Army to send unit to Pacific to aid efforts to counter China

The U.S. Army will expand efforts to counter China by deploying a specialized task force to the Pacific capable of conducting information, electronic, cyberspace and missile operations against Beijing.

The unit, which Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy detailed at an event in Washington on Friday, also would be equipped to hit land- and sea-based targets with long-range precision weapons such as hypersonic missiles, possibly clearing the way for Navy vessels in the event of conflict.

The Army task force would help neutralize some capabilities China and Russia already possess that are intended to keep U.S. carrier groups away from the Asian mainland, McCarthy said in an interview. It’s not clear how quickly the unit, which likely would be based on islands east of Taiwan and the Philippines, can be deployed.

The move is designed to “neutralize all the investments China and Russia have made,” McCarthy said. It would be bolstered by a new agreement with the National Reconnaissance Office that develops and manages U.S. spy satellites, he said. Under that accord, Army tactical units will be better able to tap into information from existing and future low-Earth-orbit satellites, he said.

The pivot includes greater Army participation in regional war games like the “Defender Pacific” series and deploying a “Security Force Assistance Brigade” in the Indo-Pacific theater next year.

SEE CHINA ON PAGE 5

Ballistic logistics

Iran’s strike on US forces exposes challenge Pentagon faces stopping missile attacks

BY DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post

For more than an hour, the missiles knifed in with a whoosh, explosions bursting in the night sky. It wasn’t clear when they’d stop, or what they’d hit.

U.S., coalition and Iraqi troops hunkered down for the Iranian attack in Iraq on Tuesday night had prepared over several days for such an onslaught following the U.S. drone strike in Baghdad that killed Qassem Soleimani, the Iranian general with involvement in the deaths of hundreds of U.S. troops, according to U.S. officials.

But the attack highlighted an ongoing challenge for the Pentagon: For all its might, the U.S. military had little ability to stop such a missile attack once it was underway.

SEE CHALLENGE ON PAGE 4

U.S. Army Spec. Justin Wittig stands in front of a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, last year. There were no THAADs positioned to defend against Iran’s attack in Iraq on Tuesday.

ADAN CAZAREZ/U.S. Army
Aramco’s IPO hits record $29.4B with new option

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Saudi Arabian oil giant Aramco announced Sunday that its initial public offering raised a record $29.4 billion, a figure higher than previously announced after the company used a so-called “greenshoe option” to sell millions more shares to meet investor demand.

The company said that the sale of an additional 450 million shares took place during the initial public offering process. The oil and gas company, which is majority-owned by the state, began publicly trading on the local Saudi Tadawul exchange on Dec. 11. It hit upwards of $10 a share on the second day of trading. This gave Aramco a market capitalization of $2 trillion, making it comfortably the world’s most valuable company.

Aramco’s additional sales mean the company has publicly floated 1.7% of its shares. Its IPO, even before the added sales, was the world’s largest ever.

The shares sold in the over-allocation option “had been allocated to investors during the book building process and therefore, no additional shares are being offered into the market today,” Aramco said.

Company shares traded down on Sunday, dipping to around 34.7 riyals, or $9.25 a share, amid heightened tensions in the Persian Gulf between Iran and the United States.

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

### Looking Rosie at Aviano

**By Norman Llamas**

**Stars and Stripes**

AVIANO AIR BASE, Italy — They Could Do It!

For the first time since Aviano began hosting its quarterly bomb-building competition, an all-female team entered — and won. The team, called the Bouncing Bettys, completed the Rapid Aircraft Generation and Employment competition last week.

All of the Bouncing Bettys dressed as Rosie the Riveter, the World War II icon whose image appeared on posters proclaiming, “We Can Do It!” The posters were used to recruit women to work in factories and shipyards to produce munitions and war supplies.

The RAGE competition included six evaluated events: a written test, stockpile practices, trailer configuration and reconfiguration, air cargo palletization and a weapons-build, said U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Air Forces Africa in a Facebook post congratulating the team on their win.

The competition is a relatively new event, first held in October.

Officials at Aviano could not immediately answer Stars and Stripes inquiries about the competition, but details of the team and the event were included in captions on pictures taken by Airman 1st Class Ericka Woolever, a public affairs airman at the base’s 31st Fighter Wing.

The Bouncing Bettys were Staff Sgt. Ana L. Merkel, a munitions inspector; Staff Sgt. Catharyn M. Clyde, a munitions control supervisor; Staff Sgt. Nicole D. Jarvis, an NCOIC of conventional munitions support; Airman 1st Class Ashlyn B. Martin, a stockpile management technician; Airman Erin N. Brumm, a stockpile management technician, all from the 31st Munitions Squadron, and Senior Airman Audrey M. Naputi, a munitions inspector from the 731st Munitions Squadron. All are based at Aviano.

Merkel’s idea to put together a team of women to highlight the impact women have on sortie generation, the preparations that are performed for an aircraft’s combat flight.

They honored Woman Ordnance Workers through their uniforms and team concept, but also through “outstanding communication and technical performance,” USAFE’s Facebook post said.

Following their win, the Bouncing Bettys’ names will be etched on plaques, which will be added to the 31st Munitions Squadron’s heritage.

“No better way to kick off 2020,” said Bouncing Bettsy member Jarvis in a Facebook post sharing photos of the event.

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### Hog cholera strikes Okinawa first time in 34 years, forcing cull

**By Matthew M. Burke and Aya Ichihashi**

**Stars and Stripes**

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Thousands of pigs are being culled on the Japanese island of Okinawa, where classical swine fever was discovered Wednesday for the first time since 1986, government officials said.

Also known as hog cholera, the highly contagious, fatal, porcine viral disease was confirmed two days after an Uruma city farmer reported pig deaths due to an unknown respiratory ailment, according to a statement from the Okinawa prefectural government. Since then, the disease has been discovered at two additional farms in Uruma and one in Okinawa city, affecting approximately 5,000 pigs.

Japanese officials are investigating the origins of the outbreak, and while they cautioned people to stay away from the impacted farms, there is no risk to public health.

“There has never been a reported case where classical swine fever has been transmitted to humans,” the statement said. “There is no possibility that infected pork will be sold at markets and shops."

Gov. Denny Tamaki requested support Wednesday from the Naha-based Japan Ground Self-Defense Force’s 15th Brigade and 360 Japanese troops have been involved in the killing and burying of hundreds of pigs, the Ministry of Defense website said.

He also ordered farmers within six miles of Uruma city not to transport pigs or boars and to sterilize their farms, the prefecture said.

The infected pigs were slated to be killed by Saturday to try and stop the disease from spreading, the statement said. As of Friday, 1,600 had been killed and were being buried, prefectural spokesman Kazushii Kubota added.

It is unclear how the disease, which affects domestic pigs and wild boars, spread to Okinawa but it can be transmitted from pig to pig as well as by rodents and vermin, the statement said. An outbreak on mainland Japan in 2018 spread to nine prefectures and killed 130,000 pigs in one year.

There were 225,800 pigs in Okinawa, an area roughly the same size as metropolitan Tokyo, as of 2018, Japan’s Cabinet Office said.

Classical swine fever comes in both acute and chronic forms, the World Organisation for Animal Health website said. Animals suffering from the acute form of the disease exhibit symptoms that include fever, diarrhea and purple discoloration and generally die within two weeks.

There is no treatment for the disease. Once a pig has tested positive, all others at that farm must be killed to stop the spread, Japan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website said.
Ignoring police, Iranians protest downed airplane

**BY JOSEPH KRAUS and JON GAMMBREL**

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iranian demonstrators defied a heavy police presence Sunday night to protest their country's days of denials that it shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane carrying 176 people, the latest unrest to roil the capital amid soaring tensions with the United States.

Videos posted online showed protesters shouting anti-government slogans and moving through subway stations and sidewalks, marching in Azadi Square, Tehran's main square, and with a larger crowd in Vali-e Asr Square, Tehran University and other landmarks. Revolutionary Guard members patrolled the city on motorbikes, and plainclothes security men kept a watchful eye. People looked down as they walked briskly past police, hoping not to draw attention to themselves.

"After successive national traumas in a short time period, people should be allowed to safely grieve and demand accountability," said Hadi Ghasemi, the executive director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Iranians shouldn't have to risk their lives to exercise their constitutional right to peaceful assembly."

Iranians have expressed anger over the downing of the plane and the misleading explanations from senior officials in the wake of the tragedy. They are also mourning the dead, which included many young people who were studying abroad.

"Even talking about it makes my heart beat faster and makes me sad," said Zahra Razeghi, a Tehran resident.

"The denial and covering up the truth over the past three days greatly added to the suffering and pain of the families, and me," she added.

Earlier Sunday, hundreds of students gathered at Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University to mourn the victims and protest against authorities for concealing the cause of the crash, the semiofficial ISNA news agency reported.

Some Iranian artists, including famed director Masoud Kimiai, withdrew from an upcoming international film festival. Two state TV hosts resigned in protest over the false reporting about the cause of the plane crash.

**Challenge: Missile defense weapons were away from targeted area**

**FROM FRONT PAGE**

The challenges include the sheer volume of Iran's missile arsenal, believed to number more than 2,000, along with the Pentagon's scarce number of missile defense options. Iran launched 16 missiles, with 11 hitting al Asad Air Base west of Baghdad, one landing at a facility in Irbil in northern Iraq and four malfunctioning, Defense Secretary Mark Esper said.

One senior U.S. military official, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity due to the issue's ongoing sensitivity, said that a ballistic missile is "obviously a significant threat for anybody."

"The denial and covering up the truth over the past three days greatly added to the suffering and pain of the families, and me," she added.

Earlier Sunday, hundreds of students gathered at Tehran's Shahid Beheshti University to mourn the victims and protest against authorities for concealing the cause of the crash, the semiofficial ISNA news agency reported.

Some Iranian artists, including famed director Masoud Kimiai, withdrew from an upcoming international film festival. Two state TV hosts resigned in protest over the false reporting about the cause of the plane crash.

President Donald Trump addressed the country's leaders in a tweet, saying "DO NOT KILL YOUR PROTESTERS."

"The World is watching. More importantly, the USA is watching," he tweeted.

A candlelight ceremony late Saturday in Tehran turned into a protest, with hundreds of people chanting against the country's leaders — including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei — and police dispersing them with tear gas. Protests were also held in the city of Isfahan and elsewhere.

**Esper: ‘Didn’t see’ proof of embargo attack plan**

**BY JOSEPH MARXS, JULIET EILIFER AND DREW HARWELL**

The Washington Post

Top Trump administration officials struggled to defend an airstrike that killed a senior Iranian general Sunday morning, acknowledging that they could not confirm President Donald Trump’s claim that the Iranians planned to attack four U.S. embassies.

On CBS’ “Face the Nation,” Deputy Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said he “didn’t see” evidence of an Iranian plot to attack four U.S. embassies. But he said he “share(s) the president’s view that probably — my expectation was they were going to go after our embassies.

The embassies are the most prominent display of American presence in a country.”

On Friday, Trump said senior Iranian general Qassem Soleimani killed by a U.S. drone strike had been planning attacks on four U.S. embassies, a claim made to justify the decision.

That assertion was at odds with intelligence assessments from senior officials in Trump’s administration. On Friday, a senior administration official and a senior defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss classified information, told The Washington Post they were only aware of vague intelligence about a plot against the embassy in Baghdad and that the information did not suggest a fully formed plot. Neither official said there were threats against multiple embassies.

On CNN’s State of the Union Sunday, Sen. Lindsey Graham defended the strike on Soleimani, saying it “disrupted attacks” and “reset terms with Iran.”

White House National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien also defended the strike, saying the Iranian regime is “having a very bad week” and that the United States would continue a “maximum pressure campaign” against the regime on ABC’s “This Week.”

He also said the president has shown “incredible restraint” in the face of regular provocation from Iran and has also been “modest in his dealings” with other countries.

