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Aboard the USS Bataan — Over the past eight months, the United States has poured more than 20,000 additional troops into the Middle East to counter the escalating threat from Iran that peaked with the recent missile attack on American forces in Iraq.

Despite President Donald Trump's pledge to bring troops home, the top U.S. commander in the Middle East on Thursday said the most recent forces to enter the region could be there for "quite a while."

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No, no America!

Thousands of Iraqis gather Friday in Baghdad to demand that U.S. troops leave the country amid heightened anti-American sentiment after a drone strike ordered by Washington this month killed a top Iranian general in the Iraqi capital. Influential, radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr had called for a "million-man" march.

"No, no America!"

Thousands gather in Baghdad to demand US troops leave

By Qassem Abdul-Zahra and Samya Kullab
Associated Press

Baghdad — Hundreds rallied in Baghdad on Friday to demand that American troops leave the country, although their numbers fell short of the "million-man" march called for by an influential Shiite cleric. The rally came amid heightened anti-U.S. sentiment after a U.S. drone strike this month killed a top Iranian general in the Iraqi capital.

Large crowds began gathering mid-morning on the Muslim day of prayers as loudspeakers blasted "No, no America!" at a central square in Baghdad. A child held up a poster reading, "Death to America. Death to Israel." But by the afternoon the rally had failed to reach the critical numbers called for by radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

Apparently seeking to show control, al-Sadr's supporters did not engage in altercations with security forces or target the separate, anti-government protests in neighboring Tahrir Square, a possibility feared by activists in the lead-up to Friday's march.

Officials and experts said the rally was the cleric's attempt to capitalize on growing anti-American feeling and show he had the upper-hand on SEE BAGHDAD ON PAGE 4

US general says troop surge in region might not end soon

By Lolita C. Baldor
Associated Press

ABROAD THE USS BATAAN — Over the past eight months, the United States has poured more than 20,000 additional troops into the Middle East to counter the escalating threat from Iran that peaked with the recent missile attack on American forces in Iraq.

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BY LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

ABOARD THE USS BATAAN — Over the past eight months, the United States has poured more than 20,000 additional troops into the Middle East to counter the escalating threat from Iran that peaked with the recent missile attack on American forces in Iraq.
Nonprofits worry sale of dot-org universe will raise costs

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The company that controls the dot-org online universe is putting the registry of domain names up for sale, and the nonprofits that often use the suffix in their websites are raising concerns about the move.

Nonprofit organizations and some tech activists plan to protest Friday outside the Los Angeles headquarters of the regulatory body for domain names where its board is meeting to discuss plans by private-equity firm Ethos Capital to buy the Public Interest Registry for $1.1 billion.

Opponents are concerned the cost of registering a dot-org website will skyrocket, and they worry about the potential loss of freedoms of speech and expression if the registry is in the wrong hands.

“It’s easy to put two and two together and see the concern that economic or other pressures could push this new for-profit PIR to make decisions that are detrimental to nonprofits,” said Elliot Harmon, activism director of the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

Ethos Capital and the Internet Society, which runs the registry now, said those concerns are misplaced and the sale is being misunderstood.

The two groups said in a statement that prices will remain low, the registry’s managers will stay in place and the infusion of capital will ensure the long-term growth of dot-org.

They also rejected assertions that online content would be spied on and censored.
Air tanker crash killed 3 vet battling Australian fires

**By Seth Robson**
Stars and Stripes

Three military veteran firefighters were killed when a C-130 Hercules air tanker crashed while battling bushfires Thursday in Australia, according to the plane's owner and operator.

The names and other details about the three fallen firefighters were in a statement released by Coulson Aviation, of Port Alberni, British Columbia, Canada, on its website Thursday.

The company confirmed that Capt. Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr. died in the crash, the cause of which remains unclear.

DeMorgan Jr. served in the Air Force and had 18 years' experience as a flight engineer on the C-130, serving 2,000 hours in combat.

“Rick lived in Navarre, Fla., and is survived by his two children Lucas and Logan, his parents Rick Sr. Linda, and his sister Virginia,” the company said in its statement. “Rick had over 4,000 hours as a Flight Engineer with nearly 2,000 hours in a combat environment. Rick’s passion was always flying and his children.”

McBeth lived in Great Falls, Mont., and is survived by his wife.

“Ian served with the Wyoming National Guard and was still a member of the Montana Air National Guard. He has spent his entire career flying C-130s and was an Instructing and Elevating pilot. Ian earned his Initial Attack qualification for Coulson in 2018,” the company said in its statement.

DeMorgan, of Buckeye, Ariz., retired from the Marine Corps as a highly decorated lieutenant colonel.

“Paul graduated from the Naval Academy in 1999 and spent the next 20 years serving in the United States Marine Corps in a number of positions including C-130 pilot,” the company said in its statement.

The brave Americans who died near Snowy Monaro died while helping Australia in its time of need,” he said in the statement.

The three had been battling bushfires in the Snowy Monaro region of the state of New South Wales when they lost contact with ground crews around 1:45 p.m. on Thursday, the Australian newspaper reported Friday.

The plane crash resulted in a massive fireball, with emergency services only finding the tail of the aircraft still intact, the newspaper reported.

“We are incredibly moved by the outpouring of support from those in Australia and around the world,” Coulson Aviation said in its statement. “Our deepest condolences are with the family and friends of our fallen heroes.”

Earlier this month the Forest Service said 159 U.S. personnel, including 87 from the Forest Service, were helping battle bushfires in the Australian states of New South Wales and Victoria that have destroyed millions of acres of forest and claimed 25 lives.

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US gunships delivered to Kenya to bolster defense

**By John Vandiver**
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Six American-made attack helicopters were handed over to the Kenyan military, and the country’s top general says the delivery couldn’t have come at a better time.

U.S. and Kenyan military officials announced the delivery of the MD-530F Cayuse Warrior helicopters as a step that will enhance a force faced with a persistent terrorist threat coming out of neighboring Somalia.

The helicopters are an “effective force multiplier” on the battlefield,” said Gen. Samson Mwathethe, Kenya Defense Force chief, at a ceremony Thursday. “The successful delivery of these assets could not have come at a better time for us.”

The deal, several years in the works, comes after In Kenya, the U.S. has about 300 military personnel focused on training local forces and coordinating missions in Somalia.

The clash with militants in coastal Kenya has raised questions about the role of the U.S. military in the region at a time when the Pentagon is considering shifting some forces away from Africa for other missions.

A growing number of lawmakers, however, have raised concerns about pulling back from the continent, as Russia and China gain influence and terrorist groups still pose a regional threat.

