they want to beat Donald Trump,” based on what we saw last year, the eventual Democratic nominee will have an army of grassroots donors behind them,” Hill said.

The number of donors and indi vidual contributions were higher in 2019 than in any other previous Democratic ActBlue’s founding in 2004, officials said.

In 2019, more than 13,000 candi dates and causes received do nations through ActBlue, totaling $35 million contributions, officials said. The average contribution in 2019 was $30.50, they said.
Calif. governor seeks $1B for homeless crisis

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — A billion-dollar investment last year has yet to curtail California’s growing homeless crisis, and with the state awash in revenue, Gov. Gavin Newsom wants to spend a billion more on programs aimed at getting people off the streets.

He signed an executive order Wednesday creating what he intends to be a $750 million fund that would pay for rent, fund affordable housing or aid boarding and care homes. Newsom wants to use to win money to house homeless people and is seeking changes to the state’s Medicaid program to increase spending on preventative health care.

In addition, the Democratic governor said the final portion of $650 million in emergency homeless aid to cities and counties approved in June was being released Wednesday after a final federal homelessness count.

The report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development found California’s homeless population increased 16% last year, to about 151,000 people. That’s more than a quarter of the national total.

President Donald Trump continued his criticism of California’s Democratic leaders this week, especially those in Los Angeles and San Francisco, for failing to adequately address homelessness. In a tweet, he called it a “local issue but said that if city and state leaders “acknowledge responsibility and politely” ask for help, then his administration “will very seriously consider getting involved.”

Newsom made no mention of Trump in his announcement but acted with an eye toward an inevitable economic downturn that wouldn’t allow the state to spend billions on the problem.

Although California is projected to have a $7 billion surplus, the state’s bipartisan legislative analysts said only $1 billion should be spent on programs that will last beyond the year.

Because Newsom’s proposal on homelessness would eat up the bulk of that $1 billion, the governor proposed to “seed” the fund with one-time state revenue and called on philanthropic and private sector groups “to step up as well.”

His order comes two days before he’ll unveil his annual budget plan, which he said includes $695 million of state and federal matching funds to increase spending on preventative health care. The money would go to things that can prevent homelessness, like helping people find housing. A portion could even go to rent assistance if it helps people not use health care services as often.

A group representing the directors of California’s county behavioral health programs praised Newsom’s proposed budget increases.

David Wolfe, legislative director of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, was skeptical.

He noted that taxpayers in 2018 also approved $4 billion in bonds for existing affordable housing programs for low-income residents, veterans and farmworkers.

The plan also allows the state to use up to $140 million each year in existing county mental-health funds to pay for housing for homeless people with mental illness.

Lawmakers also allocated $1 billion in the budget last year for homelessness and mental health services.

“You can’t just throw money at homelessness and a lack of affordable housing and expect that you’re going to achieve the result that you’re hoping to achieve,” Wolfe said.

He and Republican Assemblyman Tyler Diep, vice chairman of the chamber’s housing committee, said the state also needs to streamline its strict environmental protections to speed up housing construction.

Student engineers make walking easier for 2-legged dog

By Kelly Meyerhoffer

Wisconsin State Journal

MADISON, Wis. — The client: A furry, 4-year-old Australian shepherd mix with a hankerking for hot dogs and little ability to communicate beyond a bark.

The assignment for a group of UW-Madison students: Find a way for this two-legged dog to walk more easily.

An introductory engineering design course that has been around since the 1990s connects real-life problems with College of Engineering students assigned to solve them, according to lecturer Katie Kalscheur.

That’s how Madison residents Pete and Pat Sammataro found themselves on UW-Madison’s campus in early September introducing a group of first-year engineering students to their dog, Louie.

Louie — short for Lt. Dan, a character in the 1994 film “Forest Gump” — was born without his front legs and destined to be euthanized until the niece of a friend of the Sammataros saved him. When the couple adopted Louie in 2016, they saw how he would take advantage of university resources, including a 3-D printer.

The group created a back-up design, a scooter with guardrails, in the last week of the semester after Louie made “a bit of a scene” at MakerSpace when he tried on one of the students’ prototypes said UW-Madison freshman Jessica Nienhaus, one of the students in the group.

Nienhaus, of Racine, said the project was challenging because their client couldn’t explain why a particular design didn’t work, but she found it to be rewarding in a way that her high school projects catering to fictional clients were not.

The students’ final design modified the Sammataros’ existing cart, adjusting its height to fit Louie’s and adding small wheels in the front and back for stability.

The Sammataros received Louie’s cart earlier this month and they roll it out a couple of times each week to train him on his new set of wheels. They know that Louie learning to trust the cart to do what he has done on his own for years won’t happen overnight.

So the Sammataros keep trying, keep hoping for the day when they can take Louie for a walk and keep coaxing him along with hot dogs.

The Sammataros help Louie with his cart, designed by UW-Madison engineering students, in the front yard of their home.

Photos by Amber Arnold, Wisconsin State Journal

Pete and Pat Sammataro look on as their 4-year-old Australian shepherd mix, Louie, who was born without his two front legs, hops around the front yard at their home in Madison, Wis., last month.
Program to curb repeat hospital stays fails test

BY MARILYNN MARCHIONE
Associated Press

Researchers thought they had a way to keep hard-to-treat patients from constantly returning to the hospital and racking up big medical bills. Health workers visited homes, went along to doctor appointments, made sure medicines were available and tackled social problems, including homelessness, addiction and mental health issues.

Readmissions seemed to drop. The program looked so promising that the federal government and the MacArthur Foundation gave big boosts to expand it beyond Camden, N.J., where it started.

But a more robust study released Wednesday revealed it was a stunning failure on its main goal: Readmission rates did decline, but by the same amount as for a comparison group of similar patients not in the costly program.

“There’s real concern that the response to this would be to just throw up our arms” and say nothing can be done to help these so-called frequent fliers of the medical system, said study leader Amy Finkelstein.

Instead, researchers need to seek better solutions and test them as rigorously as new drugs, said Finkelstein of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Federal grants and research groups at MIT paid for the study, which was published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Just 5% of the U.S. population accounts for half of health care spending, and hospitalization is a big part.

A decade ago, Dr. Jeff Brenner started working with hospitals in Camden, a city with high poverty and crime rates, to identify people who go to hospitals frequently and turn those visits into actual visits. He won a MacArthur genius grant for the work, and federal grants expanded the program to Aurora, Colo.; Kansas City, Mo.; Allentown, Penn.; and San Diego.

The government also paid for a den to see if it truly worked.

The study enrolled 380 hospitalized Camden patients with at least two other admissions in the previous six months and at least two of these conditions: homelessness, drug use, a mental health problem, multiple accessing services, lack of social support or use of five or more medicines.

Half were given usual care when they left the hospital. The rest were enrolled in Brenner’s program with nurses, social workers and others coordinating their care for three months. Patients received seven to eight home visits and nine phone calls on average. The effort cost about $5,000 per patient.

Six months later, the readmission rate was 62% in both groups, and there was no difference in total health care spending.

Researchers don’t know what usual care was for the comparison group. If that suddenly improved, it could explain why the program failed to prove better.

However, two key goals of the program — a home visit and a trip to a health provider within a week of leaving the hospital — were met for only 28% of participants. Homelessness and lack of a telephone were big reasons, and the program more recently has worked harder to get people into stable housing.

“If you’re in a shelter or on the streets, it’s just not easy to help and that sometimes leads to more hospitalizations,” said the Camden project’s leader, Kathleen Noonan.

Burke admonished Weinstein as jury selection was getting underway, asking: “Is this really the way you want to end up in jail for the rest of your life, by texting in selection verdicts?”

Burke cut off Weinstein before he could respond. Weinstein’s lawyers said the film producer, who has been seen clutching an iPhone, was using his cell phone before court was in session.

The defense further argued that Burke has failed to adequately safeguard Weinstein’s right to a fair and impartial jury, in part by rejecting a request to halt jury selection for a “cooling off” period after prosecutors in Los Angeles filed new sex crimes charges against him on Monday.

In addition to Burke’s recusal, they demanded the trial be stopped until negative publicity from the new charges dissipates. Weinstein’s lawyers also want more time for individual questioning of potential jurors and asked for permission to have his jury consultant sit with his lawyers during such questioning.

“Faced with extreme and un-
Going to the mall just got cooler

Lou Fermonte of Northfield, N.J., gets air while snowboarding at Big Snow American Dream, an indoor, year-round ski resort in East Rutherford, N.J.

