Judiciary panel debates Trump impeachment; vote approaches

By Mary Clare Jalonick and Lisa Mascaro
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Judiciary Committee argued through a marathon session Thursday ahead of voting on articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump, the latest big step as the politically split panel prepares to send the charges to the full House.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi sounded confident Democrats will have the votes to impeach the president next week but said it is up to individual lawmakers to weigh the evidence and decide for themselves. Republicans seem unwavering in their opposition to expelling Trump.

“The fact is we take an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States,” Pelosi told reporters. “No one is above the law; the president will be held accountable for his abuse of power and his obstruction of Congress.”

Trump, apparently watching the live proceedings on television, tweeted his criticism of two Democratic women on the panel, Reps. Veronica Escobar and Sheila Jackson Lee, both of Texas. He called their comments about his actions inaccurate.

SEE JUDICIARY ON PAGE 11

VETERANS

A Vietnam veteran’s 10-year quest to bring his soldier home

By Wyatt Olson
Stars and Stripes

Pushing through dense foliage toward the site of the bygone ambush, Michael McDonald-Low felt like he was floating through time.

He had longed for this day, planning thoroughly for the time he would return to this hillside in Vietnam’s Que Son Valley where many of his infantry company were wounded or killed by a hail of North Vietnamese gunfire on May 11, 1968. The body of one of those soldiers in the platoon he commanded, Spc. Clifford Van Artsdalen, had never been recovered.

That fateful trek was etched like a gravestone inscription in his mind as he retraced his steps during this mission on March 9, 2012, to pinpoint the exact location of Van Artsdalen’s death so that his remains could be found and repatriated home.

He pressed on to find the split in the trail where he had sent Van Artsdalen and two other soldiers ahead to secure the route. Soon after finding it, McDonald-Low was joined by the other 11 members of the mission team from the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the U.S. Defense Department body tasked at that time with finding America’s lost warfighters.

McDonald-Low was confident that this was the exact location where Van Artsdalen was killed, he told Stars and Stripes during a series of interviews about his search. With the location pinpointed — the government for years had been working with an erroneous place and date of his death — the way was finally clear to find and repatriate the soldier’s remains.

Seven years later, nothing has changed. McDonald-Low’s quest to bring him home is no further along than it was then. And there is little time left.

SEE UNACCOUNTABLE ON PAGE 8
Baltimore — A commercial real estate developer is handing out a total of $10 million in bonuses to its 198 employees.

News radio station WTOP reported Monday that Baltimore-based St. John Properties announced the bonuses at the company’s holiday party.

Edward St. John, the founder and chairman of the company, said the amount of money that each employee gets is based on tenure. The average bonus was $50,000, but some employees will get upward of $250,000.

One man, a maintenance technician who started at the company in 1981, received more than $200,000.

“I was in shock,” Stanley Ches, the technician, told the “Today” show. “I’m still in shock. Everybody was shaking me down and giving me hugs.”

The company has employees throughout Maryland and northern Virginia. The bonuses celebrate the company’s achievement of developing 20 million square feet of office space, retail and warehouses. That real estate is spread out over eight states.

Edward St. John said that he is “thankful for every one of our employees for their hard work and dedication. I couldn’t think of a better way to show it.”

The company was founded in 1971. It has retail and warehouse space in Maryland, Virginia, Colorado, Louisiana, Nevada, Pennsylvania, Utah and Wisconsin.
US troops clean up after Bagram attack

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — A pair of Taliban bombs detonated by suicide attackers at a nearby hospital shattered windows and damaged buildings at Bagram Airfield, spurring cleanup efforts after Wednesday's failed attempt by the insurgents to breach the base.

Pictures released by the Air Force on Thursday showed airmen walking through dust and debris as they repaired parts of the passenger terminal, one of the base's busiest locations. Airmen cleared away broken metal and ceiling tiles during cleanup operations elsewhere on base Wednesday and Thursday.

The attack began at 6 a.m. Wednesday, when Taliban suicide bombers blasted the under-construction hospital in a bid to storm the base. The blasts destroyed several houses outside the base and left at least two Afghan civilians dead and 80 injured, Afghan officials said.

The hospital, which was being rebuilt for use by locals, is on the boundary line of the base and has a gate leading into it, said Mohammad Mahfouz Alizada, Parwan's police chief.

Sporadic shooting continued throughout the day as some armed fighters hid within the medical facility, leading one engineer to pause and chamber a round in his pistol upon hearing nearby gunfire, the caption of an Air Force photo said.

Five service members from the nation of Georgia received minor injuries during the assault, the Georgian Defense Ministry said in a statement.

The insurgents never entered the base, and the daylong fight ended with a series of U.S. air-strikes killing the holdout attackers, NATO officials said.

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Air Force airmen from the 405th Expeditionary Support Squadron remove damaged metal and ceiling tiles Thursday in the passenger terminal the day after a Taliban attack near Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan.

Air Force airmen clear debris from Bagram's passenger terminal.

DOD keeps Afghan food supplier despite fraud charges

BY AARON GREGG
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department is putting its primary supplier of food and water for troops in Afghanistan to continue doing business with the U.S. military even though fraud charges against three former executives resulted in a $45 million settlement.

Dubai-based logistics company Anham is at least the third supplier to be involved in massive fraud allegations for the Defense Logistics Agency's primary Afghan troop supply contract. Anham's former Virginia-based subsidiary, Unitrans International, agreed to pay the settlement last week to resolve federal criminal and civil complaints of obstruction and making false claims.

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The settlement highlights how the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan, which has stretched for nearly two decades and cost taxpayers at least $1 trillion, has consistently created opportunities for fraud.

Three executives associated with Anham, including longtime chief executive Abul Huda Farouki, were indicted by the Justice Department last year. They were accused of setting up a fake construction scene to overstate progress on a warehouse, jacking up prices for basic items sold to deployed military units and illegally shipping products through Iran.

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In January, Anham was suspended in relation to the fraud charges and barred from applying for any future opportunities with the U.S. government. However, the suspension was soon lifted because the Defense Logistics Agency entered into an “administrative agreement” that allowed the company to continue its work, providing food and water to 13,000 troops stationed in Afghanistan.

In a lengthy statement on its website, Anham said it has agreed to “review and continue to strengthen” its internal compliance programs and cooperate with future investigations.

The settlement is the latest example of a private company using the war in Afghanistan to earn excessive profits at U.S. taxpayers' expense. The supplier before Anham, a Swiss company called Supreme Foodservice GmbH, pleaded guilty to similar charges and paid $288 million in criminal fines. The supplier before that, a Kuwaiti company called Agility Public Warehousing, spent $95 million to resolve civil fraud charges of its own.
Australia’s $715M in upgrades will benefit US ships

By Seth Robson
Stars and Stripes

Upgrades worth $715 million to naval facilities in Australia’s Northern Territory will mean more support for visiting U.S. warships, according to an Australian defense expert.

The improvements are being made to an Australian naval base, HMAS Coonawarra, and the Larrikeyah Defence Precinct in Darwin, the Australian Department of Defence said in a Dec. 11 email.

The enhancements are designed to support new Australian vessels used for border protection, but they will also be useful for visiting Navy ships, former Australian Assistant Defence Secretary Ross Babbage said Wednesday in a telephone interview.

A number of American warships have called on Darwin this year, including the destroyer USS Stockdale, the mine countermeasures ship USS Patriot and the submarine tender USS Emory S. Land, U.S. 7th Fleet news releases show.

The port has been a focus of a rebalance of U.S. military forces to the Pacific, begun under the Obama administration and seen as part of China’s rapidly growing military. The Marine Corps, which deployed a rotational force there for the first time in 2012, sent an air-ground task force of 2,500 Marines to Darwin for six months this past summer. Air bases in the Northern Territory are also being upgraded. At the Royal Australian Air Force base at Darwin, for example, $88 million in projects have been awarded to build fuel tanks, expand the airfield and erect maintenance facilities. Upgrades at nearby Tindal air base are also planned.

Australia’s Defence Department, in an earlier email, said the naval upgrades at Darwin include $272 million for a new outer wharf to support major surface combatant ships, with associated fuel storage and refueling facilities by 2023.

Upgrades of the inner harbor at Coonawarra will support the home-porting of six out of 12 new Araflra-class offshore patrol vessels being introduced into the Royal Australian Navy over the next decade, the department said.

“Around $220 million of proposed works includes dredging the inner basin, upgrades to the existing wharves to accommodate the significantly larger new vessels,” the department said.

The funding will also pay for logistics, maintenance and other work areas, with construction due for completion by mid-2026. Another $223 million will upgrade infrastructure at the Larrikeyah Defence Precinct to support growth for the next 25 years, the department said.

“Beyond these projects, there are no plans for further investment in new naval basing capabilities in the Northern Territory,” the department said.

However, Babbage predicted there will be ongoing development of naval facilities in the Northern Territory.

“The details are still being sorted out, but you will see quite a bit more in the next three to four years,” he said.
The president’s daughter and adviser Ivanka Trump has made pushing for paid family leave a central part of her formal duties at the White House.

The Republican-led Senate’s version of the bill didn’t include a provision on paid parental leave for federal workers. The provision grew out of legislation led by Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-N.Y., chairwoman of the House Oversight Committee, which was then tucked onto the House version of the defense policy bill. Democratic lawmakers then fought for its inclusion in the compromise version of the defense policy bill with the Senate.

The bill would authorize a 3.1% pay raise for service members and would repeal what’s known as the “widow’s tax,” or regulations that penalize military spouses collecting benefits from the government owing to the death of their partner. It also authorizes sanctions aimed at pipe-laying ships involved in Russia’s construction of a new gas pipeline to Europe under the Baltic Sea.

Questions about whether Congress will agree to “backfill” $3.6 billion the Trump administration took from the Pentagon budget for disaster recovery on military installations.

The bill expresses a “sense of Congress” that supports the people of Hong Kong in defending their rights and autonomy against China. It would authorize another $4.5 billion to continue long-running U.S. efforts to build up Afghanistan’s national security forces in their fight against the Taliban, even though U.S. officials described that effort in confidential government interviews released this week by The Washington Post as a long-running calamity.

The legislation also would give the secretary of defense the power to pay personal injury or death claims by service members owing to medical malpractice at military facilities — but stops short of repealing a judicial precedent known as the Feres doctrine that has long prevented active-duty personnel injured during military service from suing the government.

Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, rejected criticism from within his own party that the Democrats gave up too much during the negotiations and noted that the bill brings paid family leave to millions of federal workers and repeals the “widow’s tax,” two measures he said Republican lawmakers fought during the talks.

He called the legislation the “most progressive defense bill we have passed in decades.”

Still, Democratic lawmakers had included many provisions in the House version of the bill that didn’t make it into the compromise legislation.

Among them were Democratic initiatives to overturn restrictions on transgender troops serving in the military, prohibit the deployment of new low-yield nuclear weapons, restrict Trump from waging war against Iran without congressional sign-off, and end the Pentagon’s backing for Saudi Arabia’s war against Houthi rebels in Yemen.

Some lawmakers also had hoped to see more extensive requirements for the Pentagon to deal with polyfluoroalkyl, or PFAS, contamination of ground water and drinking water on military installations. The bill would phase out the use of PFAS, a group of man-made chemicals, in firefighting foams. The Pentagon is still conducting a health impact study on the chemicals.
DOD watchdog probes contract for border wall

By Colleen Long
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department’s internal watchdog is investigating a $400 million border wall contract awarded to a firm that used multiple appearances on Fox News to push for the job.

The Pentagon’s inspector general sent a letter Thursday to the House Homeland Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson telling him the contract awarded to North Dakota-based firm Fisher Sand and Gravel Co. would be audited. Thompson, D-Miss., asked for the review last week, in part over concerns the proposals did not meet operational requirements and prototypes came in late and over budget.

Tommy Fisher, the head of the family business, said Thursday there would be “nothing to find” in an audit.

“We were told we were the lowest price and the best value,” he said. “We look forward to working with the Army Corps of Engineers.”

The border wall is one of President Donald Trump’s top priorities. He campaigned on a promise to build a “big beautiful wall” between the U.S. and Mexico, said Mexico would pay for it, and promised to build 450 miles by the end of 2020.

Trump’s effort to push through funding, using money from the Pentagon after Congress refused to fund the wall, has been met with resistance and lawsuits. A federal judge this week blocked the administration from spending money on the barrier.

Fisher had made a number of appearances on Trump’s favorite cable news channel — Fox News — talking about his desire to win a contract. His firm, though, has little experience with such construction and a previous proposal was rejected.

Fisher said his company could do the work for $13 million a mile. He said the next closest bid was $20 million a mile.

A letter from the Army Corps when Fisher was awarded the contract said the company’s proposal was both technically acceptable and the best priced.

Two administration officials familiar with the matter told The Associated Press this year that Trump aggressively pushed the Fisher firm’s bid with the heads of Homeland Security and the Army Corps of Engineers, which manages wall contracts. The interference in federal contracting by a president concerned some, as overseeing the process but, the officials said, Trump insisted Fisher could get the wall up faster and cheaper than other bidders.

Thompson had said one of his concerns was that officials from Homeland Security, the department managing border security, had toured a private barrier built by the company shortly before the contract was awarded.

The Pentagon watchdog said it was assessing how to complete the audit and would formally announce it soon.

Thompson said he was pleased.

“The company had never been awarded a construction contract before and their wall prototype was late and over budget,” he said in a statement. “Given the President’s multiple endorsements of this company and the amount of taxpayer money at stake, I remain concerned about the possibility of inappropriate influence on the Army Corps’ contracting decision.”

US soldiers, Santa collect gifts for kids after march at Grafenwoehr

By Immanuel Johnson
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — American soldiers marched 3 miles from the drop zone at Grafenwoehr Training Area to Tower Barracks on Thursday carrying assault packs filled with toys to be delivered to local children in need.

“This is about giving back to the kids and community, and building those bonds with the surrounding areas,” said Staff Sgt. Peyton Baker, a target acquisition platoon sergeant with the 4th Battalion, 319th Field Artillery Regiment, who was dressed up as Santa Claus.

American children who also took part in the march received goodie bags containing candy and small toys. Some 600 additional toys, backpacks and school supplies that were collected were wrapped up and will be distributed to children at the Haus St. Elisabeth children’s home in Windischschelben and to American military families who are financially strapped over the holidays.

This is the first year the regiment has distributed toys to local children.