“Any drawdown of our troops would be shortsighted, could cripple AFRICOM’s ability to execute its mission and, as a result, would harm national security,” Sen. James M. Inhofe, R-Okl., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said last week.

At a ceremony at Kenya’s Embakasi Barracks in Nairobi, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Michael D. Turello said the delivery of attack helicopters is an example of “how the U.S. remains fully committed to providing relevant and timely training and equipment to bolster the KDF capabilities.”

“A partnership with the Kenyan Defense Force is one of our most important partnerships in Africa and a keystone in East Africa,” said Turello, who leads the Djibouti-based Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa.

Kenya purchased the gunships through the Foreign Military Sales program, and six more helicopters are expected in the near future.

Airman dies in Antarctica

**By Jennifer H. Svahn**
Stars and Stripes

An airman from New York died this month in Antarctica while deployed with his Air National Guard unit for Operation Deep Freeze.

Staff Sgt. George Girler IV died of natural causes on Jan. 11 at McMurdo Station, the Air Force said in a statement this week.

An obituary for Girler, 37, said the cause of death was a pulmonary embolism, a sudden blockage in one of the arteries in the lungs, usually caused by a blood clot.

He is survived by his wife and two children, and numerous extended family members, the Air Force and his obituary said.

Girler joined the Air Force in 2010 and was a member of the 109th Airlift Wing, Stratton Air National Guard Base in Scotia, N.Y., since 2012.

He was serving as an aircraft electrical and environmental specialist with the 139th Expeditionary Airlift Squadron. He had deployed twice with the wing to Antarctica, as well as to Greenland, the Air Force said.

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Surge: CENTCOM chief says increase of troops in Mideast will deter future Iran attacks

**FROM FRONT PAGE**

“You’re here because I requested that you come,” Marine Gen. Frank McKenzie told sailors and Marines aboard the USS Bataan amphibious assault ship, his voice booming over the ship’s loudspeaker. “I’m not sure how long you’re going to stay in the theater. We’ll work that out as we go ahead. Could be quite a while, could be less than that, just don’t know right now.”

The Bataan and two other U.S. warships moved into the Middle East on Jan. 11. By Thursday, they were in the north Red Sea, roughly 50 miles south of the Sinai Peninsula. They are the latest additions to America’s troop presence in the region. Since May, their numbers have grown from about 60,000 to more than 80,000.

These increased deployments came despite two significant hurdles: Trump’s persistent pledge to end the wars and bring troops home, and U.S. Defense Secretary Mark Esper’s insistence that U.S. forces be shifted to the Asia-Pacific as a bulwark against threats from China.

In making its case for troops in the Middle East, the U.S. military points to Iran’s Jan. 8 launch of as many as two dozen ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases where U.S. troops were stationed. The attack was in retaliation for a U.S. drone strike that killed Qassem Soleimani, Iran’s top general. “Iran continues to pose a very real threat,” McKenzie told reporters traveling with him to the Bataan. “I do believe that they are deterred right now, at least from state-on-state actions by our response. And so I think that while that threat remains, I think we’re in a period where they’re certainly not seeking to escalate anything.”

He added, however, that Iranian proxy forces, who could strike with or without direction from Iranian leaders, still present a threat. He noted that Iranian attacks against Saudi Arabia last fall came as a surprise. “Iran is very hard to read,” McKenzie said. “So I would say the fact that things are quiet for a while does not mean that necessarily things are getting better.”

To help deter additional Iranian attacks, McKenzie asked to have the USS Bataan Amphibious Ready Group, which includes two of the ships and a Marine Expeditionary Unit, divert from their original mission in Europe and go through the Suez Canal into the Red Sea. There are about 2,500 Marines and 1,500 sailors on the three ships.

That decision is the latest move since May to bolster the American presence in the region, including the deployment of the 1st Brigade, 25th Airborne division, to Kuwait and Iraq after the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad was attacked. The U.S. also moved an aircraft carrier into the region last year. It has left and was replaced by the USS Nimitz. Truman. The Futenma has sent additional fighter jets, bomber aircraft, and Patriot missile batteries to the Middle East to provide additional security for U.S. troops and allies and as a show of force to deter attacks by Iran.

Those moves have increased the U.S. troop strength in the region to more than 83,000, based on numbers from several U.S. officials and other government agencies that track military movements.

Asked about the increase, McKenzie said he understands the demand for troops in other parts of the world, and he has had discussions with Esper about the level of risk in the Middle East.

Esper, who has approved the moves, is looking closely at world-wide deployments in a broader effort to meet the needs of the national defense strategy that identified China and Russia as the key future threats. Even as McKenzie was traveling to the Bataan, Esper was in Florida telling reporters that Russia and China are “mission number one.”

“There’s only a finite number of dollars, a finite number of troops, so I’ve got to figure out, where is the best place to put them?” Esper said.

Trump has argued that the U.S. must get out of the “endless wars” in the Middle East. But he has also signaled out Iran as a malign influence in the region, and after the Iranian missile strikes, was quick to threaten revenge.

Senior U.S. officials have noted the relative calm after the Iranian strikes, saying both the U.S. and Iran want to de-escalate tensions.

But McKenzie said that while the U.S. wants to be “cool-headed,” he worries that cooler heads may not prevail in Iran.

So when he went to the microphone on the Bataan, where Marine Harrier jets intermittently roared down the ship’s deck into the air, he issued a warning. “You need to be ready because I may need to employ you very short notice and on some very difficult missions,” he said.

Baghdad: 2 killed, dozens wounded in separate anti-government protest

**FROM FRONT PAGE**

the Iraqi street as negotiations among political elites over who should be the next prime minister stalled.

In his weekly Friday sermon, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq’s most revered Shiite cleric, called on political parties to cooperate, “al-Sistani said in a sermon delivered via a representative, “it is an important step toward resolving the current crisis.”

Roads and bridges leading to the heavily fortified Green Zone, then China, Iraq’s government compound and home to several foreign embassies, including the U.S. Embassy, were blocked off by concrete barriers. Iraqi security forces stood guard, blocking access to the gates to the zone.

There was a heavy security presence as the protestors, mostly Shiites hailing from the capital but also Iraq’s southern provinces, walked on foot to an assembly point in Baghdad’s Jadriya neighborhood, waving Iraqi flags and carrying symbolic white shrouds.

Al-Sadr, whose party won the most seats in the May 2018 parliamentary elections, had called for a “millions-man” demonstration to demand the withdrawal of American troops following the U.S. drone strike near Baghdad’s airport that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and senior Iraqi military commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. The killing sparked the ire of Iraqi officials from across the political spectrum.

