WASHINGTON — The U.S. Space Force now exists, but it could be months before it has its own troops. The sixth branch of the U.S. military became reality Friday evening when President Donald Trump signed into law the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, the annual bill that sets Pentagon policy. The NDAA directs the Pentagon to create the Space Force, which is the first new branch of service since the Air Force was carved out of the Army Air Corps in 1947. Top Air Force officials on Friday described the Space Force’s birth as a historic moment that signaled how important space operations are to the nation. It comes at a critical time as China and Russia hone their own space abilities and close a capabilities gap in the domain that the United States has long dominated.

“Let there be no mistake, the United States is the best in the world in space today, and today we’re even better,” said Air Force Gen. Jay Raymond, the commander of U.S. Space Command, who has led Pentagon efforts in space for months and who Trump picked Friday to be the first commander of the Space Force. “The United States Space Force will ensure that we compete, deter and win from a position of strength in securing our way of life and our national security.”

Space Force now exists on paper, but it is staffed almost entirely by troops who, for now, will remain in the Air Force. Many other decisions remain to be made about the service, its makeup and its culture. Congress gave the Defense Department 18 months to build the service. Decisions on uniforms, insignia, marketing strategies, rank structure and even who exactly will become a

**Taboo tattoos**

Female body artist takes big risk with every customer

BY TAMEEM AKHGAR

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A female tattoo artist, a rarity in ultra-conservative Afghanistan, is taking a big risk with every customer she takes on.

It’s been 18 months since Suraya Shaheedi started her mobile tattoo shop in the capital, Kabul. She’s received death threats for taking on the taboo of the ink-on-skin drawings she does — as well as being a single woman willing to work with men.

“I have struggled a lot, even been threatened with death, because people in Afghanistan think doing tattoos is haram,” she said, using the Arabic word meaning prohibited by religion.

“Whether my customers are men or women doesn’t matter to me. I do tattoos for both,” says Shaheedi, a 26-year-old, divorced single mother.

SEE RISK ON PAGE 5

IA st Sary Shaheedi, 26, inks a customer in Kabul, Afghanistan. In the 18 months since she started her mobile tattoo shop, Shaheedi has received death threats for taking on the craft — as well as for being a single woman willing to work with men.

SEE OFFICIAL ON PAGE 6

**It’s official: Space Force now sixth branch of military**

**By Corey Dickstein**

Stars and Stripes

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Top Pentagon general: US troops did not die in vain in Afghanistan

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**VIDEO GAMES**

No regrets about manic romp though hell in Afterparty

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**MILITARY**

Investigation says no racist intent to hand gestures

Page 3
US growth, spending showing resilience

By Martin Crutiger
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy, which only recently was flashing warning signs of a worrisome slowdown, is finishing the year in stronger shape, thanks to a resilient consumer, a healthy job market and interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

The Commerce Department said Friday the gross domestic product — the economy’s total output of goods and services — expanded at a moderate annual rate of 2.1% in the July-September quarter. A separate report showed that consumer spending grew by a solid 0.4% rate in November, the strongest gain since July, and that incomes rebounded after a weak reading in October.

The pace of spending in November is a sign that consumers, who account for about 70% of economic activity, are helping the offset drugs.

Just over a month ago, some polls said growth could slow sharply in the fourth quarter to a 0.5% annual pace or less. But since then, Trump has stepped back from a new round of tariffs, the housing market has rebounded, aided by three interest rate cuts this year and most significantly, the job market is looking healthy. In November, hiring jumped to its highest level since January, with U.S. employers adding 266,000 jobs.

SUNDAY IN EUROPE

Brussels 64/40
Stuttgart 45/39
Vicenza 47/42
Ramstein 45/39
Pápa 45/40
Lajes 48/44
Souda Bay 63/59
Mildenhall/Monash 62/54
Sigonella 61/57
Porvoo 42/38

EUROPE

INTEREST RATES
Prime rate .......................................... 4.75%
Discount rate ................................. 2.25%
Federal funds market rate .......... 1.50%
3-month bill ....................................... 1.53%
30-year bond .................................... 2.34%

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EXCHANGE RATES

Military rates

Euro costs (Dec. 23) .................. $1.1387
Dollar buys (Dec. 23) ....... 0.8872
British pound (Dec. 23) ........... $1.34
Japanese yen (Dec. 23) ............ 107.00
South Korean won (Dec. 23) .... 1,135.00

Commercial rates

Bahraini Dinar ......................... 0.3770
British pound £ ........................ 1.3615
Canadian Dollar ..................... 1.3158
Chinese Yuan ......................... 6.9067
Denmark Kroner ..................... 6.7480
Egyptian Pound ...................... 18.0480
Euro € ........................... $1.1875/80039
Hong Kong Dollar ................. 7.7963
Hungarian Forint .................. 378.24
Israel Shekel ......................... 3.4752
Japanese Yen Y ........................ 109.47
Kuwaiti Dinar ....................... 0.3107
Norwegian Krone ................. 6.9672
Philippine Peso .................... 49.75
Polish Zloty ......................... 3.84
Saudi Arabian Riyal ............... 3.7516
Singapore Dollar .................. 1.3552
South Korean Won ................ 1,109.90

Switzerland (Franc) .................. 0.9825
Thailand (Baht) ...................... 30.18
Turkey (New Lira) ................. 5.9349

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

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EXCHANGE RATES

United States (Dollar), expressed in foreign currencies. All figures are foreign currencies to one dollar, except for the British pound, which is represented in dollars-to-pound, and the euro, which is dollars-to-euro.)

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Every Friday in the European and Pacific editions of Stars and Stripes AND online daily at www.stripes.com/relo
MILITARY

Probe finds no racist intent in hand gestures

By Lolita C. Baldor

WASHINGTON — Hand gestures flashed by West Point cadets and Naval Academy midshipmen during the televised Army-Navy football game were not racist sig- nals, military investigations have concluded.

A Navy probe of the event found that the students were participating in a “sophomoric game” on Saturday and had no racist intent. An Army statement Friday also rejected any racist overtones, saying the hand gestures were “not associated with ideologies or movements that are contrary to the Army values.”

The Navy said officials are, however, disappointed in the im- maturity behavior of the students and “their actions will be appro- priately addressed.” There were no details about their exact punish- ment, but a Navy report on the investigation said the midshipmen should face “administrative action” for “failure to use good judgment.”

Clips of the hand gestures by the students went viral on social media and immediately raised questions about whether they were using a “white power” sign. But others suggested it was part of what’s called the “circle game,” in which someone flashes an upside-down OK sign below the waist and punches anyone who looks at it.

The Navy said that reviews of the footage, more than two dozen interviews and background checks by the Naval Criminal In- vestigative Service and the FBI determined that the two fresh- men midshipmen were partici- pating in the “circle game” with West Point cadets.

The investigation added that the two naval academy students “exhibited genuine shock” and said they were not aware of the racist connotation of the hand gestures. It said interviews with friends, roommates and other commanders also found no links to the white power movement.

Navy Adm. Mike Gilday, chief of naval operations, said sailors are expected to conduct themselves with integrity and charac- ter at all times.

“To be clear, the Navy does not tolerate racism in any form,” said Gilday. “And while the in- vestigation determined there was no racist intent behind these ac- tions, our behavior must be pro- fessional at all times and not give cause for others to question our core values of honor, courage and commitment.”

The Navy investigation also made a number of recommenda- tions to better coordinate and screen midshipmen who may be in high visibility areas for major events such as the game day.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point reached similar con- clusions. Lt. Gen. Darryl Williams, West Point superintendent, expressed disappointment in the cadets’ immature behavior. The cadets involved also will receive “appropriate administrative” or disciplinary actions, West Point said. No details were provided.

Canine deaths prompt halt in bomb-sniffing dog program

By Chad Garland

The U.S. is temporarily halting a program under which bomb- sniffing dogs were sent to coun- tries in the Middle East after a report released Friday found at least five more of the specially trained dogs had died in Jordan and Egypt following poor care, mistreatment or negligence.

Cost of living allowances available to stateside troops will drop for 2020

By Rose L. Thayer

Fewer service members living stateside will receive a cost of living allowance in 2020, according to an announcement from the Defense Department on Friday. The department will pay about $20.2 million in cost of living allowances, known commonly as COLA, for service members living in expensive areas of the continental United States.

This includes about 12,300 service mem- bers — down 2,600 from last year — liv- ing within 16 identified areas, according to the DOD news release. The decrease dropped annual COLA spending by about $1.9 million.

To determine what locations receive the taxable allowance, a contractor provides data cost for each military housing area and it is compared to a national average, according to the release. Any area at least 8% higher than that average is eligible to receive cost of living allowances. Cat- egories that determine cost data include transportation, goods and services, fed- eral income taxes, sales taxes and miscel- laneous expenses. Data is also adjusted based on access to commissaries and mili- tary exchange stores.

Oakland and San Francisco, Calif., and Staten Island, N.Y., will have the highest COLA rates in 2020. Saint Joseph, Mo., will see the largest increase, rising by two percentage points.

Service members stationed in Fresno, Marin/Sonoma, Sacramento, and Stock- ton, Calif.; New Haven/Fairfield, Conn.; Nantucket, Mass., and Columbia/Jefferson City and Saint Joseph, Mo., were added to the COLA list, while San Bernardino, Calif., Boston and Essex County, Mass., Detroit, Atlantic City, N.J., West Point and Westchester County, N.Y., and Willow Grove, Pa., were removed.

Other locations remaining on the COLA list are Santa Clara County and Bridge- port, Calif.; Long Island, N.Y., New York City, Philadelphia and Camden, N.J. Additionally, 30 counties outside of mili- tary housing areas were identified as loc- ations for service members to receive a boost in pay.

When looking at service members im- pacted, about 3,800 members will begin receiving COLA next year, 3,300 will see an increase in their payments, 4,100 will see a decrease and 6,400 members will no lon- ger receive cost of living allowances. An- other 1,100 will see no change, according to the release.

The total amount of COLA that a ser- vice member receives varies based on geographic duty location, rank, years of service and dependency status. Payments range from $32 to $60 per month for mem- bers with dependents, and $22 to $45 per month for members without dependents.
Top general gives defense of Afghanistan war

BY DAN LAMOTHE
The Washington Post.