Shopping may be afterthought at indoor ski resort just off New Jersey Turnpike

By Karen Heller
The Washington Post

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — To visit America’s newest ski resort, follow the Jersey Turnpike, exit at MetLife Stadium and Meadowlands Racetrack, and head next door to American Dream.

Which, of course, is a mall.

Actually, it is a $5 billion behemoth still under construction from the people who brought America the Mall of America.

When done, this consumer cathedral will be our nation’s largest in square footage. And skis.

The mall’s highlight is Big Snow American Dream, a mouthful for an audacious enterprise, which is more than four acres, packed with 5,500 tons of man-made powder and billed as North America’s first indoor, year-round, real-snow, real-slope ski and snowboard experience.

At first glance, Big Snow appears to be a head-slapping, refrigerated folly. It’s a lot of white stuff pilled into a warehouse, dotted with trees and ersatz Alpines. Mall skiing is an endeavor no one was asking for, akin to building a life-size replica of Noah’s Ark, which Americans have also done, in Kentucky — and, by the way, is equally jaw-dropping.

There are indoor ski centers around the globe, notably in Dubai, rich in sand, devoid of snow.

But East Rutherford is close to skiing of the outdoor variety. There are two New Jersey resorts an hour away, including Mountain Creek, owned by Joe Hession, the big guy at Big Snow.

So why sink $110 million into Jersey mall skiing? Because it may revolutionize the sport, expanding and diversifying its base. Still, do we want to take away the majesty of mountain snow sports by plunking them in a 16-story steel-and-concrete container?

One December Wednesday before lunch, Douglas Nazur, 41, a contractor from Astoria, Queens, hit the mall and the slope.

(p. 16)

It just feels weird but in a good way. There’s no wind. There’s no sunburn. And you’re basically on the doorstep of New York City.

Skip Hagerty
recreational sports consultant

Big Snow hopes to eliminate both.

It’s located in the country’s most densely populated state. Two-hour packages with all necessary gear (including pants and a jacket) are $69.99, and a block of six lift-only passes comes out to $16.66 a visit. To avoid interminable lift lines, only 500 patrons are permitted at a time on the trails.

“It’s bringing the mountains to the people, and abstracting the sport,” says University of Kansas professor Andrew Denning, who wrote a history of skiing.

“It’s a form of democratization.”

The domestic ski industry is neither as robust nor as diverse as resort operators desire, and it faces a mountain of obstacles. Only 3 percent of Americans ski, 10.3 million patrons per season. Domestic skiing began in the 19th century, when there was nothing cushy or bourgeois about it. It was an activity of Norwegian immigrants in the Upper Midwest, Scandinavian immigrant miners in the West, and veterans of World War II’s 10th Mountain Division, who helped develop resort skiing in the Rockies.

Today, it is considered the diversion of rich, white people.

To attract a fresh, diverse crop of patrons, snow sports need to blow up the existing model, by being inexpensive, accessible, easy and available more months of the year. They need to be more Jersey.

Hession anticipates half a million patrons during Big Snow’s first year of operation, half of them novices like Nazur, which would produce a 25 percent spike in national first-time visits. By comparison, Mountain Creek (a medium-size resort) averages 300,000 skiers per season.

So, when you think about it, why wouldn’t America’s newest ski resort be located in a mall off Exit 16W of the Jersey Turnpike?

America is a land rich in dead malls. Triple Five Group, which operates American Dream, is cheered by creating one that’s richer in experience than stuff. It’s a palace of fun.

When completed, the mall will be 45 percent retail and 55 percent entertainment, including a Nickelodeon Universe theme park, and an NHL regulation-sized ice rink. Three restaurants will offer expansive second-floor views of Big Snow.

American Dream has yet to open the majority of its shops and restaurants, as well as the Angry Birds mini-golf and a massive DreamWorks water park with a wave pool and surfing. When the water park opens, Hagerty and Braunsdorf plan to snowboard and surf during a single visit.

On this Wednesday morning, Big Snow’s patrons are far more diverse than skiing’s snow-white image and include immigrants speaking multiple languages and plenty of novices.

These are the industry’s dream patrons. Rappers Lil Uzi Vert and Meek Mill had visited Big Snow just days earlier. (Did Big Snow stay open late for Meek? Yes, it did.)

Army Staff Sgt. Daniel Blackstone, 32, who is Puerto Rican and from Mount Laurel, N.J., says, “It’s quick, indoor convenience,” something that has never been said of snowboarding.
Woes remain after fires are contained

Officials try to tally smoke-related health issues

BY MATTHEW BROWN
Associated Press

PARADISE, Calif. — First came the flames, a raging firestorm propelled by hour-long gusts that incinerated Kelsey Norton’s house and killed 85 people in her community. Then came the smoke — not just from the forest but also from 14,000 houses and its contents that burned, generating a plume that ensnared portions of Northern California for weeks and left Norton gasping.

And since the fire, more than a year now, it’s been sickness: repeated respiratory infections that sap Norton’s strength, interfere with her work and leave the 30-year-old cardiac care nurse worried about future health problems.

“I don’t want to have cancer in my 50s because I inhaled smoke in my 30s,” she said.

The immediate toll of lives and property lost a year ago when the Camp Fire tore through the Sierra Nevada foothills town of Paradise, Calif., is well documented. Still unknown is the long-term impact of the intense smoke exposure suffered by the tragedy’s survivors and the hundreds of thousands of people living in communities downwind of the blaze.

Increasingly intense wildfires are scorching forests from California to Australia and stoking worry among residents and health professionals about long-term health impacts from smoke exposure.

The issue has far-reaching implications as climate change turns some regions of the globe drier and more prone to fires that send up smoke plumes that can travel thousands of miles and affect millions of people.

As ever-intensified fires scorching huge swathes of Australia offer the most recent example as they blanket major cities with air pollution and is a professor of environmental toxicology at the University of California, Irvine. Firefighters get much higher and more frequent doses of smoke, but Kleinman said a proportional increase in illnesses could be expected among the general public exposed to wildfire smoke across California and the West.

“It’s safe to say there will probably more effects at the long-term level,” Kleinman said. “Especially if those events happened over a longer period of time or more repeatedly, there will be cumulative damage to the lungs and heart which eventually will lead to chronic disease.”

As she fled with her boyfriend to work at a hospital in Chico, about 15 miles from Paradise on the morning of Nov. 8, 2018, Norton said the smoke was so thick “it was like midnight.”

When that finally cleared, she got another, then another — eight or nine infections in all over the past year. She missed so much work in the months after the fire that she got a warning from a supervisor.

Norton is among about 9,000 people who responded to a health survey as part of a long-term health study of smoke exposure in Paradise and other California communities. The work is led by researchers at the University of California, Davis, who plan to track the lung health of a small number of these respondents in coming years by measuring their breathing capacity.

Kelsey Norton shows pictures of her property before it was overrun by a wildfire that incinerated her home in Chico, Calif. Norton says she’s suffered repeated respiratory infections since breathing in smoke from the fire.

Photos and smoke from the Camp Fire, 90 miles north of Sacramento, Calif., are seen from above in November 2018. Increasingly intense wildfires that have scorched forests from California to Australia are stoking worry about long-term health impacts from smoke exposure.

Compounding the danger, experts and firefighters say, is the proliferation of construction materials and household items made from petroleum-based plastics, ranging from plumbing pipes to exterior siding. Those burn hotter and generate smoke more toxic than wood does, exposing people to numerous hazardous chemicals.

Researchers and health officials are confident more people will get sick and many will die as areas of the West see bigger, more intense wildfires. An estimated 20,000 premature deaths now occur annually in the U.S. due to chronic wildfire smoke exposure. That’s expected to double by the end of the century, according to scientists funded by NASA, as tens of millions of people get exposed to massive “smoke waves” emanating from blazes in Western states.

But while those forecasts help illustrate the profound impacts of a warming climate, they can’t predict which fires will prove deadly and which individuals will develop lung ailments or other illnesses.

One of relatively few long-term studies on the issue is under way at the California National Primate Research Center. Fifty rhesus monkeys living in outdoor pens year-round were exposed to a prolonged period of wildfire smoke as infants in 2008. They’ve developed lungs 20% smaller than another group of monkeys born a year later, researchers found.

“It’s the closest animal model to replicate what happens with kids,” said Lisa Miller, the center’s associate director of research.

The difference first showed up when the animals were adolescents, and has continued as they’ve matured. It’s impossible for the untrained eye to distinguish the smoke-exposed monkeys from hundreds of others that share their pens, but Miller’s team next plans to investigate how the decreased lung function affects activity levels of the monkeys.