Later Friday night, two anti-government protesters were shot and killed by security forces in separate demonstrations a few miles from where the big anti-U.S. rally had taken place, two medical officials and one security official said.

In addition, at least 26 protesters were wounded when security forces opened fire with live ammunition to disperse the crowds, officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

According to U.S. military officials, rather than draw down, Americans have sent 20,000 more troops in the Middle East to counter what Washington describes as an escalating threat from Iran. There are around 5,200 U.S. troops in Iraq, where they help train and assist Iraqi forces in the fight against Islamic State.

Iran has long sought the withdrawal of American forces from neighboring Iraq, but the U.S. strike that killed Soleimani in Baghdad has added new impetus to the effort.

In a statement Friday, al-Sadr — whose followers fought U.S. troops after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion to oust dictator Saddam Hussein — issued a list of conditions for American military presence in Iraq. The list includes canceling existing security agreements, closing U.S. military bases, ending the work of American security companies and closing off access to American airspace.

If the conditions were met, the statement said, “the resistance will temporarily stop until the last soldier leaves Iraq,” al-Sadr said, referring to American troops.

Al-Sadr “proved once again he can amass the crowds to take them to the street, cleverly preventing any targeting of protestors in Tahrir Square,” tweeted Farhad Alasadi, head of the Iraqi Advisory Council and a former presidential adviser.
WAR/MILITARY

By Corey Dickstein
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon said Friday that 34 U.S. service members suffered concussions from the Iranian missile attack Jan. 8 on al Asad Air Base in Iraq and it will review its injury reports amid the shifting narrative about casualties resulting from that strike.

Eight of the troops diagnosed with traumatic brain injury as a result of the attack have been transported to the United States where they will receive treatment as outpatients at either their home stations or at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland, said Jonathan Hoffman, the Pentagon’s chief spokesman. Seventeen of the 34 have returned to duty at Al Asad since their diagnoses, he said.

The Pentagon’s announcement Friday marked at least the third official adjustment to the number of troops injured when Iran launched 11 ballistic missiles into Al Asad as retaliation for the U.S. drone strike Jan. 3 in Baghdad on Iran’s most powerful military official, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the commander of its elite Quds Force.

Initially, the Pentagon and President Donald Trump announced no Americans were injured or killed in the barrage. On Jan. 16, the Pentagon for the first time acknowledged publicly that service members had been injured, announcing 11 service members had been treated in Iraq for evaluation of suspected brain injuries. This week, officials at U.S. Central Command said 11, 13 or 14 troops were diagnosed with TBI after the attack, and Hoffman said that additional troops had been evacuated from Al Asad because of their injuries.

The review of the Defense Department injury reporting, which Hoffman said would be led by Matt Donovan, the Pentagon’s acting personnel and readiness chief, has been charged with working with the Joint Staff to determine whether the reporting requirements for injured service members should be updated, Hoffman said. The initial changes in reports of injured personnel at Al Asad was at least partially attributed to policy that does not require TBIs and similar injuries to be reported to the Pentagon, which must be notified only of wounds that threaten the loss of limb, eyesight or life.

Hoffman said the reviews will be comprehensive and look at reporting requirements for all injuries, including TBIs. He said the military has announced publicly in the future.

By Tameem Akhgar
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Nearly half of all Afghans want U.S. and NATO troops to leave Afghanistan once a peace deal to end the country’s 18-year war is signed with the Taliban, according to a survey released Thursday.

The American Institute of War and Peace Studies also found that an overwhelming 80% of Afghans surveyed said a political solution was possible.

The survey found that 46% of Afghans want U.S. and NATO troops out of the country once a deal is struck, while 33% would have them stay.

Many Afghans favor departure by US if peace talks succeed

The survey showed Afghans were divided over the choice of Khalilzad as chief negotiator, with 41% favoring his appointment and 39% opposed. A whopping 20%, however, said they had no opinion.

Of the 5,038 Afghans surveyed, 3,274 were men and just 1,764 were women.

A strong 83% of those surveyed said women should be involved in the peace negotiations, while just 17% were opposed.

A peace agreement, which is being negotiated between Khalilzad and Taliban negotiators, will leave it to Afghans on both sides of the conflict to negotiate the face of a post-war Afghanistan. They must decide on constitutional changes enshrining the rights of women, media and free speech. The negotiations will decide the future of Taliban fighters, as well as the heavily armed militias belonging to warlords ruling in Kabul.

The majority of Afghans surveyed said they feared their homeland would descend into civil war if America pulls out its troops without first getting a peace deal.

Meanwhile, Taliban fighters took responsibility Thursday for the ambush and killing of an Afghan intelligence official in southern Helmand province.

The officer, who headed the provincial police chief’s office for the province, was ambushed late Wednesday, according to provincial police chief spokesman Zaman Hamard.

An Afghan street vendor waits for customers in Kabul on Tuesday.

Many Afghans favor departure by US if peace talks succeed

Taliban express frustration with additional US demands

By Kathy Gannon
Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — The Taliban, in a rambling commentary published online Thursday, offered a harsh following earlier optimistic tweets from Taliban political and military spokesman Suhail Shaheen, who hinted that the insurgents and Khalilzad were close to an understanding.

“The goal is to be as transparent, accurate and provide the American people and our service members the best information about the sacrifices our warfighters make,” he said, adding later: “We need to have better clarity [on casualties]. We need to get a better handle on it.”

Nonetheless, Hoffman downplayed the apparent inconsistencies in injury reporting. He reiterated concussion and other TBI symptoms often develop over time following a head injury and news reporters were alerted that concussion diagnoses could grow further.

The remaining 34 service members diagnosed with TBI remained in Iraq throughout the week and have not returned to work, he said.

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The spokesman said it remained unclear as of Friday whether the Defense Department would award Purple Hearts to the service members diagnosed with TBI from the Iranian attack.

The Purple Heart, an award to recognize wounds inflicted by an enemy combatant, is approved for troops who receive TBIs in enemy attacks that are diagnosed by military medical professionals and have been treated for a result of duty missed as a result of those injuries, according to awards records.

The survey found that 46% of Afghans want U.S. and NATO troops out of the country once a deal is struck, while 33% would have them stay.

Many Afghans favor departure by US if peace talks succeed

Taliban express frustration with additional US demands

“...updates. But I think that right now the numbers [of injuries] are what they are.”

“The United States and the Afghan Taliban must commit to abide by the laws of war and end the loss of limb, eyesight or life.”