The Pentagon's top general defended the war in Afghanistan on Friday, saying there was not “some coordinated lie” by senior officials to mischaracterize the conflict and noting that no terrorist attack originating in Afghanistan has been carried out on American soil in the past 18 years.

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that he does not believe 777 American troops died in vain in the war.

“I do not. I absolutely do not,” he said. “I could not look at myself in the mirror. I couldn’t answer myself at 2 or 3 in the morning when my eyes pop open and I see that number in my mind. So no, I don’t think anybody has died in vain, per se.”

The comments came in response to questions prompted by The Afghanistan Papers, The Washington Post’s recent reporting about the war based on documents. The documents, obtained through the Freedom of Information Act after a three-year court battle, detail not only dysfunction during the conflict but how U.S. officials often publicly touted progress while privately harboring doubts about the war’s long-term outcome.

Milley, who served three tours in Afghanistan and often cited progress there, disagreed with assertions he has seen that senior U.S. officials deceived the American public or Congress. He addressed this issue while standing alongside Defense Secretary Mark Esper at a Pentagon news conference.

“More than a stretch — I find that a mischaracterization in my own personal experience,” Milley said. “You are looking at probably hundreds of general officers, State Department employees, CIA, Department of Defense folks. I just don’t think you can get that level of coordination to that kind of deception.”

Esper said the war “has been very transparent,” noting that the media and members of Congress have traveled to Afghanistan on numerous occasions over the past 18 years.

“It’s not like this war was hid- ing somewhere, and now there has been a revelation,” Esper said. “So I think, between all of the people looking at this conflict over all the years, some type of insinuation that there has been this large-scale conspiracy is just, to me, ridiculous, and I certainly echo the chairman’s comments on that front.”

The Post’s reporting did not say there had been a conspiracy or coordinated lie, but rather that a succession of senior officials have made “rosy pronouncements they knew to be false” while “hid- ing unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable.”

It draws on thousands of pages of documents gathered by investiga- tors working for John Sopko, the congressionally appointed special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction who said in an in- terview that the documents show “the American people have con- stantly been lied to.”

A Post spokesman released a statement Friday saying, “The stories and the documents they rely upon speak for themselves.”

Milley said Friday that assess- ments that commanders pro- vided over the span of the war were “based on what we knew at the time, and those were honest assessments.”

Asked whether it is fair to compare the Afghanistan docu- ments to the Pentagon Papers that detailed deception by senior officials during the Vietnam War, the general drew a distinction. The Pentagon Papers were writ- ten “in advance of decision-mak- ing,” Milley said, a reference to Defense Secretary Robert McNar- mara calling in 1967 for a secret task force to detail the history of the war as he weighed what to do next. The documents about Af- ghanistan, he said, are an attempt by Sopko’s office “to do post-facto interviews to determine lessons learned for the force as we go to the future.”

Afghan official:
Up to 700 in ISIS surrounded, held

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Afghan government said Saturday it has detained about 700 Islamic State group fighters and family members in eastern Afghanistan over the past six months.

The Afghan intelligence service, the National Directorate for Security, said among the 700 are at least 75 women and 159 children. Many of the group are from foreign countries. Many were arrested, but some turned themselves in.

The NDS said all of the fighters and family members were transported to the NDS compound in Kabul.

Earlier, security forces had surrounded dozens of remaining fighters in their homes in various districts. There was no way to independently confirm that the prisoners the government presented to reporters and photographers at the NDS compound Saturday are affiliated with the Islamic State group.

Most of the arrested ISIS members are from Pakistan, Jordan and Central Asian countries, said an NDS officer who asked that his name not be used as agency rules don’t allow him to be identified.

As many as 277 foreigners are among the arrested militants, he said.

Washington’s peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad tweeted earlier this month that ISIS in eastern Afghanistan has been weakened by operations carried out not just by the U.S. and Afghan forces, but by the Taliban as well.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham said last week that President Donald Trump may announce an American troop drawdown from Afghanistan before the year’s end.

PHOTOS BY RAHMAT GUL/AP

Top right: Islamic State militants are presented to media in Kabul, Afghanistan, on Saturday. Near and far right: The country’s intelligence service said Saturday that more than 75 women and 159 children, most of them from foreign countries, are in the custody of the National Directorate for Security.
Afghanistan's patriarchal society often forbids a woman from touching a man to her father supports her work, even though her son now lives with her parents.

Before the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States, the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, when the U.S. invaded. The insurgent group ruled Afghanistan as an Islamic state, controlling roughly half of the country. Women are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort. In areas under the Taliban, who now control or hold sway over roughly half of the country, women are not allowed to leave their homes without a male escort. The insurgent group ruled Afghanistan with a harsher version of Islamic law from 1996 to 2001, when the U.S. invaded.

Women like Shaheedi have carved out a space for themselves in a society where women are subjected to strict customs controlling women in Afghanistan need to change. "I support my daughter in every way, and she makes me proud the way she's stood against this taboo," he said.

Shaheedi uses Instagram and other social media to find and meet customers. She easily gets customers, whether men or women, as social attitudes toward tattoos loosen up and more ink parlors open. "I'm happy if the Taliban return results in peace, but if they disagree with my work and impede the freedom and progress of women, then I will be the first to stand against them," she vowed.

"I can't leave the profession I love," Shaheedi adds. "I am happy if the Taliban return results in peace, but if they disagree with my work and impede the freedom and progress of women, then I will be the first to stand against them," she vowed.

"Being a woman in Afghanistan requires having the guts," she said. "I am proud of myself for my daughter in every way, and she makes me proud the way she's stood against this taboo," he said.

Shaheedi uses Instagram and other social media to find and meet customers. She prefers not to keep a parlor with a fixed address out of concerns for her safety. Shaheedi uses Instagram and other social media to find and meet customers. She prefers not to keep a parlor with a fixed address out of concerns for her safety. She also does manicures and makeup. When she met one customer recently at a hair salon, the customer’s husband recognized her from her social media pages as the tattoo artist “Ahoo,” the nickname she uses online. The husband threatened to kill Shaheedi if she kept posting images of her tattoo work on social media.

"I'm thinking that if the Taliban return, they'll cut off my hands and legs," he said. "I can't leave the profession I love," Shaheedi adds. "I am happy if the Taliban return results in peace, but if they disagree with my work and impede the freedom and progress of women, then I will be the first to stand against them," she vowed.

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ORLANDO, Fla. — As University of Central Florida research associate Shane Reynolds guides his avatar over a virtual minefield using his iPad, small beeps and whistles reveal the location of the scourge of the modern war zone: improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

He must take his time to sweep every last inch of the playing field to make sure his character doesn’t miss any of the often-deadly bombs.

Despite his slow pace, Reynolds makes a small misstep and with a knock on a beam, he drops off his player, graphically scattering his body parts.

The device is much more than a game. It’s meant to train soldiers to find IEDs in the field to keep their comrades from injury or death.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, 45% of the 4,536 U.S. military deaths so far came because of an IED, according to the Congress’ public policy research institute.

“To teach the soldiers how to use it for their daily tasks and making it fun for them to use realmente helps them to learn through practice,” said Latika Edfert, science and technology manager at the Orlando Army Research Lab.

Virtual and augmented reality has become one of the fastest-growing methods of training workers in fields like maintenance, medicine and even making fried chicken.

The U.S. Army has been developing its IED-detection trainer for three years, with the goal being to replace $20,000, physical and bulky trainers that must be used in the field using cans or actual IEDs.

Raymond and other officials said Friday that the Space Force chief and the leader of the combatant command for space, Air Force Gen. John Raymond, could function as the Space Force chief's deputy.

Shane Reynolds, UCF Research Associate demonstrates an AR/VR system to train soldiers and Marines on how to improve their ability to detect improvised explosive devices using the military “Minehound” metal detector with ground penetrating radar, on Dec. 6.

Researchers believe their device will be cheaper and much more available.

“We are trying to show the utility of having this device available several of the service’s base. We want you to train,” Reed said.

“This enables that capability.”

At this year’s Army Expeditionary Warrior Experiments conference at Fort Benning, Ga., the research team received feedback from soldiers who would be using the device in the field.

That experience prompted some changes to the device and program, including making it more user-friendly for left-handed people.

Dean said it has been a constantly evolving effort to teach different generations of warriors on the virtual trainer.

“Young soldiers embrace the technology immediately where traditionalists often have to be shown on the device," he said.

But he said it has been a mostly smooth process of teaching soldiers.

“If you can potentially save money by improving their training and reduce the cost, it’s a big win, in my opinion,” Reed said.
Holiday break upends impeachment plans

By Andrew Taylor
The Associated Press
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is in sunny Florida after his historic impeachment, but plans for his speedy trip back in Washington remained clouded. Senate leaders hoping for leverage have failed to agree on procedures for the trial.

Trump is still expected to be acquitted of both charges in the Senate, where Republicans have the majority, in what will be only the third presidential impeachment trial in U.S. history. Proceedings are expected to begin in January.

The impasse between Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer over whether there will be new witnesses and testimony — along with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s refusal so far to send the articles of impeachment to the Senate — have left the situation unresolved.

Nancy Pelosi is looking for a Quid Pro Quo with the Senate. Why aren’t we impeaching her?” Trump tweeted, mockingly one of those accusations that he has been repeating before heading out for a two-week stay at his Mar-a-Lago resort for the holidays.

McConnell, Trump’s most powerful GOP ally in the Senate, welcomed the president’s emerging defense team Friday for a walk-through of the Senate chamber. White House counsel Pat Cipollone and legislative affairs director Eric Ueland came to Capitol Hill to assess logistics.

A six-term veteran of the Senate, McConnell is acting very much though he has the votes to ensure a trial unchallenged by witnesses — despite the protests of top Democrats Pelosi and Schumer.

“We have this fascinating situation where, following House Democrats’ rush to impeachment, following weeks of pronouncements about the urgency of this situation, the prosecutors have now developed cold feet,” McConnell, R-Ky., said late Thursday as senators left town for the year.

“We’ll continue to see how this develops, and whether the House Democrats ever work up the courage to take their accusations to trial.”

McConnell has all but promised an acquittal of the president. He appears to have united Republicans behind an approach that would begin the trial with presentations and arguments lasting perhaps two weeks, before he tries drawing the proceedings to a close. The Senate will reconvene Jan. 5.

That has sparked a fight with Pelosi and Schumer, who are demanding trial witnesses who refused to appear during House committee hearings, including acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton.