As the animals age, any diseases they develop and how they die would give clues into the fate of humans heavily exposed to smoke.

Studies of wildland firefighters also give insights into the risks of smoke inhalation. They’ve shown significantly higher rates of lung cancer and death from heart disease, said Michael Kleinman, who researches the health effects of air pollution and is a professor of environmental toxicology at the University of California, Irvine.

Firefighters get much higher and more frequent doses of smoke, but Kleinman said a proportional increase in illnesses could be expected among the general public exposed to wildfire smoke across California and the West.

“It’s safe to say there will probably more effects at the long-term level,” Kleinman said. “Especially if those events happened over a longer period of time or more repeatedly, there will be cumulative damage to the lungs and heart which eventually will lead to chronic disease.”

As she fled with her boyfriend ahead of the fire that destroyed Paradise on the morning of Nov. 8, 2018, Norton said the smoke was so thick “it was like midnight.”

A few days later, she went back to work at a hospital in Chico, about 15 miles from Paradise. But smoke from the still-burning fire had made it inside the facility.

There weren’t enough face masks to go around so Norton said she went without one for several days.

Initially she felt just a bit wheezy, as she had during the last major fire in the area about a decade earlier. But two weeks later she came down with a respiratory infection that brought fever and severe congestion.

When that finally cleared, she got another, then another — eight or nine infections in all over the past year. She missed so much work in the months after the fire that she got a warning from a supervisor.
US: ‘High confidence’ that Iran downed Ukrainian jet

The Washington Post

MOSCOW — U.S. officials have “high confidence” that an Iranian antiaircraft missile brought down a Ukrainian passenger jet near Tehran, killing all 176 aboard, a U.S. official said.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said U.S. authorities believe the plane was hit by a Russian-made SA-15 surface-to-air missile.

The official gave no other details on the circumstances that led to the possible missile firing on Wednesday, which came about four hours after Iran launched ballistic missiles into Iraq against U.S. targets in retaliation for the killing of Iranian Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

The SA-15 system dates back to the Cold War and can be used to shoot down planes, helicopters, drones or incoming missiles. Russia has exported the system to a number of countries, including Iran.

Earlier, Ukrainian investigators said they were also looking into engine failure or a terrorist attack as possible causes of the crash. Several recent reports have noted that, based on video and the wide debris field, it appeared that the Boeing 737 800 was breaking apart in the air.

A team of 45 experts and search-and-rescue personnel from Ukraine arrived in Tehran early Thursday to participate in the probe, as well as to identify and repatriate the bodies of the 11 Ukrainians on board, including all nine crew members.

Oleksiy Danilov, secretary of Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council, wrote on Facebook that his team wants to search for possible debris of a missile that could be linked to reports about the discovery of possible fragments of one near the crash site. The reports could not be independently confirmed.

He added that Ukraine’s commission includes specialists who help investigate such incidents. They were looking at all possible causes of the crash.

The report from Iran’s Civil Aviation Organization said witnesses — on the ground and among the crew of another flight in the vicinity — reported seeing a fire while the Boeing 737 800 was still in the air, followed by an explosion when it slammed into a field near an amusement park.

Iranian officials said immediately after the crash that the plane had encountered technical problems, but this did not appear in the report, which also noted that there was no distress call from the aircraft.

The passengers on the plane were mostly Iranians but also included Europeans and more than 60 Canadian citizens.

Australians on coast urged to flee amid rising fire risk

Associated Press

TOMERONG, Australia — Residents in the path of wildfires raging southeast Australia were urged to evacuate on Thursday if they don’t intend to defend their homes as hot and windy conditions are forecast to escalate the danger over the next two days.

The Rural Fire Service in New South Wales state has told fire-weary community meetings south of Sydney in the coastal towns of Novara, Narooma and Batemans Bay that northeasterly winds were likely to once again drive blazes toward the coast.

Vacationers have retreated to beaches and into the ocean in the area in recent weeks as destructive fires and choking smoke have encroached on the tourist towns, scouring sand dunes in some places.

In neighboring Victoria state, fire-threatened populations were urged to act quickly on evacuation warnings.

“We can’t guarantee your safety and we don’t want to be providing emergency servic es — whether it be volunteers or paid staff — we do not want to put them in harm’s way because people didn’t follow advice that was given,” Victoria Premier Daniel Andrews said.

Temperatures in the threatened area were expected to reach more than 110 degrees Fahrenheit on Friday, and conditions remained tinder dry.

“If you can get out, you should get out,” said Andrew Crisp, Victoria’s emergency management commissioner. “Because tomorrow is going to be a dangerous and dynamic day.”

The unprecedented fire crisis in southeastern Australia that has claimed at least 26 lives since September, destroyed more than 2,000 homes and scorched an area twice the size of the state of Maryland has focused many Australians on how the nation adapts to climate change. Prime Minister Scott Morrison has come under withering criticism both at home and abroad for downplaying the need for his government to address climate change, which experts say helps supercharge the blazes.

Last year was Australia’s hottest and driest on record. The Bureau of Meteorology’s head of climate monitoring, Karl Braganza, said while the country’s rainfall was expected to pick up a bit, it wouldn’t be enough to snuff out the blazes anytime soon.

“Unfortunately, we’re not looking at widespread, above-average rainfall at this stage,” he said. “That’s really what we need to put the fires out fairly quickly. It is going to be a campaign, in terms of the fires. We are not looking at a short and sharp end to the event — it looks like something that we will have to persist with for some time.”

Along a main roadway in southern New South Wales, forests of evergreen eucalyptus trees have taken on a ghostly autumnal appearance, with golden leaves and blackened trunks. The forests appear devoid of any wildlife. Outside, it often smells like a campfire that has been recently snuffed out, and hazy waves of smoke drift past.

In many small towns, most homes appear untouched apart from one or two that have been razed to the ground, sometimes with only a chimney stack still standing. People have hung signs and banners thanking the volunteer firefighters they call “firies.”

EU’s official says no-deal Brexit is more harmful for Britain than EU

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — The European Union’s chief Brexit negotiator said Thursday that if Britain won’t accept the bloc’s financial terms, it won’t have unferred freedom to subsidize its industry.

Michel Barnier also insisted that the state aid rules in any future trade deal would be more stringent than with nations like Canada or Japan, simply because of the physical proximity of the departing EU nation.

“If the U.K. wants an open link with us for the products — zero tariffs, zero quotas — we need to be careful about zero dumping at the same time,” Barnier said a conference in Stockholm.

“I hope that this point is, and will be correctly understood by everybody. We will ask necessarily certain conditions on state aid policy in the U.K.,” Barnier said, adding that if that is not the case, access to the lucrative EU market will be negatively affected.

The EU has been stressing the need for a level playing field in the upcoming trade deal negotiations, meaning that access will be strictly linked to commitments to social welfare and environmental standards, among others.

As a member state, Britain was bound by strict state aid rules enforced by the powerful European Commission to make sure there would be no unfair competition among EU nations in its vast single market. Third countries aren’t immediately bound by such structures.

Britain has decided to leave the EU by Jan. 31, partly because it doesn’t want to be tied down by EU rules, which it feels impedes its sovereignty. But negotiating a trade deal will still involve many compromises on rule setting.

Barnier also insisted that Britain’s goal to have a full free trade deal by the end of the year was unrealistic.
**SPECIAL DELIVERIES**

US lab chimpswere dumped on Monkey Island in Liberia and left to starve. Their caretaker saved them.

**By Danielle Paquette**

*The Washington Post*

**MONKEY ISLAND, Liberia** — All was quiet when the motorboat puttered to a stop. Saltwater lapped at the narrow sandy shore. Mangrove leaves fluttered in the breeze. Then the man in a blue life jacket cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted: Hoo hoo!

To unlock a secret password, the caller walked up to the rusty vessel with the nonchalant of someone fetching the mail.

"Time to eat," said Joseph Thomas, their wiry guardian of 40 years, tossing bananas into the furrow crowd.

Chimps aren't supposed to be stuck on their own island — especially one with no food — or mingle with much-weaker humans. But nothing about Liberia's Monkey Island is normal. It's a spectacle, an increasingly costly burden and the enduring legacy of American scientists who set out to cure hepatitis B in 1974.

Animal testing has existed since doctors in ancient Greece studied the anatomy of rodents — all estimated 115 million creatures are still used each year in research worldwide — but rarely is the aftermath so visible. Rarely is it so hungry.

This colony of 66 chimpanzees, which never learned to survive in the wild, eats roughly 500 pounds of produce each day, plus a weekly batch of hard-boiled eggs for protein.