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WASHINGTON — As senators sat through endless hours of arguments, they found a new outlet to focus their attention: fidget spinners.

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., handed out the toys to his colleagues before Thursday’s trial proceedings began. A fidget spinner is a small toy designed to be spun between the fingers, relieving stress or boredom.

Burr was seen playing with a blue spinner while listening to arguments by Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., an impeachment manager. Other senators, including Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., and Pat Toomey, R-Pa., were also seen with spinners on their desks.

The Senate jurors faced an an-other long day Friday armed with pens and paper — and, for Republicans, the gift of fidget spinners — for the historic trial.

The Senate is heading next week toward a pivotal vote on acquittal is considered likely.

“The scheme was unraveling,” said Rep. Jason Crow, of Colorado, a former Army Ranger, as the prosecution wrapped up its presentation on the first article of impeachment, abuse of power, before turning to the charge of obstruction of Congress.

As Democrats pressed their case before skeptical Republican senators for a third day, the president’s legal team was preparing its defense, expected to start Saturday. Trump, eyes on the audience beyond the Senate chamber, bemoaned the schedule in a tweet, saying “looks like my lawyers will be forced to start on Saturday, which is called Death Valley in TV.”

The Senate jurors faced another long day Friday armed with pens and paper — and, for Republicans, the gift of fidget spinners — for the historic trial.

The president is being tried in the Senate after the House impeached him last month, accusing him of abusing his office by asking Ukraine for politically motivated probes of political foe Joe Biden and his son Hunter while withholding military aid from a U.S. ally that was at war with bordering Russia. The second article of impeachment accuses him of obstructing Congress by refusing to turn over documents or allow officials to testify in the House probe.

Crow, a freshman lawmaker, said the money for Ukraine was released once Congress intervened.

“It wasn’t lifted for any legitimate reason,” Crow told the senators. “It was only lifted because President Trump had gotten caught.”

Republicans have defended Trump’s actions as appropriate and are casting the process as a politically motivated effort to weaken him in his reelection campaign. Republicans hold a 53-47 majority in the Senate, and acquittal is considered likely.

The Senate is heading next week toward a pivotal vote on Democratic demands for testimony from top Trump aides, including acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton who refused to appear before the House. It would take four Republican senators to join the Democratic minority to seek witnesses, and so far the numbers appear lacking.

“This needs to end,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a Trump confidant. He said he doesn’t want to hear from Bolton or the Bidens.

With Chief Justice John Roberts presiding, Democrats argued on Thursday that Trump’s motives were apparent, that he abused power like no other president in history, swept up by a “completely false” conspiracy theory pushed by attorney Rudy Giuliani.

Rep. Adam Schiff, the Democratic chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, made an emotional plea late Thursday for senators to consider what was at stake.

“Let me tell you something. If right doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter how good the Constitution is,” Schiff told a pin-drop-quiet room. “If you find him guilty you must find that he should be removed. Because right matters.”

They argued that Trump’s abuse of power was for his own personal political benefit ahead of the 2020 election, even as the nation’s top FBI and national security officials were publicly warning off the theory that it was Ukraine, not Russia, that interfered in the 2016 election.

“That’s what Donald Trump wanted investigated or announced — this completely bogus Kremlin-luminated conspiracy theory,” Schiff declared.

The Democrats’ challenge is clear as they try to convince not just fidgety senators but an American public divided over the Republican president in an election year.

After both sides have concluded their arguments next week, senators will face the question of whether to call witnesses to testify. But that issue has seemed all but settled. Republicans rejected Democratic efforts to get Trump aides, including Bolton and Mulvaney, to testify in back-to-back votes earlier this week.

As for the Ukraine connections, evidence has shown that Trump, with Giuliani, pursued investigations of Joe and Hunter Biden — the younger Biden served on a Ukrainian gas company’s board — and sought the probe of debunked theories of what nation was guilty of interference in the 2016 U.S. election.

It’s a story line many in the president’s camp are still pushing. Giuliani, in an appearance on his new podcast of “collusion going on in Ukraine to fix the 2016 election in favor of Hillary Clinton.”

Pressed by one of the TV hosts as to what that evidence was, Giuliani claimed he had “witnesses” willing to speak on the record next week.

Democrats, in their Senate prosecution, seemed to be anticipating arguments expected from the president’s defenders.

At one point, they showed video of a younger Graham, then a South Carolina congressman, arguing during Bill Clinton’s 1999 impeachment that no crime was needed for impeaching a president. Trump’s defense team is now arguing that the impeachment articles against him are invalid because they do not allege he committed a specific crime.

“The president’s defenders’ turn will come Saturday.

“We will be putting on a vigorous defense of both facts, rebutting what they said,” and the Constitution, said attorney Jay Sekulow.

During their presentations, Democrats have been summarizing much of the evidence and testimony already presented during televised House impeachment hearings.

Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., said the Democrats were putting forward “admirable presentations.” But he said, “There’s just not much new here.”
Trump headlines annual March for Life rally

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Friday became the first president to speak in person to antiabortion demonstrators at the March for Life rally, an annual gathering to mark the Supreme Court’s Roe v. Wade decision.

Trump has endeavored himself to the antiabortion movement, particularly through appointing Supreme Court justices who share his views. Trump’s appearance at the march came as he seeks to consolidate support from evangelical Christians in his reelection campaign.

“Today, as president of the United States, I am truly proud to stand with you,” Trump said. “The pro-life movement has a champion in Donald Trump.”

Trump’s participation was part of a larger trend of increasing antiabortion sentiment in recent years, as well as a focus on political issues and candidates who share those views.

According to a statement from the March for Life, the event is an opportunity for people to come together to express their support for the pro-life movement and to pray for the reversal of Roe v. Wade.

Melody Wooten, a 49-year-old musician from Sterling Heights, Mich., said she came for the first time because she heard it would be Trump’s first attendance. She felt a sense of history, along with the Senate impeachment trial underway, and wanted to be present. The abortion issue and the impeachment, she said, constitute “an attack on Christianity.”

“This rally is bringing everything I believe to life,” said Wooten, who is an evangelical. “In Israel, you can go and see where Jesus was born, and it brings things to life. I’ve seen the Grand Canyon in pictures, but it’s different when you see it. Coming here makes everything come to life. It’s going to be a springboard to being more active.”

Outside the hotel, where many young marchers were streaming in, was a huge electronic billboard on a truck bed reading, “Abortion is freedom.”

Volunteers handed out signs paid for by the Trump campaign at the entrance to the March for Life, an attempt to brand the annual antiabortion march as something like a campaign rally.