But O’Brien did not confirm Trump’s claim that the White House had received intelligence that Soleimani, the head of Iran’s elite Quds Force, was planning "leader-kill attacks against four U.S. embassies.

“What the president said is consistent with what we’ve been saying. We had very strong intelligence that they were looking to kill and maim Americans in American facilities in the region,” O’Brien said on Fox News Sunday."
N. Korea won’t trade weapons for sanctions lift

By Kang He In

Bloomberg News

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea won’t rely on the personal relationship between its leader, Kim Jong Un, and U.S. President Donald Trump as it doesn’t intend to trade its nuclear weapons for a lift of sanctions, its state-run media said, citing a Foreign Ministry adviser.

“There will never be such negotiations as that in Vietnam, in which we proposed exchanging a core nuclear facility of the country for the lift of some United Nations sanctions,” Kim Kye Gwan was quoted as saying by the Korean Central News Agency. “There is no need for us to be present in such talks, in which there is only unilateral pressure, and we have no desire to barter something for other thing at the talks like traders.”

The dialogue will reopen only under the condition of Washington’s “absolute agreement” on North Korea’s demands, which the U.S. is neither ready for nor able to do, he said. “We know well about the way we should go and will go on our way.”

The statement came a day after South Korea’s presidential national security adviser Chung Eui-yong told reporters that Trump asked Seoul to send greetings to Kim, whose birthday was Wednesday. This prompted hopes that the renewed tensions between the two adversaries could thaw again and they would meet for next round of talks.

Playing down Seoul’s efforts to mediate Washington-Pyongyang relations, the North Korean diplomat also said that Trump separately sent Kim a birthday letter through a “special” liaison channel between the leaders. While leader Kim’s relationship with Trump is “not bad,” it will be “stupid” to expect such ties will help restart talks between the two nations, the Foreign Ministry’s Kim said.

Two Spangdahlem airmen found dead in dormitory room

By Jennifer H. Swan

Stars and Stripes

KAISERSLAUTERN, Germany — The two airmen who were found dead in a base dormitory room at Spangdahlem Air Base on Thursday were both airmen first class from the same squadron, base officials said in a statement Sunday.

The airmen were identified as Xavier Leaphart, 20, and Aziess Whitehurst, 20. They were assigned to the 52d Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, one of two maintenance squadrons at Spangdahlem that services the 52nd Fighter Wing’s F-16 combat jets.

The airmen were found unresponsive at about 6:30 p.m. and pronounced dead 20 minutes later by emergency responders.

Their deaths are under investigation, officials said.

“It is always difficult to lose valued members of our team,” said Col. David Epperson, 52d Fighter Wing commander, in a statement Sunday. “Our sincerest and heartfelt condolences go out to the friends and families that have been affected by this tragedy.”

Leaphart is survived by his father and mother, Davin and Pamela Leaphart. Whitehurst is survived by his father, Malik Muhammad, and mother Pamela Leaphart.

4 Iraqi troops wounded by attack on air base

By Qassem Abdul-Zahra

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Four members of Iraq’s military were wounded Sunday in a rocket attack targeting an air base just north of Baghdad where American trainers are present, Iraqi security officials said.

The attack by at least six rockets came just days after Iran fired ballistic missiles at two bases in Iraq that house U.S. forces, causing no casualties.

Recent heightened tensions between the U.S. and Iran were sparked last month when a rocket attack killed an American contractor at a base in Iraq. The U.S. has blamed that attack and others on Iran-backed militias.

Saturday’s attack wounded an Iraqi air force officer and three enlisted men, Iraqi security officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack.

The rockets struck Balad air base, which hosts American trainers, advisers and a company that provides maintenance services for F-16 aircraft. Some rockets fell on a restaurant inside the airbase, the officials said.

The base is located some 50 miles north of Baghdad.

A statement from the Iraqi army’s official media office confirmed the attack but said eight rockets hit the base, and that two officers had been wounded. The difference in accounts could not immediately be reconciled.

“There are American experts, trainers and advisers at the base,” said one defense official, who requested anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media.

The U.S. and Iran recently stepped back from escalating tensions following the killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani, Iran’s top general, in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad. A senior Iraqi leader of an Iran-backed militia was also killed.

China: Army began experimenting with task force in 2018

FROM FRONT PAGE

to the Pacific, better positioning the U.S. to take on “peer competitors” China and historic rival Russia. The extent to which the current tensions with Iran upset that plan remains to be determined but the Army is pressing ahead.

Under McCarthy’s vision, the move would allow the Army to create a new paradigm in the Pacific where ground forces would “punch a hole” in enemy defenses for air and naval forces.

Now, the ground-based unit in those island chains can create the support “for air and sea,” McCarthy said.

China’s military doctrine calls for a so-called “anti-access” strategy, backed by long-range anti-ship missiles and space-based surveillance capabilities, intended to keep U.S. aircraft carrier strike groups well beyond the so-called first and second island chains. The first island chain extends from the Kuril islands down to Borneo, while the second island chain generally extends from just east of Japan to Guam and down toward New Guinea.

The pivot includes greater Army participation in regional war games such as the “Defender Pacific” series and deploying a “Security Force Assistance Brigade” next year for the Indo-Pacifict theater similar to ones set up and deployed to Afghanistan, he said.

The Army started experimenting with the task force in 2018. The 17th Field Artillery Brigade from Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State conducted nine major training exercises, plus simulations and war games to evaluate concepts.
US to expel some Saudi trainees after FBI probe

BY DEVLIN BARRETT
AND JOHN HUDSON
The Washington Post

At least a dozen Saudi military trainees in the United States could be sent back to their home country after an FBI investigation found connections to extremist rhetoric, possession of child pornography, and a failure by a small number of people to report alarming behavior by the gunman who killed three people last month at a Pensacola, Fla., military base, according to people familiar with the matter.

Federal law enforcement and military officials are preparing to announce developments in the case. The FBI has been treating the shooting as a terrorist incident, particularly after discovering an anti-American screed posted by the gunman just before the December shooting, according to a law enforcement official.

Several of the Saudis were found to possess child pornography, while others were found to have been part of a social media conversation that included alarming content for extremism, according to a person familiar with the matter.

A spokesperson for the Justice Department and a spokesperson for the FBI declined to comment. The planned expulsion of the Saudi trainees was first reported by CNN.

Lt. Col. Robert Carver, a Department of Defense spokesman, said, “In the wake of the Pensacola tragedy, the Department of Defense restricted to classes all training programs foreign military students from Saudi Arabia while we conducted a review and enhancement of our foreign student vetting procedures. That training pause is still in place while we implement new screening and security measures.”

Sea Hawk inspection

Aviation Electrician’s Mate 2nd Class Tristan Garza of Amarillo, Texas, inspects the rotors on an MH-60 Sea Hawk helicopter Saturday on the flight deck of amphibious assault ship USS America in the East China Sea. The America Expeditionary Strike Group is in the 7th Fleet area of operations to enhance interoperability with allies and serve as a ready response force in the Indo-Pacific region.

Temporary ruling blocking discharge of HIV-positive service members upheld

BY SPENCER S. HSU
The Washington Post

A federal appeals court Friday allowed a lawsuit to go forward challenging the U.S. military’s decision to discharge certain service members who test HIV-positive, saying it appears the Pentagon unlawfully discriminates against them based on a medical condition.

The unanimous decision by a three-judge panel of the Richmond, Va.-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit marked a setback for the Pentagon, which has sought to toss out the lawsuit by two airmen whom the Air Force moved to force out after the results of health screenings last year.

The Defense Department restricts newly diagnosed personnel from deploying to combat zones such as Afghanistan. The government asserts that the risk of HIV transmission is heightened on the battlefield, where it may be more difficult to maintain treatment.

Writing for the panel, U.S. Circuit Judge James A. Wynn Jr. said plaintiffs were likely to show the military acted “arbitrarily or capriciously” in violation of the Administrative Procedures Act by discharging service members without an individualized fitness assessment.

“A ban on deployment may have been justified at a time when HIV treatment was less effective at managing the virus and reducing transmission risks,” Wynn wrote in the 46-page opinion. “But any understanding of HIV that could justify this ban is outdated and at odds with current science. Such obsolete understandings cannot justify a ban, even under a deferential standard of review and even according appropriate deference to the military’s professional judgments.”

The appeals court was hearing the Pentagon’s challenge to a February ruling by Judge Leonie Brinkema of the U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., who temporarily blocked the military from enforcing its policy nationally.

Lawyers for the two discharged plaintiffs, identified in court papers by the aliases Richard Roe and Victor Voe, assert that at least four other active-duty Air Force members face discharge because of the restrictions and that hundreds of others could be affected by the policy.

A separate pending case in Virginia challenges the Army’s similar HIV-related policy.

Those diagnosed with HIV are still prohibited from joining the military.

City says soldier, 21, killed in Afghanistan was from Illinois

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — One of the first two U.S. service members killed in Afghanistan in 2020 was a 21-year-old from the Chicago suburbs, according to the city of Aurora, Ill., via a statement on Facebook on Sunday.

Miguel Villalon, whose rank was not mentioned, was killed in action Saturday when his vehicle struck a roadside bomb in southern Afghanistan, the statement said.

The Pentagon has not released the identity of either soldier killed in the attack under a Defense Department policy of withholding identification until 24 hours after the notification of next of kin.

“Our prayers and condolences are with the Villalon family during this tragic time,” Richard C. Irvin, mayor of Aurora, said in the statement, which included a photo said to be Villalon. “Miguel was a young soldier with dreams for the future and a desire to make a difference in the world today.”

Villalon’s high school, East Aurora School District 131, also posted a statement on Facebook: “We extend our sincere condolences to Miguel’s family, friends, and all those who loved him.”

Aurora is west of Chicago and about an hour away from the town of Hazel Crest, home of another U.S. soldier slain this month: Spc. Henry Mayfield Jr., 23, was killed in a Jan. 5 attack in Kenya.

Two U.S. service members were wounded in the Saturday attack, which occurred in the southern province of Kandahar, a NATO Resolute Support spokesman said.

The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility in a statement from spokesman Qari Yusuf Ahmadi, The Associated Press reported.

More than 2,400 American troops have died in Afghanistan since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion launched in response to the 9/11 attacks. Most of the 20,000 international troops now in Afghanistan are focused on training and advising Afghan security forces, with a smaller contingent taking part in a counterterrorism mission.

lawrence.jp@stripes.com Twitter: @jplawrence3
Recovery begins after storms hit South, Midwest

Associated Press

Thousands remained without electrical power Sunday morning after weekend storms ravaged parts of the Southeast and Midwest, causing 11 deaths, overturning cars, uprooting trees and reducing buildings to rubble.

The National Weather Service said it was a tornado packing winds of at least 134 mph that hit Alabama's Pickens County on Saturday, killing three. Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey praised the state's first responders Sunday in a statement expressing grief over the loss of life.

"This morning, I have reached out to both the county leadership as well as the legislative delegation to offer my deepest condolences in this terrible loss of life," Ivey's statement said.

Storm-related fatalities were also reported in Texas due to icy weather and in Louisiana, where winds were so strong that a trailer home was lifted off its foundation and carried several hundred feet. A man drowned in Oklahoma and the storms even touched the Midwest, causing 11 deaths, over two houses but caused no injuries in the North Texas cities of Burleson and Mansfield.

A man drowned near Kiowa, Okla., after he was swept away in floodwaters, the Oklahoma Highway Patrol said Saturday. Randall Hyatt, 88, of Wardville was overwhelmed by rushing water while getting out of his stalled truck.

The Iowa State Patrol said roads were caked with ice early Saturday when a semitrailer on Interstate 80 overturned, killing a passenger in the truck east of Iowa City.

In Alabama, three people were confirmed killed near Carrollton in Pickens County, the National Weather Service in Birmingham tweeted. The Alabama Emergency Management Agency said the deaths were caused by an "embedded tornado within a long line of intense thunderstorms."