“It’s a small way to … be good neighbors,” said Capt. Mike Kayle, chaplain for the regiment. German paratroopers who attended the event were supposed to parachute from CH-47 Chinook helicopters to deliver the gifts, but inclement weather caused the jump to be canceled.

Maj. Jason Byers, the chaplain with the 41st Field Artillery Brigade, carries his son, Lincoln, to the end of a march at Grafenwoehr, Germany, on Thursday.

Soldiers march in a toy delivery event at Grafenwoehr. The soldiers will provide toys to children living at Haus St. Elisabeth in Windischschelben, Germany.

Fire hits Russia’s only aircraft carrier

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russia’s only aircraft carrier suffered a massive fire Thursday that killed one crew member, injured another 11 people and significantly damaged the ill-fated ship that has been haunted by incidents throughout its service.

The fire on the Admiral Kuznetsov broke out during welding work at a shipyard in the Arctic port of Murmansk and spread quickly through the carrier’s internal compartments. The ship’s crew and emergency teams spent the day battling the blaze. The Defense Ministry said the fire was localized.

The military said one crew member died while battling the fire and another one is missing. Authorities in Murmansk said 11 people were injured and 10 of them were hospitalized in intensive care.

The Admiral Kuznetsov has been plagued by breakdowns and setbacks since its launch in 1985. In October 2018, A 78-ton crane crashed onto its deck when a mammoth floating dock holding the ship sank. The crane left a 215-square-foot hole, and the loss of the dock significantly slowed repairs on the carrier since the navy lacked another of comparable size.

Thursday’s fire will delay work to fit the ship with modern control systems and new weapons.

With its turbines belching black smoke, the Admiral Kuznetsov looks outdated compared with the nuclear-powered carriers of the United States. However, the Kremlin has used it to project military might far from Russia’s shores.

Smoke billows from the Admiral Kuznetsov carrier during a fire in Murmansk, Russia, on Thursday.
Troxell leaves GIs with call to know all conflict arenas

By Chad Garland
Stars and Stripes

America’s future enlisted leaders will need to couple the ability to bring violence to bear on the country’s enemies with a range of new skills, such as diplomacy and countering disinformation campaigns, the Pentagon’s outgoing top enlisted adviser said.

The forces of the future will have to maintain a “shoot ‘em in the face, beat ‘em to death with an entrenching tool attitude,” Command Sgt. Maj. John Wayne Troxell said in a wide-ranging interview with Stars and Stripes earlier this year. “But we also have to be savvy enough to understand all-domain conflict, especially when it comes to cyber, information operations and things like that.”

The third senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Troxell retires Friday after nearly 38 years in the Army, including four years advising the chairman and the defense secretary on issues that affect the enlisted force.

His comments echo remarks he made in Iraq and Afghanistan two years ago during a USO tour, in which he said Islamic State fighters faced the choice to surrender, or to remain, "We try to make this as real as possible for them," said Sgt. 1st Class James Deese, a digital master gunner with the 2nd Cavalry. Soldiers need to be aware of how many rounds they fire, with the assumption that they’re being tracked by the enemy, Deese said.

“The more we shoot, the more they can pinpoint where we are,” Deese said. “Once six rounds are fired, the radar knows where we are — we move the platoon after that.”

By Immanuel Johnson
Stars and Stripes

GRAFENWOEHR, Germany — The blasts of howitzers rang across the snow-covered landscape of Vilseck as soldiers from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment’s Bulldog Battery learned how to fire and move during a qualification exercise Thursday.

“We try to make this as real as possible for them,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ramon Colon-Lopez, his successor, asked Pentagon reporters Monday. “The answer is pretty simple: We can never do enough for our troops compared to what they do for us.”

Sgt. 1st Class Rocky Johnson, left, communicates with a command center before the 2nd Cavalry Regiment conducts a live-fire exercise in Vilseck, Germany, on Thursday.

2nd Cavalry’s Bulldog Battery learns how to fire, then avoid being tracked

The basic qualification allows platoons to continue on to advanced training, said 1st Lt. Jack Baisley, a squadron adjutant with the Field Artillery Squadron.

With temperatures below freezing, the exercise also gave the soldiers, some of whom will deploy to Poland at the end of January, a feel for the weather expected there.

DANIELLE O’DONNELL/U.S. Army

Command Sgt. Maj. John Wayne Troxell, senior enlisted adviser to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, shows the memento presented to him during his last visit to the NCO Leadership Center of Excellence in El Paso, Texas, last month. Troxell retires Friday.
**Unaccountable: US still pursuing cases of more than 1,100 MIA from Vietnam War**

### The toughest cases

Clifford Van Artsdalen represents one of the toughest types of cases to resolve in the search for the still-missing 1,600 soldiers, Marines, airmen and sailors from the Vietnam War: ground losses.

The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency, the body now overseeing the U.S. government’s effort to repatriate the country’s missing troops, is still actively pursuing the cases of 1,102 service members missing from the Vietnam War.

Van Artsdalen is one of the 257 lost infantrymen and Marines not associated with large metal objects such as helicopters and airplanes. The enemy often stripped the American dead bare of even their metal dog tags before a hasty burial.

Progress in retrieving these ground losses has been alarmingly slow, with the DPAA identifying only seven such cases since the beginning of 2015. At such a rate, it would take almost two centuries to recover them.

Many of the remains rest in the harsh, acidic jungle soil of Southeast Asia, dissolving over the last 50 years since the U.S. ended combat operations there in 1973.

“Time is not our ally,” Rear Adm. Jon Kreitz, then DPAA deputy director, said in June at the annual conference of the National League of POW/MIA Families.

“One of the biggest reasons when it comes to the Vietnam War is because remains are degrading at a very fast rate. It makes identifying individuals from their remains more challenging all the time,” Kreitz said.

McDonald-Low’s efforts on the Van Artsdalen case illustrate many of the obstacles that have stood — indeed, still stand — in the way of DPAA recovering ground troops still missing in action, or MIA.

For the past decade, the decorated Vietnam War veteran has shepherded Van Artsdalen’s case through the government bureaucracy, tracked down and interviewed eyewitness veterans, dug up official after-action reports and pushed back on erroneous assumptions and information held within the official case file.

“The grim reality is that there’s no sense of urgency or priority at DPAA to recover the remaining unaccounted-for soldiers of the Vietnam War, although they are keenly aware that the window for their recovery is rapidly closing,” said McDonald-Low, who lives in Portland, Ore.

The DPAA said in a written response to Stars and Stripes that the Vietnam War missing are its “primary operational priority” and that it is increasing the pace and scope of operations, spending, for example, more than $50 million in the last two years in investigative and excavation missions in Southeast Asia.

### The boyish-faced grenadier

First Lt. Michael McDonald-Low arrived by ship to Vietnam for his first combat tour in December 1967 after graduating two years earlier from Officer Candidate School in Fort Knox, Ky., and then training in Hawaii.

Within a couple of months, his company was patrolling South Vietnam’s countryside on search and destroy missions for 10 to 12 days at a time, he said.

Among the men in his platoon was Clifford Van Artsdalen, an 18-year-old boyish-faced grenadier who stood barely 5 feet tall.

Growing up, “Cliffy” had a passion for baseball, said Garth Garges, a boyhood friend, now 70, who still lives in the tiny town of Perkasie, Pa., where they both grew up. During summers in their early teens, the pair played sandlot baseball almost every day, he said.

“He didn’t have a mean bone in his body,” Garges said. “He always had some funny little quip.”

He lost track of him after Van Artsdalen dropped out of high school during the 11th grade. The two had talked frequently about the Vietnam War, and neither had any desire to go fight it, Garges said.

But Van Artsdalen found himself in the thick of it as an infantryman in Vietnam, where danger and death lurked everywhere, from sprayed ankles, jungle rot and diseases to firefightics big and small with the enemy.

He was among hundreds of soldiers killed or wounded in Que Son Valley, about 30 miles southwest of Da Nang, in the early part of May 1968, when the North Vietnamese Army launched attacks marking the start of their second Tet Offensive.

On May 5, McDonald-Low’s Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, 11th Light Infantry Brigade was chopped into a valley below Landing Zone Center, a hilltop U.S. firebase. Together with Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, 198th Light Infantry Brigade, the soldiers swept through the nearby hillsides where two U.S. helicopters had been shot down.

McDonald-Low led his men on assaults over five days on the top of Hill 352, a North Vietnamese Army stronghold, each time being driven back, each time dragging the dead and wounded down the slope to where they could be treated or evacuated.

After days of intense battle, Delta Company was badly depleted of men and rest, and on May 11 they were ordered to leave Hill 352 and make haste to Landing Zone Center for refitting and replenishment.

McDonald-Low was tasked with leading the company from Hill 352 across the valley and up the roughly 1,200 feet to LZ Center.

When McDonald-Low reached a split in the trail on a nearby summit, with one path leading up to LZ Center, the other heading down into the next valley, he sent Van Artsdalen and two other men up trail 30 yards and three men down trail the same distance to secure each location.

It was the simple kind of command he’d given countless times in recent months, but the moment was locked in his memory.

“As some guys just stick out in your mind,” McDonald-Low said of the many men who died under his command. “I remember looking at Van Artsdalen and sending him up that trail. I’ll never forget it.”

Van Artsdalen and two other soldiers were ambushed and killed moments later.

The date of Van Artsdalen’s death remains seared into McDonald-Low’s memory because that same day, May 11, 1968, he was wounded in the head, right shoulder and arm and evacuated for weeks of hospital recovery.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9
Two months later he returned to the battlefield as a newly minted captain in command of Delta Company.

Leaving Vietnam behind

McDonald-Low left the Army when his four-year stint was up in July 1969, taking with him a Combat Infantryman’s Badge, Bronze Star with “V” device for valor, Bronze Star for Meritorious Service and Purple Heart with two Oak Leaf Clusters. “I left Vietnam behind me,” he said. “I put it in the back of my mind for many, many years. Never admitted I was a Vietnam vet.” He said he never forgot the bedlam, uncertainty and loss he experienced in infantry combat; it flooded through nightmares and mood swings.

An extreme-sports enthusiast, he made a career out of writing and publishing magazines on windsurfing, snowboarding and wakeboarding as he raised a family. When he retired in early 2009, he began for the first time reflecting in depth about the Vietnam War experiences he had pushed into a dark corner. He found the website for his old unit, the 11th Light Infantry Brigade, which listed those in the unit who died. He was stunned when he reached the entry about Van Artsdalen. He was listed as missing in action, body never recovered. He had no idea that one of his soldiers remained unfound in Vietnam.

The website listed Van Artsdalen’s death on the wrong date — two days before McDonald-Low had looked the soldier in the eye and sent him up the trail — and in the wrong location.

He said he was aghast to learn that the Hawaii-based Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, or JPAC, was using the same flawed data even sending search teams several times to the wrong location in Vietnam.

The information JPAC and its sister agency, the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office on the East Coast, had on Van Artsdalen’s death was largely based on statements made by Capt. Charles Seketa, Delta’s company commander, during a board of inquiry May 20, 1968 — nine days after the deadly battle near Landing Zone Center. After discovering Van Artsdalen was still missing, McDonald-Low tracked down Seketa and met with him in the summer of 2009, about six months before he died.

“He was very cordial, and we sat down with a map,” McDonald-Low said. “But Chuck couldn’t read a map if his life depended on it. He admitted to me, ‘You know, you couldn’t really rely on me for those kinds of things.’”

“In the board of inquiry, all he was trying to do was put names to dates, nine days after he’d lost some 45 men,” McDonald-Low said. “For a company commander to do that even with as few men as we had left would be very difficult to do under the best of circumstances.”

In June 2010, McDonald-Low provided JPAC with a map showing the exact location where Van Artsdalen died.

Three months later he received an email from a JPAC analyst telling him that Seketa’s information “is obviously incorrect,” and invited McDonald-Low to head the next investigative field team to the location just below LZ Center.

Under JPAC protocol, no excavation was done during that investigatory field mission in March 2012. McDonald-Low said the mission’s forensic anthropologist, Eliot Moore, indicated that the most likely spot the North Vietnamese would have buried Van Artsdalen was in a nearby small gully covered with dense overbrush and that there was a 10-year window to retrieve bones before the acidic soil dissolved them.

“Research has shown that remains can be lost within 10 years in very acidic soils,” Moore, who retired from JPAC in 2015, told Stars and Stripes in an email. In less acidic soils they may last “up to 40 years plus,” he said.

Fog of war

Two years after standing on that Vietnamese trail with Moore, McDonald-Low had grown frustrated that no excavation mission had gone to the site. In May 2014, he was contacted by Alisa Stack, a senior Defense Department civilian heading the Personnel Accounting Consolidation Task Force, or PACT, which had been formed by Defense Department Secretary Chuck Hagel to oversee the overhaul of the department’s accounting after a series of scandals. She invited McDonald-Low’s feedback on the agency’s performance.

In an email, he complained about the slow progress in finding his soldier, whom JPAC had officially designated MIA 1165. “I wasn’t in a fog of war,” he said. “I knew the exact map coordinates. I provided precise information on where he was killed or buried.”

McDonald-Low dismisses that characterization.

“I wasn’t in a fog of war,” he said. “I knew the exact map coordinates. I provided precise information on where he was killed.”

Illogical conclusions

Stack invited McDonald-Low to become a member of the PACT task force, and he was sent to Hawaii for a week to assess JPAC’s operations and procedures.

It was during these interviews that the chasm between JPAC in Hawaii and DPMO on the East Coast became clear: “There was not just miscommunication, but also a self-serving willingness to guard information — an unwillingness to share, which was affecting their ability to work as a team and accomplish the mission,” he said.

In 1968 there were few villagers who dared travel near LZ Center in the remote, mountainous, hostile area of the Que Son Valley where 1165 was killed. The chance of any villager being alive after 44 years, let alone remembering a single U.S. soldier killed there when there were hundreds lost in that same area is virtually zero.

DPAA spokesman Lt. Col. Kenneth Hoffman, in a written response to a query by Stars and Stripes, said the agency routinely takes U.S. and foreign veterans and civilians back to battlefields to help locate burial sites.

“Many of these individuals, to include Mr. McDonald-Low, were not able to confirm precise locations based on their recollection of events that occurred decades ago in the fog of war,” Hoffman said. “Mr. McDonald-Low was able to point out the general area where he last saw SP4 Van Artsdalen but could provide no information on where he was killed or buried.”