Trump’s decision to attend the rally comes as he seeks to consolidate support from evangelicals in his reelection campaign amid signs that a portion of his conservative base has been troubled by his conduct.

Early Friday, Eric and Julie Feltes, both 53, came from Greenville, S.C., with three of their children and the kids’ friend group. They were waiting to head to the Mall early because of increased security and waits. They were thrilled Trump was attending because they thought it would increase turnout. Trump, Eric said, is the first president to “really vocalize our social issues.”

“Trump is a true conservative president on social issues,” he said. “It feels more Reaganesque.”

For them, abortion is a top issue.

“It all begins with life. If you don’t have that — it all flows from there,” Julie said.

Police say 2 dead after explosion inside warehouse shakes Houston

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Two people died after a massive explosion Friday leveled a warehouse in Houston, damaging nearby buildings and homes and rousing frightened people from their sleep miles away, authorities said.

The explosion happened about 4:30 a.m. inside a building at Watson Grinding and Manufacturing, which makes valves and provides thermal-spray coatings for equipment in various industries, authorities said. The building was reduced to burning rubble and debris, and some of the surrounding buildings suffered heavy damage to parts of their walls and roofs.

Police Chief Art Acevedo confirmed the deaths Friday. He said authorities don’t believe the explosion was intentional though a criminal investigation is under way. Acevedo asked residents who live nearby to search their homes and neighborhoods for any debris — including body parts — and to contact police if they find anything that could aid in the investigation.

Houston Fire Chief Samuel Pena said hazardous materials crews have secured the valve on a 2,000-gallon tank of propylene that had been leaking. Propylene is a colorless gas used to produce chemicals in plastics, synthetic rubber and gasoline. It is highly flammable and can explode in a fire. People exposed to propylene can become dizzy and light-headed, and the gas can also cause liver damage.

Nearby homes sustained significant damage. Some were knocked off their foundations.

Danny Wilson, 63, who lives less than a mile from the site, said he was sleeping when his wife woke him up.

“She heard a big noise and the (grandkids) were running out of their rooms,” Wilson said. “She said it was some kind of explosion or somebody was trying to get in.”

Wilson said he first checked inside his home to make sure nobody had broken in and then he went outside and talked to neighbors to find out what was going on and to check for any damage.

“I didn’t notice any broken glass and I looked at the back window and it was shattered big time,” Wilson said.

Damage to buildings is seen in an image from video after an explosion in Houston on Friday.

He said the blast also broke glass on part of his front windows.

“Everybody seems to be OK now. That’s the main thing,” Wilson said.

Mark Brady, who lives near the site, told TV station KPRC that the explosion “knocked us all out of bed.”

“It busted out every window in our house. It busted everybody’s garage door in around here … and closer toward the explosion over here, it busted people’s roofs in and walls in,” he said.

The blast shook other buildings, with reports on Twitter of a boom felt across the city. Pena said there were no reports of hazardous air quality, based on monitoring done by a hazardous materials team.

A phone number for Watson Grinding was out of service when called by a reporter with The Associated Press on Friday morning. The family-owned business manufactures valves and provides thermal-spray coatings for equipment used in the chemical, mining, petroleum and aerospace industries, among others, according to its website.

Houston police tweeted that officers were blocking off streets, but no evacuation was ordered. Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez said first responders checked on residents of nearby homes.

Several people told TV station KHOU that the explosion was so loud, they thought a bomb had gone off or that a vehicle had crashed into their homes.
**2020 primary is here for many early US voters**

By Kathleen Ronayne  
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — The Iowa caucuses are more than a week away, but millions of Americans are already free to vote. Early voting in the crucial Super Tuesday states that hold primaries on March 3 amounts to a parallel campaign for the Democratic nomination. While much of the focus is on who will come out on top in the traditional first four voting states, early voting will allow a much broader swath of voters to play a key role in picking the nominee.

In Minnesota, in-person early voting began Jan. 17. Vermont’s deadline to mail out its absentee ballots was the same day. Many of the 14 Super Tuesday states will offer some form of early voting between now and mid-February.

These states will test the organizational strength of the White House hopefuls. The campaigns must balance the demands of the first four states — Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada — while also making sure to target potential supporters in the Super Tuesday states that follow. Some campaigns may believe that two-step while their candidate is in Washington participating in President Donald Trump’s impeachment trial.

Several campaigns said they’ve been working to perfect this balance for months!

“Super Tuesday has never really been March 3 for us,” said Pete Kavanaugh, an adviser for former Vice President Joe Biden’s campaign. “In our minds and from a resource allocation perspective, Super Tuesday begins in early February.”

Michael Bloomberg, the billionaire businessman, is ignoring the early states entirely and using his nearly bottomless resources to campaign hard in the Super Tuesday states.

Bernie Sanders, meanwhile, sees early voting as a way to boost turnout among core constituencies like young, minority and working-class voters. Early voting opens new opportunities for people with strict work schedules or other barriers to voting to find time to cast ballots beyond the typical Election Day, spokeswoman Sarah Ford said.

The campaign of Pete Buttigieg, the former mayor of South Bend, Ind., is educating volunteers in Minnesota, Colorado, California and Texas about the early voting process. And Minnesota Sen. Amy Klobuchar rallied in her home state recently to mark the start of early voting and generate enthusiasm among voters who have sent her to the U.S. Senate three times.

Davis Sensenbrenner slept in an RV outside a Minnesota polling place with friends so that they could be some of the first people to vote in the presidential election.

“I want to do this first because I’m for something, not voting against something.”

The biggest early voting state, California, will mail ballots to more than 12 million voters starting Feb. 3, the same day as the Iowa caucuses, though not all of those voters will get a Democratic primary ballot.

9 separated from kids return to US

By Nomaan Merchant and Elliot Spagat  
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — As his long-lost son walked toward him in an airport terminal, sobbing David Xol stretched out his arms, fell to one knee and embraced the boy for about three minutes, crying into his shoulder.

He had not held the child since May 2018, when border agents pulled then-7-year-old Byron away inside a detention facility. They were separated under President Donald Trump’s zero-tolerance policy — the father deported to Guatemala, the son placed in a series of government facilities before ending up with a host family in Texas.

Xol was one of nine parents who won the exceedingly rare chance to return to the U.S. after being deported under family separation. They arrived Wednesday at Los Angeles International Airport to be reunited with children they hadn’t seen in a year and a half or longer under the order of a federal judge who found the U.S. government had unlawfully prevented them from seeking asylum.