They rely on money from a charity and the devotion of men who’ve known them since they lived in steel cages.

"That's Mabel," said Thomas, the captain of that small crew, pointing to a 100-pound female. "Look! She likes to wash her food in sugary milk paste, the chimps were infected with hepatitis B in the 1970s and 1980s. The American researchers said, stole the lab's cars.

Conflict surged into the 2000s as militaries fought for control of Liberia, and public pressure to end testing on chimps snowballed. The New York Blood Center halted tests in 2004, sparking a big question: What would they do with all the animals?

Putting them back into the nation's forests wasn't an option. They could spread disease to others, and they didn't know how to pick fruit or hunt insects.

Another problem arose from their artificial comfort zone. What if the chimps heard the familiar sound of people talking — or poachers talking — and ambled out to say hi?

"The only way to hold them was to put them on an island," Thomas said.

There are six islands in the Farmington and Little Bassa rivers. These makeshift sanctuaries on the Atlantic coast became known collectively as Monkey Island.

Thomas and the other caretakers collected funds from New York to deliver buckets of bananas and lettuce, among other goods, to the chimps every two days. A veterinarian stayed on the nonprofit's payroll to check on the animals.

In 2009, the New York Blood Center said it was getting hard to pay for Monkey Island. The charity contacted Liberia's then-president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, for help and received no reply, its spokeswoman told The Washington Post. (A spokesman for Sirleaf declined to comment.)

By 2015, as the Ebola virus ravaged the country, the New York Blood Center notified the Liberian government that it could "no longer divert funds from its important lifesaving mission here at home," a spokeswoman said in a recent statement.

Thomas stuck to the feeding schedule until the last penny was gone.

He went with the other caretakers from fruit stall to fruit stall, seeking donations — a daunting task in a time of epidemic. One particularly generous neighbor gave him 50 pieces of coconut. The men gathered enough food to keep the chimps alive, if not full, for a few weeks.

During that period, Thomas remembers pulling up to islands and seeing frantic, desperate animals. They screamed and fought over scraps. It wasn't enough.

He told the story to whoever would listen, he said, and eventually found a sympathetic ear with connections to the Humane Society in Washington.

The nonprofit has since bankrolled the care, spending about $500,000 annually on Monkey Island. Meals now happen twice a day. The price grows, though, as the colony does.

Despite the team of 10 caretakers best family planning efforts, which include vasectomies for males and stopping birth control in sugary milk paste, the chimps have had a few babies. "Very cute accidents," Humane Society chief executive Kitty Block said.

Over the years, Monkey Island has become a local legend, though some news articles have painted the inhabitants as infectious threats.

"A bunch of 'monster' Chimps are living on their own island in a Planet of the Apes meets Resident Evil-style scenario," one Australian reporter wrote in 2018.

Thomas rolls his eyes.

The public should stay away from animals that might get spooked and attack, he said, but it's unclear if the chimps still carry disease. Tests are too expensive.

The caretakers dream of building an animal hospital on one of the sanctuaries, as well as a private security system to keep people away. As of now, one man sits on a small dock off each island, telling onlookers to scram.

That doesn't stop fishermen from floating over for a peek, and guidebooks from irresponsibly advising tourists to hitch a ride.

No one can get as close as Thomas. Photos show him standing knee-deep in river water, hugging the chimps he sees as family.

He greets them by name: Mabel, Stuart, Juno, Elyse, Annie.

"I'll be doing this," he said, "until they die or I do."
2 men accused of trying to scam lottery

MS FLOWOOD — Authorities in Mississippi said two men attempted to scam the state lottery commission by submitting a losing ticket that had the winning numbers glued onto it.

Odis Latham, 47, and Russell Sparks, 48, were charged with offenses including uttering counterfeit instrument over $1,000.

The state lottery commission called Flowood police about the fake ticket Monday morning, Sgt. Adam Nelson said. Officers were told the suspects presented an altered $100,000 ticket that appeared to have the winning numbers glued onto it.

Corn spill forms smooth path on railroad tracks

MN CRYSTAL — Bushels and bushels of corn spilled from a freight train and formed a smooth, yellow path for more than a third of a mile on railroad tracks in a northern Minneapolis suburb.

The spill happened in Crystal on the Canadian Pacific line. The Star Tribune reported the corn stretched for about 2,000 feet. Assuming the corn was about 1.5 inches deep the entire way, the Tribune estimated the spill would amount to about 900 bushels.

Twins born in different decades

IN CARMEL — Twin siblings born in an Indiana hospital around the New Year’s holiday have birthdays in different decades.

Dawn Gilliam delivered one baby, Jolynn, at 11:37 p.m. on Dec. 31, 2019, and a second baby, Jaxon, 30 minutes later at 12:07 a.m. on Jan. 1, 2020.

The babies weren’t due until February, but Gilliam made a New Year’s Eve trip to the hospital when she had a concern about a lack of fetal movement. Gilliam said hospital staff told her she would have to deliver much sooner.

Man wanted to go to jail to support girlfriend

KY LANCASTER — Authorities in Kentucky said they’ve arrested a man who wanted to go to jail to support his jailed girlfriend.

Raymond Pace, 47, was charged with offenses including possession of methamphetamine, heroin and drug paraphernalia, news outlets reported.

Pace called authorities to report a stolen laptop, according to a statement by Garrard County police. Officer Steven Debord arrived to find an intoxicated Pace requesting to be jailed for several months to support his girlfriend, who Pace said was serving five months in jail.

Pace shoved the officer in an attempt to be arrested, but the officer demurred until Pace pulled out a bundle of drug paraphernalia, police said.

Riding out the storm

IN JIM BUTTE — A Butte man used zip ties to detain a hit-and-run driver, Butte-Silver Bow law enforcement officials said.

Dispatchers received two reports of hit-and-run crashes Jan. 2. A man who witnessed the suspect rear-end a car and drive away called police and followed the suspect.

The suspect was driving on three wheels due to damage sustained in the hit-and-run, according to police reports.

The suspect got out of the car and jumped over a fence, but fell. The witness followed and used zip ties to detain the suspect until police arrived and swapped the zip ties for handcuffs.

6 teens arrested in melee at skating rink

AZ MESA — Six teenagers were arrested after several fights broke out at a crowded indoor skating rink in Mesa, authorities said.

Mesa police said they were called to Skateland in response to a report of teens fighting.

Officers on the scene said they had to deal with fighting and other disruptive behavior amid a crowd of roughly 1,000. Hundreds of people fled as more police arrived. Yet, fights continued to erupt inside and outside.

In a statement on its Facebook page, Skateland said the melee began when a customer became angry about not being allowed to go in and out of the building with her rental skates. According to the facility, she attempted to charge at an employee. The incident escalated with others in her group getting unruly.

Police say suspect lured seagulls, ran them over

AZ LAUREL — Police in suburban Washington are investigating an apparent animal cruelty case involving seagulls that officers say were lured with popcorn and then run over with a vehicle.

The Laurel Police Department said at least 10 seagulls were killed in a shopping center, The Washington Post reported.

Police said someone emptied a bag of pre-popped popcorn, “intentionally luring” the gulls, and then ran them over.

Man uses zip ties to detain hit-and-run driver

THE CENSUS

The number of sets of twins a Florida mom gave birth to in the same year.

Doctors told Alexandria Wolliston she had a better chance of winning the lottery than of giving birth to two sets of twins in the same year.

But Wolliston said she won the jackpot last year with the births of Mark and Malakhi in March and Kaylen and Kaleb in December. She said her 3-year-old daughter helped her prepare for the double dose of twins.

Big rig carrying trash overturns on highway

GA ATLANTA — A tractor-trailer full of trash overturned on an Atlanta highway, spilling its cargo and closing the road for hours.

No injuries were reported in the wreck on Interstate 285 crash near Interstate 75, Georgia State Patrol Lt. Stephanie Stallings said.

She said the cause of the accident was not yet known, and she did not know whether the driver was cited.

School evacuated after firework ignites inside

TX HOUSTON — Officials evacuated a Houston-area high school after reports that a firework was ignited inside the campus cafeteria.

It wasn’t immediately known if anybody was injured during the incident at Klein Forest High School in Klein, Texas.

In a tweet, the Harris County Fire Marshal’s Office said one person might have been injured. But the Klein school district said in a separate tweet that all students and staff were safe.

From wire reports
By Josh Rottenberg
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — We all know the feeling of coming back from a leisurely holiday break to suddenly face a wall of deadlines. This year in Hollywood, that experience has had its own unique twist.