Earlier Saturday, in northwestern Louisiana, firefighters found the bodies of Jerry W. Franks, 79, and Mary Sue Franks, 65, near their demolished trailer in Benton, the Bossier Parish Sheriff's Office said via Facebook. The winds were so strong the home of the couple, who were the in-laws of a parish deputy, was moved 200 feet from its foundation.

Willie Davis owns a barn near where the Franks lived. He told KTBS-TV that this wasn't the first time he'd seen storms like this.

"Four or five times that I've known that (storms) have been through, they hit, tearing down trees and the barn and stuff like that," Willie Davis said. "But that's about all it normally does every time, ... this is the first time we've had any casualties."

The National Weather Service in Shreveport said a tornado with winds of around 135 mph had touched down in Bossier Parish. Drone footage showed smashed buildings, a large vehicle flipped on its side, toppled trees and debris scattered over a large area.

Also in Louisiana, Raymond Holden, 78, was killed in his bed when a tree fell on his home in Oil City, crushing him, according to the Caddo Parish Coroner's Office.

In Tennessee, damage was widespread throughout Shelby County, the state's most populous county, which includes Memphis. There were numerous downed trees and power poles, some of which will need to be replaced, according to the utility.

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation said portions of several highways in the south-eastern part of the state were closed due to flooding. The Arkansas Department of Transportation reported that portions of several state highways across the state, particularly in southeastern Arkansas, were closed due to downed trees, power lines and flooding.

The storm, which brought the threat of ice and snow to the Chicago area, prompted the cancellation of more than 1,200 flights Saturday at Chicago's two main airports. More cancellations occurred at Chicago's O'Hare International, according to the Chicago Department of Aviation's online flight-tracking website.

High winds and icy weather were factors in power outages affecting tens of thousands of people in the South and the Northeast. The PowerOutage.US website, which tracks outages, reported more than 40,000 outages in New York. More than 28,000 were without power in the Carolinas on Sunday morning.
Residents restless as Puerto Rico shakes

By Jim Wyss
Miami Herald

GUANICA, Puerto Rico — Elcier Lugo was evacuating his shattered home on Saturday when he was jolted by a magnitude 5.9 aftershock.

Then he heard a roar from the mountain behind him. A Boulder the size of a jet ski tumbled down the cliff, bounced over a house, broke through a concrete fence and came to rest by the bumper of his neighbor's car. Her daughter was in the back seat.

Southern Puerto Rico has been gripped by a series of tremors that began Dec. 28 and peaked on Tuesday with a magnitude 6.4 earthquake. Since then, hundreds of aftershocks have followed.

Guanica — a small coastal town on a pleasant inlet — has taken the brunt of the damage. More than 150 buildings have either been destroyed or severely damaged, including city hall and the local school.

Saturday’s aftershock — the most powerful yet since Tuesday’s “mainshock” — brought fresh pain. One of the principle bridges into town was closed after cracks appeared in its surface.

On Saturday, Gov. Wanda Vázquez reassured jittery islanders that the aftershocks were to be re-inspected — and damage estimates reassessed — after each serious shake.

Despite the continued rumbling, recovery efforts are underway. On Saturday, teams of workers were replacing transforming stations and power lines as structural engineers scoured Guanica trying to assess the damage. Puerto Rico’s Electric Power Authority said 96% of its 1.4 million customers now have electricity, although Guanica and others on the center-southern coast were still largely powerless.

Standing in downtown Guanica, Juan Alicia Flores, the president of Puerto Rico’s Engineering College, CIAPR, said there’s no reason so many homes should have been destroyed.

“I’ve been struck by what I’ve seen, but I’m not surprised,” he said. “We don’t have a problem with building codes here, what we have is a problem with people building informally,” that is, ignoring the codes.

Some phenomena of shoddily built houses next to sturdy ones has created an odd patchwork of destruction. Perfectly good structures stand next to buildings that have rumbled or collapsed entirely.

Like other towns on the hard hit southern coast, Guanica was a virtual ghost town Saturday. Most of the residents have joined the estimated 6,000 people who are staying at outdoor emergency shelters or have gone to stay with relatives on more stable ground.

William Melendez, 59, had remained behind to help repair a restaurant. When Saturday’s aftershock hit, he stepped outside and watched a house across the street, which had been previously destroyed, start to shake and heave.

“That building over there was moving like it was a toy,” he said.

“You just don’t ever get used to it.”

Like others, Melendez worried that Guanica — already hobbled by a decade-long recession and an exodus of its youth — would not fully recover from this latest hit.

“Even the owners of this restaurant aren’t sure they want to come back here,” he said. “The recovery is going to be hard.”

Researchers solve Amish medical mystery

By Jeremy Olson
(Minneapolis) Star Tribune

Research led by Mayo Clinic has solved a 2-decade-old mystery about why so many otherwise healthy children and young people in Amish communities have been dying from sudden unexplained cardiac deaths.

Examiner the DNA of four Amish siblings who suffered cardiac deaths while playing or exercising, researchers found they all had a duplication of specific genetic material that put them at risk.

Further research found the same genetic defect in children from other Amish families who suffered unexplained cardiac deaths — and that the defect could be passed down only if both birth parents carried the defect.

Genetic testing wasn’t sophisticated enough to find the defect after the deaths of the first two adolescents in 2004, and before the more recent deaths of their siblings. But the discovery now provides a way to find out if future generations of children are at risk, said Dr. Michael Ackerman of Mayo’s Windland Smith Rice Sudden Death Genomics Laboratory.

“What we have for this community is a gold standard biomarker for them to figure out who are the carriers,” he said. He said there are no known heart scans or tests that identify the at-risk children.

The genetic defect in these children is linked to the practice in some Amish communities of close relatives marrying and having children together.

“Screening and genetic counseling could dissuade carriers of the defect from having children together, though Ackerman said that could be disruptive to the Amish social order.”

He said researchers hope that ongoing work will find medications or treatments that can protect at-risk children. Families also can consider having defibrillators implanted in children who received “double doses” of the genetic defect from their parents.

The discovery was reported in the medical Journal JAMA Cardiology. Ackerman said the researchers studied cases from Amish communities in Delaware, Pennsylvania and Iowa, and that they all probably trace back to the same ancestry and “founder gene.”

Despite stereotypes of shunning technology, the Amish families have been open to medical testing and to taking steps to prevent the risks of cardiac deaths in their children, Ackerman said.

Hanukkah attack leads to rise in handgun applications

Associated Press

MONSEY, N.Y. — The number of residents seeking to own handguns has risen sharply in a New York community shaken last month by a massacre that injured five men during a Hanukkah celebration.

The Journal News reports 73 pistol permit applications have been filed with the Rockland County Clerk’s Office since the Dec. 28 attack at a rabbi’s home in Monsey, a hamlet in the town of Ramapo northwest of New York City.

That compares to 51 applications the office received during the eight weeks prior to the stabbing, County Clerk Paul Pipitone told the newspaper.

Sixty-eight of the new applications are from Ramapo residents, including 31 from Monsey.

“It's definitely because of this incident,” Pipitone told the newspaper, referring to the attack. “In some way, shape or form, they want to defend themselves.”

Chief William Barbera of the Rockland County Sheriff’s Department says an application is the first step in a months-long process. Applicants are required to be fingerprinted and undergo a background check and firearms training before the paperwork is submitted to a licensing officer.

An academy run by veterans of the Israel Defense Forces has been providing weapons training in Ramapo’s synagogues since the machete attack, The Journal News reports.

Its trainers have been advising Jewish residents to seek unrestricted pistol permits.

“The goal is to be able to carry at synagogue and not to just possess at home and take to the range,” said Yonatan Stern, the academy’s director.
Yang faces major hurdles ahead of caucuses

BY SARA BURNETT
Associated Press

DAVENPORT, Iowa — On a recent swing through Iowa, Andrew Yang was moving through his stump speech, a string of stories and statistics that can sound like an economics seminar. There was talk of flawed indicators and his signature plan to give a monthly check to every American. He warned about a dark and near future where America’s highways are filled with trucks driven by robots.

But with the first votes of the Democratic primary due to be cast within weeks, a woman inside a crammed coffee shop had a more immediate concern for the 44-year-old entrepreneur who has become one of the surprise survivors of the long contest: What if we go to caucus for you on Feb. 3, she asked, and you don’t have enough support to win delegates? Why should we waste our votes?

And the candidate, who loves to talk about number crunching, data, and his plan to use a Power Point during his State of the Union address, assured the woman in Davenport that she didn’t need to worry. “We have done the math,” he said, a nod to his campaign slogan Make America Think Harder, abbreviated on hats and pins as J-MATH.

But major challenges remain for a campaign that has compared itself to a startup and that has nonetheless been embraced by major names and political figures, including former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro and Washington Post columnist Dan Balz.

Yang’s core message has focused on the changing economy, with millions of jobs lost to automation and artificial intelligence, particularly in states like Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, where voters were swayed by Trump’s promises to bring back American jobs.

As his Senate trial nears, Trump keeps the claim alive. But with the first votes of the Democratic primary due to be cast within weeks, a man in a crammed coffee shop had a more immediate concern for the 44-year-old entrepreneur who has become one of the surprise survivors of the long contest: What if we go to caucus for you on Feb. 3, she asked, and you don’t have enough support to win delegates? Why should we waste our votes?

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Yang’s core message has focused on the changing economy, with millions of jobs lost to automation and artificial intelligence, particularly in states like Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin, where voters were swayed by Trump’s promises to bring back American jobs. He says companies like Amazon, Google and Facebook that make money off automation and data should be taxed more to pay for his so-called freedom dividend, the $1,000 monthly payment Yang would give to Americans 18 and older.

Iowa Democratic strategist Jeff Link said he’s been impressed with the way Yang has been able to share his point of view on the changing economy, make it real for voters and talk about it in an approachable way. But Link said there are many undecided Iowa voters who will be making up their minds in the coming weeks, and while having millions in a campaign fund is helpful, not qualifying for the debate stage is “a big deal.”

“No. 1 thing for voters is who is the candidate most likely to beat Trump,” Link said. “It’s hard to argue you’re the best candidate if you can’t make the debate.”

Jerry Stoefen, who was a union plumber for 42 years and farms outside Tipton, attended Yang’s event there and said he was glad to see someone talking about the loss of manufacturing jobs. The 62-year-old said he has narrowed his choices to Yang, Sanders and Buttigieg.

Stoefen said he believes Yang’s idea of giving $1,000 a month to people could work. But he said it might be a little too out there for many in his farming community.

“They think it’s just the craziest idea they’ve ever heard,” he said. “They really do.”

Allison Ambrose, 57, an accounting professor from Des Moines, called Yang a “breath of fresh air” but is also considering Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar.

“She knows the solutions to the problems we don’t even know we have,” Ambrose said, though she also has her concerns. “Maybe because he’s so different, and his lack of experience and his youth, that I’m not sure how electable he is.”

Despite contrary evidence, Ukraine theory endures

BY AMANDA SEITZ, ERIC TUCKER AND RICHARD LARDNER
Washington & Providence sources

With President Donald Trump’s impeachment trial set to begin in the Senate, some Republican allies continue to promote a discredited theory that accuses Ukraine of interfering in the 2016 U.S. election to keep him from winning.

The notion, which is not supported by U.S. intelligence agencies, has nonetheless been embraced by a president reluctant to admit the existence of Russian election interference, and anxious to show he had reason to be suspicious of Ukraine as the U.S. withheld crucial military aid last year.

The president’s demand that Ukraine look into its own purported corruption was a key moment in the period leading up to the impeachment, and a political rival, former Vice President Joe Biden, while the U.S. withheld the aid is at the heart of the congressional investigation that produced Trump’s impeachment in the House on charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress.