After embracing, David stood and patted Byron, now 9, on the head. “He was small,” the father said. “He grew a lot.”

The reunion was a powerful reminder of the lasting effects of Trump’s separation policy, even as attention and outrage has faded amid impeachment proceedings and tensions with Iran. But it also underscored the fact that hundreds, potentially thousands, of other parents and children are still apart nearly two years after the zero-tolerance policy on unauthorized border crossings took effect.

“They all kind of hit the lottery,” said Linda Dakin-Grimm, an attorney who represents one of the parents returning to the U.S. “There are so many people out there who have been traumatized by the family separation policy — pain is not going to be redressed.”

More than 4,000 children are known to have been separated from their parents before and during the official start of zero tolerance in spring 2018.

In June 2018, U.S. District Judge Dana Sabraw ordered the government to stop separating families and reunite parents and children.

Evin Fernando Arredondo was also on the plane. The father from Guatemala was separated from one of his daughters, Andrea Arredondo — then 12 years old and now 13, after they turned themselves in on May 16, 2018, at a Texas crossing and sought asylum legally, according to his lawyer.

Andrea was separated for about a month. She was finally reunited with her mother, who had turned herself in at the Texas crossing with the other two daughters four days earlier than her husband.

Arredondo eventually emerged with the other parents. He hugged his three daughters.

“To live the way I lived was very difficult,” he said.

New York City Council votes to ban cashless businesses, joining others

By Karen Matthews  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York City lawmakers voted Thursday to require stores and restaurants to accept cash for payment, saying businesses that accept only credit and debit cards are discriminating against New Yorkers who lack bank accounts and credit cards.

“This practice punishes the underbanked,” City Council Speaker Corey Johnson said before the council’s 43-3 vote in favor of the bill.

Under the bill, businesses that refuse cash will be fined $1,000 for the first violation and $2,500 after that. The measure, which is expected to go into effect by the end of the year, also prohibits stores from charging higher prices for paying in cash.

Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio is expected to sign the legislation. A spokeswoman for the mayor said that he supports the intent of the bill but that his administration will review it.

Backers of the cashless model say the benefits include greater efficiency and eliminating the risk of theft, but opponents say millions of Americans still rely on cash.

In adopting the ban on cashless businesses, New York City joins a growing backlash against the digital-only economy.

Philadelphia became the first U.S. city to ban cashless stores last year. San Francisco and New Jersey passed similar measures soon after. Only one jurisdiction required businesses to accept cash before 2019: Massachusetts, which passed a law nearly 40 years ago.

Backers of the New York City bill said that hundreds of thousands of city residents don’t have bank accounts or credit cards and that others simply prefer to use cash.

“What your reasons, consumers should have the power to choose their preferred method of payment,” City Councilman Ritchie Torres, the Bronx Democ- ratic who sponsored the legislation, said before the council’s vote.
Trump to increase fuel economy standards

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is making a concession on its proposed minimum fuel economy requirement for new vehicles, but environmental groups and a key Democratic senator complain it does not go far enough, and still falls well below the requirements set under the Obama administration.

Fuel economy standards would increase 1.5% per year from 2021 through 2026 under the new proposal. That’s a reversal from the Trump administration’s proposal in 2018, which sought to freeze the standards at 2020 levels.

Environmentalists and Delaware Sen. Tom Carper hardly cheered the move, which doesn’t come close to the 5% annual increase that the Obama administration had mandated.

Carper, senior Democrat on the Environment and Public Works Committee, released some details of the latest fuel-standards proposal in a letter Wednesday urging the administration to scrap its new mileage proposal as ineffective and costly.

“Many of the court’s review of the draft rule indicates that it utterly fails to provide any demonstrable safety, environmental or economic benefit to consumers or the country,” Carper wrote in a letter to the Office of Management and Budget.

The office reviews proposed regulations before they are finalized and printed in the Federal Register. The administration hasn’t released the numbers, but they are detailed in Carper’s letter to Paul Ray, a management and budget specialist.

The Trump administration billed its mileage standards as safer and less costly to motorists, but there’s a growing chorus of critics disputing that, including the Trump EPA’s own scientific advisory board. The mileage rollback has become one of the most fiercely contested rollback efforts by the administration, prompting legal battles with California and other states and splitting loyalties of top automakers.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which develops fuel economy rules, wouldn’t comment Thursday. It reissued a statement saying the rule will improve fuel economy, cut pollution and make vehicles more affordable.

When the Trump administration released its proposed “Safer Affordable Fuel-Efficient Vehicles Rule” in 2018, it calculated that the rule would save 12,700 lives in car crashes through model year 2029. That notion was that relaxed fuel mileage standards would cut the cost of vehicles, making them more affordable and increasing sales. Since new vehicles are safer, lives would be saved.

The proposal pegged the cost of meeting Obama-era requirements at $2,700 per vehicle and said buyers would save that much per car.

But Carper wrote that the administration’s final proposal claims total savings of 474 lives through 2029. That number doesn’t include deaths associated with increased air pollution from less-efficient vehicles, Carper wrote.

“Those 474 prevented traffic fatalities are nowhere near enough to offset the costs related to the 80 billion gallons of additional gasoline consumption in the administration’s proposal,” Carper wrote. “Dave Cooke, senior vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said in a separate statement.

Robert Koehler appears before Judge David Silverman via closed circuit Tuesday at Brevard County Jail in Sharpes, Fla. Koehler is charged in a sexual assault from the 1980s.

Prosecutor says DNA match led to arrest of Florida ‘pillowcase rapist’

Associated Press

MIAMI — Prosecutors announced Thursday that a sophisticated DNA match has led to the cold case arrest of a Florida man believed to be the “pillowcase rapist” who terrorized greater Miami with a series of assaults on women in the 1980s.

Robert Koehler, 60, was arrested last weekend and was being held without bond Thursday in a Miami jail. He faces charges in one assault though authorities said as many as 25 victims could be involved.

The “pillowcase rapist” was so named because he used a pillowcase or other fabric to cover the faces of his terrified victims, usually after he had broken into an apartment or town home, according to investigators. The assaults, often carried out at knife-point, took place between 1981 and 1986 and had put investigators on alert.

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China expands lockdown, builds hospital

BY YANAN WANG
Associated Press

BEIJING — China is swiftly building a 1,000-bed hospital dedicated to patients infected with a new virus that has killed 26 people, sickened hundreds and prompted unprecedented lockdowns of cities during the country’s most important holiday.

On the eve of the Lunar New Year, transportation was shut down Friday in at least 10 cities with a total of about 33 million people. The cities are Wuhan, where the illness has been concentrated, and nine of its neighbors in central China’s Hubei province.