“They should have witnesses and documentation,” Pelosi told The Associated Press. “This could be something very beneficial to the country, if the facts are there.”

Schumer’s leverage is limited, though his party can force votes on witnesses once a trial begins. He appears to be counting on public opinion, and political pressure on vulnerable Republican incumbents like Susan Collins of Maine, to give Democrats the 51 votes they need.

“Wouldn’t send them to vote, I’m going to vote to kick President Trump out of office,” Schumer said in an interview. “But you might get them to vote for witnesses, you might get them to vote for documents, and we’ll see where it falls from there.”

McConnell isn’t budging. After a 20-minute meeting with Schumer Thursday, he declared the talks at an impasse and instructed senators to return on Jan. 6 ready to vote.

McConnell appears ready to impose a framework drawn from the 1999 trial of Bill Clinton, who was acquitted of two articles of impeachment. That trial featured a 100-0 vote on arrangements that established two weeks of presentations and argument before a partisan tally in which Republicans called a limited number of witnesses, including Monica Lewinsky for a videotaped deposition.

McConnell said Thursday: “I continue to believe that the unanimous bipartisan precedent that was good for President Clinton ought to be good enough for this president, too. Fair is fair.”

There’s a risk that Schumer’s protests — which started Sunday with a letter to McConnell requesting four witnesses — could complicate the process.

Endangered Republican senators including Cory Gardner of Colorado and Martha McSally of Arizona need strong turnout by the GOP base to win, and will be hard-pressed to take Schumer’s side.

Trump, meanwhile, has been hoping the trial will serve as an opportunity for vindication. He continues to talk about parading his own witnesses to the chamber, including former Vice President and 2020 Democratic candidate Joe Biden and House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff, D-Calif., who led the fact-finding phase of the impeachment investigation.

There is little appetite for witnesses among McConnell and other key Senate GOP allies, however.

Trump signs 2 massive spending bills, averts shutdown

By Jennifer Shutt
CQ Roll Call
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed two behemoth spending packages totaling $1.375 billion on border barrier funding from certain accounts, while leaving the border wall intact, but didn’t backfill $3.6 billion the White House diverted from military construction projects to barrier construction.

Neither side was particularly happy with the compromise; in fact, House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee Chairwoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., voted against her own bill. But bipartisan majorities in both chambers were willing to accept the trade-offs in the end, brushing off critiques about a rushed process and essentially just breaking one giant omnibus package into two pieces.

Congress will have about a month off from budget and appropriations before early February when the Trump administration sends its fiscal 2021 budget request to Capitol Hill and the administration’s leaders.

It’s unclear when the Senate’s impeachment trial will begin, but要看 how long the House impeachment process will take or whether the Senate will take a break, which it may with the election-year budget cycle. But appropriations already have topline budget numbers for next year in place so they’ll be able to at least avoid the complications that marked the fiscal 2020 process, when spending allocations weren’t determined until July.

State of the Union set for Feb. 4

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“The invite came in a letter Pelosi sent to Trump citing “the spirit of our Constitution,” which calls for the president to give Congress information on the state of the union “from time to time.”

By Andrew Taylor
The Associated Press
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump accepted Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s invitation Friday to deliver his State of the Union address on Feb. 4, which will be his first visit to the House since Democrats voted to impeach him.

“You wouldn’t get them to say, ‘I’m going to vote to kick President Trump out of office,’” Schumer said in an interview. “But you might get them to vote for witnesses, you might get them to vote for documents, and we’ll see where it falls from there.”

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Trump’s signatures on the fiscal 2020 defense authorization bill at an event at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on Friday night. That measure includes Trump’s prized provisions establishing a new Space Force branch of the U.S. military, which could take 12 weeks of paid parental leave for federal workers.

Trump also signed the bill allocating $1.375 billion on border barrier spending — a topic many feared could lead to another shutdown.

The seemingly endless stalemate over the wall ended just over a week ago when appropriations reached agreement to spend $1.375 billion on border barrier construction during fiscal 2020, keeping funding level with the previous fiscal year.

Negotiators left the Trump administration’s ability to reprogram funding from certain accounts to the border wall intact, but didn’t backfill $3.6 billion the White House diverted from military construction projects to barrier construction.

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Chief of Space Operations John Raymond, left, and President Donald Trump are seen at the signing ceremony for S.1709, The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, on Friday at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland.
**NATION**

**Watchdog: No misconduct in death of 2 migrant kids**

**By Colleen Long**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Department of Homeland Security released two brief statements Friday evening on the deaths of Jakelin Amei Rosmery Caal Maquin, who died in Dec. 8, and Felipe Gomez Alonzo, who died Dec. 24.

The deaths ushered in a growing border crisis that caught immigration officials unprepared to manage a crush of Central American families seeking asylum in the U.S. and raising questions about medical care and treatment. Border crossings have since declined in recent months following major crackdowns.

“ar are still saddened by the tragic loss of these young lives, and we continue to bolster medical screenings and care at DHS facilities on the border,” a spokesperson for Homeland Security said. “The men and women of Border Patrol are committed to the highest standards of professionalism and care.”

Both children made their way over the U.S.-Mexico border with a parent. Jakelin was part of a large group that crossed in an extremely remote location and it took hours for her to be transported to a hospital. Some seven hours later, she was put on a bus to the nearest Border Patrol station but soon began vomiting. By the end of the two-hour drive, she had stopped breathing.

Lawmakers and immigrant advocates questioned the care she received and criticized the immigration agency’s then-Leader Kevin McAleenan for not alerting lawmakers to the death during his testimony before a Congressional committee. Customs and Border Protection said that the girl initially appeared healthy and that an interview raised no signs of trouble.

The watchdog said it had conducted a detailed investigation in coordination with the local medical examiner’s office. The girl died from Streptococcal sepsis.

Felipe was taken with his father to a hospital in Alamogordo, N.M., where he was diagnosed with a common cold. He was released just before 3 p.m., about 90 minutes after he had been found to have a fever of 103 degrees Fahrenheit, CBP said at the time.

He was prescribed amoxicillin and ibuprofen and taken with his father to a holding facility at a highway checkpoint. At about 7 p.m., agents helped clean up the boy’s vomit. By about 10 p.m., the boy “appeared lethargic and nauseous,” the agency said, and agents decided to have him taken to the hospital. The boy died shortly before midnight.

Felipe and his father were detained by CBP for about a week and sent to various facilities because of overcrowding, an unusually long period in custody at the time but something that later came to be common as the agency struggled with a growing number of migrants detained.

The inspector general coordinated with the local medical examiner’s office and said the boy died from sepsis caused by Staphylococcal aureus bacteria.

The deaths pushed U.S. Customs and Border protection to increase medical checks. But increasingly more family members would cross the border, overwhelming border facilities in the months after their deaths.

The inspector general in May criticized the Border Patrol for “dangerous overcrowding” in its El Paso-area detention stations. Several months after Jakelin and Felipe died, the Border Patrol had packed thousands of parents and children into cells unequipped to hold them. According to the report, one cell with a 12-person capacity had 76 people. Another cell meant for 35 people was holding 155.

**Boy kidnaped in 1964 found through DNA site**

**By Michael Tarm**  
Associated Press

CHICAGO — A Michigan man recently identified as the newborn boy snatched from his mother in 1964 by someone posing as a maternity-ward nurse was found through commercial ancestry websites after the man or a child of his submitted DNA to the sites to learn more about their family tree, a genetic genealogist who played a role in the discovery said Friday.

Recent media reports have said the now-55-year-old man living in rural Michigan was the 2-day-old child of Chester and Dora Fronczak abducted on April 27, 1964, from a Chicago hospital. Those reports have not provided details about how he was located — other than to say DNA was involved.

But genealogist CeCe Moore revealed that she and an adopted son of the Fronczaks, Paul Fronczak, submitted DNA from one of the kidnapped boy’s close relatives to the ancestry sites in 2014 in what she described as a genetic fishing expedition.

The DNA was submitted to Ancestry.com, 23andme.com, MyHeritage.com and FamilyTreeDNA.com, which combined, have around 30 million DNA records, Moore said.

After Moore and Paul Fronczak submitted the DNA, all they could do was wait and hope for a long-shot occurrence: that the kidnapped boy-now adult or one of his own offspring would submit DNA to one the ancestry sites. They finally got a notification a year last year through one of the sites that there was a match, Moore said. The notification included identifiers and ways to communicate with those who submitted the matched DNA.

Citing concerns about infringing on the privacy of the man and the Fronczak family, Moore declined to offer several key details, including the man’s name and where he lives in Michigan.

Dora Fronczak was 28 when her newborn son was abducted. She’s now in her 80s and still lives in the Chicago area.

“The most important thing is that he and his mother have a reunion,” Moore told the AP. “Our greatest wish is for that to happen.”

**Critics attack ex-Kentucky governor’s pardon of man convicted of child rape**

**Associated Press**

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Former Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin defended his controversial pardon of a man who was convicted of raping a child, saying there was no physical evidence of an assault.

Bevin’s comments sparked a flurry of harsh criticism from medical and law enforcement officials.

Mciah Schoettle was in the second year of a 23-year prison sentence when Bevin pardoned him of rape, sodomy and sexual crimes last week. Rob Sanders, the prosecutor who put Schoettle away, called the pardon a “completely classified move.”

Bevin defended the Schoettle pardon in a radio interview Thursday, saying there was no physical evidence of rape in the case.

“If you have been repeatedly

sexually violated as a small child by an adult, there are going to be repercussions of that physically and medically,” Bevin said in the WHAS radio interview. “There was zero evidence of that.”

Bevin also publicly revealed the child’s relationship to Schoettle for the first time, Sanders said.

“Just as offensive are all of his ignorant statements that he made about physical injury in assault cases,” said Sanders, who heads the Commonwealth’s Attorney’s office in Kenton County, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati.

“He obviously did not do any research on this matter or he would know that only 2% of sexual assault victims show any visible physical injury as a result of the rapes that they’ve suffered,” Sanders, a Republican, said in an interview Friday. “This is the kind of foolish ignorance that prosecutors have been working for decades to overcome.”

Bevin, a Republican, issued hundreds of pardons between his electoral defeat on Nov. 5 and his final day in office on Dec. 9. Several have stirred controversy, including his pardon of Patrick Baker, a man convicted of homicide and other crimes whose family held a fundraiser for Bevin last year.