The voting period for this year’s Academy Awards nominations closed Tuesday afternoon — a full two weeks earlier than normal — a compressed timetable that forced Oscar campaigners to push their “for your consideration” blitzes forward and left many of the motion picture academy’s nearly 9,000 voting members scrambling to plow through piles of DVD screeners, make their lists and check them twice. Despite the academy’s frequent reminders, some it seems may have been unaware of the new deadline altogether, believing they still had more time to set aside for, say, Martin Scorsese’s sprawling, 3½-hour gangster epic “The Irishman” or the black-and-white Czech war drama “The Painted Bird.”

For some in the business, the constant stream of reminders has been a bit wearying. “They’ve been telling us for weeks: ‘It’s a shorter window. Vote. Vote. Vote,’” said one screenwriter, who declined to speak on the record due to having a film in this year’s awards race.

“I’ve never received so many emails from the academy,” said another member in the acting branch, who is also involved in a potential contender and wished to remain anonymous. “They’ve been extremely diligent. Do I wish I had more time? Yes. But I feel that way every year.”

Still, anecdotally, it seems some academy voters may not have received the message. Last week, as the nominations deadline loomed, film journalist and longtime academy observer Mark Harris tweeted, “Based on my extremely informal survey of Oscar voters, a high number of them have NO idea that voting for nominations ends in three days.”

Those who have been left feeling frazzled can take comfort in two things: One, the academy has already announced that in 2021 and 2022, the Oscars will return to their traditional late-February spot. And two, as frantic as this year may feel, it’ll all be over that much sooner.

Prince Harry and Meghan to ‘step back’ as senior UK royals

Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, say they plan to “step back” as senior members of Britain’s royal family, a stunning announcement that underscores the couple’s wish to forge a new path for royals in the modern world.

A statement issued Wednesday evening by Buckingham Palace, described as “a personal message from the Duke and Duchess of Sussex,” said Harry and Meghan intend to “become financially independent” and to “balance” their time between the U.K. and North America.

“As many months of reflection and internal discussions, we have made a decision that this transition this year, starting to carve out a progressive new role within this institution,“ the statement said. “We intend to step back as ‘senior’ members of the royal family and work to become financially independent, while continuing to fully support her majesty the queen.”

The 35-year-old Harry, the youngest son of Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana, is Queen Elizabeth II’s grandson and sixth in line to the British throne. With his dark hair and beard, he has become one of the royal family’s most popular members.

Just before announcing the prince in a royal wedding watched around the world in 2018, the 38-year-old Duchess of Sussex was an American actress known as Meghan Markle and a star of the TV show “Suit.” The couple’s first child, Archie, was born in May 2019.

In the statement, the couple did not reveal where in North America they plan to make a second home, but they cited their baby as a reason why they decided to live part of their time outside Britain.

Trebek: ‘Jeopardy!’ retirement isn’t imminent despite cancer

The brief farewell that Alex Trebek says will close his final “Jeopardy!” episode isn’t on the horizon.

“I don’t foresee that 30-second moment coming up in the near future,” Trebek said Wednesday, referring to his request for time to close out his decades-long run with the quiz show.

While treatment for pancreatic cancer is still taking a toll, Trebek said he’s not ready to retire although he’s mulling it in recent years. He spoke during a panel promoting the jury at the Berlin International Film

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“We expect that we’ll come up with a very commercial set of nominations,” Burke told a TV critics meeting Tuesday, “and our key targets have come together that convinced us we’ll have a very entertaining show.”

Nominations will be announced on Monday.

From The Associated Press

Oscars to go hostless for 2nd consecutive year

The Oscars are going without a host again this year.

ABC Entertainment President Karey Burke said the Feb. 9 telecast will focus on “telling a story” with “huge entertainment value, big musical numbers, big comedy and big power.”

Last year’s ceremony attracted 29.6 million viewers, the second-smallest in Oscars history but 12% more than in 2018, which ended a four-year slide in viewership.

Comedian Kevin Hart was originally announced as host but he backed away when some anti-gay tweets he posted a decade ago resurfaced.

ABC and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences agreed to go hostless for a second straight year, Burke said.

“We expect that we’ll come up with a very commercial set of nominations,” Burke told a TV critics meeting Tuesday, “and our key targets have come together that convinced us we’ll have a very entertaining show.”

Nominations will be announced on Monday.

From The Associated Press

Get those red carpets and Oscar statues ready: The Academy Awards are Feb. 9 this year, two weeks earlier than normal.

By Dayl Deere

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced Wednesday that the 92nd Academy Awards will be held Feb. 9, the earliest date ever.

Knowing the effect the shortened award season would have, the academy made a big change: More after than a decade of the Oscars being in late February or early March, the 92nd Academy Awards will be held Feb. 9, the earliest date ever.

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Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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<td>16. Curly-haired lap dog</td>
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<td>17. I don’t know what will become of me.</td>
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<td>18. I’ll transfer you to marketing. They’re all like that.</td>
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<td>19. Hey pig. Why do you have two ears?</td>
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<td>20. Because you’re my friend.</td>
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<td>21. I don’t see why.</td>
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<td>22. Get me out of these things.</td>
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<td>23. I can’t sleep.</td>
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<td>24. I’m just a little lady.</td>
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<td>25. I can’t help it.</td>
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<td>14. Annex</td>
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<td>15. “Alice” waitress abbr.</td>
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Answer to Previous Puzzle

I-10

CRYPTOQUIP

IL CGLCQGTZ IXQ INXRHM DC UXIN HIGLRM HIXRM, ZLD RQQW IL CYZ YIQRIHRL IL INQ IUXRZ WQIYXTH.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: FAMOUS VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS TO LEARN TO DANCE TO MUSIC OF THE SEVENTIES: DISCO TECH.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: I equals T
McConnell has it right on impeachment path, tactics

By HENRY OLSEN
The Washington Post

he decision from Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to push through rules governing President Donald Trump’s impeachment trial was the right one. McConnell’s actions to do so strongly position him as the leader of the Senate’s third-ranking Democrat, Ernie Gates

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Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) is published weekly (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents by Stars and Stripes, Inc., 45000 APO AP 96301-5000. Periodicals postage paid at Pacifica, CA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacifica Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96301-5000. This newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense as a publisher of the military services overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unclassified, and are not to be made available to the public in any form as classified information if, or as authorized by, the government. As a DD newspaper, Stars and Stripes cannot be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations. APO/DPO/ENLISTED personnel are excluded.

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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.

Embrace 2nd chance to assist Puerto Rico after quakes

Puerto Rico is still healing from the aftermath of a powerful 5.8 earthquake and equally powerful aftershocks. Casualties and electrical power is slowly returning. But the quakes are just the latest natural disasters to cripple the U.S. commonwealth.

Puerto Rico still is heating from the hit it took two years ago from Hurricane Maria. Gov. Wanda Vázquez has declared a state of emergency, which President Donald Trump has done the same. That’s very the least the Trump administration should do. It would be a fitting presidential act for the US to atone for its deplorable response to Hurricane Maria’s destruction in 2017, when Trump practically ignored the devastation. Recovery efforts became a political football between island leadership and Trump.

Vázquez said that she expects more quakes, and called up the National Guard.

Declaring a state of emergency is a no-brainer. This is also an election year, to the frustration of Puerto Rican leaders. That’s why Gov. Wanda Vázquez of Puerto Ricans soared after Hurricane Maria, is in play. But more than a year and a half after Maria hit, the president was still talking trash about Puerto Rican leaders, saying in 2019 that they “only take from Washington, D.C., a wimp person referred to it as “that country.”

No, Puerto Ricans are Americans. They vote in our elections.

The administration, which has yet to be held accountable for its ham-handed response to the hurricane destruction, should also expedite the overdue release of unused funding for hurricane recovery.

In December, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development said it was withholding an additional $8 billion in unmet-needs disaster relief from Puerto Rico. The release of two tranches of aid, roughly $18 billion that Congress appropriated for the U.S. territory. The money is a combination of federal and state funds designed to upgrade infrastructure, hardening electrical grids, for instance, and rebuilding homes, businesses and bridges to better withstand natural disasters.