As U.S. authorities collected evidence in 2016 that Russia had hacked Democratic National Committee servers, former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort suggested Ukraine, not Russia, had likely committed the attack, his deputy Rick Gates later told the FBI.

That September, Trump campaign fiduciary Roger Stone tweet ed, “The only interference in the U.S. election is from Hillary’s friends in Ukraine,” referring to Trump opponent Hillary Clinton.

But Trump’s FBI director rejected those allegations. U.S. intelligence agencies blame Russia for interfering on Trump’s behalf, and special counsel Robert Mueller has charged 25 Russians with hacking Democratic email accounts and waging a covert social media campaign to sway public opinion.

Yet, against all evidence, the theory’s shape-shifting nature over the years has compounded its staying power.

“I think both Russia and Ukraine meddled in the 2016 election,” Republican Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana said last month on “Meet the Press.”

In February 2017, Putin publicly claimed Ukraine’s entire government had supported Clinton and now needed to “improve relations” with the new Trump administration.

By that April, Trump himself promoted the theory, falsely suggest ing, in an AP interview that Crowdstrike, the cybersecurity firm that traced the hack to Russia, had strong ties to Ukraine.

“I heard it’s owned by a very rich Ukrainian, that’s what I heard,” Trump said. “Why didn’t they allow the FBI in to investigate the server?”

In fact, Crowdstrike is a California company founded by two U.S. citizens — George Kurtz and Dmitri Alperovitch, who was born in Russia and lives in America.

And the FBI didn’t need to physically take the DNC servers to confirm Crowdstrike’s findings. Crowdstrike gave the FBI digital images that captured everything from emails, browsing history and files of the DNC system, the company says.

But Trump took his suspicions about the servers directly to newly elected president Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky in a now infamous July 25 phone call that spurred the articles of impeachment against Trump.

“I would like you to find out what happened with this whole situation with Ukraine, they say Crowdstrike … I guess you have one of your wealthy people… Trump asked. “The server, they say Ukraine has it.”

Crowdstrike released a blog post rebutting Trump’s claims. The president’s own advisers rebutted the theory to no avail, former White House aide Fiona Hill told impeachment investigators.

Trump keeps the claim alive. He insisted to Fox News viewers in November that he only withheld aid from Ukraine to investigate corruption there, hinting once again that’s where the DNC’s servers are hidden.

Parts of the Ukraine theory have been echoed by the president’s Republican allies, some of whom concede Russia interfered but post Russia did too.

“Russia’s campaign to interfere in our election was real and systematic. It is also true that Ukrainian officials did not want … then-candidate Trump to win. The two are not mutually exclusive,” the office of Republican Sen. Ted Cruz said in a statement. Cruz himself said there’s “considerable evidence” of Ukraine interference.

As his Senate trial nears, Trump has pressed GOP senators to rally behind him — asking personal attorney Rudy Giuliani to brief them on his trip to Europe, where he searched for witnesses and documents.
By MARISA IATI
The Washington Post

U.S. Customs and Border Protection has a problem with vultures — specifically, roughly 300 of them that are defecating and urinating all over a radio tower that the agency needs to communicate.

The excretion is coating the entire 320-foot tower in southern Texas, an area that part that workers need to touch, according to a request for information from the state's telecommunications vendors. The government is seeking a “Vulture Deterrence Netting System” to be installed in August before the birds' roosting season.

The migratory birds have been making themselves comfortable atop the tower in Kingsville — about 45 miles southwest of Corpus Christi — for more than six years, a CBP spokesperson told Quartz, which first reported on the vultures. CBP did not answer questions from The Washington Post on Friday.

“They will often defecate and vomit from their roost onto buildings below that house employees and equipment,” said the spokesperson, whom Quartz did not name. “There are anecdotes about the preying on trash and the destruction of objects that are created on the tower.”

Beyond the risk of vomit and prey falling from the sky, vultures have sharp nails and beaks that can cause deep scratches. The birds also “regurgitate a reeking and corrosive vomit” that can damage the tower and “also slowly destroys metal,” according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

As acidic excretion piles up on a radio tower, the structure becomes more dangerous for the maintenance workers who have to climb it, reported AGL Media Group, a telecommunications trade publication. The birds also dug up the undigested fur and bones of their prey, and the remnants were piling up on the ground, AGL reported.

Customs and Border Protection plans to clean the contaminated radio tower, remove the rust and repaint the structure before installing the netting that it hopes will deter future vultures from setting up shop. The agency's radio towers are critical to enabling officers to quickly exchange information related to border security.

Other ways of dispelling the widely disliked birds are more creative. Hanging an effigy of a vulture or a life-like replica is often effective because birds avoid congregating near where another bird has been hurt or killed, according to AGL. Effigies should be hung head-down to appear as if they are struggling or dead.

Propane cannons and pyrotechnics can effectively dispel vultures at night, but Customs and Border Protection wrote that the current it uses should involve minimal noise and visual impacts to the nearby rural area.

“In some situations, selective, lethal removal of birds may be needed to resolve damage effectively,” the Agriculture Department says of vulture removal.

Killing the birds, however, is usually not an option because of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 makes it illegal.

The Customs and Border Protection spokesperson told Quartz that the agency wants to keep the birds away and potentially protecting them. And for good reason: Vultures help clean up deteriorating carcasses on the ground and quell the spread of diseases and bacteria.

“CBP's Office of Information Technology works closely with several agencies including Fish and Wildlife, the USDA, environmental experts and the Texas State Historical Preservation Officer, to determine what, if any, combating efforts will be required,” she said.

The vultures did not respond to a request for comment.

Red meat study under scrutiny for Texas A&M involvement

BY LARA KORTE
Austin (Texas) American-Statesman

AUSTIN, Texas — A widely criticized study about the benefits of red meat is under scrutiny again after the journal that published it issued a correction for failing to disclose that one of the authors received funding for other research from Texas A&M University, which many consider a conflict of interest.

The Annals of Internal Medicine, an academic medical journal, last fall published a study declaring there is “no need to cut down on red and processed meat for health reasons.” The findings drew criticism from medical researchers and nationally known nutritionists who said the conclusions were misleading and weren’t supported in their own research.

The journal initially defended the study and its authors, including then-Dalhousie University professor Bradley Johnston. But on Dec. 31, the journal revealed Johnston had failed to disclose his ties to Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agency, including a grant worth more than $76,000 to conduct a separate study into saturated fats, as well as his recruitment to a professor position at the school.

The authors, journal and Texas A&M now are under fire for what some see as a conflict of interest between the study’s findings and A&M’s relationship with the beef industry.

Patrick Stover, vice chancellor and dean at AgriLife and an author of the study, says there is no conflict of interest posed by the grant to Johnston because it was for an unrelated study and was awarded near the end of the red meat study. In addition, Stover said that Johnston followed all disclosure rules when the paper was submitted, providing additional information that was not called for in the guidelines.

Cuts of meat at a butcher store in Florida. Texas A&M University’s AgriLife institution has received criticism for its involvement in a study saying red and processed meat do not have significant effects on health.

“People are running with an appearance of conflict, but none of those monies have anything to do with the red meat study, nor was there a requirement for them to be disclosed,” Stover said.

According to Annals' editor-in-chief, Dr. Christine Laine, the journal requires authors to complete a disclosure form from the International Committee of Medical Editors, which asks authors to include in their disclosures financial relationships over the past 36 months that are topically relevant to the work but did not directly support it.

Laine said that Johnston failed to disclose the Texas A&M grant because he misunderstood the disclosure policy, which required authors to report grants of relevant topics. Laine also said the fat study and Johnston's tenure at A&M was not intended to begin until August 2020.

But according to Stover, the $76,000 was granted as a kind of “advance” ahead of Johnston's appointment to Texas A&M to a medical faculty study. Johnston's move to A&M was delayed because of personal reasons, Stover said, but had he been able to support all of his salary, it would have been included as part of his salary.

But it’s not just the grant that is raising eyebrows among some nutrition scientists. At the start of the red meat study, Stover was employed at Cornell University. In 2019, Stover moved into his role as dean and vice chancellor at AgriLife. Shortly after, Johnston was recruited to teach and research at A&M, a fact the medical journal did not know at the time the red meat study was published, Laine said.

In August, about a month before the study was published, Johnston was offered a teaching and research position at A&M with an annual salary totaling more than $185,000, according to an offer letter obtained by The Austin American-Statesman.

The International Committee of Medical Journal Editors' recommendations on disclosure advises that perceptions of conflict of interest are as important as actual conflicts of interest.

Johnston has faced criticism in the past for possible conflicts with other studies. A 2017 publication in Annals found current guidelines for conflict of interest are based on “low-quality evidence.” At the time, Johnston disclosed he was funded by the Internation Committee of Medical Editors, an organization whose members include the Coca-Cola Co., Hershey Co., Kellogg Co. and others.

The conflict, whether perceived or actual, stems from Texas A&M's relationship with the beef industry. Stover said AgriLife receives funding from a variety of sources for a gamut of agricultural research. Last year, gril-life received about $4.5 million for beef research, half of which came from government grants and the other half from commodity groups or the beef industry. That money represents less than 5% of A&M's total research funds, Stover said.

Still, others say the beef industry's influence is obvious.

“That's clearly a conflict of interest if the subject matter of the research is the health consequences of consuming red meat,” said Dr. Neal Barnard, a George Washington University associate professor and founding president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

AAM, a group of scientists who took issue with the methods used in the study and the conclusions drawn from the analysis. Researchers who study meat use a grading system known as Grades of Recommendation Assessment, Development and Evaluation, or GRADE, to analyze several existing studies about red and processed meat. In the GRADE system, observational studies, which examine the effects of peoples’ habits, are weighted less than controlled clinical studies, which ask people to change their habits and study the effects.
Police remove 62 animals from home

WY CASPER—Casper police officials removed 62 animals that were subjected to what authorities described as unsanitary and neglectful conditions from a Natrona County home.

Animal protection officers worked for more than three hours to remove 46 dogs, 15 rabbits and a cat, the Casper Star-Tribune reported.

The animals were being evaluated by a veterinarian and recovering in a shelter.

Police officials said they previously tried to help the home owner create a plan to take better care of the animals after they responded to a complaint in December.

Skulls, jaw bones found in archival storage boxes

NV LAS VEGAS — Two human skulls and two human jaw bones were discovered in archival storage boxes by a volunteer, prompting an investigation, Clark County Museum officials said.

The 50-year-old museum grew from a collection of items from the Las Vegas Valley’s first female mortician Anna Roberts Parks, The Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

This was the first time human remains were found in Parks’ collection, museum registrar Cynthia Sanford said.

The bones were taken to the Clark County coroner’s office for investigation, officials said.

FBI is trying to catch a ‘bad wig bandit’

NC CHARLOTTE — The FBI is asking the public’s help in catching a so-called “bad wig bandit” who’s been robbing banks in North Carolina.

The FBI said in a statement he robbed a BB&T in Huntersville on Dec. 17. The first was a New Horizon Bank in Belmont. The second was a BB&T in Huntersville on Dec. 7. The first was a New Horizon Bank in Belmont.

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Rules set for island where pelicans nest

LA NEW ORLEANS — Louisiana is setting rules for a barrier island that’s being restored to greatly increase the number of pelicans and other seabirds that can nest there.

The Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission made Queen Bess Island a wildlife refuge in November.

It’s taking comments through March 2 on the rules, which include no hunting, nighttime activities or vehicles ever and no public access during nesting season, from February through September. During that season, fishing would be forbidden between the island and breakwaters built to protect it.

Turtle released into sea after flipper amputation

FL WILBUR-BY-THE-SEA — A sea turtle whose left flipper was amputated due to an infection was released back into the Atlantic Ocean in Florida.

The green turtle named Endor had spent months rehabilitating and living in the Florida Aquarium in Tampa before being released on Florida’s East coast.

The turtle was taken to Tampa on April 1 with six other turtles who had endured cold-stunning, which is similar to hypothermia and causes low blood circulation, and decreased heart rate and exhaustion.