Sanders has launched an investigation into Schoettle’s pardon and whether his family’s wealth and political connections played a role in it.

**We are still saddened by the tragic loss... and we continue to bolster medical screenings and care at DHS facilities on the border.**

Homeland Security spokeswoman

Paul Joseph Fronczak shortly after his birth on April 26, 1964, at Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago. The newborn baby was kidnapped and not found until recently through a commercial ancestry site.
MS-13 arrests deal blow to gang leadership

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Authorities said Friday they have dealt an unprecedented blow to the violent MS-13 street gang, announcing charges against nearly 100 of the group’s members and associates on Long Island.

Suffolk County District Attorney Timothy Sini revealed a sweeping indictment that he said “decimated” the gang’s leadership and drug suppliers on Long Island. He described the case as the largest of its kind against MS-13 in New York, where the gang has been blamed for dozens of killings since 2016.

The two-year investigation by state and federal authorities thwarted more than a half-dozen murder plots, Sini said, and also provided authorities insights into the gang’s structure and recruiting patterns. The investigation was bolstered by an expansive wire tap in which the authorities monitored calls from more than 200 phone numbers.

Gang members on Long Island conspired with colleagues from as far away as Europe and Oklahoma, collecting cash from drug sales and sending that money to the organization’s leaders in El Salvador, according to the 77-count indictment handed up Monday.

The gang feuded against rival groups and would even kill its own members who showed signs of disloyalty or failed to perform “required tasks” such as paying dues or trafficking drugs and weapons, the indictment says.

“MS-13 is a ruthless, savage gang,” Sini said at a news conference, pointing to a machete recovered by law enforcement, the gang’s signature weapon. “They will attempt to recalibrate and send individuals to take up leadership roles in Suffolk County. That’s why we have to stay vigilant.”

Authorities said they seized more than 10 kilograms of cocaine, hundreds of fentanyl pills, drug ledgers, long guns and other firearms, and more than $290,000 cash. Those taken into custody in the MS-13 sweep included nine so-called “cliques” — factions of the gang.

“What you’re hearing from us today is that we’re more committed than ever to eradicate this gang,” Sini said. “Is the battle over? Absolutely not.”

MS-13, also known as Mara Salvatrucha, is considered one of the top transnational organized crime threats in the United States. Invesigation committed by the gang, including the 2016 slayings of two teenage girls, helped spark an aggressive effort by the FBI and the U.S. Justice Department to dismantle the gang.

Police: Texas mother found dead had been strangled, baby safe

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — More than a week after a 33-year-old Texas mother and her infant daughter vanished, authorities said Friday they found the woman dead more than 100 miles away but the baby safe, and have charged a suspect with kidnapping and tampering with a corpse.

Heidi Broussard and her 1-month-old daughter, Margo Carey, were last seen Dec. 12 in their hometown of Austin, Texas, after Broussard dropped off an older child at an elementary school. Their abrupt disappearance drew national attention, and authorities now say the search appears to have ended with the baby found alive but her mother dead at a home near Houston.

The Austin American-Statesman reported that Magen Rose Fieramusca, 33, was charged Friday and was behind bars with a $600,000 bail. Law enforcement sources told the American-Statesman on Friday that Fieramusca pretended to be pregnant simultaneously with Broussard but had actually been plotting to take Broussard’s baby. Margot was born on Nov. 26.

Broussard’s body was positive identified by the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science, which called her death a homicide by strangulation. However, by Friday evening they had not announced any murder charges. “Although we are grateful that it appears as though we have safely recovered baby Margo, again we do believe Miss Broussard lost her life in this incident,” Austin Police Chief Brian Manley told reporters at a news conference.

Manley refused to disclose the person’s identity, citing the ongoing investigation, even while acknowledging that a name and picture was already being widely distributed by multiple media outlets.

Bond for the suspect was set at $600,000.

Authorities said the baby found at the house looked like Broussard’s child but were still awaiting DNA tests. The baby was described as being found “healthy” and placed in the custody of Texas Child Protective Services.

Tammy Broussard, Heidi’s mother, earlier told NBC News that police told her the body was likely that of her daughter and that the body was found in the trunk of a car at the home in the Houston suburb of Jersey Village, about 130 miles southeast of Austin.

Austin police Detective Brad Herries said that after receiving numerous tips, a lead was generated this week that led to a “location of interest” in the Houston area. He said investigators zeroed in on a residence and detained a person outside the residence Thursday, and then obtained a search warrant to search the cars and residence.

Police chief says city employee targeted co-worker in deadly shooting

Associated Press

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — A deadly shooting at a city building in Winston-Salem, N.C., was an act of “workplace violence” by one city employee who targeted a co-worker he disliked for a long time, police said Friday.

Winston-Salem Police Chief Catrina Thompson told news reporters the gunman at a city building was killed during a gunfight with police officers who responded to the scene. One officer was wounded. She said Steven DeWayne Hazlitt, 61, shot and killed another employee, Terry Lee Cobb Jr., whom he had targeted.

Another city employee and a police officer were also wounded but are expected to survive.

Police Capt. Steven Tolleie said the slain employee and the gunman had a “longstanding dislike for each other,” but he couldn’t elaborate on the source of their disagreements. Cobb, 48, had worked for the city for 20 years. Hazlitt had worked there for 12.

Tolleie said the two men had been involved in a physical altercation Thursday that wasn’t reported at the time to their superiors. Another city employee who was wounded wasn’t targeted and was “collateral damage,” Tolleie said. Tolleie said the gunman brought multiple firearms to the shooting Friday.

The shooting drew numerous police cars at the municipal complex east of downtown that houses sanitation and engineering departments for the city of about 245,000 in the central part of the state.

City workers described a frantic scene as many people scattered and sought cover outside.
Vitamin E blamed for ‘vast majority’ of vaping illnesses

By Carla K. Johnson
Associated Press

Health officials now blame vitamin E acetate for the "vast majority" of vaping illnesses and say doctors should monitor patients more closely after they go home from the hospital.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced the updated advice Friday.

And, in a related move Monday, authorities investigating how patients obtained possibly tainted vape products said they have shut down 44 websites advertising the sale of illicit vaping cartridges containing THC.

The new medical advice is based on a close look at about 3% of vaping illness patients who returned to the hospital after discharge and seven who died after hospital discharge.

The study suggests that vaping illnesses can get worse, even deadly, after patients leave the hospital and doctors should check on patients within two days of sending them home.

The two-day followup after hospital discharge is shorter than the previous recommendation of one to two weeks.

Compared to other vaping illness patients, those who went back to the hospital were in "the vast majority of patients."

The nation’s outbreak of vaping-related lung injuries continues, but new cases are on the decline. More than 2,500 cases of vaping illness have been reported by all 50 states. There have been 54 deaths and more deaths are under investigation.

Researchers study if better labels could stem obesity

By Candice Choi
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Would you put down that bag of chips if you saw it had 170 calories? What if the label said it would take 16 minutes of running to burn off those calories?

Health experts for years have pushed for clearer food labeling to empower people to make better choices. In the U.S., a recent regulation requires calorie counts on packages to be bigger. Red, yellow and green labels signal the healthfulness of some foods in the United Kingdom. But with obesity rates persistently high, researchers are looking at whether more drastic approaches could help.

To encourage attention, chips can be highlighted: Labeling foods with "exercise calories," or the amount of physical activity needed to burn them off.

It’s not surprising some people don’t pay attention to current labels, but exercise calories might be more useful, said Amanda Daley, a professor of behavioral medicine at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom.

"They may still ignore it, but let’s give it a go. Let’s at least give them a chance to be able to easily understand," she said.

Not everyone finds the idea compelling. Regardless of whether it gets people to eat less, it could reinforce negative attitudes about exercise, said Yoni Freedhoff, an obesity expert at the University of Ottawa.

"The idea that exercise is a punishment for eating doesn’t strike me as a good way to promote exercise or healthy attitudes around food," he said.

Instead of trying to find a label that can finally persuade people to stop eating unhealthy foods, Freedhoff said it would be better to promote environments where it’s easier to make good choices.

For now, it’s unknown how exercise-time labeling would affect choices in the real world. Last week, a BMJ journal published an analysis co-authored by Daley reviewing the limited research so far. The review suggested it may lead people to pick lower-calorie items than no labeling at all. But the evidence was less clear when comparing exercise-calorie labeling to specific alternatives like calorie counts alone.

The concept may seem too drastic, but new cases are on the decline. More than 2,500 cases of vaping illness have been reported by all 50 states. There have been 54 deaths and more deaths are under investigation.

Interviews with patients and families led investigators to some of the websites that were shut down by the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The three planes will fly simultaneously with the hope of being able to identify faces, but should help them to quickly recognize criminal activity.

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The testing will align with the city’s historically most violent months and will be focused on homicides, shootings and robberies, including carjackings. Harrison said police will not have access to live feeds, and instead, officers will receive “evidence packages” of specific crimes that have already been reported.

Baltimore is experiencing one of its most violent years on record, with more than 330 homicides so far. That’s up from 309 total in 2018. The city has also seen more than 1,310 armed and unarmed commercial robberies and carjackings. It wrapped up last year with 1,361 of those cases.

City Solicitor Andre Davis on Friday said Baltimore’s law department is “entirely comfortable” with the planned test, whose cost Harrison said will be covered by philanthropic funds, not tax dollars. He said he has been in constant communication with the foundation of Texas millionaires Laura and John Arnold, who funded the 2016 tryout through a donation to the Baltimore Community Foundation, a nonprofit civic organization.
Death toll rises in Indian clashes over new law

BY SHEIKH SALLIQ
AND EMILY SCHMALL
Associated Press

NEW DELHI — Nine people died Saturday during clashes between demonstrators and police in northern India, raising the nationwide death toll in protests against a new citizenship law to 23, police said.

Uttar Pradesh state police spokesman Pravin Kumar said the nine fatalities increased the death toll in the state to 15 in the protests against the new law, which the demonstrators say discriminates against Muslims.

The “majority of the dead are young people,” Singh said. “Some of them died of bullet injuries, but these injuries are not because of police fire. The police have used only tear gas to scare away the agitating mob.”

Around a dozen vehicles were set on fire as protesters went amok in the northern Indian cities of Rampur, Sambhal, Muzafarnagar, Bijnore and Kanpur, where a police station was also torched, Singh said.