“To address the insufficiency of existing medical resources,” Wuhan authorities said in a Friday notice, the city is constructing a hospital modeled after the Xiaotangshan SARS hospital in Beijing. The facility will be a prefabricated structure on a 270,000-square-foot lot, slated for completion Feb. 3.

The SARS hospital was built from scratch in 2003 in just six days to treat an outbreak of a similar respiratory virus that had spread from China to more than a dozen countries and killed about 800 people. The hospital featured individual isolation units that looked like rows of tiny cabins. Normally bustling streets, malls and other public spaces were eerily quiet in Wuhan on the second day of its lockdown. Masks were mandatory in public, and images from the city showed empty shelves as people stocked up for what could be an extended isolation. Train stations, the airport and subways were closed; police checked incoming vehicles but did not entirely close off roads.

Hospitals in Wuhan were grappling with a flood of patients and a lack of supplies. Videos circulating online showed throngs of frantic people in masks lined up for checks. Some users on Weibo said their family members had sought diagnoses but were turned away at hospitals that were at capacity.

At least eight hospitals in Wuhan issued public calls for donations of masks, gloves, gowns and other protective medical gear, according to notices online. Administrators at Wuhan University Hospital set up a group chat on the popular WeChat messaging app to coordinate donations.

Authorities were taking precautions around the country. In the capital, Beijing, major public events were canceled, including traditional temple fairs that are a staple of Lunar New Year celebrations. Beijing’s Forbidden City, Shanghai Disneyland and a slew of other tourist attractions have been closed indefinitely.

The number of confirmed cases of the new virus has risen to 830, the National Health Commission said. Twenty-six people have died, including the first two deaths outside Hubei and the youngest recorded victim.

Some see end to caravans as Mexican guardsmen stop them

BY PETER ORSI
Associated Press

FRONTERA HIDALGO, Mexico — From the roadside stand where his family sells mole, barbecue and chicken stew, Miguel Angel Vazquez has seen all the caravans of Central American migrants and asylum seekers stream past his front door in recent years, thousands of people driven to flee poverty and violence in hopes of a better life in the United States.

After watching armored National Guard troops and immigration agents break up the latest one right on his doorstep, loading men, women and wailing children onto buses and hauling them off to a detention center in the nearby city of Tapachula, he’s sure of one thing.

“I can see that these caravans are no longer going to pass,” said Vazquez, 56.

Where the first caravans were allowed to pass through Mexican territory and even given humanitarian aid or transportation by many communities and some officials, President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador’s administration changed that beginning last year in response to steep trade tariffs imposed by the United States.

The result was on display Thursday on a rural highway in the far-southern Mexican city of Frontera Hidalgo, just across the river border between Mexico and Guatemala that the hundreds of migrants, mostly Hondurans, crossed before dawn.

The migrants walked for hours before stopping at the crossroads where Vazquez’s stand lies, taking advantage of the copious shade on a road otherwise largely exposed to the beating tropical sun.

Many of the migrants filled out official forms without any government officials present, expressing their desire to request refuge and giving their reasons for leaving their home countries. They knew that a few kilometers up the road, National Guard troops awaited with riot shields and orders not to let them pass, but still held out hope they could negotiate.

Then hundreds of national guard troops advanced their lines to within 100 yards of the migrants. A brief negotiation stalled, and the migrants knelt to the ground in prayer and began to chant “we want to pass.”

National guardsmen advanced baring their plastic shields with batons and engaged the migrants. Many of the people allowed themselves to be escorted to the buses without resistance. In all, 800 migrants were detained, according to a statement from Mexico’s National Immigration Institute.

Before the confrontation, Anibal, who declined to give his last name for fear of reprisal from immigration authorities, ate a bag of chips and wearily took his shoes off in the shade next to the food stall. He joined the majority Honduran caravan from his hometown of Santa Rosa, Guatemala, and was determined to get to the U.S., no matter where, and work to save money and return to his wife and three kids.

“They need to let us pass,” he said.

Asked about assertions from Mexico’s president that migration must be regular and orderly, he said: “He needs to have a little more compassion ... we’re going out of necessity. We’re not going for ambition.”

2 elephants escape from circus, take quick tour of Russian city

Associated Press

Russia is said to be the place where bears roam the streets — but for a short while, it was a free-for-all for elephants.

Residents of Yekaterinburg were flabbergasted to see a couple of elephants wandering the snowy streets of Russia’s third-largest city after they escaped from a circus.

Unreceptive to attempts to bring her back, one of the female elephants crossed a busy street and headed to a residential building to roll and cavort in the snow on Thursday. One man who tried to stop her by holding on to her trunk was pushed across the street, his feet sliding on the ice.

The local circus said the two elephants — Karla and Ranni — belonged to an Italian company that ran a show in Yekaterinburg during the New Year holidays.

When its troupe tried to load the animals into a truck to head to the next destination, they resisted and walked away. The circus said that Ranni latched near the loading point but the more adventurous Karla decided to take a tour of the city.

Handlers finally got a rope around one of the elephant’s front legs, but it took a dozen people to pull her back. She reluctantly obeyed after playing in the snow.

“The elephants wanted to get some new experiences before a long journey, and they got them,” the circus commented.
Get happy!

When it comes to contentment, Americans are doing it wrong. These 4 books are here to help

BY ANGELA HAUPF Special to The Washington Post

There's a British antidote to our cold, chaotic world — and it's called coziness. The feel-good, sock-heavy concept is a nice addition to "new year, new you" routines, right up there with ichigo icchie: the Japanese expression that reminds us to put down our phones, because each moment is unique and isn't coming back. Both are among the practices outlined in a rush of new books from other countries that seem to imply that Americans are doing it wrong and could be happier. Here's a look at the lessons four of these new guides impart.

To learn how to be anchored in the present, consult "The Book of Ichiigo Ichie," by Halima Garcia and Françoise Michéle. You could spend this beautiful, fleeting moment opening the zillionth tab in your internet browser, or you could smell the rain-soaked earth or even just notice the citrussy tones of your hot tea. Whatever you choose, know that each tiny speck of time, though it might feel like a fad, is unique and will never happen again — so relish it.