Endor grew from 3.24 pounds to 13.67 pounds during his rehabilitation program.

In case Endor washes up on shore or gets injured, aquarium biologists tagged Endor and others can have access to his medical condition and history.

Frozen kingdom

Site manager Billy Tedemann directs ice artisans while the Ice Castles are created at Homestead Resort in Midway, Utah. The annual attraction opened Friday. The Midway Ice Castles feature ice walls and tall towers that take 10,000 man hours and about 25 tons of ice and snow to create, the Daily Herald newspaper reported.

Man breaks into Taco Bell, eats, takes nap

GA LAWRENCEVILLE—A Taco Bell wasn’t open on Christmas Day but a burglar in Georgia decided he wanted a festive feast anyway — and to take a nap while he was at it.

Just after midnight Dec. 25, a man approached a Taco Bell and entered through the drive-thru window. Surveillance video showed him using the fryers to make himself a meal. After eating, he proceeded to take a nap on the restaurant floor. Prior to leaving about three hours later, the suspect stole a laptop and tablet, investigators said.

Police: Couple baited thieves, beat them

CA VISALIA — A central California couple was arrested after investigators said they lured thieves to their home with the intention of assaulting them, according to a news report.

Corey Curnutt and Savannah Grillot left an unattended bicycle outside their residence and when it was taken they allegedly chased the thieves and beat them with an aluminum bat, KFSN-TV reported. It wasn’t immediately known if they have attorneys.

Police began investigating Curnutt and Grillot after clips of the bike theft videos began appearing on YouTube last July, said Visalia Police Lt. Ron Epp.
Australia takes offense in fire fight

By Nick Perry
Associated Press

BODALLA, Australia — Crews battling Australia's wildfires said Sunday that they have been able to turn from defense to offense for the first time in weeks thanks to a break in the weather.

Dale McLean, who is helping manage the response to a fire near the town of Bodalla in New South Wales state, was part of a team that was bulldozing down small trees and burning scrub ahead of the fire's projected path to try to stop it from reaching a major highway by starving it of fuel.

"This fire took a major run about seven or eight days ago, and with the weather changing now, the weather settling down, the fire has settled down," he said. "The fire behavior has changed. So we're able to get in front of the fire now, get on the offensive."

Other workers echoed McLean's comments, saying cooler temperatures and mild winds have finally offered them a chance to make progress. The weather is expected to remain benign for the next week, although any deterioration in conditions after that could see the wildfires flare up again.

The progress made by the crews came after a firefighter was killed by a falling tree. Bill Slade — one of the few professionals among mainly volunteer brigades battling blazes across southeast Australia — died on Saturday near Omeo in eastern Victoria state, Forest Fire Management Victoria Executive Director Chris Hardman said.

"Although we do have enormous experience in identifying hazardous trees, sometimes these tree failures can't be predicted," Hardman said. "Working on the fire ground in a forest environment is a dynamic, high-risk environment and it carries with it a significant risk."

The tragedy brings the death toll to at least 27 in a crisis that has destroyed more than 2,000 homes and scorched an area larger than the U.S. state of Indiana since September. Four of the casualties have been firefighters.

The crisis has brought accusations that Prime Minister Scott Morrison's conservative government needs to take more action to counter climate change, which experts say has worsened the crisis. In scenes of protests rallied Friday in Sydney and Melbourne, calling for Morrison to be fired and for Australia to take tougher action on global warming.

The prime minister said Sunday that his government was building resilience to the fire danger posed by climate change.

He said the government was developing a national disaster risk reduction framework within the Department of Home Affairs that will deal with wildfires, cyclones, floods and drought.

Small volcano erupts in Philippines

By Aaron Favila
AND Jim Gomez
Associated Press

TAGAYTAY, Philippines — A small volcano south of the Philippine capital that draws many tourists for its picturesque setting in a lake erupted with a massive plume of ash and steam Sunday as the weather changed now, offering them a chance to make progress.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or damage, but authorities scrambled to evacuate more than 6,000 villagers from an island in the middle of a lake, where the volcano lies, and tens of thousands more from nearby coastal towns, officials said.

"We have asked people in high-risk areas, including the volcano island, to evacuate now ahead of a possible hazardous eruption," Solidum said.

Renelyn Bautista, a 38-year-old housewife who was among thousands of residents who fled from Batangas province's Laurel town, said she hitched a ride to safety from her home with her two children, including a 4-month-old baby, after Taal erupted and the ground shook mildly.

"We hurriedly evacuated when the air turned muddy because of the ashfall and it started to smell like gunpowder," Bautista said by phone.

International and domestic flights were suspended Sunday night at Manila's international airport “due to volcanic ash in the vicinity of the airport” and nearby air routes, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said.

Heavy to light ashfall was reported in towns and cities several miles from the island, and officials advised residents to stay indoors and don masks and goggles for safety. Motorists were hounded by poor visibility, which was worsened by rainy weather.

Authorities recorded a swarm of earthquakes, some of them felt with rumbling sounds, and a slight inflation of portions of the 350-foot volcano ahead of Sunday’s steam-driven explosion, officials said.

China warns Taiwan’s leader after US meeting

By Ken Moritsugu
AND Elaine Kurtenbach
Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan — Fresh from a landslide reelection victory, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen met Sunday in Singapore with the de facto U.S. ambassador to Taipei, as China warned that countries should stick with recognizing communist-ruled Beijing as the rightful government of “one China,” including Taiwan.

Tsun Trent Christensen, a U.S. diplomat who is director of the American Institute in Taiwan, congratulated Tsai on her victory in Saturday’s election, and she thanked him for his support.

China considers self-governed Taiwan a part of its territory and opposes any official contact with the U.S. as an interference in its internal affairs.

China and Taiwan have not had formal diplomatic relations with each other since 1979. Taiwan has enjoyed a de facto recognition from hundreds of countries, although many now also recognize Beijing.

Such countries include some in Latin America and the Caribbean, and China considers them to be renegades.

Thousands run against ‘dictatorship’ in Bangkok

BANGKOK — Thousands of anti-government protesters took part in the “Run Against Dictatorship” in the Thai capital Sunday, the biggest political demonstration in years.

Organizers said more than 13,000 people turned up to run at a park, demanding that Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha step down.

T-shirts were emblazoned with caricatures of Prayuth, and placards on a stage carried tongue-in-cheek slogans such as “Every drop of sweat is for the future of Thailand” and “Getting rid of this old dog rather than getting rid of belly fat.”

Prayuth's nickname is ‘Uncle Tu.’

Book on famed French author spurs debate

PARIS — He was a middle-aged French author becoming known, even celebrated, for writing about sex with children. She was a fragrant fecal smell, a stick with recognizing communist China as the rightful government of “one China” and opposed all official contact with the U.S. as an interference in its internal affairs.

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Such countries include some in Latin America and the Caribbean, and China considers them to be renegades.
Oman monarch remembered as peacekeeper

BY JON GAMBER
Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Oman’s Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Mideast’s longest-ruling monarch who seized power in a 1970 palace coup and pulled his Arabian sultanate into modernity while carefully balancing diplomatic ties between adversaries Iran and the U.S., has died. He was 79.

The British-educated, reclusive sultan reformed a nation that was home to only three schools and harsh laws banning electricity, radios, eyeglasses and even umbrellas when he took the throne. Under his reign, Oman became known as a welcoming tourist destination and a key Mideast interlocutor, helping the U.S. free captives in Iran and Yemen and even hosting visits by Israeli officials while pushing back on their occupation of land Palestinians want for a future state.

“We do not have any conflicts and we do not put fuel on the fire when our opinion does not agree with someone,” Sultan Qaboos told a Kuwaiti newspaper in a rare interview in 2008. The sultan’s death early Saturday, but offered no cause. The royal court declared three days of mourning. Following Islamic tradition, the sultan was buried before nightfall.

Oman’s state-run news agency announced his death early Saturday, but offered no cause. The royal court declared three days of mourning. Following Islamic tradition, the sultan was buried before nightfall.

The sultan’s death had raised the risk of unrest in this country on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. The unmarried Sultan Qaboos had no children and did not publicly name an heir, a tradition among the ruling Al Said dynasty whose history is replete with bloody takeovers. But within hours, Oman state television announced Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, who had served as the sultanate’s culture minister, as the new sultan.

The sultan had been believed to be ill for some time, though authorities never disclosed what malady he faced.

The sultan’s willingness to stand apart was key to Oman’s influence in the region. While home to some 4.6 million people and smaller oil reserves than its neighbors, Oman under Sultan Qaboos routinely influenced the region in ways others couldn’t.

The sultan’s greatest diplomatic achievement came as Oman hosted secret talks between Iranian and U.S. diplomats that led to the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers. The agreement, which limited Iran’s atomic program in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions, has come unraveled since President Donald Trump withdrew from it in May 2018.

Trump issued a statement saying that the sultan “brought peace and prosperity to his country and was a friend to all. His unprecedented efforts to engage in dialogue and achieve peace in the region showed us the importance of listening to all viewpoints.”

Former President Jimmy Carter also expressed sadness, saying: “His voice for peace and tolerance in the Middle East will be missed. He was a wise counsel and ally to me in the White House.”

He is known to have had three major passions — reading, music and yachting. Sultan Qaboos was briefly married to a first cousin. They divorced in 1979.

Queen determined to resolve conflict within royal family

LONDON — Queen Elizabeth II ended 2019 with a public plea for global harmony after a rocky year. She’s starting 2020 trying to heal disharmony within her own family after Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, decided to “step back” as senior royals without consulting the monarch.

After initial talks between courtiers to the senior royals over the couple’s unorthodox declaration of independence, Buckingham Palace said Saturday that the queen would meet Monday at her Sandringham estate in eastern England with Charles, William and Harry to agree on “next steps.”

Harry’s next scheduled public appearance is a rugby event at Buckingham Palace on Thursday. Meghan, meanwhile, has flown to Canada, where the couple and their 8-month-old son, Archie, spent a six-week Christmas break. They announced last week they plan to “balance” their time between the U.K. and North America, with Canada their likely base.

Meghan is American but lived in Toronto for several years while filming the TV show “Suits.”

Associated Press

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Meghan is American but lived in Toronto for several years while filming the TV show “Suits.”
4 reasons the Oscars are likely to snub ‘Avengers: Endgame’

By Michael Cavna
The Washington Post

O n Monday, if the awards season holds to form, a superhero-universe movie will be nominated for the best picture Oscar for the second straight year. And if the awards season truly holds to form, that movie won’t be “Avengers: Endgame.”

While Martin Scorsese famously dismissed Marvel movies as not “cinema,” “Endgame” has a lot going for it. Not only is it the narrative culmination of a decade-plus of Marvel Cinematic Universe movies that dominated the multiplex; it also was embraced by more viewers ($2.8 billion box office worldwide) than any movie last year and more reviewers (94 percent “fresh” on Rotten Tomatoes; 78 median score on Metacritic.com) than such potential Oscar rivals as “Joker” (69 on Rotten Tomatoes; 59 on Metacritic) and “Jojo Rabbit” (79 on Rotten Tomatoes; 57 on Metacritic). So why does “Endgame” feel like such a long shot? Here are four possible reasons.

1. Odds are against the Academy picking two superhero movies: Last year, Marvel’s “Black Panther” became the first superhero film to receive a best picture nomination, serving as a reminder that the Academy is accordingly likely enough to avoid charges of pop-taste irrelevance.

2. One billion-dollar movie is “enough”: Although “Joker” did nowhere near the record-breaking business that “Endgame” did, the Batman archenemy’s story — starring Joaquin Phoenix — was among the 10 highest-grossing movies of the year worldwide, none of the other PGA best-picture nominees — again, a fair reflection of likely Oscar nominees — cracked the top 30 in global box office.