But HUD fears the funds could fall vic

Friday, January 10, 2020

STARS AND STRIPES PAGE 23

Bolton’s testimony relevant, plus it would define GOP plans

A major hiccup has been introduced into Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s plans for a speedy acquittal of President Donald Trump at his impending impeachment trial. Former national security advisor John Bolton says he is prepared to testify if subpoenaed. McConnell, with a big assist by Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley, was all but prepared to declar

What Australia can do to mitigate its climate calamities

If a Hollywood producer ordered up these images, they might be described as too dramatic: an ash-filled ruin; fire tornadoes; flames jumping as high as 20 feet; people huddling for shelter on the beaches. But for the community of Mallacoota, Australia, this fire season is a natural cycle known as the Indian Ocean Dipole, which can make water in the western Indian Ocean warmer and in the eastern Indian Ocean cooler. This results in less rainfall over Australia. This phenomenon has dried out the nation’s eastern forests, making it harder to quantify any link between climate change and the dipole’s recent behavior, scientists have warned. Forest fires are burning out of control; the nation’s eucalyptus forests may be damaged for good.

Specifically, southern Australia’s temperatures have risen about 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit since 1950. Conditions over the past two decades have been warmer than in the 20 years before that, and the 20 years before that, and so forth. Heat and drought in 2009 toasted the land, turning Australia’s countryside into a tinderbox. A major factor worsening Australia’s fire season is a natural cycle known as the Indian Ocean Dipole, which can make water in the western Indian Ocean warmer and in the eastern Indian Ocean cooler. This results in less rainfall over Australia. This phenomenon has dried out the nation’s eastern forests, making it harder to quantify any link between climate change and the dipole’s recent behavior, scientists have warned. Forest fires are burning out of control; the nation’s eucalyptus forests may be damaged for good.

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College basketball

Wednesday's men's scores

EAST

American U. 75, Baruch 60
Baruch 76, Medgar Evers 73

Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference
Boston U. 84, Lehigh 67

Patriots

New Hampshire 77, Maine 51
Old Dominion 81, Old West End (LO) 70

Yellow Jackets

Rutgers 82, Temple 77

Scarlet Knights

Notre Dame 77, Seton Hall 70

Blue Jays

Robert Morris 63, Central Missouri 58

Panthers

Iona 67, Manhattan 65

Jaspers

Case Western Reserve 65, Carnegie Mellon 59

Browns

Duke 89, Miami 72

Blue Devils

William & Mary 57, Davidson College 54

Wildcats

North Carolina A&T 76, Tennessee State 58

Pro football

Bowl schedule

Friday, Dec. 20

Baltimore Bowl

Buffalo 31, Charlotte 24

Syracuse Bowl

Kent State 24, Central Michigan 16

Saturday, Dec. 21

New Mexico Bowl

New Mexico State 17, Southern Illinois 15

Gleno Media Bowl

Bozeman 29, Eastern Washington 27

Monday, Dec. 23

Las Vegas Bowl

Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl

FAU 52, Temple 30

Cowbell Classic

Comellia Bowl

Arkansas State 34, Florida Atlantic 20

Coca-Cola Classic

Appalachian State 13, Miami (Ohio) 12

Holiday Bowl

Washington State 17, Arizona State 10

Peach Bowl

UCF 48, Utah 20

Tuesday, Dec. 24

Hawaii Bowl

Hawaii 38, BYU 24

December 26, 2020

December 28, 2020

December 29, 2020

December 30, 2020

December 31, 2020

January 1, 2021

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April 10, 2021
Harden, Young get 40 point triples as Rockets top Hawks

By CHARLES ODUM
Associated Press

ATLANTA — James Harden's big first quarter gave Houston a lead that seemed safe. His misses helped give Atlanta a chance.

Harden scored 41 points, including 22 in the first quarter, to lead the Houston Rockets over Trae Young and the Hawks 122-115 on Wednesday.

Harden had 10 assists and 10 rebounds for his second straight triple-double. He made only 9 of 34 shots, including 4 of 20 three-pointers.

"I think, obviously, we had a couple guys run out of gas," said Houston coach Mike D'Antoni. "... Our legs got tired, obviously. We just had to hang on." D'Antoni said Harden "just didn't shoot the ball well. So be it.""He had 44 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists for his first triple-double of the season in a 115-108 win over Philadelphia on Friday night.

The Hawks pulled within three late in the fourth quarter, the last time at 118-115 on two free throws by Alex Len. Harden sank four free throws in the final 10.4 seconds to put Houston up 120-115.

"They made shots," Harden said. "We missed shots. They're a very, very good team." Clint Capela had 22 points and 22 rebounds, and Ben McLemore had 18 points in Houston's third straight win.

Harden more than made up for the absence of Russell Westbrook, his usual backcourt partner. D'Antoni had a confident answer when asked before the game about the impact of Westbrook being rested.

"Just more James," D'Antoni said, referring to Harden, who scored 60 points in his last game against Atlanta in November, set out on another high-scoring pace. The NBA's leader at 38.4 points per game, Harden abused the Hawks with his mix of three-pointers and drives. Atlanta's frequent best answer was to foul him, and he made 19 of 23 free throws.

Houston led 45-29 after the first quarter and pushed the lead to 20 in the second period.

Just the third time this season, Harden had a 40-point triple-double in a win at Indiana.

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DeRozan, Spurs start quickly, hold off Celtics

Associated Press

BOSTON — DeMar DeRozan scored 30 points and the San Antonio Spurs to a 129-114 defeat of the Boston Celtics on Wednesday.

The Spurs scored 22 of the first 25 points and held on through a slightly more competitive — and controversial — second half. Kemba Walker returned after missing three games with the flu and was ejected with back-to-back technical fouls when he argued a non-call in the third quarter.

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PHILADELPHIA — Kevin Hayes scored the go-ahead goal late in the second period shorthand to lead the Philadelphia Flyers to a 3-2 victory over the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night.

Robert Hagg and Travis Konecny also scored for the Philadelphia Flyers to a 3-2 victory over the Washington Capitals on Wednesday night.

Anton Khudobin gave up a goal in the shootout.

The Flyers, who were home for the first time in 16 days, play the next two and five of six in Philadelphia.


Jets 4, Maple Leafs 3 (SO): Blake Wheeler scored the winner in a shootout and visiting Winnipeg beat Toronto, spooling a milestone performance by star Auston Matthews.

NHL/COLLEGE BASKETBALL

No. 2 Duke continues to thwart Georgia Tech

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Tre Jones hit two key baskets down the stretch and No. 2 Duke extended its decade-long domination of Georgia Tech, holding off the Yellow Jackets 73-64 on Wednesday night.

The Blue Devils (14-4, 4-0 Atlantic Coast Conference) extended their winning streak to eight and their firm hold on this series goes back much further. Georgia Tech (7-8, 2-3) has lost 13 straight to Duke since its last victory over the Blue Devils on Jan. 9, 2010 — almost 10 years ago to the day.

The Yellow Jackets rallied from a 17-point deficit with 5 minutes 14 seconds left in the game, closing the gap to 66-60 before Duke’s key baskets down the stretch sealed the win for the Blue Devils.

Jones led the Blue Devils with 16 points, including a pull-up jumper that snatched a 61-60 lead from the Jacket in the lane that made it 68-64. Cassius Stanley and Vernon Carey Jr. added 14 apiece.

Joe Alvarado paced Georgia Tech with 18 points. James Banks scored 14 points, grabbed a season-high 15 rebounds and swatted away seven shots.

No. 3 Kansas 79, Iowa State 53: Devon Dotson had 20 points and six assists, David McCormack added 16 points and seven rebounds and the visiting Jayhawks routed the Cyclones.

Kansas (12-2, 2-0 Big 12) closed the first half with a 21-3 run to turn a 7-7 game into a 16-point halftime lead. The Jayhawks shot 52% from the field and held the Cyclones to 33%.

Ochai Agbaji added 16 points for the Jayhawks. They handed Iowa State its most-losted loss in the Allen Fieldhouse since No. 21 Malachi Flynn scored 37 seconds into the game last season.

Duke center Vernon Carey Jr., right, goes up for a shot as Georgia Tech forward Evan Cole defends during the first half of Wednesday's game in Atlanta. Duke won 73-64, extending its winning streak against the Yellow Jackets to 13 games over 10 years.

No. 10 Florida State 78, Wake Forest 68: Devon Vassell scored 17 points and the visiting Seminoles pulled away in the final 10 minutes to beat the Demon Deacons.

M.J. Walker scored 12 of his 15 points in the first half for Florida State (14-2, 4-1 Atlantic Coast Conference). The Seminoles trailed early in the second half before going ahead for good on RaQuan Gray's three-pointer at the 14:04 mark. They have won seven straight and 14 of 15.

Brandon Childress scored 20 points for Wake Forest (8-6, 1-3).

American 68, Army 60: Mark Gasperini posted 19 points as the visiting Eagles topped the Black Knights.