“I wasn’t in a fog of war,” he said. “I knew the exact map coordinates. I provided precise information on where he was killed.”

Read our series of features that add context and understanding to the history of the Vietnam War

stripes.com/vietnam50

SYMILATION
Uncountable: Vietnam vet feels frustration, sense of urgency

FROM PAGE 9

In his final report, McDonald-Low wrote that burden-of-proof protocols for infantry ground-loss cases, like Van Artsdalen’s, should be changed to improve the chances for success in these “toughest remaining cases.”

A few months later, in August 2014, McDonald-Low was appointed as the first-ever Southeast Asian veteran liaison for JPAC/DPMO. He underwent a background security check, was issued an official Defense Department ID card and worked as an unpaid contractor reviewing unresolved ground-loss cases. As he worked the cases, it became clear to him that many JPAC investigators were unfamiliar with basic Vietnam War-era infantry combat tactics and weapons, as well as the types of wounds and damage they could inflict, he said.

“In one case, an investigator said a soldier had an 81-mm mortar land at his feet, and his body was vaporized,” he said. “Hence, there was no further remains we could identify and recover, as had been reported by the soldiers on the ground.

“It’s impossible for a human being to be disintegrated by that mortar size,” he said. He saw that ignorance surface in Van Artsdalen’s case, which he reviewed in early 2015. In it, a JPAC analyst speculated on the possibility Van Artsdalen was “wounded and perhaps left the immediate vicinity of the battle.” That notion entirely ignored after-action reports McDonald-Low had been reviewing.

Those reports detail a search for the bodies up the trail about three hours after the initial firefight. They received the bodies of two but could not recover the third body they saw, Van Artsdalen, because of subsequent heavy enemy fire.

“For the JPAC case analyst to imply that 1165 lay at that location for three hours until [Alpha Company] arrived and then [he] departed after their firefight is illogical,” he wrote.

Waning casework

By the end of 2016, he said the flow of cases from the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency had dried to a trickle. His numerous inquiries about cases he had worked on and requests for new cases went unanswered.

As someone who speaks his mind, he is an irritant who may have rubbed somebody the wrong way. “Certainly I’m an abrasive personality,” he said. If he judged something in an analyst’s report to be “ridiculous,” he did not hesitate to point it out, he said.

But he also suspects he might have ruffled feathers with a book he self-published in 2016, titled “Uncounted,” which chronicled the battle that led to Van Artsdalen’s death and the mission McDonald-Low led in Vietnam in 2012.

“I wrote it for 1165 and myself,” he said of the book, which depicted the government accounting effort in a generally positive light. “I wanted to memorialize his service, his loss and my experience going through it.”

To this day, he does not know why the casework ended.

“I only had one goal, which was to be honest and give them my opinion based on my knowledge and experience,” he said. “I had no ax to grind. I just wanted to see the mission fulfilled, streamlined and improved.”

His official credentials giving him access to certain DPAA databases ended in November 2017. The leash left him ever more removed from the Van Artsdalen case.

Frustrated, he wrote a lengthy letter in early 2018 to President Donald Trump, which he copied and distributed to veterans’ groups and members of the media. In it, he highlighted the shortcomings in the DPAA’s procedures for locating and excavating remains for ground-loss cases such as Van Artsdalen.

Months later, in September 2018, he finally received a letter from DPAA Director Kelly McKeague, who wrote that he was responding on behalf of the president.

McDonald-Low was familiar with the director because McKeague’s professional involvement with the MIA accounting effort mirrored his own.

As an Air Force major general, McKeague took command of JPAC at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, in 2012, the same year McDonald-Low led the mission to Vietnam. McKeague became Van Artsdalen’s first deputy director when it was created in 2015. He became its director in 2017 after retiring from active duty.

‘With rigor and urgency’

McKeague touted DPAA’s new review and evaluation processes which now includes writing an overall case narrative — as a means of speeding approvals of investigation and excavation field missions.

He concluded, “The pledge that I make to families of the missing and veterans whose comrades-in-arms are unaccounted-for is that DPAA will diligently and dutifully pursue this noble humanitarian effort, and sanctioned obligation, with rigor and urgency, employing best practices as well as embracing new methodologies.”

While the letter addressed some of McDonald-Low’s general concerns about DPAA, it did nothing to advance Van Artsdalen’s case. Although sidelined from official access to DPAA databases, McDonald-Low continued to work the case on his own.

In October 2018, he tracked down and interviewed a radio operator who was among a group of soldiers from Alpha Company, 1-6 Infantry, sent out on May 16, 1968, to recover the body of a different soldier left on the trail leading to Landing Zone Center. That was five days after Van Artsdalen was killed.

His recollections provided clarification over reports by searchers that had confused sightings of the body of another soldier as being that of Van Artsdalen.

Confident that the new statement would move the case forward, McDonald-Low submitted an updated report to the DPAA in November 2018. In the following months he queried the agency about the status of the updated report with the radio operator’s information but received no reply.

The radio operator died Feb. 2, 2019. No DPAA interview was ever done.

“So the man who gave me this new information died before DPAA even bothered to interview him and verify what I put in that report,” he said. “They dragged their feet.”

Still lost

With a heightened sense of urgency in the wake of the death, McDonald-Low wrote to the DPAA a few days later requesting to review Van Artsdalen’s case narrative, if one had been written.

About two weeks later, he received a reply from Navy Cmdr. Jason Menarchik, chief of a sub-regional team at the DPAA’s Hawaii lab, which said the agency was conducting an “in-depth review of your report.”

“To clarify,” concluded the short email sent Feb. 27, “since you are not the Primary Next of Kin for SP4 Van Artsdalen, nor have on-record any authorization, we cannot provide sensitive details on this particular case, such as the Case Narrative, that you requested at this time.”

McDonald-Low said he still seethes over the denial. He had spent the last decade collecting official after-action reports and tracking down veterans with eyewitness accounts. He led an accounting agency mission to Vietnam in 2012 to verify the exact location where Van Artsdalen had died — after JPAC had sent missions to Vietnam numerous times to the wrong place, costing hundreds of thousands of dollars.

To be so casually dismissed from the case he’d built and shepherded — in the death of a soldier he led and fought beside — epitomizes all he finds self-defeating within the Defense Department’s MIA accounting effort.

“The bottom line is that Van Artsdalen represents every other poor, forgotten soul — particularly infantrymen and Marines — still lost from the war,” he said.

McDonald-Low’s entreaties to DPAA officials, including McKeague, have gone unanswered.

A request by Stars and Stripes to interview McKeague was not granted.

McDonald-Low talks often about the letter McKeague sent him a year ago — and the vow he made in it to pursue cases with “rigor and urgency.”

“I am still waiting to see Director McKeague’s promises fulfilled for the many MIAs remaining unaccounted,” McDonald-Low said. “I am deeply worried about when the last Vietnam veteran died — the last man to see a soldier alive, a man like me who gave him an order to go up that trail — who will be left to carry on the mission?”

Twitter: @WyattWOlson
NATION

Judiciary: Clashes between Republicans, Democrats mark Trump impeachment hearing

FROM FRONT PAGE

“Very sad,” Trump tweeted. As the hearing began, lawmakers dug in for the second day of the Judiciary session, only the fourth time in U.S. history a president is facing impeachment, to consider the two articles brought by House Democrats. Trump with abuse of power for asking Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden while withholding aid as leverage and with obstruction of Congress for stonewalling the House’s investigation.

Chairman Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., immediately asked for a full reading of the nine-page resolution aireding the two articles of impeachment against the president for the live TV cameras. It was expected to be a long day of fights over amendment, primarily by Republicans trying to stop the impeachment. They were likely to be rejected by Democrats along party lines.

The top Republican, Rep. Doug Collins, of Georgia, called the proceedings a “farcical” and said they should be halted until his side was provided a chance for its own hearing. The request was denied, with the chairman saying the process was in line with the impeachment hearings of Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton.

First up was an amendment from GOP Rep. Jim Jordan, of Ohio, who tried to write the first charge against Trump. “This amendment strikes article 1 because article 1 ignores the truth,” Jordan said.


One Democrat, Rep. Val Demings, of Florida, told the panel that, as a descendant of slaves and now a member of Congress, she has faith in America because it is the “government of the people” and in this country “nobody is above the law.” Freshman Democratic Rep. Lucy McBath, of Georgia, emotional talked about losing her son to gun violence and said that while impeachment was not why she came to Washington, she wants to “fight for an America that Tony Jordan would be proud of.”

But Rep. Jordan insisted Democ- rats were impeaching because “they don’t like us,” and he read out a long list claiming Trump’s accomplishments.

For all the debate, the articles weren’t likely to be changed. Democrats were unlikely to accept any amendments proposed by Republicans unified against Trump’s impeachment.

Democrats are also unified. They have agreed to the articles’ language, which says that Trump acted “corruptly” and “betrayed the nation.” Hamstrung in the minority, Republicans wouldn’t have the votes to make changes without support from at least some Democrats.

Nadler said the committee should consider whether the evidence shows that Trump committed the acts he’s accused of, whether they rise to the level of impeachable high crimes and misdemeanors and what the consequences will be if Congress fails to act.

“When his time has passed, when his grip on our politics is as surely it will, to calmer times and stronger leadership, history will look back on our actions here today,” Nadler said. “How would you be remembered?”

Republicans are also mess- ing with the American people — and to Trump himself — as they argue that the articles show Democrats are out to get the pres- ident. Most Republicans contend, as Trump does, that he has done nothing wrong, and all of them are expected to vote against the articles.

Collins argued that Democrats are impeaching the president because they think they can’t beat him in the 2020 election.

“That’s the wrong reason to im- peach somebody, and the Ameri- can people are seeing through this,” Collins said. “But at the end of the day, my heart breaks for a committee that has trashed this institution.”

The House is expected to vote on the articles next week, in the days before Christmas. That would send them to the Senate for a 2020 trial.

Senior Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday that he would be “totally surprised” if there were not the necessary 67 votes in the chamber to convict Trump, and signaled options for a swift trial. He said no decision had been made about whether to call witnesses.

Pelosi drug bill reflects Trump idea but he isn’t on board

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As a White House candidate, Donald Trump said he could save Medicare bil- lions of dollars by negotiating prescription drug prices.

Legislation expected to pass the Democratic-controlled House on Thursday would deliver that and much more.

But Trump’s not on board, the White House is threatening a veto and Republicans who run the Senate say they will ignore the bill by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., because they say the government shouldn’t negoti- ate drug prices.

That’s not stopping Democrats from savaging the moment. They contend Trump’s disagreement signals the end of his health care deal behind some of his populist pitches.

They’re also betting that Pelo- si’s plan will prove popular with 2020 voters, helping elect Demo- crats who will eventually be in a position to pass something like it.

The bill would cap drug copays and deductibles at $2,000 a year for Medicare recipients. It would use about $360 billion of its pro- jected 10-year savings from lowering drug costs to create Medicare coverage for dental care, hearing aids and vision, filling major gaps for seniors.

“We were sent to Washington with a mandate to bring down the cost of prescription drugs,” Rep. Haley Stevens, D-Mich., as debate got underway. She is a member of the freshman class that enabled Democrats to regain control of the House in 2018.

White House officials say Pe- alo’s bill is unworkable and that Trump wants something that can pass now. Near unanimous oppo- sition from congressional Repub- licans means it would never clear the Senate.

Republican lawmakers pre- dict Pelosi’s bill would stifle innovation and they urged House Democrats to seek a bipartisan compromise.

“Drugs that save lives will not be around,” said Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore. “Innovation goes on the rocks, lives will be lost.”

A major concern about the legislation is that it will result in fewer drugs coming to market. But there’s debate about the ex- tent. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates about 3% to 10% fewer new drugs, while the White House Council of Economic Advisers says it could be much higher, up to one-third of new medications.

Rep. Bobby Scott, D-Va., who helped write the Pelosi bill, said Republicans predicting the drug pipeline will dry up are using a straw man.

“Any drug that’s out there, we’re going to have access to,” he said. “The U.S. would still be the biggest market.”

The pharmaceutical industry is strongly opposed to the bill. Among the groups backing it is AARP.

High prescription drug prices consistently register in polls as the public’s top health care concern. But it’s unclear in a capital divided over Trump’s impeachment that any major legisla- tion will pass before next year’s elections.

There’s a bipartisan Senate bill that would also cap seniors’ out- of-pocket costs at $3,100 a year and require drugmakers to pay Medicare rebates if companies raise prices above inflation. The plan has Trump’s support but Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., hasn’t said if or when he’ll bring it to the floor.

Inflation rebates are included in Pelosi’s bill as well, so there is considerable overlap between the two major pieces of legislation before lawmakers. But Pelosi’s measure goes farther with sever- al unique features, including:

■ Medicare would be au- thorized to negotiate prices for costly medications, using a for- mula based on lower prices paid in other economically advanced countries.

■ Drugmakers who refuse to negotiate would be hit with steep sales taxes for the medication at issue. Republicans say proposed taxes as high as 95% are uncon- stitutional. The budget office projects that most pharmaceuti- cal companies would opt to accept lower prices from Medicare.

■ Private health insurance plans would be able to receive Medicare’s discounted prices.

■ Congressional budget ex- perts estimate the price nego- tiations provisions of Pelosi’s bill would save $456 billion over 10 years. After subtracting for new Medicare dental, hearing and vision coverage, that still leaves money to increase spending on medical research, community health centers and countering the opioid epidemic.
By Michael R. Sisak and David Porter
Associated Press

JERSEY CITY, N.J. — The two killers who stormed a kosher market in Jersey City had apparently been followers of the Black Hebrew Israelites — a fringe group whose members have been known to rail against white people and Jews — and one of them had made anti-Semitic posts online, according to a law enforcement official briefed on the investigation.

The findings stoked suspicions that the rampage Tuesday that left the killers and four victims dead was not a random crime but an anti-Semitic attack, even as state and federal authorities cautioned that the motive was still under investigation.

The FBI on Wednesday searched the Harlem headquarters of the Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ, which is the formal name of the Black Hebrew group, according to the official, who was not authorized to discuss the case publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

“The why and the ideology and the motivation — that’s what we’re investigating,” New Jersey Attorney General Grewal said Wednesday, adding that authorities are trying to determine whether anyone else was involved.

Others, including Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop, pointed to the bloodshed as a hate crime against Jews, with Fulop saying surveillance video made it clear that the attackers targeted the Jewish market, slowly and deliberately driving up to the grocery in a stolen rental van and immediately opening fire.