3. “Endgame” is not picking up actor nominations: Despite speculation last spring that Robert Downey Jr.’s likely final portrayal as Iron Man might receive an outstanding achievement in popular film category. (Thankfully, blowback prompted leadership to reconsider. The Oscars did get a ratings uptick in 2019.)

That’s where “Joker” comes in. Although “Joker” did nowhere near the record-breaking business that “Endgame” did, the Batman archenemy’s story — starring Joaquin Phoenix in a Golden Globe-winning performance — grossed $1.07 billion worldwide. As far as the Oscars are concerned, just one billion-dollar movie in the big category is likely enough to avoid charges of pop-taste irrelevance.

Also worth noting: Although “Joker” was among the 10 highest-grossing movies of the year worldwide, none of the other PGA best-picture nominees — again, a fair reflection of likely Oscar nominees — cranked the top 30 in global box office.

4. 2019 is a deep field for contenders: Since the rule change about a decade ago to allow a maximum of 10 best picture nominees, the Academy nominates eight or nine movies most years — and 2019 has at least a dozen strong candidates to fill out the field before even getting to “Endgame.”

Plus, there is a healthy mix of works among the leading contenders — from a war epic like “1917” to a small-scale drama like “Marriage Story” to “real life” biography like “The Irishman.” If the final field only runs eight deep, “Endgame” will almost assuredly be shut out.

But that said: Do expect “Endgame” — like its fellow Disney films “The Lion King” and “Star Wars: Rise of Skywalker” — to clean up in the technical nominations.

Network boss calls growth in number of TV series ‘bananas’

Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — The mass of television series is certifiably “bananas,” according to the TV executive who has kept a close eye on its growth.

An estimated tally of scripted programs available to viewers exceeded 500 for the first time, FX Networks head John Landgraf said. He is credited with coining the phrase “peak TV” and has regularly warned that more is not better.

There were 532 scripted drama and comedy series in 2019 on broadcast, cable and streaming platforms, a 7% increase over 2018, Landgraf told a TV critics meeting Thursday. When FX started its track- ing in 2009 there were about 200 shows, with streaming services responsible for the lion’s share of the subsequent growth.

“There’s too much story. There’s too much narrative,” Landgraf said in 2018. That leads to the “impossibility of surprising the audience, of providing something that seems truly novel, truly new.”

With streaming wars afoot, “we expect that total likely will increase this year. That’s just bananas, right?” Landgraf said Thursday, calling it “a mad race to keep such a massive conveyor belt of content going.”

On March 2, the FX on Hulu streaming hub will launch, offering most current and past seasons of FX’s original series and exclusive fare.

Other news

■ Donald Glover’s “Atlanta” is returning with new episodes, but not for another year. Landgraf said Thursday that star and creator Glover is making 18 new episodes. Ten of them will air in January 2021, with the rest to follow later that year, in the fall.

■ Buck Henry, “The Graduate” co-writer who as screenwriter, character actor, “Saturday Night Live” host and cherished talk-show and party guest became a cultural superstar of the 1960s and ’70s, died Jan. 8 in Los Angeles. He was 89.

■ Eddie Byrnes, who played Kookie on the hit TV show “77 Sunset Strip,” scored a gold record with a song about his character’s hair-combing obsession and appeared in the 1978 movie “Grease,” died Jan. 8 at 87.
Weinstein’s accusers standing strong

By ROBIN AARCANI

arvey Weinstein hobbled into a New York courtroom, leaning on a walker cushioned by two bright green tennis balls. Bent and suffering from incontinence allegedly caused by the entitled movie mogul who believed he could help himself to any woman he desired.

Instead, the man whose sexual bullying helped fuel the rage behind the #MeToo movement was quickly appraised as weak and pathetic. It all feels very calculated.

Just last month, he told the New York Post in the vice president of defense, “I feel like the forgotten man,” he told the Post. “I made more movies directed by women and about women than any filmmaker, and I’m talking about 30 years ago. … I did it first! I pioneered it! It all got eviscerated because of what happened.”

Note: We have added voice-activated hand: “because of what happened,” not “because of what I did.”

Those more than 80 women have accused the once-fearsome producer of sexual misconduct over decades, he is facing charges in California for rape and he is alleged to have inflicted on only two: a woman who says he raped her in a Manhattan hotel in 2006, and another who says he forced oral sex on her at his home in 2006.

In an excellent turn of events, he may also face a second criminal trial. And last Monday, Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey announced she would file four new charges of sexual assault and sexual misconduct against Weinstein involving alleged sexual attacks on two women in hotels in Los Angeles and Beverly Hills in 2013, just before that year’s Oscars.

He will be convicted on any of these counts is far from certain, but just seeing him in court is a balm. It turns out that Justice is sticking him down,” said one of his earliest accusers, Rose McGowan. “It feels like a huge vindication.”

Weinstein’s wretched behavior left a trail of destruction behind him: the ruined or stymied careers of women who fought him off in Hollywood, the stars who went to work only at a steep cost to their well-being, the enablers and defenders who tossed their agenda for the predator into the pot while helping silence accusers with financial settlements, which came with non disclosure agreements. All this now makes him to continue behaving as he always had.

I can’t look at Weinstein without thinking about Bill Cosby, who finally got what was coming, and now sits, remarried, in a Pennsylvania jail. Or men like Matt Laufer, Les Moonves, Charlie Rose and dozens of others who lost their jobs but not really took responsibility for their actions.

But have things changed?

Only that the Weinstein case in the upper professional echelons. One year after the Weinstein scandal broke, The New York Times reported that of the 201 powerful men who lost their jobs, a fraction of sexual misconduct allegations, nearly half were replaced by women.

At a downtown Los Angeles courthouse Tuesday morning I watched a live feed of Weinstein’s courthouse entrance, then a nearby press conference by seven of his accusers, including McGowan, Rosan

Blue wall states pro-Trump also abandoned by Dems

By GARY ABERNATHY

Florida gets all the notoriety for tip-top 2020 voting. George W. Bush and the GOP. Republicans insist it was their state’s five Electoral College votes that handed the GOP nominee his 271-266 mandate.

But even several years after Bush’s upset victory in West Virginia, “Republican” was anathema to a person who hadn’t even moved to the Mountain State. The state Republican Party, where I worked for several years beginning in 2001, was dwarfed in financi

Even traditional Republican allies — including the state’s Chamber of Commerce and West Virginians for Life, the state’s pro-life organization — were mostly in the Democrats’ corner, since the Democratic Party was conservative enough to be in theirs, too, and held the power.

Times have changed. I recently visited West Virginia for the first time since 2005. Republicans now hold almost all key state and federal offices, what still surprised me was the phony anger about the federal government, legislation voiced by the rank-and-file voters I encountered. From impeachment to the confrontation with Iran, President Donald Trump has amassed a majority of voters in West Virginia and Virginia, but so is Ohio, which was until recently a swing state but is probably now solidly Republican. Now, can both states can Democrats afford to abandon?

The recent dust-up over the Hallmark Channel’s refusal to run an advertisement featuring a kiss between a lesbian couple in a Hallmark movie offered a perfect example of the left’s divorce proceedings from middle America. According to some liberal critics, Hallmark is not just guilty of harboring an unenlightened attitude. It is also in the unscrupulous business of making movies that appeal to white people living in small towns and rural areas.

Writing in Salon last month, Amanda Marcotte undertook a leap of Grand Canyon proportions, claiming, “Hallmark movies, with their explicitly anti-LGBT agenda and unapologetic celebration of home and the pleasures of the small, domestic life, also send a not-at-all subtle signal that LGBT Americans should have no curiosity about the larger world, which is exactly the sort of attitude that helps breed the kind of defensive white nationalism that the right has been telling us that we see growing in strength in the Donald Trump era.”

I had to shake my head when the subject of Hallmark movies came up during my West Virginia visit — not in relation to the recent bruhatanga, but in regard to how some women said they had been spending their holidays. Safe to say, Hallmark movies are as popular in blue wall states as Trump is.

Diversity is an admirable objective, and tolerance is important for us to peacefully coexist. Conservatives must tolerate pro

Diversity, by definition, includes not just people of color, religious minorities, women and also white Americans and conservative principles. Each side must strive to respect the other side’s right to defend their traditional values. Isn’t that what their future will include more West Virginia-style breakups, and they’ll look back, wistfully, remembering when states like Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin were theirs.

Gary Abernathy, a contributing columnist for The Washington Post, is a freelance writer based in Hillsboro, Ohio.

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Tennis

APC Toby, Dec. 23-27

Women's Doubles

Dusan Lajovic, Serbia, 7-5, 7-6 (3), 7-5

Breno Cannavaro, Brazil, 7-6 (7-2), 6-2, 6-3

Carla Suárez Navarro, Spain, 6-3, 6-4

Men's Singles

Roberto Bautista Agut, Spain, def. Alex de Minaur 7-6 (7-5), 6-2, 6-4

Men's Doubles

Pablo Carreno Busta, Spain, and Feliciano Lopez, Spain, def. John Peers, Australia, 6-2, 6-7 (8-10), 7-6 (7-4), 6-4

Doa Open

Saturday at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex

Purse: $135,180

Surface: Hard-Outdoor

Men's Singles

Andrey Rublev, Russia, def. Corentin Moutet, France, 6-2, 7-6 (3)

Saturday at ASB Centre

Auckland, New Zealand

Surface: Hard-Outdoor

Women's Singles

Asia Muhammad and Taylor Townsend, United States, def. Dayana Yastremska, Ukraine, 6-4, 7-6 (7-2), 7-6 (3)

Women's Doubles

Michael Mmoh, United States, def. Tanja Nisic, Romania, 6-2, 6-0

Men's Singles

Michael Mmoh, United States, def. Teymuraz Gabashvili and Kont-

Men's Doubles

Spain, 6-2, 6-4

at Toyota Stadium

Men's Singles

At Liacouras Center, Philadelphia

Women's Singles

Serena Williams ended her 8-year title drought when she fell American Jessica Pegula 6-3, 6-4 in court April 13 .

Serena Williams was given Spain a 1-0 lead by beating

cure Serbia's victory over Spain

in the doubles final at the ASB Classic.

Williams hadn’t won a title

since the Australian Open in January 2017, and not since she

won the Olympic women’s singles gold medal at the Rio Summer Olympics, which was court-side to see

the victory.

In other news:  

Novak Djokovic beat Rafael Nadal then went back on court within an hour and won the decider as Serbia secured its first

in the inaugural ATP Cup final.

Djokovic’s victory kept the


 baggage of Alexander Zverev

Tour of 2019, which is a lead-up to the BNP Paribas Open in California.

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — Serena Williams ended a three-year title drought on Sunday when she defeated fellow American Jessica Pegula 6-3, 6-4 Sunday night to win the singles final of the ASB Classic.

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Djokovic’s victory kept the
Oh Henry! Titans upset Ravens

Derrick Henry runs for 195 yards, throws touchdown pass as Tennessee advances

BY BARRY WILNER
Associated Press

BALTIMORE — With his bright red shoes and relentless running, Derrick Henry grabbed the spotlight and wouldn't let go.

When he was done leading Tennessee into the AFC championship game Saturday night, he did a lengthy victory lap around the Baltimore Ravens' home, slapping hands and taking selfies with Titans fans.

It has been quite a two-week ride.

"It's not just me," Henry said after rushing for 195 yards and throwing a 3-yard touchdown pass in a 28-12 upset of the NFL's top team Saturday night. "It's a team effort. We're all playing collectively as an offense, as a whole. We're just locked in. We believe in each other. We communicate. It's working out there.

The Titans fear no one, and why should they with Henry rushing — and even throwing — the ball, and a big-play defense making clutch stops and turnovers?

One week after dominating defending Super Bowl champion New England, the Titans (12-7), eliminated Baltimore (14-3). The Ravens had won their last 12 games, with quarterback Lamar Jackson setting records and looking unstoppable.