Jamir Harris had 12 points for American (6-8, 2-1 Patriot League). Saeed Nelson added 12 points. Jacob Boonyathid had 11 points for the Eagles.

Matt Wilson had 16 points for Army (5-9, 0-3), which has lost four straight games. Lonnie Grayson added 13 points. Alex King had 13 points.

No. 1 Florida State 78, Wake Forest 68: Devon Vassell scored 17 points and the visiting Seminoles pulled away in the final 10 minutes to beat the Demon Deacons.

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Best of the bowls

LSU's Burrow, Jefferson lead All-Bowl Team

By STEVE MEGARGEE
Associated Press

Joe Burrow and Justin Jefferson were easy selections for The Associated Press All-Bowl Team after they connected for four first-half touchdowns in LSU's College Football Playoff semifinal blowout of Oklahoma.

Selecting the rest of the team wasn't nearly as simple.

The LSU offense won't end until LSU faces Clemson in the championship game Monday night in New Orleans, all the post-season games with “bowl” in the title have been played. So why wait?

Because some defenses run a 4-3 scheme, some run a 3-4 and others use the nickel as their base defense, AP included four linemen, four linebackers and five defensive backs in picking the honorees. There are also 13 players on offense, since we include an all-purpose player and a third running back.

There were far more receivers than tight ends worthy of consideration, so we left out the tight end position and went with three receivers instead.

Wide receiver

Jerry Jeudy, Alabama (Citrus): Jeudy caught an 85-yard touchdown pass on the No. 9 Crimson Tide's first play from scrimmage and finished with six receptions for 204 yards in a 35-16 victory over No. 17 Michigan.

T.J. Johnson, Minnesota (Outback): Johnson had 12 receptions for 202 yards and two touchdowns as the No. 16 Gophers defeated No. 9 Auburn 31-24.

Tremayne Anchrum and Jackson Carman, Clemson ( Fiesta): The Tigers' two offensive tackles helped limit Heisman Trophy finalist Chase Young in third-ranked Clemson's 29-23 victory over No. 2 Ohio State in the other CFP semifinal.

Samuel Cosmi, Texas (Alamo): Cosmi anchored a line that helped the Longhorns rush for 231 yards against a 12th-ranked Utah team that had been leading the nation in run defense. The Utes also ranked third in total defense, but Texas gained 438 total yards in its 38-10 victory.

Quarterback
Joe Burrow, LSU (Peach): The Heisman Trophy winner tied a bowl record by throwing seven touchdown passes in the top-ranked Tigers' 63-28 victory over No. 4 Oklahoma — all in the first half. Burrow went 29-for-39 for 394 yards passing. He also had a touchdown run.

Running back

Lamical Perine, Florida (Orange): Perine ran for 138 yards and caught five passes for 43 yards in the ninth-ranked Gators' 36-28 victory over No. 24 Virginia. Perine had two touchdown runs and one touchdown catch.

Xazavian Valladay, Wyoming (Arizona): Valladay rushed for 204 yards and one touchdown on 26 carries as the Cowboys beat Georgia State 38-17. He also caught three passes for 91 yards, including a 63-yard score.

OFFENSE
Line
A.J. Epenesa, Iowa (Holiday): The Associated Press All-America second-team defensive end collected 2½ sacks and forced a fumble as the 19th-ranked Hawkeyes defeated No. 22 Southern California, 49-24.

Malcolm Koonce, Buffalo (Bahamas): Koonce had two of the Bills' five sacks in a 31-9 rout of Charlotte. He also forced a fumble and had five tackles.

Jesse Lemonier, Liberty (Cure): Lemonier had eight tackles and recorded two sacks to improve his two-year career sack total to 20½. He was named the game's most valuable player after the Flames' 23-16 victory over Georgia Southern.

Kenny Willeke, Michigan State (Pinstripe): Willeke had nine tackles, including a sack, as the Spartans' 27-21 triumph over Wake Forest.

Linebacker
Joseph Ossai, Texas (Alamo): Ossai posted nine tackles — six for loss — and three sacks against Utah.

Jeremiah Owusu-Koramoah, Notre Dame (Camping World): Technically listed as a rover, Owusu-Koramoah recorded nine tackles — four for loss — and three sacks in the 14th-ranked Fighting Irish's 33-9 victory over Iowa State.

Defensive back
Charlie Heck, North Carolina (Military): The Tar Heels' left tackle led a line that allowed no sacks against Temple, which had 39 during the regular season. North Carolina gained 534 yards in a 55-13 blowout.

Ford Higgins, Navy (Liberty): The Midshipmen's center helped pave the way for quarterback Malcolm Perry's 213-yard rushing performance as 21st-ranked Navy edged Kansas State, 20-17. The Midshipmen controlled the ball for 36½ minutes against a Kansas State team that was ranked fourth in time of possession.

James Hudson, Cincinnati (Birming- ham): The Michigan transfer made his Bears' debut as a starting left tackle and helped 23rd-ranked Cincinnati gain 343 yards in a 36-6 rout of Boston College.

All-purpose
Lynn Bowden Jr., Kentucky (Belk): The receiver-turned-quarterback rushed for 233 yards and two scores and threw a game-winning touchdown pass 15 seconds remaining in the Wildcats' 37-30 victory over Virginia Tech.

Joe Burrow tied a bowl record by throwing seven first-half touchdown passes in top-ranked LSU's 63-28 Peach Bowl victory over No. 4 Oklahoma.

Joe Burrow and Justin Jefferson were easy selections for The Associated Press All-Bowl Team after they connected for four first-half touchdowns in LSU’s College Football Playoff semifinal blowout of Oklahoma.
**NFL PLAYOFFS**

Versatile Honey Badger could haunt Texans

Houston coach O’Brien wanted to retain Chiefs S Mathieu in offseason

BY DAVE SKRETTA  
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — One of the first things Bill O’Brien makes perfect clear is that he never wanted to lose the Honey Badger.

In just one season in Houston, versatile safety Tyrann Mathieu had become such a ball-hawking leader that he was voted a team captain. He piled up nearly 90 tackles, filled in at nickel back when injuries decimated the Texans’ defensive backfield, and he helped to lead the franchise back to the playoffs after a one-year absence.

So when Mathieu’s one-year prove-it contract was up, the Texans made a strong push to keep him. Various reports suggest they offered him a multiyear deal worth about $11 million per year, a nice bump from the $7 million he made last season.

It wasn’t enough. Not when the Kansas City Chiefs entered the picture.

With new coordinator Steve Spagnuolo transitioning the Chiefs to a 3-4 defensive scheme, the Chiefs knew they needed to find some help rushing the passer and in the secondary. General manager Brett Veach solved the problem by trading for Frank Clark and signing him to a long-term contract, giving him to a multiyear contract, and in the secondary. General manager Brett Veach solved the problem by trading for Frank Clark and signing him to a long-term contract, giving him to a multiyear contract, and in the secondary.

Mathieu to Kansas City with a $42 million, three-year deal and in the secondary. General manager Brett Veach solved the problem by trading for Frank Clark and signing him to a long-term contract, giving him to a multiyear contract, and in the secondary.

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Spagnuolo transitioning the picture.

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Spagnuolo transitioning the picture.

“Now, the Honey Badger has the picture.

Chiefs safety Tyrann Mathieu celebrates an interception last month in Kansas City, Mo. Mathieu had 75 tackles, two sacks and picked off four passes — the second most of his career — in his first season since joining the Chiefs on a $42 million, three-year contract last offseason.

Chiefs coach Andy Reid said. “I had talked to Bill, actually. Bill would have loved to have had him there. It’s just part of the National Football League and the way it works. He told me that he was going to try to keep both on the field and off. Great leader.”

Now, the only question left is if he can lead the Chiefs all the way to the Super Bowl.

Matt B. of Kingston, N.Y.

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The only question left is if he can lead the Chiefs all the way to the Super Bowl.
OWINGS MILLS, Md. — The Baltimore Ravens were preparing for the 2018 NFL Draft when coach John Harbaugh began studying tape of a pretty good tight end at Oklahoma by the name of Mark Andrews.

“He always got open. He always made catches. He had a knack,” Harbaugh recalled. “You’re like, ’Is he going to be able to get that open and make those plays in the NFL?’”

The answer: Undoubtedly, yes. Following a modest rookie season, Andrews led the Ravens this year with 64 catches, 852 yards receiving and 10 touchdown receptions. He also earned an invitation to the Pro Bowl and is one big reason why Baltimore (14-2) will bring a 12-game winning streak into its playoff opener Saturday night against the Tennessee Titans.