The attackers were identified as David N. Anderson, 47, and Francine Graham, 50 — both of them also prime suspects in the slaying of a livewire driver found dead in a car trunk in nearby Bayonne over the weekend, Grewal said.

Nielson was awarded $663,000 for 20 years of back pay, and his wife received $57,000 in widow’s benefits.

“It’s the largest award I have ever seen,” Gang said.

“Whatever it would have made had the VA granted the benefits way back when he first got this process started, and what a difference it would have made to him to have seen the VA grant his claim while he was still alive.”

The VA declined to comment on Nielson’s case, saying it can’t publicly discuss its interactions with individual veterans due to privacy concerns.

But a spokeswoman said the agency has “modernized the process for appealing disability claims to provide more timely and consistent decisions” under the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017.

“In the last fiscal year, VA completed more than 95,000 appeals decisions, a record high,” said a Senate aide. Christina Mandreucci said in an email.

Nielson turned to Gang, whose firm specializes in disability appeals for military veterans, in 2012 after exhausting all administrative appeal remedies at the VA. The earlier claims of malnutrition were denied, but doctors had determined he suffered from an autoimmune disease that began manifesting itself during his service.

Gang was armed with journal entries in which then-Airman 1st Class Nielson complains about not being able to eat and weight loss while in Seoul, South Korea.

“Boy am I in misery,” Nielson wrote in neat, cursive handwriting on Sept. 25, 1952. “I had 6 teeth pulled this morning,” he said, adding that he had gone into shock after the dentist pulled four of them with- out Novocain.

Medical experts hired by Gang also examined Nielson’s service records and were able to prove the problems he described were symptoms of an autoimmune disease that hindered his ability to work and support his family.

Nielson died on Oct. 6, 2014, at home in Tucson, Ariz., but Gang continued his claim by adding Nielson’s widow as the substitute claimant.

The Board of Veterans Appeals ruled in Nielson’s favor in April 2017, but the check didn’t appear.

“We wait. A year goes by. We don’t hear anything. Two or three years go by,” Gang said. “Total radio silence from the VA.”

He finally reached a VA official who informed him that the department wasn’t going to implement the board’s decision because Mrs. Nielson forgot to sign a form in the right place. Gang filed a writ of mandamus in federal appeals court, which compelled the agency to pay.

Gang, who is an outspoken advocate for a massive overhaul of the VA, said he understands why officials dismissed his client’s claims about malnutrition, but he believes the agency had a responsibility to help determine the actual cause of his problems.

“But the thing that’s most egregious in my opinion is their actions once we had finally been vindicated — to just be vindicative and not want to pay the claim. That’s just unacceptable,” he said.

NATION

2 killers in NJ attack tied to fringe group

By Kim Gamel
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Thomas Nielson joined the Air Force in 1950 and served on the peninsula in 1950-54, where the war against the communist-North was just getting underway. He served on the peninsula in 1950-54.

However, Nielson’s real fight began after he returned home and filed for military medical benefits for health problems that he believed stemmed from severe dental issues and malnutrition during his service.

Five years after he died in 2014 at age 81, his family finally received more than $720,000 in retroactive benefits after the VA grant his claim while he was still alive.

“We’ve been vindicated — to just be vindicated, not to have our claim actually be proved,” said a Senate aide. Christina Mandreucci said in an email.

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Deceased Korean War vet awarded accrued VA benefits

By Kim Gamel
Stars and Stripes

In the last fiscal year, VA completed 16,000 appeals decisions, a record high,” said a Senate aide. Christina Mandreucci said in an email.

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NATIONAL
Fewer kids report sex abuse in US detention centers

By Rebecca Boone
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — A new federal study has found the number of kids who say they have been sexually victimized in juvenile detention centers has dropped across the U.S., compared with past years. But remarkably high rates of sexual abuse persist in 12 facilities stretching from Oregon to Florida, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics report released Wednesday.

The report analyzed data collected during more than 6,000 anonymous interviews last year at nearly 330 juvenile detention facilities.

Young people were asked about any forced or coerced sexual contact they experienced, whether by staffers or other kids, ranging from rape to unwanted touching to being shown sexual pictures or movies.

Nationwide, an estimated 7.1% of children in juvenile facilities reported being sexually victimized during the previous 12 months, the report said. That's a drop compared with the last time the study was done in early 2014, when 9.5% of youth reported being victimized.

"Today's report shows that the juvenile justice system is making long-overdue strides in preventing sexual abuse," Lovisa Stansson, executive director of Just Detention International, an organization seeking to end sexual abuse in detention, said in a statement. 

"But even sexual assault is too many and, as the report makes clear, this violence remains commonplace in youth facilities across the U.S."

Twelve facilities had dramatically higher rates of sexual victimization, including three juvenile residential centers in Florida, three in Texas and one each in Oregon, Arkansas, Idaho, Georgia, Ohio and New Jersey, according to the report.

At the Liberty Juvenile Unit for Specialized Treatment in Florida, just over 26% of youth reported being sexually victimized in the past 12 months. Similarly high rates — about 22% and 21% — were reported at the Hastings Comprehensive Mental Health Treatment Program and Gulf Academy, both in Florida.

Florida officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

At the Juvenile Correctional Center in the small eastern Idaho town of St. Anthony, nearly 13% of youths reported being sexually victimized within the last 12 months. Roughly 500 miles north in a Lewiston, Idaho, juvenile correctional center, no incidents of sexual victimization were reported.

Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections Director Monty Prow said he was surprised to learn the St. Anthony facility had a high rate of victimization. Calling children's safety the "primary task," he said his department would dig into the data.

"If the kids don't feel safe, they won't move to the treatment aspects of what we're trying to offer," he said.

Harvey Weinstein reaches tentative $25M deal with his accusers

By Larry Neumeister
Associated Press

NEW YORK — A tentative $25 million settlement revealed Wednesday to end nearly every sexual misconduct lawsuit brought against Harvey Weinstein and his former film studio's board was praised by a plaintiff and some lawyers but criticized by others who say those who opt out are punished.

Lousette Geiss, a plaintiff in a Manhattan federal court class-action lawsuit, said the settlement was "our way to hold all women up" and that she would hold accountable if they protect predators in their midst.

"Now that The Weinstein Company is in bankruptcy and Harvey is about to stand trial, this settlement will ensure that all survivors have the chance for recovery and can move forward without Harvey's damaging lock on their careers," Geiss said.

Attorney Thomas Giaftra said the agreement was the same deal announced several months ago but with more punitive provisions aimed at forcing holdouts to accept it.

"The most troubling aspect of this settlement is a punitive provision designed to force victims to settle," Giaftra said in a statement. "Shocking, any funds that would have been allocated to claims from the settlement fund for non-settling claimants would be turned over to Harvey and Robert Weinstein to defend against their claims in court."
Biden unveils his immigration policy

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Joe Biden has joined his top Democratic presidential rivals in pledging to end for-profit migrant detention centers that existed while he was vice president. He also acknowledged through his campaign the “pain” caused by deportations carried out by the Obama administration.

The moves, which come amid skepticism about Biden from some immigrant rights activists, are part of a comprehensive immigration policy released Wednesday by the former vice president. The wide-ranging plan positions Biden as a stark contrast to President Donald Trump but not as far to the left as some of his rivals for the Democratic nomination are.

“It’s all about families. It’s all about families to me,” Biden said at a Las Vegas event with casino workers, including many immigrants.

Position papers released earlier Wednesday went further, with an explicit nod to the criticism Biden has gotten for immigration policy under President Barack Obama.

“Joe Biden understands the pain felt by every family across this country that has had a loved one removed from the country, including under the Obama-Biden administration,” the campaign wrote.

Biden and his campaign outlined priorities that include ending family separations at the border, rolling back Trump’s travel limits on citizens from certain Muslim-majority countries and providing a citizenship pathway to more than 11 million people in the U.S. illegally, including immediately shielding from deportation visitors, are part of a comprehensive immigration policy released Wednesday by the former vice president. Biden wrote.

He emphasized a proposal to spend $4 billion in four years aimed at stabilizing Central American economies. The idea, Biden explained in Nevada, is to address the root causes of mass migration and relieve pressure at the U.S. border, where the scene of migrant detention facilities has drawn international attention.

“We should be engaging and offering our help to organize this hemisphere right now,” Biden said. “I’m going to spend, literally, a billion dollars a year to build up those countries so there’s no reason to leave in the beginning.”

Biden joins progressive Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, along with Mayor Pete Buttigieg, as Democratic White House hopefuls promising to end the practice of separating families in for-profit detention centers.

The U.S. government contracted for such facilities under Obama, drawing criticism from civil rights groups at the time. But the practice has gained new scrutiny under Trump’s hard-line approach to immigration and especially his administration’s practice of separating families in the U.S.

The Republican president has defended his policies as necessary to protect U.S. security and American workers’ economic interests, and he’s made clear that he will emphasize the issue again in 2020, just as he did to energize his white conservative base in 2016.

The Penn model says the proposed wealth tax would bring in at least $1 trillion less in new government revenue than the Democratic presidential candidate estimates while ultimately shrinking the economy over the next 30 years, according to a new academic analysis.

The Massachusetts senator wants a 2% tax on fortunes worth $50 million-plus and a leeway three times that on anyone who has a net worth of more than $1 billion.

She has pledged to use those to dramatically remake government, offering universal child care and tuition costs at public universities while wiping out most student debt for 42 million Americans and helping to finance a “Medicare for All” plan providing government-sponsored health care nationwide.

But the piggy bank that Warren wants to use to accomplish her sweeping policy promises won’t be nearly as flush with cash as she believes, the University of Pennsylvania’s Penn Wharton Budget Model, which provides nonpartisan analysis of public policy proposals, found Thursday.

Warren’s campaign pushed back, saying the analysis was of a “different and worse” plan than what the senator is proposing.

The model says the new tax would reduce “private capital formation” enough to drive the U.S. economy’s average wage down between 0.9% and 2.3%, even affecting households not rich enough to qualify for the tax.

The findings are important because Warren’s proposal has been among the most popular — and most scrutinized — of her campaign. It’s given the senator an economic populist edge that helped vault her among the Democratic presidential field.

The race’s other top progressive candidate, Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, has proposed an even higher tax on top fortunes — but it’s such a part of Warren rallies that her crowds often break into chants of “2 cents!” in a rallying cry for her wealth tax.

Trump criticizes Thunberg after Time magazine honor

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump railed on social media Wednesday after he was named by Time magazine as one of the most influential people in the world, in a show of support for the 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg.

But Thunberg, a Swedish teenager who has become a symbol of a growing movement of young climate activists after leading weekly school strikes in Sweden that inspired similar actions in about 100 cities worldwide. She has drawn large crowds with her fiery appearances at protests and conferences over the past year and a half.

In a Thursday morning tweet, Trump said, “Greta must work on her Anger Management problem, then go to a good old fashioned movie with me!”

He added: “Chill Greta, Chill!”

Thunberg responded Thursday by changing her Twitter profile picture to read: “A teenager working on her anger management problem. Currently chilling and watching a good old fashioned movie with a friend.”

It’s not the first time Trump has lashed out at Thunberg, and that includes committing our country to new and innovative ways to combat poverty. There has to be a war on poverty,” the New York billionaire said while campaigning in Stockton.

His plan includes initiatives to raise the minimum wage and expand affordable housing. He outlined them after a community discussion with Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs, who endorsed Bloomberg and said he had the “record, resources and relationships” to defeat President Donald Trump.

The trip marked Bloomberg’s first to California since launching his 2020 White House bid. Since he’s bypassing the four early voting states, Bloomberg — a former New York City mayor — is hanging his campaign success on states such as California, which votes on Super Tuesday and offers the biggest delegate haul in the primary contest. He’s already spent at least $50 million on television advertisements, though his spokesman wouldn’t say how much he’s spent in California specifically. He said the campaign has hired three staff members in California.

Bloomberg said he thinks his pragmatic message will resonate with Californians, nearly 15 million of whom will be eligible to vote in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary.

“Californians understand nothing’s simple — you have to have real solutions,” he said. “And you have to have the evolutionary rather than revolutionary change.”
WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Wednesday hit Iran with new sanctions that target several transportation firms as it continues its “maximum pressure campaign” against the Islamic Republic over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

The sanctions target Iran’s state shipping line and a China-based company that has been involved in delivering missile parts to Iran. They also add a layer of new penalties to a previously sanctioned Iranian airline, Mahan Air, which is accused of sending weapons to Iranian proxies in Lebanon and Yemen, and three of its sales agents.

The moves were announced by the Treasury and the State Department and will subject foreign firms and governments that do business with the targeted entities to sanctions themselves, including a freeze on any assets they may have in U.S. jurisdictions.

“Today’s designations put the world on notice that those who engage in illicit transactions with these companies will risk exposure and sanctions themselves,” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

Alireza Miryousefi, a spokesman for Iran’s U.N. Mission, tweeted later Wednesday: “These sanctions are directly targeting ordinary Iranians’ livelihood, but they will not be cowed by pressures by any foreign power. And another step in the US’ #econoterrorism against Iranians, who are never fooled by the US’s crocodile tears.”

Pompeo announced the sanctions even as he expressed hope that a weekend prisoner swap with Iran could lead to a dialogue between Washington and Tehran over prisoners. He called Saturday’s release of Princeton graduate student Xiyue Wang in exchange for an Iranian jailed in the U.S. a “happier note” that could yield progress.

“I do hope the exchange that took place will lead to a broader discussion on consular affairs. We are working to use this as an opportunity to continue that effort,” he said.

U.S. authorities say Iran is holding one American national and five dual U.S.-Iranian nationals. They include Navy veteran Michael White, who is serving a 10-year espionage sentence, as well as environmentalist Morad Tahbaz, an Iranian with U.S. and British citizenship also initially sentenced to 10 years in prison, and Iranian-American father and son Siamak and Baquer Namazi. Former FBI agent Robert Levinson has been missing for 13 years since disappearing in Iran.

Iran says American authorities are holding about 20 Iranian nationals in jail and on Monday said it was ready for more prisoner swaps with the U.S.
UK votes in bid to resolve Brexit stalemate

Associated Press
LONDON — Britons who have endured three years of wrangling over their country’s messy divorce from the European Union cast ballots Thursday in an election billed as a way out of the Brexit stalemate.

The contest pits Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who says he will take Britain out of the EU by Jan. 31, against opposition leader Jeremy Corbyn, who promises to block a no-deal Brexit and call for another referendum on Brexit.