The ongoing backlash against the citizenship law marks the strongest show of dissent against the Hindu nationalist government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi since he was first elected in 2014.

The law allows Hindus, Chris-

tians and other religious minori-
ties who are in India illegally to
become citizens if they can show they were persecuted because of their religion in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It does not apply to Muslims.

Critics have slammed the law as a violation of India’s secular constitution and have called it the latest effort by the Modi govern-
ment to marginalize the country’s 200 million Muslims. Modi has defended the law as a humanitar-
ian gesture.

An anti-terror squad was de-
ployed and internet services were
suspended for another 48 hours in the state.

Six people were killed during clashes in Uttar Pradesh on Fri-
day, and police said Saturday that over 600 in the state had been taken into custody since then as part of “preventive action.” In ad-
dition, five people have been ar-
rested and 13 police cases have been filed for posting “objection-
able” material on social media.

In the northeastern border state of Assam, where internet services were restored after a 10-day blackout, hundreds of women on Saturday staged a sit-
in against the law in Gauhati, the state capital.

“Our peaceful protests will continue till this illegal and un-
constitutional citizenship law amendment is scrapped,” said Sushil Bisheshwary, the leader of the All Assam Students Union, which organized the rally.

He rejected an offer for dia-
logue by Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, saying talks could take place when the “government was hoping to strike some compromise.”

In New Delhi on Saturday, po-
lice charged more than a dozen protesters with rioting in connection with violence during a pro-
test Friday night in the capital’s Floral Garden area.

Two U.S. Democratic presiden-
tial candidates, Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Sen. Bernie Sanders denounced the new law on Twit-
ter, and Malaysian Prime Minis-
ter Mahathir Mohamad criticized it at a news conference following the conclusion of an Islamic sum-
mit in Kuala Lumpur.

Temps rise as wildfire spreads in Australia

BY TRISTAN LAVALETTE
Associated Press

PERTH, Australia — Aus-
tralia’s most populous state was paralyzed by “catastrophic” fire conditions Saturday amid soaring

temperatures, while one person died as wildfires ravaged

the country’s southeast, officials said.

“Catastrophic fire conditions are as bad as they get,” New South Wales Rural Fire Services Com-
missioner Shane Fitzsimmons told reporters. “Given we have a landscape with so much active

fire burning, you have a recipe
of ingredients that can set
off an explosion.”

Areas in western Sydney were
forecast to hit 115 degrees Fahr-
dez, while cooler air was expected to move through New South Wales late Saturday, although authori-
ties warned that strong winds could push fires in dangerous
directions.

New South Wales is in a seven-
day state of emergency, with about 2,000 firefighters battling

100 wildfires.

Two firefighters died Thurs-
day battling blazes southwest of Sydney. Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O’Dwyer, 36, were in a

truck convoy southwest of Sydney when a tree fell and caused their vehicle to roll off the road.

Authorities confirmed Sat-
day that one person died and 15 homes were destroyed in South Australia as a wildfire ravaged the Adelaide Hills on Friday. Another person was critically injured after fighting to save his home from the fire.

That follows the death of a 24-
year-old man in a road crash in South Australia on Friday, which sparked a fire in the area of the

Murraylands.

Authorities said 23 fire-
fighters and several police have also suffered injuries, as more than 95,842 acres burned across South

Australia.

“It is going to be a real scene of
devastation, especially for those people in the Adelaide Hills who have been most affected,” South Australia Premier Steven Mar-
shall said.

The annual Australian fire season, which peaks during the Southern Hemisphere summer, started early after an unusually warm and dry winter. Around 7.4

million acres of land have burned nationwide during a torrid past few months, with nine people killed and more than 800 homes destroyed.

The devastation has put pres-
sure on Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who has received criti-
cism for going on a family vaca-
tion in Hawaii during the wildfire
crisis.

Morrison cut short his vacation and returned home on Saturday night. He is due to visit the New South Wales Rural Fire Service headquarters on Sunday.

US diplomat’s wife charged in UK teen’s death in crash

BY JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

LONDON — An American diplomat’s wife who left the U.K. after being involved in a road acci-
dent that killed a British teenag-
er has been charged with causing
death by dangerous driving, Brit-
ish prosecutors said Friday.

The Crown Prosecution Ser-
vie said it had begun extradi-
tion proceedings against Anne Sacoolas.

The decision to charge Sacoo-
las, who has claimed diplomatic immunity, has caused tensions between the U.K. and the United States. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab welcomed the move but the State Department called it unhelpful.

British police say 19-year-old Harry Dunn died in August when he was hit by a car driven by Sacoolas, whose husband was an intelligence offi-
cer at RAF Croughton, a military base in central England used by U.S. forces. Sacoolas claimed dip-
ломatic immunity and left Britain after the crash.

Dunn’s family has urged her to return and face British justice and met with U.S. President Don-
ald Trump in Washington as part of their campaign.

Britain’s prosecution service said it had authorized police to charge Sacoolas with caus-
ing death by dangerous driving

— which carries a maximum sen-
tence of 14 years in prison — “fol-
lowing a thorough review of the evidence available.”

Prosecutors said they had begun extradition proceedings although it is up to the govern-
ment to formally ask through dip-
lomatic channels for Sacoolas to be sent back to Britain.

Sacoolas’s lawyer, Amy Jef-
fress, said her client had co-oper-
ately with the investigation but “will not return voluntarily to the United Kingdom to face a potential jail sentence for what was a terrible but unintentional accident.”

Dunn’s mother, Charlotte Charles, said the charge was “a huge step in the start of achiev-
ing the promise to Harry that we made.”

“We made that promise to him the night we lost him to seek jus-
tice, thinking it was going to be really easy,” she said. “We had the idea it was going to be this hard.”

In its statement, the State De-
partment expressed “deepest sympa-thies” over Dunn’s death but said the decision to charge Sacoolas was not “a helpful development.”

“I hope that Anne Sacoolas will now realize the right thing to do is to come back to the U.K. and cooperate with the criminal jus-
tice process,” Raab said.
Griswold family Christmas quiz

From cousin Eddie to Todd, how well do you know the classic holiday film?

“Austin American-Statesman

“‘

Hallelujah. Holy (expletive). Where’s the Tylenol?’

As foul-mouthed holiday rants go, a couple of Chevy Chase’s — as family man Clark Griswold in ‘National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation’ — are up there.

Oh, they’re not as intentionally offensive as Steve Martin’s rental car counter tirade in ‘Planes, Trains and Automobiles’ (he drops the F-bomb 18 times, if you’re counting). Nor are they as endearing as Peter Billingsley’s “Only I didn’t say fudge” from ‘A Christmas Story.’

And let’s not even mention Jimmy Stewart’s filthy diatribe in the uncensored version of ‘It’s A Wonderful Life.’

I kid.

Like Santa’s sleigh, ‘Christmas Vacation’ flies under the radar. It’s nowhere near as popular as those other holiday mainstays, but that’s OK — with its unvarnished look at the impossibly high expectations and nonstop pressure of the holidays, it works best as a cult classic, anyway.

Much like Clark, it’s a perpetual underdog.

If you’re a fan of the film, take this 20-question quiz to see just how closely you’ve watched. And if you’ve never seen it, get your ‘cheap, lying, no-good, rotten, four-flushing, low-life, snake-licking, dirt-eating, inbred, overstuffed, ignorant, blood-sucking, dog-kissing, brainless, (expletive)less, hopeless, heartless, fat-(expletive), bug-eyed, stiff-legged, spotty-lipped, worm-headed sack of monkey (expletive)’ self to the big box store bargain bin.

The sanitized ABC Family version’s just not as much fun.

Above: Chevy Chase and Beverly D’Angelo star in “National Lampoon’s Christmas Vacation.”

Warner Bros.
None of the characters in Afterparty want to take up too much of anyone’s time, even in hell where the game is set. Demons, if you didn’t know, take schedules seriously, and it’s only because a demon at a processing center considers his off-hours sacrosanct that Milo and Lola, two new arrivals to the Pit, are free to stroll about for a night rather than being assigned an ironic form of torture for their sins. Milo and Lola aren’t sure how they died — one minute they were chatting with their fellow college grads at a party then, zap! — or why they’ve ended up in hell, but they adapt quickly. Looking for an escape plan, they learn that if they can best Satan in a drinking contest, they’ll win their liberty. And so begins a pub crawl in which the kids — sorry, I mean the recently-certified adults — get involved in a whole lot of tomfoolery.

Before the night is over Milo and Lola will, among other things, commit themselves to a bad impersonation, instigate a fight and cut past lots of people waiting to get into a party. They’ll also suffer the occasional interruption from their personal demon, Sister Mary Wormhorn, whose job, naturally, is to remind them of difficult memories. Wormhorn is batty and overeager, but like the rest of Hell’s denizens, she keeps her routines short.

To everyone’s good fortune, Milo, a people pleaser, and Lola, the one who will tell you that your tastes are too commercial, have Sam (voiced by the talented Ashly Burch) to ferry them across lava on her boat from place to place and deliver clipped exposition. Without the burden of responsibility, Milo and Lola can, and really should, drink all manner of concoctions since they impart extra dialogue options.

Hell is a repository of drinks with names such as Famous Last Words (“menthol, colored solvents, with a touch of sugar; slightly more enjoyable than death”) and the Headless Groom (“orange rum; melted chocolate; catholic guilt; twisty straws for mild enjoyment”). There are drinks that will boost the characters’ courage, as well as to make them more flirtatious, more obnoxious or more inclined to speak like someone out of a 1940s Hollywood noir film.

Afterparty is the second game from Nightschool Studio. Like its previous game, Oxenfree, Afterparty feels like a marriage of graphic novels, animated films and video games. Playing it mostly involves walking around and talking to people. Though occasionally Milo and Lola might be called upon to dance, play beer pong or try to stack shot glasses on top of each other, these are low-pressure activities that don’t carry the threat of a game over screen. Indeed, Afterparty provides a breezy, frictionless experience that lasts about as long as a good party (four or five hours).

Chatting with the characters, you get the feeling that everyone is trying extra hard to deliver their snappiest lines. The reference-heavy humor pulls in everything from Schopenhauer to “How Stella Got Her Groove Back,” to ’90s-era cartoons. The approach is scattershot, but not grating.