Sure, the Ravens are known for their ability to run. But when dual-threat quarterback Lamar Jackson decides to throw, more often than not he will start his progression with Andrews.

“He finds a way to get open. I just call it street ball,” Jackson said. “Mark does a great job of reading the defense, knowing when they’re zoning,” Jackson said. “He finds a way to get open. I just call it street ball.”

Andrews is the biggest threat among the receivers, and that’s not just because of his 6-foot-5, 256-pound frame. “The quarterback has a lot of confidence in him,” Tennessee coach Mike Vrabel said Tuesday. “He’s got great length, good body control, good hands, catches it in traffic and can create space with his body. It looks like the quarterback really trusts him and likes him and knows where he’s going to be.”

Andrews was targeted 98 times this season, 27 more than runner-up Marquise Brown and at least twice as often as anyone else. In addition, his 10 TD catches were only one fewer than the combined total of everyone else on the squad.

And yet, Andrews was the second tight end drafted by the Ravens in 2018, behind Hayden Hurst. Andrews finally went in the third round, but that doesn’t mean the scouts — and Harbaugh — did not appreciate his body of work.

“The truth is, I think hindsight would say that he was undervalued by the NFL world of evaluation,” Harbaugh said. “But when we first did it, he was our top tight end in the rankings.”

Jackson and Andrews entered the NFL together, and it didn’t take a whole lot of practice for them to get on the same page — even if it wasn’t precisely out of the playbook.

“I would run a route maybe a little differently than how it was drawn up, and he would see it the same way and would throw it perfectly on time,” Andrews said. “We’ve had that kind of chemistry pretty early on from the start.”

Hurst and Nick Boyle give Jackson a couple of options in terms of tight ends to target. But it’s clear who is the No. 1 choice.

“Ohviously, he likes his Pro Bowler, Mark Andrews,” Titans safety Kenny Vaccaro said. “I think what makes him good is Lamar trusts him.”

Vaccaro lauded Andrews for his “catch radius” — the ability to snag a ball in the immediate vicinity — along with the tight end’s effort to catch the ball at its highest point.

“Though Andrews has displayed soft hands downfield, he’s not afraid to bang helmets on the line of scrimmage,” he insisted. “I’m never going to shy away from someone. I don’t fear anybody,” he insisted. “A lot receiving tight ends, you look at them and they don’t go into the block wanting to block. That’s not who I am. I’m a guy who wants to do my job to the best of my ability. I’ve worked really hard at getting better at that.”

Baltimore Ravens tight end Mark Andrews scores on a 39-yard touchdown reception during the first half of a Dec. 22 game against the Browns in Cleveland. Andrews led the Ravens this year with 64 catches, 852 yards receiving and 10 touchdown receptions.
Harris a secondary success story for Vikings

Safety has come long way from undrafted practice squad player

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — Over Minnesota’s past six games, Anthony Harris has picked off Russell Wilson, Aaron Rodgers and Drew Brees, owners of three of the four lowest interception percentages in the NFL this season.

The fifth-year safety has come a long way from undrafted practice squad player, as some of the league’s best quarterbacks have been reminded recently. Harris, who became a full-time starter last year, tied for the regular-season lead with six interceptions in 2019.

“Every time he got an opportunity, he stepped up,” Vikings defensive coordinator George Edwards said.

The tandem Harris has formed with Harrison Smith in the secondary has been a significant part of the success the Vikings defense has had this season, a value that will be scrutinized at team headquarters in the coming months with his contract set to expire which will make him an unrestricted free agent. Harris and Smith will be an integral part of the plan to stop San Francisco’s versatile offense in the divisional round game on Saturday.

“The scheme they play in is very good. It puts a lot of pressure on them, but it allows them to make a lot of plays, too,” 49ers coach Kyle Shanahan said.

Harris has done just that. All three of those statistically improbable interceptions led to touchdowns for the Vikings. When Wilson’s pass for Seattle wide receiver速率 stattered at the line of scrimmage, his ill-fated attempt to knock the ball to the turf let it hang in the air long enough for Harris to snag it and run it in for a 20-yard score to break a second-quarter tie.

Harris helped break a second-quarter tie against Green Bay, too, when he darted in front of Davante Adams to grab an underthrown throw by Rodgers and return it 10 yards. The Vikings were in the end zone three plays later.

Then at New Orleans, with the Vikings trailing 10-6 just before the two-minute warning, Harris hung on to the deep ball Rodgers is the least likely quarterback to be picked off in league history, with a career interception rate of just 1.4%. He dropped that to 0.7% in 2019, with Kansas City’s Patrick Mahomes, Wilson and Brees right behind him on the leader board.

Harris tied for the league lead in six interceptions in 2019. The Vikings have 17 takeaways over their past six games, including five forced turnovers against Green Bay and New Orleans.

It’s been a long journey, but I look at it as a continuous thing,” the 6-foot-1, 202-pound Harris said. “It’s not just something that I have.”

QB Garoppolo set to make first playoff start for 49ers

BY JOSH DUROW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Jimmy Garoppolo’s postseason experience consists of a couple of garbage-time handoffs and a midseason trade from New England during the 2014 AFC championship game that is remembered far more for the controversy surrounding deflated footballs.

Garoppolo will carry a much bigger burden when he makes his first career playoff start for San Francisco as the 49ers host the Minnesota Vikings on Saturday in their first playoff game since the 2013 season.

“I’ve seen the atmosphere in the building ramp up, the atmosphere of the coaches and players and everyone,” Garoppolo said Tuesday about the lessons he learned during his time with the New England Patriots. “Just a lot more energy in the building for sure.”

Garoppolo’s first full season as a starting quarterback in the NFL was a success as he helped lead the Niners (13-3) to the playoffs for the first time in six years, earning the top seed in the NFC.

He had highs and lows, with

He’s been here since Day 1,” tackle Joe Staley said. “He’s going to be the same person for this franchise that he’s been.”

The first season of the deal was hardly a success. He threw three interceptions in a season-opening loss to the Vikings and then suffered a season-ending knee injury in a Week 3 loss at Kansas City.

That injury contributed to coach Kyle Shanahan’s reluctance to put too much on Garoppolo’s plate early this season, relying more on a dominant defense and running game.

But as the defense regressed in the second half of the season and opposing defenses focused on shutting down the running game, Garoppolo showed the ability to carry a much heavier load.

He had a pair of four-touchdown games against Arizona, had a mostly flawless prime-time performance against New England, and led the fourth-quarter comeback in a 48-46 win at New Orleans and beat the Seahawks on the road in the season finale to clinch the division and top seed.

Now the Niners are counting on Garoppolo to deliver in the postseason.

“I thought last week was a playoff game,” Shanahan said. “That was pretty intense when we played Seattle. He’s shown he can handle himself with poise. I think Jimmy has played some pretty big games. Anyone who’s around him in those games and talks to him, it’s not much different in those games than it is in a pre-season game.”

Garoppolo has more playoff experience than most of his teammates, having served as Tom Brady’s backup in New England in Super Bowl-winning runs in the 2014 and 16 seasons.

But the only time he made it on the field came in the closing minutes of the 2014 AFC championship game against Indianapolis, when he handed off twice in a 45-7 win. Brady was later suspended four games when the NFL said he directed equipment staffers to deflate footballs to make them easier to grip.

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NFL PLAYOFFS

Harris a secondary success story for Vikings

Safety has come long way from undrafted practice squad player

BY DAVE CAMPBELL
Associated Press

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He had highs and lows, with...
Rookie WR Metcalf found ‘perfect situation’ in Seattle

By Tim Booth
Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. —

A mid an avalanche of attention following the best game of his career, DK Metcalf allowed himself a little bit of reflection.

What would have happened if he hadn’t unexpectedly slid out of the first round of the NFL Draft last April? What if all the hype that surrounded his performance at the NFL combine had led to hearing his name called on the first night of the draft and not a day later when the Seattle Seahawks swooped in to grab the wide receiver with the 64th overall pick.

“It was a perfect situation for me,” Metcalf said on Wednesday. “At the moment I was mad, but after everything was said and done looking back at it I’m just happy that I landed here. Great quarterback. Great offense. Great team. Great organization. We’re in the playoffs.

‘It was a perfect situation for me. ... Great quarterback. Great offense. Great team. Great organization.’

DK Metcalf
Rookie wide receiver, pictured, on being drafted with the 64th overall pick by the Seattle Seahawks

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LSU QB-WR duo of Burrow, Jefferson lead All-Bowl Team » Page 28