All 650 seats in the House of Commons are up for grabs in the election, which is being held more than two years ahead of schedule.

At a fish market in the eastern port of Grimsby, seafood company owner Nathan Godley summed up the hopes of many people that “one way or another — the election would provide a pathway to a resolution of Brexit.”

“I think we all got a bit weary of the politicians over the last few years really and I think having a government with a majority to give them the clout to actually do what they want is a good thing,” he said.

Johnson voted at Methodist Central Hall in London, accompanied by his dog, Dilyn. Corbyn was greeted by supporters and an activist dressed as Elmo from “Sesame Street” as he arrived to vote in his north London constituency.

With so much at stake, political parties have pushed the boundaries of truth, transparency and reality during five weeks of campaigning.

Johnson’s Conservative Party was criticized for using misleading tactics on social media, while Corbyn’s Labour Party promised to tax the rich, boost government spending and nationalize industries such as railroads and water companies. One of the focal points of the ugly campaign was the National Health Service, a deeply respected institution that has struggled to meet rising demand after nine years of austerity under Conservative-led governments.

The prime minister called early elections in hopes of breaking a logjam in Parliament that stalled approval of his Brexit agreement in October. Johnson didn’t have a majority in the last Parliament and was stymied once he lost the support of the Democratic Unionist Party because of concerns about how Northern Ireland would be treated under his deal with the EU.

Opinion polls have consistently shown the Conservative Party in the lead, but recent surveys suggest the margin may have narrowed in the final days of campaigning.

While Labour is unlikely to win an outright majority, smaller opposition parties hope to win enough seats so they can team up to block Johnson’s Brexit plans.

All of the parties are nervous about the verdict of voters who are more willing to abandon long-held party loyalties after three years of wrangling over Brexit.

Outdated and dangerous childbirth practices persist in parts of Europe

By Maria Cheng
Associated Press

BARCELONA — When Clara Massons was in labor with her son, a midwife climbed onto her bed and pushed down on Massons’ belly, explaining that she was helping to deliver her baby. For the next few hours, the midwife and a doctor took turns pressing down during contractions, using an old, now controversial technique for troubled deliveries.

Masson said her pleas to stop the technique were ignored at the Barcelona hospital where she delivered two years ago, and she later complained to authorities.

The hospital said doctors took “appropriate measures” during her delivery.

“I thought I was going to die,” she said. “For one month after, my belly was blue and purple.”

The technique is known as the Kristeller maneuver and was first described in an 1867 German textbook. It is sometimes used during the second stage of labor to assist delivery and avoid an cesarean section when complications arise.

But many doctors in developed countries say they have stopped using it because of the potential for broken bones, organ damage and other complications. The World Health Organization does not recommend the technique.

Yet the procedure is still commonly performed in many European countries, highlighting how once-accepted practices can persist even long after they’re considered to be unnecessary or even dangerous.

Europe has some of the world’s lowest maternal and infant death rates, and assertions of mistreatment during childbirth are common in Africa, Asia and Latin America. But the Kristeller maneuver and some other medical practices related to childbirth have come under increasing scrutiny in Europe, including complaints about inadequate anesthesia, surgical incisions during vaginal births and failure to seek patient consent for certain procedures.

“Depending on the act, these practices rise to the level of a human rights violation,” said Mindy Roseman, director of a global justice and women’s rights program at Yale Law School. “Not obtaining consent from women for medical procedures, not providing pain relief or doing something that’s not scientifically justified, that is simply not the standard of care in troubling, wherever that occurs.”

Last year, Croatian lawmaker Ivana Nincevic Lesandric drew attention to the anesthesia issue when she complained to Parliament she did not receive any for an emergency procedure after a miscarriage.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been in (a) more more awful situation in my life,” Lesandric said.

In response, the speaker of the House chastised Lesandric for speaking over her allotted time and for publicly sharing such intimate details, saying it put him in an awkward position.

The Ministry of Health, while not directly commenting on her case, typically uses a local anesthetic for such procedures. Officials suggested there may have been a “misunderstanding” on Lesandric’s part regarding the type of anesthesia she received.

Dr. Frederick Mercier, chair of obstetrics for the European Society of Anaesthesiology, said general anesthesia is “most often used” in procedures like the one Lesandric had. He said local anesthesia isn’t used because “it is less effective.”

In submissions for a U.N. report, general anesthesia is “most often used in procedures like the one Lesandric had.” He said local anesthesia isn’t used because “it is less effective.”

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**Reynolds picks up picked-on Peloton actress for gin ad**

**By John Carucci**
Associated Press

Ryan Reynolds says he relates to the social media criticism heaped on the Peloton ad actress. In fact, that feeling led him to hire her for a commercial promoting his gin company.

Reynolds spoke Tuesday about the uproar while promoting his new action flick, the Michael Bay-directed “6 Underground.”

In the Peloton commercial, Monica Ruiz portrays a wife who receives an exercise bike as a Christmas present, and chronicles her yearlong journey to get in shape. The commercial ends with the wife thanking her husband for the gift.

Reynolds thought the viral negativity was unfair, and said it’s “a situation that I’ve been in many times before” as an actor.

“You put it out there, and it doesn’t quite work, and you feel a little alienated and stuff. So, I had tremendous empathy for her in that moment,” Reynolds said at the premiere of his new action flick, “6 Underground.”

“Doing the Avigation Gin ad sort of gave her some authorship over some of this conversation, which I loved,” he said. “And she’s, she’s the best. She’s really funny, really smart.”

In “6 Underground,” which is now streaming on Netflix, Reynolds stars as the leader of a group of six warriors, each with their own special set of skills. After faking their own deaths, they take on a number for their names, ranging from One to Six, and go underground to take down a dictator. Reynolds plays One.

The movie also stars French actress Melanie Laurent, Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Ben Hardy, Adria Arjona, Dave Franco and Israeli actor Lior Raz.

It was directed by Michael Bay, who is known for the big-screen action movies like “Armageddon,” “The Rock” and “Transformers” series. But he says it worked for him to pair him with Netflix.

“This is the thing: I love big cinema. But Netflix is a new voice. It is a big, it’s a big name out here right now. And it’s doing a lot of interesting content. And it gives it — it’s all over the world, you know, access to almost 250 million people,” Boy said.

Ryan Reynolds: Actor, gin producer, friend to misunderstood actresses. CHARLES SYKES, INVISION/AP

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**Kardashian West sues over ‘Vampire Facial’**

Reality TV star and businesswoman Kim Kardashian West is suing an Alabama doctor over claims he wrongly used her image to promote a medical procedure called a “Vampire Facial.”

West filed suit Tuesday in Los Angeles against Dr. Charles Runels of coastal Fairhope, Ala. The suit claims Runels misused West’s image in promotional materials after she posted a photo of herself on social media showing the results of a “Vampire Facial.”

West, a reality TV star and successful businesswoman who has a number of beauty and lifestyle enterprises and millions of followers on social media, asked a federal judge to bar Runels from using her name or photo and to make him and any other doctors who benefited pay her profits.

Runels, 59, said in a telephone interview Wednesday that West wrongly used his trademarked name for a medical procedure to promote herself. He called the lawsuit “disappointing.”

“We’re trying to do good medicine. The last thing we want to do is spend millions of dollars arguing with a celebrity,” he said.

The cosmetic procedure involves drawing a patient’s blood, spinning it in a centrifuge and then injecting small amounts under the skin using multiple small needles, Runels’ website says, and blood also is applied topically on the skin.

**Women in Entertainment gala honors Witherspoon**

Reese Witherspoon remembered when she met with several film production studios in 2011 to ask them how many movies were being developed for women.

The studios’ responses nearly floored her.

“Of all the major seven studios, the answer was one,” Witherspoon said after she received the prestigious Sherry Lansing Leadership Award at The Hollywood Reporter’s Women in Entertainment breakfast gala Wednesday in Los Angeles. The Oscar- and Emmy-winning actress said she was grateful to receive the award named after Lansing, the former Paramount Pictures CEO who was the first woman to head a Hollywood studio. The award honors those excelling in film and making philanthropic contributions.

Witherspoon said the moment helped empower her to start her own production company, Hello Sunshine, which has produced Oscar-nominated films “Gone Girl,” “Wild” and the HBO drama series “Big Little Lies” with an all-female leading cast.

**Other news**

- The rapper known as Saucy Santana said he was one of three people shot and wounded during a drive-by shooting near Miami early Wednesday morning. At least six shots were fired, striking all three of the occupants of the vehicle in which Santana and his friends were riding. No arrests were immediately reported.

From The Associated Press
Officials say gunman hanged by angry mob in Baghdad square

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An angry mob killed a 16-year-old and strung up the corpse by its feet from a traffic pole after the teen shot and killed six people Thursday, including four anti-government protesters, Iraqi officials said.

Dozens of people pointed their cellphones at the body dangling high above them in a central Baghdad square. Videos circulating on social media showed the young man being beaten and dragged across the street.

The violence underscored the growing fears and suspicions swirling around the 8-week-old protest movement, which engulfed Iraq on Oct. 1 when thousands took to the streets to decry government corruption, poor services and scarcity of jobs.

A string of mysterious acts of bloodshed by unknown groups has put anti-government protesters on edge and eroded their faith in the ability of state security forces to protect them.

On Dec. 6, 25 protesters were killed when gunmen in pickup trucks opened fire in Baghdad’s Khilani Square. That same week, mysterious knife attacks targeted Iraqis, raping of women and torching of houses — that forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh.

The killing of the teenager was initiated by the wider protest movement in Tahrir Square, which said in a statement that it was a campaign to instill fear and weaken their peaceful movement.

Thursday’s bloodshed began when the young gunman opened fire in Baghdad’s Wathba Square, killing two shop owners and four protesters. Security officials said the teen was wanted by police on drug-related charges and was running from security forces.

An enraged mob beat the young man to death, security and health officials said. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity. At least eight people were wounded, the officials said.

Influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr called those who killed the teen “terrorists” and warned that if they were not identified within 48 hours, he would order his militia to leave the square. Members of Saraya Salam, or Peace Brigades, are deployed in the square to protect protesters.

The killing of the teenager was condemned by the wider protest movement in Tahrir Square, which said in a statement that the perpetrators were not part of their peaceful demonstrations.

Defense of Myanmar army is blasted in genocide case

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — Lawyers seeking to halt what they allege is ongoing genocide in Myanmar have slammed leader Aung San Suu Kyi’s defense of her country’s armed forces, saying Thursday that the Nobel Peace Prize winner and former pro-democracy icon chose to ignore “unspeakable” crimes targeting Muslim civilians.

The United Nation’s top court is conducting emergency legal proceedings to determine if military personnel committed genocide against Myanmar’s Rohingya minority in 2017. The African nation of Gambia, acting on behalf of a large group of Muslim countries, requested the International Court of Justice to consider whether Myanmar has committed crimes against humanity.

With maps, satellite imagery and graphic photos, Myanmar’s accusers have detailed what they say is a deliberate campaign of ethnic cleansing and genocide — including the killing of civilians, raping of women and torching of houses — that forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to neighboring Bangladesh.

Gambia wants the U.N. court to take “all measures within its power to prevent all acts that amount to or contribute to the crime of genocide.”

The U.N. court proceedings in The Hague produced the spectacle Wednesday of Suu Kyi, who was awarded the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for championing democracy and rights under Myanmar’s then-ruling junta, defending the army that kept her under house arrest for some 15 years.

“We heard nothing about sexual violence from Myanmar yesterday, not a single word about it,” lawyer Paul Reicher told the world court Thursday as Suu Kyi watched impassively. “Because it is undeniable and unspeakable, they chose to ignore it completely. I can’t really blame them. I would hate having to be the one to defend it.”

Suu Kyi testified Wednesday the exodus of Rohingya was a tragic consequence of hostilities initiated by insurgents. The allegations of genocide and other crimes by the army stemmed from “an internal armed conflict started by coordinated and comprehensive armed attacks … to which Myanmar’s defense services responded,” she said.
Welcome to the Neighborhood.

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With base information, travel tips, restaurant reviews and even the score of your child’s high school basketball game, we’ve got you covered.

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Stars and Stripes. Korea
Stars and Stripes. Guam
Stars and Stripes. Japan
Stars and Stripes. Europe

Stay connected and hey, welcome to the neighborhood.
Police pay off layaways at Walmart store

DADE CITY — A Florida police department gave back this holiday season by paying off all the layaways at a Walmart store, allowing 26 customers to pick up their purchases.

The Dade City Police Department said in a Facebook post that Chief James Walters and his staff walked into the store to pay off 26 layaway accounts totaling more than $4,300.

The money came from anonymous donors and the Dade City Police Foundation. The buyers were surprised when they received the good news on a phone call from the police chief.

Man rescued after falling into abandoned well

VENTURA — Firefighters rescued an 87-year-old man who received minor injuries when he fell into an abandoned well in a southern California neighborhood.

The Ventura County Star reported that the man was apparently mowing the lawn at his home near Simi Valley when he fell into a hole previously covered more than a decade. A woman in the area said she was in her car when she kept hearing a sound before following the voice, discovering the man and calling 911.

Ventura County Fire officials said the man was alert and able to communicate with firefighters when they arrived to find him about 25 feet below the surface.

Man charged with theft in $10K bingo win

MONROE — The luck ran out for a Louisiana man allegedly caught rigging bingo games to win more than $10,000.

John Cook, 43, was booked into the Ouachita Correctional Facility on a felony theft charge and two counts for failing to appear multiple times following his June 29 arrest, according to a Monroe Police warrant obtained by news outlets.

Police said Cook was recorded on video at a bingo parlor manipulating a “Bouanza Bingo” game by handpicking the balls he wanted to play and then hiding the winner until he was ready to end the game. The warrant said Cook did that four times and won thousands for three people, including his sister.

Teen runaway found ‘camping’ inside store

GREENVILLE — Employees at a Bed, Bath & Beyond in North Carolina discovered an unwelcome sleepover guest hiding in the store when they opened up Monday morning.

The Greenville Police Department called local police at 8:30 a.m. and officers responded to a “breaking and entering in progress,” according to The News & Observer. The intruder turned out to be a 14-year-old runaway who had “campaigned” at the store overnight, Greenville police spokeswoman Kristen Hunter said.

Scientist: Rodent complaints led to firing

SOCORRO — A New Mexico scientist said she was fired from a New Mexico Tech lab job after complaining about a rodent infestation.