In contrast with Milo and Lola’s vigor, the demons come across as weary, working stiffs. For example, after hopping in and out of cages operated by elevator demons to ascend the cliffs outside of Satan’s house, Milo asks the third elevator demon, “Why didn’t Satan make more stairs?” to which the demon replies, “Because Satan likes to keep demons employed.” Khoi Dao (Milo) and Janina Gavankar (Lola) are gifted vocal actors, and their banter flows. Of course, not every joke hits, but a good number do. I’m surely not the only one who started a new game after the credits rolled because I wanted to see how the night could have turned out differently.

Afterparty ably emulates the manic tempo of being young, smart (and stupid) and having a wild night out.

#noregrets

Platforms: Mac, Nintendo Switch, PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One
Online: nightschoolstudio.com/afterparty

More game reviews at stripes.com/games
NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORD

‘LOOKIN’ GOOD!’
BY EMILY CARROLL / EDITED BY WILL SHORTZ

Emily Carroll, of New York City, is a 2016 medical-school graduate who just finished her residency. She is applying for fellowships and expects to get news (fingers crossed!) around the time this crossword is published. The genesis of the puzzle was 41-Across, which became the puzzle’s “revealer” entry. This is Emily’s 10th crossword for The Times and her second Sunday. — W.S.

Emily’s 10th crossword for The Times and her second Sunday. — W.S.

GUNSTON STREET RESULTS FOR ABOVE PUZZLE

Emily’s 10th crossword for The Times and her second Sunday. — W.S.

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Skydiving Santa sent to hospital for hard landing

COCOA BEACH — Without reindeer or a sleigh, a skydiving Santa in Florida made a hard landing on the beach and had to be taken to a hospital.

Organizers of the Skydiving Santas event in Cocoa Beach said the woman was conscious and breathing when she was airlifted by helicopter to a nearby hospital.

The case was considered life-threatening. His name was not released.

Boy, 3, shoots sleeping father in buttocks

ERIE — A 3-year-old Erie boy shot his sleeping father in the buttocks with a handgun, authorities said.

The shooting happened about 2 a.m. about 30 minutes later, a man walked up and shut the door. Jokinen figured out that the wind had blown his front door wide open for several hours, he said in a video he posted on Twitter.

After watching surveillance footage of his home, Jokinen figured out that the tree had started to fall as a black car missed passing car.

Falling tree barely misses passing car

LEICESTER — It was a close call between a Massachusetts driver and a falling tree that barely missed the car.

The Leicesters Police Department’s surveillance system captured the close call.

The footage shows the large tree starting to fall as a black car drives down the road with no sign of slowing down. The car drives past the tree just before it crashes to the ground, blocking both sides of Route 9.

Man dragged deputy trying to stop car

GRAND ISLAND — A man was sentenced for dragging a Nebraska sheriff’s deputy as the deputy tried to stop a car the man was driving.

Hal County District Court records said Tristan Bush was given two to three years last month after pleading no contest to severing a police officer and using a deadly weapon in resisting arrest.

Bush was a passenger in the stopped car but slid over and began driving away to keep the deputy from arresting him on several warrants, authorities said.

Artifact found in 1973 may be 3,000 years old

MONROE — An item found in North Carolina in 1973 may be thousands of years old, according to the state’s office of archaeology.

The 7-inch carved artifact found by a Monroe landowner is suspected to be a grooved adz, a tool used for smoothing or trimming wood, the Charlotte Observer reported. It could have been used to carve bowls, dugout canoes or other objects, according to a North Carolina Office of State Archaeology statement.

The item’s age is unclear, but likely dates to the Late Archaic period between 3,000-1,000 B.C.

Mayor pardons pigs ahead of holiday dinner

MIAMI — Miami has a little different take on the presidential turkey pardoning. Mayor Carlos Gimenez adds some caliente to the tradition by pardoning a pig.

Roasted pig or lechon is the centerpiece of many South Florida Christmas feasts.

The two lucky pigs, Peppa and Petra, were rescued from a local slaughterhouse by the Aguacate Sanctuary of Love.

The rescue group said the pigs will have ample space to run free.

The 3 Musketeers

Kirk Crupi, left, his little brother, Colt, and Owen Rinna duel with plastic swords in the Point Mallard pavilion in Decatur, Ala.

The approximate worth of lobsters in a truck that was stolen by a South Boston man. When Boston police officers responded to a report of a motor vehicle accident in Charlestown, they were told that the 29-year-old suspect had stolen the truck from a local lobster company. Workers were loading the truck at the dock when the suspect jumped into the truck’s cabin and took off, officials said.

The shooting remains under investigation.

Family adopt sick dog after wanderers into home

PHILADELPHIA — A malnourished dog that wandered into a Philadelphia home during a storm was adopted.

Sports podcast host Jack Jokinen said his wife found the dog when she went to grab a pacifier for their baby early in the morning. She woke Jokinen up, and he rushed downstairs, where all the doors and windows were closed.

The shooting happened about 2 a.m. About 30 minutes later, a man walked up and shut the door.

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The false premise of ‘common ground politics’

By ROBERT GEBELHOFF

The Washington Post

It’s worse than deficits, though. “Common ground” achievements create a fic- tion that leaves whatever problems demand Congress’ attention — climate change, immigration, exploding health care costs — still unresolved. The ordinary Fourth Amendment rights of citizens are at stake here. To remind, this is “the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures.” That right is not a mere legal nicety, but a foundation of constitutional governance as justifying action.

The false premise of this supposed “common ground” achievements creates a fiction that leaves whatever problems demand Congress’ attention still unresolved. The ordinary Fourth Amendment rights of citizens are at stake here. To remind, this is “the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures.” That right is not a mere legal nicety, but a foundation of constitutional governance as justifying action.

Congressional leaders, not to mention the FBI, are to blame for that fiction, the continuing太平洋 FISA court on the FBI’s application and does not yet able to perform any of the planned steps described in the submission, it shall also include (a) a proposed timetable for implementing such measures and (b) an explanation of why, in the government’s view, the information in FBI applications submitted in the interim should be regarded as reliable.

What is the sound basis for confidence in the heightened candor of the FBI, the court cannot trust its applications for surveil- lance powers to be reliable. Not only our Fourth Amendment rights but also national security hinge on the accuracy of FBI representations.

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NEW YORK — The National Football League injury report for the week of Jan. 17 includes:

**Out:**
- CB Avonte Maddox (knee).
- TC Lane Johnson (ankle).
- QUESTIONABLE:
  - C.J. Goodwin (thumb), WR Devin Smith (knee).
  - Incognito (ankle), RB Josh Jacobs (shoulder).
  - CB Massie (ankle).
  - WR D.J. Chark (ankle).
  -_wr_ (knee).
  - DT Henderson (shoulder), G Andrew Wylie (illness).

**Questionable:**
- CB Samuel (knee).
- DT Vernon Butler (illness), WR Cur-
  rick Robinson (calf).
- Alonso (quadriceps), S Vonn Bell (knee),
  WR D.J. Chark (ankle).
- OUT:
  - WR A.J. Green (ankle), TE Rhett El-
  lington (shoulder), G Matt Kalil (knee).
  - RB Stockstill (ankle), DT Shamar Stephen (knee).
  - DT Epenwah (shoulder), CB Bear (knee).
  - WRs (illness), DT Zach Sieler (ankle).
  - Chandler Cox (shoulder), K Jason Sand-
Robert Glenn “Junior” Johnson, the moonshine runner turned NASCAR driver described as “The Last American Hero” by author Tom Wolfe in a 1965 article for Esquire, died Friday. He was 88.

NASCAR announced the death of Johnson, the winner of 50 races as a driver and 132 as an owner. He was a member of the inaugural class inducted into the NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2010.

“From his early days running moonshine through the end of his life, Junior wholly embodied the NASCAR spirit,” NASCAR Chairman Jim France said in a statement. “He was an inaugural NASCAR Hall of Famer, a nod to an extraordinary career as both a driver and team owner. Between his on-track accomplishments and his introduction of (sponsor) Winston to the sport, few have contributed to the success of NASCAR as Junior has.

“The entire NASCAR family is saddened by the loss of a true giant of our sport, and we offer our deepest condolences to Junior’s family and friends during this difficult time.”

From North Wilkesboro, N.C., Johnson was named one of NASCAR’s greatest drivers in 1998 after a 14-year career that ended in 1986 and included a win in the 1960 Daytona 500. He honed his driving skills running moonshine through the North Carolina hills, a crime for which he received a federal conviction in 1956 and a full presidential pardon in 1986 from President Ronald Reagan.

He was first immortalized by Wolfe in 1965 and later in a 1973 movie adaptation starring Jeff Bridges.

As a car owner for drivers that included Darrell Waltrip, Cale Yarborough, Bill Elliott and his son, the moonshine runner turned driver described as NASCAR’s greatest drivers in 1998.

Terry Labonte, Johnson claimed three wins in 1984, 1985 and 1986, while driving for his father’s team. In 1985, Labonte took the checkered flag in the 500-mile race at Talladega Superspeedway, the first of the four races in which he would win.

Johnson was honored as one of NASCAR’s greatest drivers in 1998 and the sport’s greatest driver in 2008.

“NASCAR as Junior has

NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2010.

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“NASCAR as Junior has

NASCAR Hall of Fame in 2010.

Winston to the sport, few have contributed to the success of NASCAR as Junior has.
Porzingis, short-handed Mavericks beat 76ers

Second consecutive home loss for Philadelphia

By Aaron Bracy
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The Dallas Mavericks are proving they are more than a one-man show.

Kristaps Porzingis had 22 points and a career-high 18 rebounds, Tim Hardaway Jr. added 27 points and Dallas scored another road win over a top Eastern Conference team without star guard Luka Doncic, dealing the Philadelphia 76ers their second straight home loss, 117-98 on Friday night.

The Mavericks improved to 11-2 on the road despite playing without Doncic. The 20-year-old missed his third straight game with a right ankle sprain. Doncic, one of the league leaders in minutes, points and assists, is averaging 29.3 points, 9.3 rebounds and 8.9 assists.

Dallas ended the Bucks’ 18-game winning streak in Milwaukee on Monday night in Doncic’s absence.

“You never want to be without Luka, and we need him back as soon as possible,” Dallas coach Rick Carlisle said. “But as long as he’s out, we have a plan and guys are executing well.”