On Saturday night, it was Henry who was unstoppable, despite Baltimore stacking eight men up front on almost two-thirds of his runs. At times, Henry used power to create space, at other times he used finesse. The Titans twice stopped Baltimore on fourth-and-1. Henry's jump-pass to Corey Davis displayed yet another of his skills. He has completed three throws in four attempts in his career.

"I put it perfect, man," he said with a smile. "I haven't done that pass since high school. I feel like I still got it." But it's the way he plows over and through opponents that makes Henry — and the Titans — dangerous. Next week, they will go after their second Super Bowl trip and first since the 1999 season, either at Kansas City or Houston. The last six seed to get to the big game was Green Bay in the 2010 season; the Packers won it all. Tennessee scored all of its points off takeaways or fourth-down stops.

Ryan Tannehill's throws to Jonnu Smith and Kalif Raymond, who missed the last two games in concussion protocol, gave Tennessee a 14-point edge.

Tennessee Titans running back Derrick Henry (22) runs past Baltimore Ravens strong safety Chuck Clark during the Titans' 28-12 win in Saturday's NFL divisional playoff game.

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

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49ers' defense, run game dominate Vikings

BY JOSH DUBOW
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — Richard Sherman anticipated the route for an interception and then watched the San Francisco 49ers run eight straight times for the touchdown that put them in control of their first playoff game in six years.

The dominant defense and powerful running game that carried the Niners to an 8-0 start this season delivered a 27-10 victory over the Minnesota Vikings in the divisional round Saturday.

"People keep disrespecting us. At the end of the day, all you can do is go out and execute," Sherman said. "It felt good. That's what we look like when we're totally healthy.

The return of injured defensive starters Dee Ford, Kwon Alexander and Jaquiski Tartt had the Niners (14-3) playing as they did in the first half of the season as they set a franchise playoff record by allowing only 147 yards. Jimmy Garoppolo threw a TD pass on his opening drive as a playoff starter and then mostly watched his defense and running game take over from there. The top-seeded 49ers turned a pair of second-half turnovers by Minnesota (11-7) into 10 points.

"They're pretty good right?" tight end George Kittle said of his defense. "It's such a blast just to watch them, how they work together."

"If our defense keeps playing like that, all we have to do is not turn the ball over to win games," Sherman set up Tevin Colemarn's second short touchdown run of the game when he beat Adam Thielen to the spot to intercept Kirk Cousins for his third career playoff interception.

Colman had five of the eight turnovers the Niners forced in this one. They relied on a mix of the coverages Cousins struggled with in each other. That's our mental-
Celtics snap three-game skid

Associated Press

BOSTON — Celtics coach Brad Stevens said giving his team a day off following its worst losing streak of the season felt like the right thing to do.

It certainly re-energized Jayson Tatum. The third-year forward made six three-pointers and scored a career-high 41 points as Bos-

ton cruised past the short-handed New Orleans Pelicans, 140-105 on Saturday night.

Tatum’s first career 40-point performance helped the Celtics snap a season-high, three- game skid.

“Shots were going in. It felt good. I felt like we played with a purpose today on both ends, from the beginning of the game,” Tatum said.

“I felt like we did our job. I know we haven’t been playing well lately. It felt good to start the game off right.”

Enes Kanter added 22 points and 19 rebounds, marking season highs in both categories. Gor-

don Hayward had 19 points and Kemba Walker finished with 17 points and seven assists.

Boston shot 14 of 29 from the three-point line and tied a season high for points.


“We just never got any traction offensively or defensively, really,” Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry said. “They took us out of just about every-thing we tried to do.”

New Orleans played without Derrick Favors because a right hamstring strain. Jrue Holiday sat his fourth straight game with back soreness and J.J. Redick sat with a left elbow contusion.

Lakers 125, Thunder 110: Kyle Kuzma scored a season-high 36 points and the Los Angeles Lakers rolled past the Oklahoma City Thunder 125-110 on Saturday night without stars LeBron James and Anthony Davis.

Lakers coach Frank Vogel said James had a chest cold. James is averaging 25.4 points, a league-leading 10.7 assists and 8.7 rebounds and has helped Los Angeles to the best record in the Western Conference. Davis, who leads the Lakers with 27.1 points per game, missed his second straight game with a gluteus maximus con-

fusion. It didn’t matter. Kuzma, in just his third start of the season, made 15 of 24 shots. Rajon Rondo added 21 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists for Los Angeles, which shot 51.5% to win its eighth in a row.

Rockets 139, Timberwolves 109: James Harden scored 32 points in three quarters to surpass 20,000 and Houston rolled past visiting Minnesota.

Harden is the 45th player in NBA history to reach 20,000 points, and at 30, the seventh-

youngest. He entered the game 10 points away and reached the milestone in fitting fashion, on

a step-back three-pointer midway through the second quarter. He also had 12 rebounds and eight assists.

Mavericks 109, 76ers 101: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 32 points and 17 rebounds, Kris Middleton scored 30 points and Milwau-

kee beat host Portland.

Damian Lillard led Portland with 26 points, CJ McCollum had 20 and Carmelo Anthony added 19 points and 11 rebounds. The Trail Blazes have lost eight of 10.

Bulls 108, Pistons 99: Zach LaVine scored 25 points and visiting Chicago held off Detroit to snap a six-game losing streak.

Already without injured Blake Griffin, the Pistons lost Andre Drummond when he was ejected early in the third quarter. Drummond threw the ball off the back of Daniel Gafford’s head. The exchange also resulted in a technical foul on Gafford.

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**Stars and Stripes**

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Stop by our location on base to learn more or visit: militaryautosource.com/ford
Lightning roll to 10th straight win

By Aaron Bracy
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tampa Bay got offense from an unlikely source to keep its winning streak going.

Pat Maroon scored the game’s only goal, Andrei Vasilevskiy made 41 saves and the Lightning tied a club record with their 10th straight win, 1-0 over the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday.

The Lightning haven’t lost since Dec. 21 at Washington, and have outscored opponents 43-17 during their streak. Tampa Bay has tallied 12 unanswered goals, two short of matching a team mark. Tampa Bay will look to set a club record for consecutive victories on Sunday night at New Jersey.

“ar the guys you’re used to scoring a lot for us (didn’t score),” Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. “But when they don’t, you need other guys to step up. And that’s probably how you get five in the third period, when he stopped Travis Sanheim’s one-timer from close range with a right pad save.

“I’ve said this before, a shutout requires a full team effort,” Vasilevskiy said. “The team played great defensively, all the D-men and forwards. Tonight, one goal was enough for us to win because we played good defensively.”

Tampa Bay Lightning left wing Pat Maroon grimaces after injuring his right shoulder. He scored his team’s only goal in a 1-0 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday, but left the game after injury.

Roundup

Devils’ Domingue stymies Capitals

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nico Hischier scored twice, Louis Domingue made 33 saves and the last-place New Jersey Devils routed the NHL-leading Washington Capitals 5-1, snapping the Devils’ losing streak.

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With overtime victory, Tigers are 1-59 at North Carolina

By Aaron Beard
Associated Press

CHARLIE PATEL, ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Aamir Simms hit an overtime-forcing three-pointer with 3.5 seconds left in regulation and Clemson went on to erase decades of futility at North Carolina by beating the Tar Heels 79-76 on Saturday, earning their first win in 60 tries in Chapel Hill.

Simms finished with 20 points for the Tigers (8-7, 2-3 Atlantic Coast Conference), who trailed by 10 with a little more than two minutes left in regulation. But Clemson made a frantic comeback to force the extra period, then came up with enough key baskets to do what no other predecessor had done in school history: walk off the court in Chapel Hill with a victory.

Simms added a critical driving basket with 1.8 seconds left in OT, then the Tigers got a final stop when Garrison Brooks and 10th-ranked North Carolina rebounded three-pointers on the final possession.

When Robinson’s missed the horn, Clemson players ran to midcourt to celebrate the win at North Carolina Saturday.

Clemson coach Brad Brownell embraces assistant coach Anthony Goin as they celebrate the win at North Carolina Saturday.

Roundup

No. 14 Kentucky downs Alabama for 1,000th SEC win

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Immanuel Quickley scored the game’s final five points and finished with 19, and the No. 14 Kentucky Wildcats topped the Alabama Crimson Tide 76-67 for their 1,000th Southeastern Conference victory.

The Wildcats (12-3, 3-0) led by 15 early in the second half and never let Alabama’s cold stretch allow the Crimson Tide to climb within 63-60 with just over five minutes remaining. But Quickley stepped up down the stretch. Kentucky beat Alabama for the 12th time in 13 meetings despite shooting just 32% after intermission. The Wildcats are 1,000-281 overall in SEC play.

Herbert Jones had 18 points for the Crimson Tide (8-7, 1-2), and John Petty Jr. finished with 16.

Kentucky made 9 of 15 three-point shots. That was one shy of the season-high 10 it made against Lamar.

That was one shy of the season-high 10 it made against Lamar.

Bey, a 6-foot-8 sophomore forward, was the longest home winning streak against Clemson all-time in Chapel Hill for the longest home winning streak against one opponent in NCAA history. That included 28-0 in the Smith Center, UNC’s campus arena that opened in January 1986. The win leaves coach Roy Williams tied with late mentor Dean Smith for fourth on another freshman loss in Chapel Hill when they trailed 68-58 with 2:08 left, only to complete an improbable turnaround and make history.

UNC: The Tar Heels were struggling with their worst record through 15 games under Williams. And they were battered entering this one, from top player Cole Anthony missing his seventh straight game following knee surgery to the pregame announcement that freshman guard Jeremiah Francis wouldn’t play due to a left-knee soreness. Williams said Friday he doesn’t say much about the streak with his team beyond noting it has to end at some point and the goal should be “to try to put it off another year.” And now, that run is over.

No. 13 Louisville 67, Notre Dame 64

LEXINGTON, Ky. — Immanuel Quickley scored 19 points and the host Hoosiers handed the Buckeyes their fourth straight loss.

Indiana (13-3, 3-2 Big Ten) earned its second straight win despite going 20-for-36 at the line. Phinisee had four of the lineup’s 11 steals.

Meanwhile, Robinson laid out on the court after his miss, capping a day that saw him go for a career-high 27 points but come up a shot short.

UNC (8-8, 1-4) came into this one 59-0 against Clemson all-time in Chapel Hill for the longest home winning streak against one opponent in NCAA history. That included 28-0 in the Smith Center, UNC’s

West Virginia (13-2, 2-1 Big 12) continued a remarkable turnaround by surpassing its total of 12 wins from last season, when the Mountaineers finished last in the league.

Syracuse 63, No. 18 Virginia 55 (OT): Buddy Boeheim scored nine of his 14 points in overtime and the Orange got the win on the road.

Syracuse scored 20 points in the extra period after netting just 19 in the second half.

Freshman Joe Girard had 19 points for the Orange (9-7, 2-3 Atlantic Coast Conference), and Elijah Hughes had 18.

Jay Huff had 16 points and 10 rebounds for the Cavaliers (11-4, 3-2), who lost back-to-back games for the first time since the 2016-17 season. Mammady Diakite and Kielce Clarke each added 13 points.

Wisconsin 58, No. 20 Penn State 49:

Micah Potter scored 18 of his career-high 24 points in the first half and grabbed 13 rebounds, leading the visiting Badgers.

Brad Davison had 11 points and 13 rebounds for Wisconsin (14-3, 5-2 Big Ten), which bounced back nicely after losing 71-70 to Illinois on Wednesday night.

Colgate 70, Navy 63:

Nelly Cummings had 20 points as the visiting Raiders won their seventh consecutive game.

Rapalos Ivanuskauskas had 16 points for Colgate (13-4, 4-0 Patriot League), and Flik Floc won 88-72.

Syracuse 62, Boston College 51:

Brahmin had 20 points and 13 rebounds for the Eagles (12-3, 3-1 Big East).