Chemical engineer Gannene Johnson was terminated from her position as a lab manager at the Energetic Materials Research and Testing Center following her complaints about mouse droppings and dead rodents, KOB-TV reported. Johnson said the work environment made her sick and she later tested positive for hantavirus — an infectious disease spread by rodents.

The university would not comment on why she is no longer employed.

Hail drops on city for 2nd time in 18 days

PHOENIX — For the second time in 18 days, large hail coated the desert in parts of the Phoenix metro area.

National Weather Service meteorologists said some pop-up thunderstorms dropped hail in some sections of north Phoenix and other areas recently.

It wasn’t as widespread as Nov. 21 when hail fell in parts of Phoenix and the suburbs of Goodyear, Avondale, Tempe, Mesa and Apache Junction — an unusual sight in the desert.

Last week, hail blanketed some north Phoenix freeways and made it look like a winter wonderland for a while until rain and warmer temperatures took over.

Mom surprised at how twin daughters survived

LANGLEY — The mother of twin 4-year-old girls who survived a car crash that killed their dad north of Seattle said she’s astonished at what they did.

Authorities said that after the car plunged down an embankment and into thick forest and undergrowth, the girls unbuckled themselves from their booster seats, realized their dad wasn’t talking and climbed out a broken rear window.

They made it back up to the road, where they were spotted by a woman who happened to drive by.

The girls’ mother, Esther Cridde, told The Seattle Times they are “independent,” but she was astonished by what they did.

The crash, on Whidbey Island, killed Corey Simmons, 47, of Langley. He was not wearing a seat belt, authorities said.

State bird’s status changed to threatened

HONOLULU — The federal government changed the protection status of Hawaii’s state bird from endangered to threatened, officials said.

Federal officials said the nene has been brought back from the brink of extinction through a breeding program and habitat restoration, Hawaii Public Radio reported.

The nene is native to the Hawaiian Islands. In the 1950s the number of nenes fell to about 30 birds in the wild, but long-term efforts restored the population to about 3,000 statewide, wildlife officials said.

Man arrested after ride on mule deer

RILEY — Police said a young man was arrested after he was caught on video riding on the back of a mule deer that was trapped in a fenced area in rural eastern Oregon.

Oregon State Police said Jacob Belcher, 18, of Riley was arrested Dec. 6 and charged with wildlife harassment and animal abuse.

Police said someone sent the state police’s Fish and Wildlife division a video of Belcher climbing onto the young mule deer back and riding the animal, which appears exhausted.

Troopers said the deer makes grunting or bleating sounds throughout the video.
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 Pouch
4 Compass pt.
7 Marina sights
12 Actor Danson
13 Hooting bird
14 Sound
16 Melody
18 Like upscale designer apparel
19 Strainer
20 Cougar
22 Gun lobby org.
23 Big-screen format
27 French article
29 Indigenous
31 Pago Pago's place
34 Walks in water
35 Out of reach, maybe
37 — canto
38 "Born Free" lioness
39 Swelled head
41 Bug
45 Pester
47 Floral necklace
48 Nongeneric, as a drug
52 Hanoi holiday
53 Scooter's kin
54 Sawbuck
55 Poem of praise
56 Garden spoilers

DOWN
1 Postage
2 Vowel group
3 PC drive insert
4 Billions of years
5 Suitor
6 Curry of fiction
7 Innocent one
8 "— Town"
9 Nabokov novel
10 Can material
11 Lay down
12 lawn
17 Author Hunter
21 Hilo hello
23 Tuscani setting
24 Centrail
25 "Hall, Caesar!"
26 Ballot marks
28 — Claire, Wisc.
30 Shock partner
31 That lady
32 Have a bug
33 Brit. sports cars
36 Teller's partner
37 Esasion of football
40 Pesky insects
42 Choir members
43 Essentials
44 Windy day toys
45 Tosses in
46 Desires
48 Upscale auto
49 Shad product
50 Mimic
51 Nancy Drew's boyfriend

Answer to Previous Puzzle
F R A S A S C B E E P
L O B I T E R U C L A
A B S I N T H I E L C A N
Q I D O O P U L E N T
B E L I E F E T E R H A
S L E B O U C E B U L B E S
A R E A G A Y P E R U
H E D G E P U F P I E
E S Q P U T I T E
T A E L A F R A J
S A L E T A X I C A B S
A S P S A M E S R O A
R E Q S R E S T S O W

12-13 CRYPTOQUIP
R B P L A S O L J R Q C B Q F R J P
O S M L A S W L L W K R D Z D J
M L F Q J O S R D P S E L F P
W E L F O Q S .

Yesterday's Cryptquip: A CERTAIN PROLIFIC FILM AND TELEVISION ACTOR'S CHILDREN PROBABLY REFER TO HIM AS DADDY DEVITO.

Today's Cryptquip Clue: O equals B
The court's unwillingness to philosophize about the Constitution in the abstract is one of the most important limits on its power.

Ruling on gun case would be unnecessary

**OPINION**

By Greg Weiner

Special to The Washington Post

The Supreme Court's newly reinforced conservative majority is facing a test. It could use a case before the court as an opportunity to expand the scope of Second Amendment protections. Or it could pursue the correct conservative approach: decline the temptation to intervene.

This is a tension as old as the republic. In 1793, the Washington administration asked the Supreme Court to advise it about the interjection of treaties. The king's chief Justice John Jay, demurred. That set a precedent against the court issuing advisory opinions. That case has defined itself to the actual "cases and controversies" over which the Constitution gives it jurisdiction.

Last week, the court heard arguments in a case involving a New York City rule that restricted the ability of law-abiding gun owners to transport their weapons. Many constitutional conservatives are eager for the court, which has not elaborated on the scope of Second Amendment rights since its landmark decision back in the decade ago, to assert its authority and define the Second Amendment broadly. Jay might wish that they should be more concerned about the Supreme Court defining its own power broadly.

The problem is that the case is moot. New York has simply repealed the rule at issue after the Supreme Court agreed to hear the challenge, and New York State further closed the door by passing a statute that protects gun owners and prevents them from transporting weapons. This was an effort to prevent the court from issuing an opinion by removing all controversy at the outset.

For the court to rule in the absence of a live controversy — to pronounce on the constitutionality of a law no longer on the books — is not the same as an "advisory opinion" such as the one Jay declined to provide in 1793. It does implicate the same principle. The court's unwillingness to philosophize about the Constitution in the abstract is one of the most important limits on its power.

The framers of the Constitution were a diverse group, but it is fair to characterize them broadly as believing legislatures and executives should philosophize on constitutional questions. The reason was that the people could not simply outsource constitutional questions to the courts. All of us have a responsibility to consider because the Constitution is the property of citizens. Leaving such issues solely in the hands of the judiciary would risk a moral hazard by which the elected branches of government feel free to ignore constitutional questions on the grounds that the judiciary will resolve them.

The underlying controversy involves a debate between originalists who seek a more limited judiciary model on the rule Robert Bork's and the increasingly ascendant libertarian view of originalism, known as "judicial engagement," that calls for a more aggressive into the protection of rights.

Yet the Constitution does not belong to the courts alone. In the noblest sense, it is a people's law. Without that awareness, it is impossible to debate constitutional questions calls us to our civic duty. Consigning them to the judiciary is an abdication of our duty. The people, entities such as the New York City Council and state legislature — where citizens are more immediately represented — are "cases" over which constitutional questions belong. Conservatives may disagree with those bodies' conclusions, but the constitu- tion provides no more fundamental constitutional question than the scope of a single constitutional provision.

Originalists should reject the temptation to push for a ruling on the Second Amendment now. Instead, they should focus instead on a larger constitutional priority: the limitation of the judiciary to "cases and controversies." The scope of judicial power poses more fundamental constitutional question than the scope of a single constitutional provision.

Greg Weiner is an associate professor of political science at Assumption College and a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

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**Honesty about Afghanistan would be a life-saver**

By Jay Ambrose

Tribune News Service

It's no small thing when grotesque mistakes and lies add up to 2,300 lives and a trillion dollars, but that's what we got from U.S. officials who have kept us at war in Afghanistan for 18 years. A chief culprit is the Pentagon, of course, but also presidents, Congress and the State Department. And the overall result was a powerfully sustained an illusion that a Washington Post exposé comes at us at a time when so much else in our republic seems a mess.

After all, we just now have House Democrats atrociously and deceptively abusing their power in an impeachment effort that doesn't bear the Pentagon title. It is, of course, without a doubt, the Pentagon, of course, but also presidents, Congress and the State Department. And the overall result was a powerfully sustained an illusion that a Washington Post exposé comes at us at a time when so much else in our republic seems a mess.

And on top of all of these scandals we once-proud Americans are learning how dishonorable our military are in Afghanistan. After an initial attack following the 9/11 tragedy at the hands of al-Qaeda. We needed to strike back if we were going to prevent future terrorism on our shores, and we asked the Taliban, then pretty much in charge of Afghanistan, to let us punish the al-Qaida conspirators in the neighbor- hood. The Taliban were paid, al-Qaida, and we pushed the Taliban aside and shredded al- Qaeda as its terror-struck terrorists fled into Pakistan. We should have then said there was a promise with a promise to visit again if necessary.

Instead, our military hung around with no idea of what our mission was or what strategies would work in a land where we understood nothing about the culture. We were going to try nation building, but we did, heading to confusion and unapproachable corruption. We were going to stop the opium trade, but saw it blossom. We were going to train the Afghan army, but they were simply trying to short-circuit the case before an adverse ruling from the Supreme Court is irrelevant. The fact remains that the rule was repealed in the face of constitutional concerns. Constitutional conservatives should welcome, not ignore, that development.

We heard all kinds of positive stories from people named Bush and Obama along with the military, bureaucrats and members of Congress even if they all knew how much was amiss. There was then a federal project to get at the truth through hundreds of interviews and its report was hidden away. For several years now, The Post has tried to get access to it, not through leaks but through the Freedom of Information Act, and has lately been success- ful. What it has come up with is story after story of the missteps, the failures, the lies, the untruth from people named Bush and Obama is not the same as an "advisory opinion" over which the Constitution gives it jurisdiction.

The most recent is one of the most important limits on its power.

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The most recent is one of the most important limits on its power.

We might ask people to keep an eye on Afghanistan, especially since we know other terrorist groups are building bases there, and that we should be prepared to act early and often if need arises. But we should not be quizzing American lives over and meanwhile demand truth from people who are supposedly our friends.
What newspapers are saying at home

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

Ban is toothless if Russia’s athletes can still compete

Chicago Tribune

International olympic regulators say they’ve had it with Russian cheating and have banned the country from international competition for four years. Instead, the WADA Cup and all other international competitions for Russian athletes.

Not a word from Trump about the threat of terrorism, a shred of curiosity about motives and whether the Saudi officer was radicalized by and whom, or a thought about what Saudi Arabia could do to help investigate the shooter, or perhaps a last-ditch effort to understand the motive behind a Saudi officer who, at the age of 21, had shot and killed a fellow American officer.

The bureau quickly moved to a full-scale investigation of the 2016 election, much as Washington Post contributing columnist Jamal Khashoggi was dismembered in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, Trump and members of his administration vowed, as Secretary of State Mike Pompeo put it, to pursue “a thorough, transparent and timely investigation, including accountability for those responsible for the killing.” That promise remains unfulfilled.

Real crime is what fed FBI’s conduct on FISA warrants

The Wall Street Journal

The press corps is portraying Monday’s report by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz as a “no big deal.” The absolute is that Horowitz concludes that FBI’s decision to open a counterintelligence probe against the Trump campaign in July 2016 “was sufficient to predicate the investigation” under current FBI rules. Yet Horowitz also notes that these rules amount to a “low threshold for predication.”

For more than a century, the FBI has been the go-to agency for stateside syndicates.

Readers can look at the detailed executive summary and decide for themselves. But our own initial reading confirms the worst of what we feared about the bureau when it was run by James Comey. The FBI corrupted the secret court process for obtaining warrants to spy on former Donald Trump aide Carter Page. And it did so by supplying the court with false information produced by Christopher Steele, an agent of the Hillary Clinton campaign.

How can anyone, most of all civil libertarians, pass this off as no big deal? The absolute is that Horowitz concludes that FBI’s decision to open a counterintelligence probe against the Trump campaign in July 2016 “was sufficient to predicate the investigation” under current FBI rules. Yet Horowitz also notes that these rules amount to a “low threshold for predication.”

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Thieves to blame for deaths, but shootout is troubling

Miami Herald

A police pursuit of two suspected Coral Gables, Fla., jewelry store robbers ended in shocking violence on Dec. 5 on live TV: four dead; a jewelry store employee wounded.

The omissions include the stunner that FBI findings.

The omissions include the stunner that FBI findings.

Whose bullets killed the victims? Should the hostage and the bystander have been better protected?

For anyone watching on television as the afternoon rush hour chase of the fleeing suspects came to a shocking end in shocking violence, the FBI is being investigated as terrorism.

The bullets kept coming, more than 100 in shocking violence on Dec. 5. It was heartbreaking.

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For anyone watching on television as the afternoon rush hour chase of the fleeing suspects came to a shocking end in shocking violence, the FBI is being investigated as terrorism.

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stripes.com/newsletters
Go to the American Football Network website for the most up-to-date TV schedules.