Joel Embiid had 33 points and 17 rebounds for Philadelphia, which lost its third in a row overall. The 76ers were booted for much of the night while falling to 14-2 at home. The 76ers suffered their first home loss on Wednesday, 108-104 to Miami in a contest in which the Heat stifled Philadelphia with a 2-3 zone.

“The past three games we have had eggs,” Philadelphia coach Brett Brown said. “We have not played with a competitive drive that reflects this team.”

NBA

Scoreboard

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Thursday’s games

Utah 111, Atlanta 110: Tony Dejak
Overpowered the Hawks with a 22-point, 10-rebound double-double and his second triple-double in that span. He has 33 career triple-doubles.

Minnesota, playing without center Karl-Anthony Towns for the second straight game due to a sprained left knee, has lost nine straight.

Heat 129, Knicks 114: Bam Adebayo scored 20 points and Miami’s starters got the fourth quarter off in an easy win over visiting New York.

The Heat cruised to such a degree that Jimmy Butler was only called upon to take three shots. Butler finished with nine points and eight assists in 28 minutes.

The Trail Blazers improved to 8-3 in the second half and 10-3 at home.

Warriors 106, Pelicans 102: D’Angelo Russell made a tie-breaking 22-foot jumper with 32.9 seconds remaining, and struggling host Golden State won after blowing a 20-point lead.

Russell finished with 25 points and seven assists as the Warriors (6-24) snapped a five-game losing streak with their second win over the Pelicans (7-23) this season.

Thunder 126, Suns 108: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a career-high 32 points and Oklahoma City rolled past visiting Phoenix.

Denver beat Phoenix.

Raptors 122, Wizards 118: Kyle Lowry scored 26 points, Serge Ibaka had 23 points and 10 rebounds, and short-handed host Toronto overcame the absence of three injured starters to beat struggling Washington.

Bradley Beal scored 37 points, Ish Smith had 26 and Isaiah Thomas scored 12 as the Wizards lost for the eighth time in 10 December games.

Cavaliers 114, Grizzlies 107: Jordan Clarkson scored a season-high 33 points, Kevin Love hit the go-ahead three-pointer with just over a minute to play and host Cleveland beat Memphis.

Jaren Jackson led Memphis with 24 points while Dillon Brooks scored 16, but the Grizzlies took their second straight tough loss to a rookie star.

Capers 119, Kings 105: T.J. Warren scored 23 points and Indiana beat visiting Sacramento for its fifth straight victory.

Myles Turner added 17 points, and Domantas Sabonis and T.J. McConnell each had 15, with Sabonis also grabbing nine rebounds as the Pacers improved to 20-9.

Trail Blazers 118, Magic 103: Carmelo Anthony to a bruised left knee in the second quarter. The Trail Blazers improved to 8-7 since Anthony joined the team a month ago.

Roundup

Jokic’s 5th triple-double of season leads Denver

Associated Press

DENVER — Nikola Jokic had 22 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for his fifth triple-double of the season, and Denver complet- ed a sweep of a five-game home-stand with a 109-100 win over Minnesota.

It was Jokic’s eighth straight double-double and his second triple-double in that span. He has 33 career triple-doubles.

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Early favorites for 2020 Heisman have Georgia ties

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The 2020 Heisman Trophy race will start with a couple of clear front-runners and plenty of room for other stars to emerge, the way LSU’s Joe Burrow did this year.

Six contenders for 2020, ranked from most likely to least:

Justin Fields, QB, Ohio State

The only Heisman finalist likely to be back in college next season. Unless Fields’ teammates like Chase Young, shocks the college football world and decides to come back for his senior year. Fields did not play very well for most of this season, with 3,347 yards passing and 35 touchdown passes. He is a lock for the 2020 Heisman Trophy race.

Javian Hawkins of Louisville is expected to see the field early in his college career.

The Heisman almost always goes to a player on a playoff contender. An exception is occasionally made for a player who lifts his team above its usual standards. Think Robert Griffin III at Baylor in 2011 or Lamar Jackson at Louisville in 2016. Well was the most productive freshman quarterback in the country this season, with 4,050 passing yards and 37 touchdowns.

The last three in that he likely won’t be a transfer. Rattler was a huge recruit in the 2019 class and the front-runner to slide into coach Lincoln Riley’s Heisman machine.

Sam Howell, QB, North Carolina and Brock Purdy, QB, Iowa State

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A running back

The Heisman is a quarterback’s award now. Seventeen QBs have won the award since 2000. Running backs have a hard time even breaking into the group of finalists.

The season featured some wildly productive runners such as Jonathan Taylor of Wisconsin (fifth in the Heisman voting), Dobbins (sixth), Chuba Hubbard of Oklahoma State (eighth) and Travis Etienne of Clemson (ninth). None made it to New York and there is a good chance all will be off to the NFL next year.

It was from the clinching factor in his commitment, but it was significant, nonetheless. Clemson coaches told Williams he probably would be able to don his favorite number, should it be available. His cousin, Nigel Williams, who wore No. 8 as a defensive tackle at Virginia Tech. Three of the teams in this year’s college football playoff — Clemson, Oklahoma and Ohio State — have defensive linemen that wear a single digit. — popularized by players like former South Carolina star Jadeveon Clowney and Ohio State Heisman finalist Chase Young — has complicated that further. Defensive linemen are often some of the most coveted players on the recruiting trail, leaving college football coaches to battle it out to earn their commitments however they can. More and more, a jersey number 1 through 9 can serve as something of a sweetener.

Williams followed in the footsteps of his cousin, Nigel Williams, who wore No. 8 as a defensive tackle at Virginia Tech. Three of the teams in this year’s college football playoff — Clemson, Oklahoma and Ohio State — have defensive linemen that wear a single digit.

“When they see guys like that, players look up to them, players try to emulate, wearing a single digit, that’s something that they want to do, also,” Friedman said. “It’s like, ‘Why do basketball players always want to wear the number 23?’ Well, it’s because Michael Jordan wore No. 23.’”

Or, as Williams put it: “You look good, you play good.”

Some college programs reward single digits for play on the field — at places such as Notre Dame, Hawaii and Temple, the coveted numbers must be earned through a merit system — and the movement has trickled down to the high school ranks.

More than a dozen of the top 100 defensive linemen in the country wore single digits in high school this season, and have decorated their social media accounts with photos of themselves wearing single digits on recruiting visits.

Quintin Somerville of Saguaros High School in Scottsdale, Ariz., who is rated as one of the top defensive linemen in the nation, wore his No. 9 in elementary school because he idolized former North Carolina State pass rusher Bradley Chubb, who now plays for the Denver Broncos. Someverrill was determined to keep the number. When he went on a Michigan visit last year, his No. 9 uniform in maize and blue was waiting for him in the team’s locker room.

“It was incredible,” he said.

 Recruiting’s numbers game

Coaches lure defensive linemen with single-digit numbers

By Roman Stubbs

When Tre Williams made his official visit to Clemson University last winter, the football program checked every box for him. The blue-chip defensive tackle, from St. John’s College High School in Washington, D.C., knew about the two-time defending national champion’s tradition at his position. He loved the campus and the facilities. He felt the Tigers had recruited him harder than any other school, and as he neared a decision, he knew he might have a chance to see the field early in his college career.

But there was something else in the back of his mind, a small-but-very-important question he needed to ask: Would he be able to wear jersey No. 8?

It was far from the clinching factor in his commitment, but it was significant, nonetheless. Clemson coaches told Williams he probably would be able to don his favorite number, should it be available. His cousin, Nigel Williams, who wore No. 8 as a defensive tackle at Virginia Tech.

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FRISCO, Texas — Kent State football players, as coach Sean Lewis said Thursday, haven’t been able to call themselves winners for seven years. On Friday night, the Golden Flashes not only became winners but also achieved something that no other team in school history could claim: a bowl victory.

Dustin Crum passed for 289 yards and two touchdowns and ran for a career-high 147 yards and the clinching score to help Kent State beat Utah State 51-41 in the Frisco Bowl.

“I’m just so happy for the university,” said Crum, who also was Kent State’s leading rusher during the season. “We weren’t supposed to be here, but here we are.”

Utah State (7-6) closed with four straight wins to finish with a winning record for the first time since 2012.

“I love these boys,” said second-year coach Lewis, whose first Kent State team finished 2-10. “Just tremendous resolve by them. It was a testament to their character.”

Matthew Trickett kicked five field goals to set a Kent State game record.

Crum threw a 78-yard touchdown pass to Isaiah McCoy down the right sideline on Kent State’s third play from scrimmage. Crum flipped a 1-yard scoring pass to Antwan Dixon with 9:36 to play to put the Golden Flashes ahead for good, then scored with 1:56 left on a fourth-and-1 run from the 4.

“This is a group that fights together,” said Lewis, the youngest head coach in the FBS at 33 years old. “They bolt tight when things get hard. They show that they can fight and, man, do they finish strong. They finished this game strong, the right way. They finished the season the right way.”

Jordan Love passed for 308 yards and three touchdowns, two of them to Siaosi Mariner, in his final game for Utah State (7-6). The junior announced last week that he’ll bypass his senior season to enter the NFL Draft.

Jordan Thompkins scored on a 57-yard run and a 17-yard reception for the Aggies.

He wore us down,” Charlotte coach Will Healy said.

Victor Tucker caught a 51-yard catch-and-run touchdown pass from Love. Reynolds old late in the third quarter for Charlotte (7-6), which saw its five-game winning streak snapped. Charlotte was in a bowl game for the first time.

Reynolds completed 15 of 24 passes for 198 yards.

The bowl game was the first of 40 to be played this season.

Balanced trip: During their days in the Bahamas, the teams took part in a youth clinic, dance contests, a pinball tournament and some beach and pool time. Temperature Friday were in the mid-70s in the Bahamas, mid-50s in Charlotte and mid-20s in Buffalo.

“To be able to get down here in the sun is really nice for us,” Bulls defensive end Taylor Riggins said.

Tough debut: Charlotte went scoreless on its first seven possessions and punted on only one of those.

The 49ers missed a field-goal attempt — Jonathan Cruz’s 33-yard try late in the first quarter got caught up in the 25 mph right-to-left breeze and sailed well past the left upright — plus had two other drives stopped on downs and two more snuffed out by turnovers. The other possession was erased by the end of the first half, without the offense even getting on the field after Charlotte’s Marquavis Gibbs intercepted a pass.