No. 17 West Virginia 66, No. 22 Texas Tech 54:

Miles McBride scored a season-high 22 points and Oscar Tshiebwe grabbed 17 rebounds, leading the Mountaineers.

Two big blocks from New Mexico’s Zane Martin and Corey Manigault in the closing minutes helped the Lobos (15-3, 4-1 Mountain West Conference) secure the victory.

Air Force (8-9, 2-3) got a season-high 26 points and nine boards from Lavalle Scottie.
FRISCO, Texas — Redshirt freshman quarterback Trey Lance ran for 166 yards, with a clutch 44-yard touchdown to start the fourth quarter, and North Dakota State held on to claim its eighth FCS national championship with a 28-20 win over James Madison on Saturday.

James Hendricks had an interception at the goal line in the final seconds for the Bison (16-0), who stretched their FCS-record winning streak to 37 and completed the first 16-win season in any division since Yale in 1894.

After stopping Lance short on a fourth-and-2 at its 36 with 2:51 left, James Madison (14-2) drove to the 3. Hendricks, who earlier had a 20-yard touchdown run on a fake field goal, then picked off the pass by Ben DiNucci.

Lance’s 44-yard score came on a third-and-23 play to open the fourth quarter and put the Bison up 28-13. Riley Stapleton’s 5-yard TD catch with 7 minutes left was his second of the game. He also had two TD catches in the national title game two years ago, when the Bison lost to North Dakota State.

That was a season after they won a semifinal game at the FargoDome and then beat Youngstown State for the title.

The Bison won their eighth FCS championship in nine years, after five NCAA Division II national titles between 1983-90.

While Lance was only 6 of 10 passing for 72 yards, he has now thrown 289 straight completions without an interception for the Bison without ever throwing an interception. He ran a season-high 28 times in the win over James Madison.

Stapleton had a 5-yard TD on the opening drive of the game for the Bison, who radioed the snap, then got it and ran to the end zone.

Big picture

James Madison: The Dukes got off to a stellar 3-0 start, going 86 yards on 17 plays and taking half of the first quarter for their opening drive. That was the only time they threatened.

North Dakota State: The Bison’s eighth appearance in the FCS championship matched the most with Georgia Southern, which won six times. ... The only two DI winning streaks longer than NDSU are Washington (40, from 1908-14) and Oklahoma’s record 48 in a row from 1953-57.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, right front, arrives with the team in New Orleans on Friday ahead of the College Football Playoff championship.

**Matchup**: QB Lawrence should help Clemson keep pace with Burrow, LSU

**FROM BACK PAGE**

The stars of Clemson’s defense are versatile back-seven players such as All-America linebacker Isaac Simmons and strong safety Klawon Wallace, both of whom can play multiple positions, and free safety Tanner Muse.

Mellor said Burrow was the top-graded quarterback in the country this season when facing pressure.

“Pressure doesn’t matter in this game as much as allowing Simmons and Muse to roam the back end freely,” Mellor said.

LSU has five players who can consistently win one-on-one matchups in the passing game with wide receivers Ja’Marr Chase, Justin Jefferson and Terrace Marshall Jr., tight end Thaddeus Moss and running back Clyde Edwards-Helaire. All have more than 40 catches, allowing Burrow to feast on a defense’s weak links.

“They move those guys inside and force your linebackers and safeties to cover,” Fisher said.

In the semifinal against Oklahoma, Chase, an All-American, was locked down by the Sooners. No big deal. Justin Jefferson caught 14 passes and scored four touchdowns, mostly working from the slot.

Burrow’s raw numbers are eye-popping (55 touchdowns and 5,208 yards). LSU’s defense has struggled to contain them, allowing Simmons and Muse to roam the back end. The LSU defensive line is huge, with three 300-pounders usually on the field at once.

“Against that 3-4, it’s hard to get a push inside,” said Fisher, who expects Clemson to run outside of the tackles.

Etienne is maybe the toughest back in the country to take down so getting him out in space is the way to go. Mellor said the junior set a PFF record by forcing missed tackles on 45% of his carries. The previous best was 33% last year by Iowa State’s David Montgomery.

Could it be another busy day on the ground for Lawrence? The quarterback set career highs with 16 carries and 107 yards against Ohio State. He completed a season-low 54.5% against the Buckeyes, but was 3-for-3 on a late 94-yard, go-ahead touchdown drive.

“People get hung up on stats, but it’s about making plays when you really need them and both of these quarterbacks can do that,” Fisher said. “They both have the ‘it’ factor.”

Simmons and strong safety Klavon Wallace.

**Facts & figures**

Clemson is on a 29-game winning streak, including 25-0 with sophomore QB Trevor Lawrence starting. The Tigers could become the 13th team in the history of major college football to win 30 straight games, and just the seventh team to accomplish the feat since 1950. ... Burrow has completed 77.6% of his passes. The NCAA record is 76.7% by Texas’ Colt McCoy in 2008. ... LSU won its last two national championships at the Superdome in New Orleans (2003 vs. Nebraska, 1997 vs. Ohio State), and lost its last title game appearance there to Oklahoma in 2011 season. ... Clemson coach Dabo Swinney could become the 12th coach to win at least three national championships in the AP poll era. ... LSU coach Ed Orgeron is trying to repeat as national champion and become the first team to do that since Alabama in 2011-12. The Tigers were the only win under even more exclusive college football company with a third national title in four years. In the AP poll era (starting in 1936), only Alabama (2009-11-12), Nebraska (1994-95-97) and Notre Dame (1946-47, ’49) accomplished that feat. It would stand the Tigers as a true dynasty.

LSU, the Southeastern Conference champ, is looking for its first national championship since 2007 and fourth overall (2003 BCS, 1998 AP).

**Key matchup**

Clemson LB Isaac Simmons vs. LSU QB Joe Burrow: Linebackers vs. quarterback might make you think Burrow is going to be running the triple-option, but Simmons is a different kind of linebacker. The Butkus Award winner lines up all over the defense run by coordinator Brent Venables. Simmons could be the best way for Clemson to fluster Burrow. Nothing has worked so far this season as the Heisman Trophy winner has thrown for an SEC-record 55 touchdowns and 5,208 yards.

**Players to watch**

Clemson – RB Travis Etienne: On an offense with an array of elite playmakers, Etienne is the best and most versatile weapon. He ran for 1,588 yards and 8.0 per carry. Ohio State found him down on the ground in the semifinal, so only to see him catch three passes for 98 yards and two touchdowns.

 LSU – DE K’Lavon Chaisson: The Tigers had 35 sacks and Chaisson is far and away their best individual pass rusher. Injuries slowed down Chaisson more early this season, but he led the team with 6.5 sacks, including 4.5 the last three games.

**LSU wide receiver Ja’Marr Chase poses during media day on Saturday in New Orleans.**

possible first-round NFL draft pick while freshman Derek Creekling Jr., an All-American, was PFF’s highest-graded corner.

Safety Grant Delpit also grades well in coverage, but his tackling has been spotty. That has improved late after a high ankle sprain healed.

“Avoiding those three (in coverage) is the biggest win for Clemson,” Mellor said.

“People get hung up on stats, but it’s about making plays when you really need them and both of these quarterbacks can do that,” Fisher said. “They both have the ‘it’ factor.”

Simmons and strong safety Klavon Wallace.

**National championship**

No. 1 LSU (14-0) vs. No. 3 Clemson (14-0) 

AFN-Sports 

2:15 a.m. Tuesday CET 

10:15 a.m. Tuesday JKT

Line: LSU by 5.5

**Series record**: LSU-2.1

**What’s at stake**: Clemson, the ACC Coast Conference champion, is trying to repeat as national champion and become the first team to do that since Alabama in 2011-12. The Tigers were the only win under even more exclusive college football company with a third national title in four years. In the AP poll era (starting in 1936), only Alabama (2009-11-12), Nebraska (1994-95-97) and Notre Dame (1946-47, ’49) accomplished that feat. It would stand the Tigers as a true dynasty.

LSU, the Southeastern Conference champ, is looking for its first national championship since 2007 and fourth overall (2003 BCS, 1998 AP).
One solid guarantee: The Tigers will win

By PETE IACOBELLI  Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — No. 1 LSU has been unstoppable this season but the top-ranked team in the nation hasn’t faced Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables this season.

It is a given that in prepping for the College Football championship game Venables spent plenty of long, dizzying nights in his meeting rooms dissecting the heart of LSU’s offense. He has been looking to uncover ways to impede LSU’s offensive juggernaut that’s been led by Heisman Trophy winner Joe Burrow and a bevvy of NFL-ready receivers.

“They do a great job of spreading you out and making you defend every patch of grass on the field,” Venables said Saturday. “I’m so sick of seeing LSU’s playmakers.”

But LSU’s defense has looked remarkable improved in recent high-stakes games against Georgia in the SEC championship and Oklahoma in the CFP semifinal at the Peach Bowl. And that unit gets an additional boost with 2018 co-sack leader Michael Divinity returning fresh for the final.

“Since we knew the national championship was going to be in New Orleans it was a goal of ours to earn the right to be here,” said LSU coach Ed Orgeron, who grew up about 60 miles southwest of New Orleans.

But LSU’s defense should be set to stop the Tigers from South Carolina, too, and at 28 or fewer points, resulting in lopsided victories each time. The unit gets a boost from Divinity, who had three sacks in five games before briefly leaving the team for personal reasons. After he came back, he was held out for previous violations of team rules but is now set to rejoin his unit in the biggest game of the year.

Dome advantage

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney doesn’t hesitate to present the Superdome’s proximity to LSU as another challenge for which Clemson must prepare.

“We’re the only (team) that took a plane here. So yeah, this is definitely a difficult game,” Swinney said. “How cool is that, for them to be able to just hop on a bus and ride up the road. ... It would be like us playing for the national championship in Green-ville (S.C.).”

Clemson QB Trevor Lawrence will have to overcome crowd noise, not to mention a defense that has made life difficult for Georgia’s Jake Fromm and Oklahoma’s Jalen Hurts in its past two outings.

Why LSU will win: Home, dome advantage, improved defense will thwart Clemson

Why Clemson wins: Defensive coordinator Venables will be able to slow LSU, Burrow

By BRETT MARTEL  Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — It would be one thing if all top-ranked LSU could hang its hat on Heisman Trophy winning quarterback Joe Burrow leading what is arguably one of the greatest offenses in the history of college football.

But LSU’s defense has looked remarkably improved in recent high-stakes games against Georgia in the SEC championship and Oklahoma in the CFP semifinal at the Peach Bowl.

One solid guarantee: The Tigers will win.

Clemson head coach Ed Orgeron, left, and Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney pose with the national championship trophy after a news conference Sunday in New Orleans.
Top-ranked LSU and Heisman Trophy winner Joe Burrow head into the national championship game peaking, matching their record-setting offense with a healthy and improving defense.

Clemson has not lost since sophomore quarterback Trevor Lawrence joined the team in 2018. The third-ranked Tigers are looking for their third national title in four seasons and second straight.

With the help of Texas A&M’s Jimbo Fisher, the only coach to face both Clemson and LSU, and Pro Football Focus college analyst Cam Mellor, the matchups that could make the difference Monday night in New Orleans:

**When LSU has the ball:** What can Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables cook up to stop LSU’s hyper-aggressive passing game that often attacks with five receivers?

Clemson is playing a 3-3-5 defensive alignment and using lots of eight-man coverage. Lacking dominant defensive lineman, Venables has needed to be creative to pressure the quarterback.

“Brent’s going to blitz,” Fisher said. “But LSU has been good at either picking it up or Burrow identifying it and getting the ball out quickly. Or he can scramble away from it and keep his eyes downfield. He is so patient.”

**SEE MATCHUP ON PAGE 22**

**Inside:**
- Why Clemson/LSU can win, Page 23
- ND State captures FCS title, Page 22

**Versatile Clemson defense squares off against LSU’s aggressive pass attack**

**By Ralph D. Russo**
Associated Press