**College football**

**Schedule**

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**NCAAF FCS playoffs**

**Second Round**

- #2 James Madison 65, #3 (MN) 21
- #1 New Hampshire 62, Montana State 21
- #4 Weber State 26, #20 Kennesaw State 20

**Quarterfinals**

- #2 Montana 41, #20 Central Arkansas 14
- #5 Montana State 77, #11 Nicholls 17
- Montana 73, Southern Utah 20

**Semiinals**

- Montana 35-10 at Weber State (10-3)

**Final Four**

- #1 Montana (10-2) vs #3 Ferris State (12-1)
- #2 Montana (10-2) at #3 Ferris State (12-1)

**Championship**

- #1 Montana (10-2) vs #3 Ferris State (12-1)
- #1 Montana (10-2) vs #3 Ferris State (12-1)

**FINALS II**

- #1 Montana (10-2) vs #3 Ferris State (12-1)
- #1 Montana (10-2) vs #3 Ferris State (12-1)

**MACC DIvision II**

- Slippery Rock Dec, vs. #13 Le Moyne (11-2) 14-0
- Slippery Rock vs. #19 Louisiana-SMC (10-2) 33-16

**SEMI-FINALS**

- Slippery Rock (11-2) at #1 Ferris State (12-1)
- Slippery Rock (11-2) at #1 Ferris State (12-1)

**FOOTBALL**

- Slippery Rock (11-2) at #1 Ferris State (12-1)
- Slippery Rock (11-2) at #1 Ferris State (12-1)

**College basketball**

**NBA**

- No games scheduled

**COURT**

- No games scheduled

**NBA schedule**

- No games scheduled

**NBA playoffs**

- No games scheduled

**NBA FREE AGENCY**

- No games scheduled

**NBA draft**

- No games scheduled

**NBA All-Star game**

- No games scheduled

**NBA trade deadline**

- No games scheduled

**NBA Awards**

- No games scheduled

**MLB calendar**

- No games scheduled

**MLB trade deadline**

- No games scheduled

**MLB awards**

- No games scheduled

**NHL calendar**

- No games scheduled

**NHL trade deadline**

- No games scheduled

**NHL awards**

- No games scheduled

**NFL calendar**

- No games scheduled

**NFL trade deadline**

- No games scheduled

**NFL awards**

- No games scheduled
Knicks nip Warriors in OT to end slump

Marcus Morris puts up season-high 36 points

**Scoreboard**

**Eastern Conference**

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**Los Angeles Clippers forward Kawhi Leonard stretches for the ball as Toronto Raptors forward OG Anunoby, right, looks on during the Clippers’ 112-92 win Wednesday in Toronto.**

**Roundup**

Leonard leads Clippers past Raptors in return to Toronto

**Associated Press**

TORONTO — Kawhi Leonard scored 23 points, including his 1,000th career point, and the Clippers won their third straight game Wednesday, beating the slumping Raptors 112-92. Marcus Harkless scored 14 points and Paul George had 13 as the Clippers evened their road record at 6-6.

Before the game, Leonard received his championship ring from the 2018-19 season, when he helped Toronto beat Golden State in six games for the franchise’s first NBA title. Clippers guard Patrick Beverley scored 11 points in 19 minutes before leaving due to an ankle injury because of a concussion. Beverley collided with Marc Gasol’s shoulder as the Raptors center was setting a screen.

Pascal Siakam scored 24 points, Norman Powell had 22 and OG Anunoby had 20 as the Raptors lost for the fourth time in five games and dropped their third straight at home. Toronto set a franchise record with nine straight home victories to begin the season.

**Los Angeles Lakers 122, Toronto Raptors 117**

LeBron James had 25 points, 10 assists and 11 rebounds to help Los Angeles win at Orlando. Anthony Davis had 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Lakers, who have won 13 of 14. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 15 points for Los Angeles.

Jonathan Isaac led the Magic with 19 points. Evan Fournier had 18 and Aaron Gordon finished with 14 points and 14 rebounds.

**Pacers 122, Celtics 117**

Malcolm Brogdon scored 29 points and Aaron Holiday scored 11 of his 18 points in the fourth quarter to help host Indiana rally past Boston. The Pacers trailed 94-84 after three quarters but took the lead for good on the first half of Holiday’s two-three-pointers with 4:16 left.

Kemba Walker scored a season-high 44 points and had seven assists — not enough to extend the Celtics’ four-game winning streak.

Indiana snapped a seven-game losing streak in the series — including Boston’s first-round play-off sweep last season.

**Rockets 116, Cavaliers 110**

James Harden scored 55 points — 20 in the fourth quarter — and Russell Westbrook added 23 points as Houston withstood an unexpected scare at Cleveland.

The free-falling Cavaliers have lost eight straight and 14 of 15. Harden matched Kyrie Irving’s arena record for points in a game.

**Hornets 113, Nets 108**

Devonte’ Graham scored a career-high 40 points, and Charlotte rallied from a 20-point deficit to win at Brooklyn. Graham had 27 points in the second half in the Hornets’ second-straight victory. Miles Bridges added 14 points.

**Jazz 127, Timberwolves 116**

Donovan Mitchell had 30 points and six assists, Joe Ingles pitched in a season-high 23 points and visiting Utah dealt Minnesota its sixth straight loss.

Rudy Gobert added 20 points and 16 rebounds for the Jazz, who won for just the third time in nine games by taking over with a 38-24 advantage in the third quarter.

**Bulls 136, Hawks 102**

Zach LaVine scored 35 points in three quarters, Lauri Markkanen added 22 and host Chicago snapped a three-game losing streak with a victory over road-weary Atlanta. LaVine, who sat out the final 14 minutes, was 12-for-15 from the field, including 7-for-7 from three-point range.

**Grizzlies 115, Suns 108**

Dillon Brooks scored 27 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. added 24 and Memphis earned a win at Phoenix.

The Grizzlies won two games in a row for the first time in nearly a month. Jackson shot 10-for-18 from the field, including 3-for-7 from three-point range, and the Grizzlies improved to 6-0 when Brooks scores at least 20 points.

**Bucks 127, Pelicans 112**

Giannis Antetokounmpo sat out but host Milwaukee kept on rolling, getting 29 points from Eric Bledsoe in a rout of New Orleans that extended the team’s winning streak to 16 games.

The Bucks (22-3) tied the second-longest winning streak in franchise history and moved closer to the franchise record of 20, set during the team’s 1970-71 championship season.

**Kings 94, Thunder 93**

Bogdan Bogdanovic made a three-pointer with 13.4 seconds remaining, and host Sacramento overcame an 11-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Oklahoma City.

Both teams committed turnovers with the game tied in the final minute before Shai Gilgeous-Alexander hit two free throws to put the Thunder up 93-91 with 31.6 seconds left.

Bogdanovic got the ball outside the arc as Oklahoma City defender Dennis Schroder went flying past him trying for a block. Bogdanovic then hit a 28-foot jumper to give Sacramento the lead.

**The New York Knicks’ Julius Randle, right, shoots against Golden State Warriors defender Kevin Looney during the Knicks’ 124-122 overtime victory Wednesday in San Francisco.**

**NATHAN DENETTE/The Canadian Press/AP**
**College basketball/NHL/Golf**

**College basketball roundup**

**Cockburn, Illinois upset No. 5 Michigan**

Associated Press

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. — Kofi Cockburn had 19 points, 10 rebounds and four blocks to help Illinois upset No. 5 Michigan 71-62 on Wednesday night.

The 7-foot freshman from Jamaica dominated from the opening tip, making two dunks that brought the crowd to its feet. Ayo Dosunmu scored 13 points, Adre Hill had 13 and Giorgi Bezhanishvili 12 for Illinois (7-3, 1-1 Big Ten).

Jon Teske scored 16 points for Michigan (8-3, 1-1). Eli Brooks and Isaiah Livers each scored 12 points.

With about four minutes left in the game, Cockburn hit a basket and was fouled. While celebrating, he inadvertently hit referee Lewis Garrison in the head and knocked him unconscious. Illinois spokesman Derrick Burson said Garrison was cleared on site by doctors and taken to a hospital as a precaution.

**NHL roundup**

**Caps retain dominance of Bruins**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — T.J. Oshie scored twice in under four minutes and John Carlson got the go-ahead goal to extend the Washington Capitals’ long-standing domination of the Boston Bruins with a 3-2 victory Wednesday night in a showdown between the NHL’s two best teams.

The Caps have won 16 of their past 17 games against the Bruins, who have lost four in an eight-game losing streak against the Capitals, who have lost four in a row.

Carlson’s blast past Jaroslav Halak in the third period fired up a crowd that had remained loyal in the wake of the Capitals’ firings of general manager Bill Riley and head coach Barry Trotz.

The Caps won 12 of their past 13 games against the Bruins.

**No. 15 Arizona 99, Nebraska-Omaha 49:** Josh Green and Chase Jeter each had 15 points, helping the host Wildcats bounce back from their first loss of the season.

**Arizona (10-1) returned to McKale Center for the first time in 17 days with a dominating performance, jumping on the Mavericks with a big opening run and keeping its foot on the gas.** Arizona shot 58%, had 25 assists on 38 field goals and had a 44-20 advantage in the paint.

**Merrimack 69, Army 60:** Julius Hodge Jr. scored 14 points, eight assists and six rebounds as the host Knights topped the Black Knights.

**Mike Watkins had 17 points for Merrimack (6-5). Devin Jensen added 14 points. Jaleel Lord had eight rebounds for the hosts.**

**Tommy Funk had 18 points for the Black Knights (4-5). Matt Wilson added 18 points and 11 rebounds.**

**NHL scoreboard**

**Eastern Conference**

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**By the numbers**

**4-1**

The score in favor of the International team after Thursday’s fourballs play in the Presidents Cup.

**2005**

The last time the International squad led the event, then after the second session.

**6**

Birdies by Tiger Woods in the only match of the day the U.S. team won on Thursday, 4 and 3, with Woods and Justin Thomas defeating Marc Leishman and Joaquin Niemann.

**By DOUG FERGUSON**

**Associated Press**

MELBOURNE, Australia — Tiger Woods looked good as ever playing in the Presidents Cup. As captain, his American team found itself in foreign territory — trailing for the first time in 14 years.

An inspired International team shook off an opening fourballs loss to Woods and Justin Thomas by getting big shots and key puts from rookies and veterans alike. It won the other four matches Thursday, never trailing in three of them, and wound up with the start it needed in a bid to win for the first time since 1999.

The International won the opening session 4-1, its best start ever and the first time it led after any session since 2005.

“Browse the images for this while. We’ve got to try to keep this lead now as long as possible, and hopefully the week runs out.”

Woods showed off an exquisite short game, building a 2-up lead after two holes with pitch-and-run shots that set up easy birdies. He chipped in for birdie on the par-5 fifth, and closed out the match with an 8-foot birdie on the par-5 15th, his sixth birdie in the 15 holes he and Thomas needed to beat Marc Leishman and Joaquin Niemann.

Asked what worked well in their first playing together, Thomas replied, “Tiger was working well.”

Little else did for the Americans, but that was more a product of great play by the International team that Ernie Els assembled to try to win the Presidents Cup for the first time since 1999, its only victory.

The International team walked off the course with arms around shoulders, a most happy occasion after coming last seven in a row since the tie in South Africa in 2003.

Even as the normally stoic Hideki Matsuyama showed just how much this week means, fist-pumping his way to victory, Matsuyama led a 25-foot birdie on the 17th for a 1-up lead with C.T. Pan, leading to the final victory of the session over Patrick Reed and Webb Simpson.

“We celebrate this little session victory and then we’ve got a couple more to go,” Els said.

Next up is foursomes matches, a U.S. strength in the Presidents Cup.

“We have to earn the cup,” Woods said, perhaps a reminder that history only goes so far inside the ropes. “It’s a long week. We’re not out of it yet.”

Woods is the first playing captain since the first Presidents Cup in 1994, and it was his first time playing since 2013. It was his 25th victory in the Presidents Cup, one short of the record held by Phil Mickelson.

Source: Associated Press
**MLB**

**Source: Rendon, Angels agree on $245M**

Third baseman gets seven-year contract

**By Ronald Blum**
*Associated Press*

SAN DIEGO — Third baseman Anthony Rendon and the Los Angeles Angels agreed to a $245 million, seven-year contract Wednesday, a person with direct knowledge of the deal told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been announced and was subject to a successful physical.

Rendon gets a $4 million signing bonus payable by Dec. 31 and salaries of $25.5 million next season, $27.5 million in 2021, $36 million in 2022 and $38 million each year from 2023-26. He would receive a $250,000 bonus for World Series MVP, $150,000 for League Championship Series MVP; $125,000 for election as an All-Star starter and $100,000 for selection as a reserve.

Rendon is the third prized free agent to strike a big-money deal at this week’s baseball winter meetings. He’ll join three-time MVPs Mike Trout and Albert Pujols on a team that’s made just one postseason appearance in the past decade.

The Angels had missed out on free agent right-hander Gerrit Cole, who agreed to a record $324 million, nine-year contract with the New York Yankees on Tuesday night, a person familiar with the deal told the AP.

“With our flexibility, if we miss a big player, there (are) still very talented players that are accessible in the free-agent and trade market right now,” Angels general manager Billy Eppler said earlier Wednesday.

Rendon, who has played all seven of his major league seasons with Washington, drove in a career-best 126 runs while helping the Nationals capture the franchise’s first World Series championship this year. His 19.9 Wins Above Replacement, per FanGraphs, over the past four seasons ranks only behind Trout, Boston’s Mookie Betts and Milwaukee’s Christian Yelich among position players.

Rendon is the latest big signing by owner Arte Moreno, following Pujols, Shohei Ohtani, Josh Hamilton and C.J. Wilson.

“We’re within some structure of a budget and a payroll forecast that you realistically want to be near and then we just take those opportunities to Arte and see if he’ll grant us the permission to do those things,” Eppler said. “There (are) good players out there and players that warrant some sizeable contracts. I know the players that he likes.”

Rendon follows Bryce Harper as a homegrown star in Washington to leave via free agency — Harper signed a $330 million, 13-year deal with the Philadelphia Phillies last March. The Nationals had remained in contact with the 29-year-old Rendon’s representatives Wednesday, according to general manager Mike Rizzo.

“The third-base market specifically is an active market,” Rizzo said. “There are several teams that are in the market for that particular position. I think it will move fairly rapidly, not only in the free-agent market but in the trade market I think we’ll see some activity.”

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**Ohtani’s throwing program at top of franchise’s agenda**

**By Janie McCauley**
*Associated Press*

SAN DIEGO — Once Shohei Ohtani completes the final phase of his recovery from Tommy John surgery later this month, the Los Angeles Angels will confer with surgeon Dr. Neal ElAttrache and the team’s medical staff to determine how to proceed with the Japanese two-way star’s throwing program.

Ohtani threw another bullpen session Wednesday and has worked up to about 50 pitches, general manager Billy Eppler said. The team may decide to keep him from the mound or flat ground, but he may also take time off before ramping up again for spring training.

“The first step is going to be get through what he needs to get through and then talk to Dr. ElAttrache and talk to our medical personnel and come up with a plan,” Eppler said. “He’s throwing now at this time of year at more intensity than other pitchers are and other starters.

“So my question that I’m going to ask is going to be: ‘What’s best for Shohei? Is it to just continue throwing, is it to continue throwing on a mound, continue throwing flat ground?’ Stop, rest, start back up? So I’m going to explore that, but I’m going to wait until we get through this and then I’ll know a little bit more about how to utilize him.”