Odd finish: The teams shook hands and Buffalo began celebrating thinking the game was over — but there were three seconds left on the clock. So the teams headed back to their sidelines, Charlotte then called a timeout, and Reynolds got sacked on the ‘second’ final play.

The takeaway

Buffalo: The Bulls had lost all three of their previous bowl trips by double digits, but never trailed in this game. Buffalo ended the season with six wins in seven games, the only misstep in being there being a three-point loss at Kent State on Nov. 14.

Charlotte: The bowl loss may sting for a bit, but Charlotte’s rebuild now enters its third season under coach Brad Lambert. The team was in only their fifth season at the FBS level — had been 2-10, 4-8, 11-1 and 5-7 before this year. Charlotte not only got to a bowl but did so in a year where it was picked to finish last in Conference USA’s East division.

Up next

Buffalo: Opens next season Sept. 5 at Kansas State.

Charlotte: Opens next season Sept. 5 at Tennessee.

“Two guys we beat last year,” said Love’s successor having seen practice as Love’s successor, seeing them more playing time as a freshman in 2018 than as a sophomore this season.

The season will begin with a visit from Washington State and includes trips to Washington, BYU and Boise State.

Kent State: The Golden Flashes could again spend the conference season trying to recover from a rugged non-league schedule. (visits to Penn State, Kentucky and Alabama). They could be dependent at least early on an offense that returns Crum and McCoy as top playmakers given their losses on the defensive front.

North Central captures 1st Division III championship

SHENENDOAH, Texas — North Central of Illinois made the most of its first trip to the NCAA Division III championship game, starting fast and never looking back.

Ethann Greenfield ran for 138 yards and three touchdowns, Broc Rutter threw for 263 yards and two scores and North Central routed Wisconsin-Whitewater 41-14 on Friday night for its first Division III championship.

North Central was making its first appearance in the Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl. The Cardinals capped their best finish in the Division III playoffs with a semifinal loss in 2013.

“Just thrilled with the way these guys played,” North Central coach Jeff Thorne said. “These guys played their ever-living tails off like they have all year long. To be here in this position is beyond description.”

Rutter was 17-for-26 passing and ran for another touchdown, Andrew Kamaikens caught nine passes for 134 yards and a score, and Julian Bell had two interceptions.

“We came out, we were ready to play,” Rutter said. “We couldn’t wait all day. We came out and executed the game plan.”

Rutter broke the Division III record for career passing yards with his fifth touchdown pass, giving him 14,265 yards and surpassing Alex Tanney, who played at Monmouth College in Illinois. Tanney threw for 14,249 yards.

Rutter gave credit to his team and coaches for the record.

“I had no clue,” Rutter said of the record. “It’s a pretty cool accomplishment. … I’ve been doing this for four years, and it’s the best four years of my life. Time of my life. To get that is a nice reward to cap things off, but this national championship means so much more to me than that ever could.”

The Cardinals (14-1) outlasted the Warhawks (13-2) 436-390.
Regrets: Steelers stay civil when discussing Bell

FROM BACK PAGE

There’s no animosity from either side, with the Steelers players also not taking any cheap shots at their former teammate.

“I love the dude,” Pittsburgh defensive tackle Cameron Heyward said. “Even though he’s on a different team, we play football and we’re trying to get after him. In the right mind, we appreciate what he’s done here. He’s going to be going at us, too. We don’t expect him to be going light.

I know that.

Bell was drafted by the Steelers in the second round out of Michigan State in 2013 and quickly established himself as one of the NFL’s most versatile running backs.

He made three Pro Bowls during his first three seasons and put up monstrous numbers on the ground and as a pass catcher out of the backfield. Bell used a deliberate running style to become a dynamic force for Pittsburgh — and a fan favorite.

Last season as last year and two years ago is two years ago,” Bell said. “I’m over it now, I’m past it. I’m here. I’m with the New York Jets and I’m happy.”

But the numbers wouldn’t necessarily show it.

He had played for just 676 yards and three touchdowns with an average of 3.3 yards per carry, which is a career low. He has yet to run for more than 100 yards in any game, with last week’s 87-yard performance at Baltimore his season high. Bell is second on the Jets with 57 catches for 404 yards and a score, but he hasn’t been the elite playmaking presence most expected when he came to New York.

And, because of that, some label Bell a free-agent bust.

“People look at stats and just go off the stats, which is OK,” he said. “I mean, it’s not their fault. I think people who understand football and break down the film and watch it, they know exactly what’s going on, what type of player I am, how I’ve been performing.

‘Stats don’t really show how well I’ve been playing. Regardless of the stats, I don’t really care what people think. I know I’ve been playing very good football and I’m continuing to get better. … I’m healthy. I feel good. It’s Week 16. I’m happy right now.’

A few things have contributed to the subplot, including the offensive line lacking chemistry in front of Bell early in the season.

Quarterback Sam Darnold missed three games with mono-nucleosis, putting more on Bell’s shoulders to try to right the offense in his absence. There were also reports that coach Adam Gase wasn’t in favor of then-general manager Mike Maccagnan spending so much money on a running back.

Bell has been unable to completely silence the doubters with his performance so far this season. The running back also insists he hasn’t gotten enough consistent opportunities to do so.

“I feel like the last few outings, though, it’s looked more like we thought it was going to look like,” Gase said. “It’s hard to explain. I think when he’s got stuff there, we’re getting good yards. He’s an average ball carrier on the last two or three games, of taking what they’re giving him instead of trying to create big plays. He’s keeping us ahead of the sticks.

Still, Bell refuses to look back at any of the decisions he made.

He enjoyed his time in Pittsburgh. He also looks forward to building success in New York.

“I don’t regret anything that happened,” Bell said. “I’m happy where I am today.”

The Panthers' Noel Acciari, center, celebrates with teammates MacKenzie Weegar, left, and Jonathan Huberdeau after scoring a goal during the second period Friday against the Dallas Stars in Sunrise, Fla. Acciari scored three goals in the Panthers' 7-4 victory over the Dallas Stars.

Associated Press

Acciari’s 3 goals propel Panthers

The Panthers’ Noel Acciari, center, celebrates with teammates MacKenzie Weegar, left, and Jonathan Huberdeau after scoring a goal during the second period Friday against the Dallas Stars in Sunrise, Fla. Acciari scored three goals in the Panthers’ 7-4 victory, his second consecutive hat trick.

Jonus Siegenthaler and Richard Panik also scored, and rookie Ilya Samsonov made 24 saves.

Washington’s 26-6-5 record is currently the NHL’s best. It is the only team in the league not to lose consecutive games in regulation this season.

Kyle Palmieri, Blake Coleman and Miles Wood scored for the Devils, who were denied their first three-game winning streak of the season. Mackenzie Blackwood had 21 saves before being replaced by Gilles Senn in the third period.

Maple Leafs 6, Rangers 3: William Nylander and Mitchell Marner each scored their second goal of the game early in the third period as visiting Toronto doubled up New York.

Pierre Engvall and Ilya Mikheyev also scored, and Frederik Andersen made 37 saves as Toronto won its third straight.

Brady Skjei, Ryan Strome and Zachary Parise scored for New York.

The Panthers’ Noel Acciari, center, celebrates with teammates MacKenzie Weegar, left, and Jonathan Huberdeau after scoring a goal during the second period Friday against the Dallas Stars in Sunrise, Fla. Acciari scored three goals in the Panthers’ 7-4 victory, his second consecutive hat trick.

The New York Rangers’ Artemi Panarin, left, celebrates his second-period goal against the New York Islanders with teammate Artem Kazalishin during an NHL hockey game Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019, in Uniondale, N.Y. (AP Photo/Stew Milne)

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The New York Rangers’ Artemi Panarin, left, celebrates his second-period goal against the New York Islanders with teammate Artem Kazalishin during an NHL hockey game Thursday, Dec. 19, 2019, in Uniondale, N.Y. (AP Photo/Stew Milne)
Marquee matchup

Green Bay Packers (11-3) at Minnesota Vikings (10-4)

AFN-Sports, 2:15 a.m. Tuesday Central European Time

Series: Packers lead 60-53-3.


Packers offense: OVERALL (21), RUSH (17), PASS (17).

Packers defense: OVERALL (23), RUSH (24), PASS (22).

Vikings offense: OVERALL (10), RUSH (4), PASS (12).

Vikings defense: OVERALL (14), RUSH (8), PASS (20).

Notes: Vikings have won three of past five meetings. ... Packers can clinch NFC North with win. ... Packers are plus-14 in takeaways/giveaways category, while Vikings are plus-11. ... Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers had two TD passes in Week 2 meeting. He has 21 TDs and only two interceptions in 11 career road games against Vikings. ... Running back Dalvin Cook had 191 scrimmage yards (career-high 154 rushing, 37 receiving) and a rushing TD in Week 2 meeting. ... Wide receiver Stefon Diggs led team with 76 receiving yards last week in 39-10 victory over Chargers. ... Wide receiver Adam Thielen has 25 receptions for 331 yards and two TDs in his past three games against the Packers.
Regrets?

Jets RB says he has none as he prepares to face his former team

BY DENNIS WASZAK JR.
Associated Press

FLORHAM PARK, N.J.
Le’Veon Bell will jog onto the field at MetLife Stadium on Sunday and see plenty of Jets fans in the stands wearing his green and white jersey.

The New York running back knows lots of well-traveled Steelers fans will also make the trek from Pittsburgh, where he spent his first six NFL seasons. Some might even be decked out in his old black and gold No. 26, rooting for their team while also paying homage to one of the Steelers’ best players in recent years.

Others might, well, remind Bell he’s an enemy now.

“I think it’ll probably be 50-50,” Bell said Thursday of the reception he expects from visiting Steelers fans. “I think it’ll be half that are happy to see me and still love me, and half that hate me, despise me. It is what it is. “I’m going to show love, regardless, to everybody wearing my jersey on both sides and things like that, so that’ll be fun.” Bell facing familiar foes makes for a juicy storyline to a late-season showdown between the team he once played for that’s trying to keep pace in the playoff hunt and the struggling squad he’s on now that has been ravaged by injuries and inconsistency.

Still, the man nicknamed “Juice” refused to add any extra to the matchup, maintaining a reserved approach while talking about the Steelers.

“Going out there against guys that I practiced with for a long time and actually get a chance to compete against them,” Bell said, “it’s going to be fun.”

SEE REGRETS ON PAGE 22