Ohtani is throwing at 85%, and the Angels would like him to reach about 90%. Eppler said some pitchers on the staff will have their innings monitored — Ohtani likely one of them — without offering specifics at this stage. He does plan to keep Ohtani pitching once a week and hitting four days a week if all goes well.

“If he can do that, then that would be the usage plan,” Eppler said. “I don’t want to take additional risk on a guy who is right back from a UCL reconstruction. I don’t want to introduce additional risk, clearly at the outset of the season. I don’t think that’s a mindful thing to do.”

The 25-year-old Ohtani had surgery on his left knee cap in September, but the reconstructed elbow is most concerning for the Angels.

Ohtani got back on the mound last week and pitched a bullpen session in front of new pitching coach Mickey Callaway in Anaheim on Monday. The 2018 AL Rookie of the Year finished his second major league season batting .286 with 18 homers and 62 RBIs in 106 games as the Angels’ designated hitter.
Army quarterback Kelvin Hopkins Jr. looks to pass against Hawaii last month in Honolulu.

Legacy: Hopkins won over West Point with personality

FROM BACK PAGE
All these years later, Hopkins has memorized one of the most complex offensive playsbooks in college football. He is most renowned in West Point for being the first quarterback in program history to rush and pass for 1,000 yards apiece. Among his teammates, however, he may be better known for his genial disposition and winsome smile.

“He’s funny,” said wide receiver Camden Harrison, whose connection with Hopkins on the field this season has been constant. “He’s fun to be around, and you can always count on him to have your back.”

If last year was proof that hard work pays off, this year for Hopkins has been a lesson that sometimes plans don’t work out as expected. He was knocked out of multiple games with injuries, missed several contests and fallen short on last-minute game-winning drives. “It’s been a challenge for me,” Hopkins said.

Fullback Connor Slomka surmises that Hopkins was a sixth-string quarterback when he arrived at West Point, typical just by the sheer number of athletes on Army’s roster. What’s atypical is Hopkins’ gradual rise through the ranks, from afterthought to program-altering star.

“He’s been a lot of things,” Slomka said, referring to the quarterback’s uplifting personality as well as his versatility as a dreamer and motivator.

Slomka calls it “a cinematic story. He’s worked his way up.”

For Hopkins, success is usually a slow burn. He enjoys the process, the pressure, the pressure.

“My Six Sense,” the quarterback, if healthy, has the potential to shock the audience with a season finale few may see coming, considering the struggles Army has endured all year. He may not start — said head coach Jeff Monken on Tuesday of his quarterbacks, “We’re going to have a very competitive game on Saturday.”

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Slomka calls it “a cinematic story. He’s worked his way up.”

Perry currently ranks third all-time at Navy with 3,842 career rushing yards, trailing record-setting quarterback Keenan Reynolds (4,559, 2012-2015) and Napoleon McCallum (4,179, 1981-85).

Fast forward five years later and Jasper marvels at the Malcolm Perry has added to the Navy football sideline. There is Perry outshoring teammates to stop worrying about what went wrong on the previous possession and focus on improving the next. Here is Perry telling Jasper what the defense is doing and suggesting some plays that might work.

“Seeing how far Malcolm has come, both as a player and a person, has been very rewarding for me personally,” Jasper said. “Malcolm is so much more commanding on the sideline. He’s provided a strong leadership presence and really taken control of the offense. Malcolm has gone from a kid who didn’t say much to one that speaks up and is assertive.”

Watching from the stands at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, Bonny Perry has seen the dramatic evolution as well.

“I see Malcolm on the sideline hyping people up and I almost can’t believe it. He has never been like that before,” Bonny Perry said of her youngest son. “I remember a game this season when Malcolm scored a touchdown, then flipped the ball to the referee. He’s never done anything like that before. I agree with Coach Jasper, Malcolm has grown and changed a lot.”

Malcolm Perry has always been a fierce competitor who tried to lead by example, but motivating teammates verbally was never his style.

“Malcolm has been playing football since the age of 9 and all his coaches have wanted him to be more vocal, and he just wouldn’t do it,” Bonny said. “Malcolm knew the other kids weren’t as motivated, weren’t as serious as we were. Malcolm knew he couldn’t hide his feelings with words, so he just tried to show the way.”

Malcolm Xiomar Perry is the youngest of six children born to parents who were both career ball players in the military. Maurice Perry met his future wife while they both worked in logistics with the military. They married in 1995.

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League executive: Interference rules have caused ‘angst’

BY SCHUYLER DIXON
Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Amid the concern and controversy over coaches’ challenges and video reviews of pass interference, the NFL plans a hard look at the rules adjustment instituted this season.

The change was for the 2019 season only and the 32 team owners would have to ratify it again — on a temporary or permanent basis — for it to be continued. Thus far, inconsistencies in how the penalties are being called and with decisions made after video reviews have plagued the system.

“‘There’s no question there’s been angst,’ Rich McKay, president of the Atlanta Falcons and head of the NFL’s powerful competition committee said Wednesday at the league meetings. “I’ve felt the angst. I felt the angst with our team, feel the angst of others. But it’s a new rule. It’s a big rule. It’s a new rule. It’s more efficient and more effective.”

“After you do that, which is what McKay emphasized that his job is to evaluate all officiating matters.

“My role is to gather all the information and evaluate it, myself included,” he said.

In other topics:

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Ryan Tannehill has done exactly what the Tennessee Titans hoped he would when they made him their starting quarterback.

They have scored at least 30 points in four straight games, the franchise’s longest streak since 2003. And though the Titans are coming off of a game where they averaged more yards per play than any other NFL game this season, they still see plenty of room for improvement.

“Definitely things we can clean up some games more than others,” Tannehill said Wednesday. “You go back and look at the tape, there’s always things we can be better at, plays that we missed. Conversions that we should’ve had, maybe a block on the backside of a run or a throw location could’ve been better, a route could’ve been better.

Some might say they’re nitpicking, but the Titans (8-5) are working to fix those mistakes — which concern Tannehill.

The same mistake next game could hurt us,” he said, “so we definitely want to clean those things up.

Only the Baltimore Ravens (35.1) have scored more points in the NFL over the past eight weeks than the Titans — who are averaging 21.4 points per game in that span. All the scoring has helped Tennessee win four straight and six of its last seven and turn Sunday’s game with Houston (8-5) into a showdown for the top of the AFC South.

Everyone on the Titans’ roster is getting into the scoring act too. The defense has scored a touchdown three times this season, the last with linebacker Jayon Brown picking up a fumble and running 46 yards for the clinching TD in last week’s 42-21 victory in Oakland. Linebacker Rashaan Evans returned a fumble Nov. 10 in a win over Kansas City.

Brown returned a fumble forced by Tye Smith, who returned a blocked field goal for a touchdown in a win in Indianapolis on Dec. 1.

“We’re all feeding off each other,” Brown said. “Special teams is feeding off defense, and the defense is feeding off offense.”

The biggest difference for Tennessee in this scoring outburst in recent weeks has been due to the offense. The Titans had scored only one touchdown in 10 quarters when Tennessee benched Marcus Mariota for Tannehill looking for an offensive spark.

The difference in the offense was immediate. The Titans have scored 27 touchdowns in seven games with Tannehill.

“I don’t think it’s like a secret formula or anything like that,” Titans safety Kevin Byard said. “I think guys are just executing a lot better than they were before.”

Tannehill not only is second in the NFL completing 73.4% of his passes, he leads the league with a 118.5 passer rating. Derrick Henry ranks second with 1,243 yards rushing, and he’s averaging 5.7 yards a carry to give Tennessee a serious threat on play-action. Rookie wide receiver A.J. Brown leads the team with 39 catches for 779 yards and six touchdowns.

Trying to slow down or stop the Titans has kept the Texans’ coaching staff busy the past couple days. Houston coach Bill O’Brien says the Titans are doing a great job with the offense and the defense with Tannehill executing.

“He’s a good football player,” O’Brien said. “He’s accurate, very accurate. He’s been accurate his whole career. He’s making really good decisions with the ball, he’s getting them into the right play, out of a bad play, he can run, he’s very athletic. He’s playing really well.”

D. Ross Cameron/AP

Tipping point: Titans’ Tannehill triggers an offensive turnaround

BY TERESA M. WALKER
Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Ryan Tannehill has scored 31 or more points this season.

By the numbers

31.4

Points per game the last eight weeks for the Titans, second only to the Baltimore Ravens over the same period.

4

Consecutive games Tennessee has scored 31 or more points this season.

118.5

Ryan Tannehill’s league-leading passer rating.

SOURCE: Associated Press
**SACK HUNTER**

Vikings’ relentless defensive end has blossomed into one of the league’s premier pass rushers

**By Dave Campbell**
Associated Press

EAGAN, Minn. — After the Minnesota Vikings knocked down passes on Detroit’s first two plays, Danielle Hunter crouched down in his three-point stance on third-and-10 with a tight end lined up to try to block him. The Lions could hardly have found a faster track to punt. Jesse James had little hope of fending off Hunter long enough for quarterback David Blough to escape harm, and Hunter brought him to the ground on the next one of his three sacks in the first half on Sunday, getting pressure on Matt staffed by the defense.

With 12 ½ sacks this season, Hunter is tied for fourth in the league, with Terrell Suggs (138) leading the way. He leads the league in sack hurry, and he leads the league in sack hustle. Hunter, at 25 years and four months old, became the youngest player in NFL history to have 50 sacks, doing so 127 days ahead of Robert Quinn’s arrival at that milestone in 2015 for the Rams. Hunter is already 24th among active players in total career sacks, with Terrell Suggs (138) leading the way. Hunter is already halfway to third place on the franchise’s career list. Carl Eller (130), Jim Marshall (127) and John Randle (114) have the first three spots. Hunter is already 24th among active players in the league, with Terrell Suggs (138) leading the way.

Drafted by the Vikings in 2015 in the third round out of LSU after an unremarkable college career, Hunter has more than affirmed the team’s projections that an ideal frame, proven work ethic and humble attitude would translate to NFL success for the 6-foot-5, 252-pound physical marvel.

“Did we know he was going to have 50 sacks at 25 or something?” said Zimmer. “No, but we felt like we could improve him.”

Not many players are blessed with his combination of size, speed and strength, but the preparation and dedication are what has set Hunter apart in the eyes of his appreciative teammates.

“That guy’s a workhorse,” backup defensive end Ifeadi Odenigbo said. “He’s truly a professional. The team would be a lot better if there was more Danielle Hunters around.”

25-year-old Vikings DE Danielle Hunter is the youngest player in NFL history to reach 50 sacks, doing so 127 days ahead of Robert Quinn’s arrival at that milestone in 2015 for the Rams.

AP photos

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**Mostert earns lead RB role for Niners**

**By Grant Cohn**
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — When the 49ers’ Raheem Mostert started his NFL career, he was a running back in name only.

He made the final roster primarily to play special teams. He had never been a starting running back, even in college.

Now Mostert is the lead running back on the 49ers’ second-ranked rushing offense.

But his self-image hasn’t changed. He always saw himself as a running back by nature. “You can’t look at it as anything other than your position,,” Mostert said.

Mostert is an excellent special teams player, and until recently the 49ers didn’t need him to run the ball. But starting running back Tevin Coleman has averaged just 2.1 yards per carry the past four games, and backup Matt Breida missed three weeks with an ankle injury.

So the 49ers turned to Mostert. And the past three games, he has rushed 35 times for 260 yards, averaged 7.4 yards per carry and scored four touchdowns. He has become one of their most potent playmakers.

“Raheem has earned it these last few weeks,” coach Kyle Shanahan said. “We need to give him more opportunities.”

He’s given us no choice. I’m happy for him. He’s been extremely impressive.”

Mostert played college football at Purdue, where he carried the ball only 136 times in four years. He primarily was a kick returner and a sprinter on special teams. In 2016, he won gold medals at the Big Ten Indoor Track and Field Championships with a 6.63-second time in the 60-yard dash and a 20.73-second time in the 200-meter dash. He also ran a 4.32 40-yard dash at his pro day.

However, no team drafted Mostert. He signed with the Philadelphia Eagles as an undrafted free agent in 2015, and bounced around the league until he landed with the 49ers in 2016.

“Raheem always has had an impact on special teams,” said Atlanta Falcons coach Dan Quinn, who will face the 49ers on Sunday. “But now, out on the perimeter when he gets the ball in his hands, he’s a real factor. Sometimes, you need the opportunity, and he definitely has taken advantage of his.”

**By the numbers**

7.4
Average yards per carry over the last three games for San Francisco 49ers RB Raheem Mostert.

**SOURCE:** Associated Press

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**Mostert is the youngest player in NFL history to reach 50 sacks, doing so 127 days ahead of Robert Quinn’s arrival at that milestone in 2015 for the Rams.**

AP photos
Leaving a mark

Record-setting runner Perry matured into commanding leader for Navy

BY BILL WAGNER
The Capital (Annapolis, Md.)

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — As an offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach, Ivin Jasper has thoroughly enjoyed watching Malcolm Perry run wild on the football field.

Perry has provided three straight seasons of spectacular highlights, running his way into the Navy football record book in breakaway style.

As a teacher and mentor, Jasper’s heart has been filled with joy about witnessing Perry’s transformation from a boy into a man.

“It’s been really neat to watch Malcolm mature. He’s grown up so much since we first met at the prep school,” Jasper said this week.

That meeting took place at the Naval Academy Prep School when Jasper traveled to Newport, R.I., to spend some time and get to know his future protegé. Perry was shy, reticent and a youngster of very few words in the summer of 2015.

Army’s Hopkins could get one final chance to enhance renowned legacy

BY JUSTIN FEDICH
The Times Herald-Record (Middletown, N.Y.)

WEST POINT — The broad-shouldered quarterback who runs through 250-pound linebackers on Saturdays still has a copy of “The Big Friendly Giant” in his closet.

When Kelvin Hopkins was a second-grader at Trinity Episcopal School in Charlotte, N.C., his imagination didn’t take him to West Point. He just wanted to understand what he was reading.

Hopkins had the drive, but he lacked the natural ability to comprehend his schoolwork. His teacher that year gifted him a copy of the same book that remains in his house in Charlotte, with a note: “You can do it. Put in the time and effort.”

Those words stuck with Hopkins. He learned that though he might not be the most book smart in his class, though he might not be the biggest, tallest football player on his team, it wasn’t an excuse. It was a chance to prove himself.