That’s the idea behind the ancient Japanese concept "ichigo icchie." "The moment is a jealous lover that demands we give our all," Garcia and Miralles write, a fairly dramatic description for a tenet of Zen Buddhism. "Every unrepeatable moment is a small oasis of happiness. And many oases together make an ocean of happiness." To savor each moment like it’s the last, one must fully employ the five senses. Keep your phone in your pocket; go for a walk and check the color of the sky and shapes of the clouds instead of your texts. Walk barefoot on the grass or dirt. Blindfold yourself and then eat an apple, noting how it feels in your hand and in your mouth — chewing "as if it were the only thing in the universe." It’s ultimately a practice, a promise that while we’ll never get these moments back, we can squee a whole lot of life out of them beforehand.

To de-stress, curl up with "Cosy," by Laura Weir.

"Cosy" might be British, but warm, fuzzy feelings are universal, and Weir’s guide to comfort and contentment is pleasant if not particularly novel. Homebodies will appreciate the permission to stay in and practice self-imposed lethargy — which, to be sure, is good for overworked and over-socialized brains.

To have better balance, take a break with "The Little Book of Fika," by Lynda Balslev.

Sad desk lunch, meet fika: the Swedish ritual that pairs short, twice-daily coffee breaks with conversation and a gooey treat. Americans can have their to-go cups; Sweedes — consistently ranked among the world’s happiest people — see coffee as an opportunity to slow down and appreciate a simple pleasure.

"In many cultures, the notion of drinking coffee is almost genetic," Balslev writes. "Swedish fika is quite the opposite. It’s a moment to relax and reflect, [and] connect with friends and family, nature or oneself." The "Little Book of Fika" is short enough to devour during a 15-minute fika. The practice, which traces back to the 1600s, is part of the lagom movement, or the concept of "not too much, not too little — just enough." It’s observed at home, at coffee shops, in parks, in the office; wherever there’s coffee, there can be fika.

"Consider it a caffeinated meditation," Balslev suggests. Leave your desk to make a dark roast, or take a thermos to savor in a park. Don’t multitask — this is a break after all — but catching up with a friend or colleague is encouraged. You’ll return to regularly scheduled life feeling clearer and calmer.

To make more friends, study "The Power of Nunchi," by Euny Hong.

Hong’s guidance, you, too, can become a nunchi ninja. In breezy chapters complemented by charming illustrations, Weir evangelizes on the joys of quotidian pleasures such as a dark roast, or take a thermos to savor in a park. Don’t multitask — this is a break after all — but catching up with a friend or colleague is encouraged. You’ll return to regularly scheduled life feeling clearer and calmer.

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There are parallels between British coziness and the Danish concept of hygge. But hygge carries a "certain elitism...now that it’s been hijacked by hipsters and interior design magazines," Weir writes. So, no twinkly lights are necessary to get cozy. But socks? Now, those are divine.

Over the past few years, Weir, a London-based journalist, found herself “seeking comfort from politically dark winters and the relentlessly bleak news cycle.” Reprieve came in the form of coziness — which essentially means retreating inside with whatever makes you happy, doing whatever you do when no one is watching.

In breezy chapters complemented by charming illustrations, Weir evangelizes on the joys of quotidian pleasures such as warm feet, warm fires and, obviously, tea. There are recipes for cozy feasts — cottage pie, apple crumble — plus craft ideas and suggestions for comfy, layered outfits. She likens napping to a “decadent snack” and extols the virtues of dimly lit rooms.

"Cosy" might be British, but warm, fuzzy feelings are universal, and Weir’s guide to comfort and contentment is pleasant if not particularly novel. Homebodies will appreciate the permission to stay in and practice self-imposed lethargy — which, to be sure, is good for overworked and over-socialized brains.

Everyday Ubuntu helps us to make sense of the world and our place in it

BY VICKY HALLETT

Special to The Washington Post

Maybe it was the paparazzi. Maybe it was the tension over race. Or maybe it was “Everyday Ubuntu: Living Better Together, the African Way.”

OK, this is kind of a long-shot theory for explaining Megxit — the decision by Prince Harry and Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, to step back as senior members of the British royal family. But in a recent documentary, the couple was photographed holding “Everyday Ubuntu,” a new self-help book by Mandela and Tutu.

Ubuntu comes from a proverb found in languages throughout Africa that translates as, “a person is a person through other persons.” Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains in the foreword. In practice, “ubuntu can help us to become someone in the world who builds bridges, someone who sees each interaction as a chance to foster a more positive environment.”

Tutu, who is Ngoné’s grandfather, describes ubuntu as “one of Africa’s greatest gifts to the world.” As Ngoné breaks down the concept into 14 easy-to-digest lessons, some do seem tailor-made for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex.

For instance, Chapter 1, “See Yourself in Other People,” offers a reframe to influence consumer culture and the idea that a handful of individuals are somehow superior to the rest of us. Tutu decides to restart her lifestyle blog, The Tig, perhaps she’ll adopt Ngoné’s ubuntu messaging: “We don’t need to compare our lives to others’ and what they may or may not have in them.”

Chapter 2, “Strength Lies in Unity,” devotes a section to why wealth doesn’t equal worth, which bolsters the couple’s plan to seek financial independence. The most valuable assets you can have are real connections with other people, Ngoné writes, noting that in the era of social media, loneliness has skyrocketed. Her suggestions for building your own community, including joining parent groups and volunteering for charities, certainly seem applicable to a young family about to split their time between Britain and Canada.

Ngoné’s advice is most powerful when referencing the history of ubuntu in South Africa, where the principle guided the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work after the end of apartheid. She writes that her grandfather “thought that if people were to become ‘one’ again, they needed to share a common history. And you can only do that if you are allowed to experience what the other side has experienced.”

So, in the spirit of ubuntu, as people came forward to talk about what they did and why, everyone listened and tried to understand. Mandela and Archbishop Tutu serve as examples of ubuntu in many of her anecdotes, as they perform grand, healing gestures. There’s President Mandela wearing a Springbok jersey at the 1995 Rugby World Cup, signaling that he supports South Africa’s team and its Afrikaner players. There’s Tutu, cracking jokes about nose size to help ease the tension at a event in post-genocide Rwanda.

In any other book, Tutu and Mandela might seem to set a playbook for the powerful — but this book is all about how every person matters and has the power to effect change. The message particularly resonates in an election year in an increasingly divided nation. Although Ngoné never explicitly references American politics, her encouragement to maintain hope — while taking action — can read like a playbook for people frustrated by seemingly intractable partisanship.
I didn't usually get that from a movie.” With 10 Oscar nominations, including best picture and one for Pacino, “The Irishman” is a reunion, a farewell and a summation. It’s the fourth movie Pacino and De Niro, 76, have made together, though they shared no screen time in one of those films (“The Godfather Part II”) and had only one scene together in another (“Heat”). It’s the ninth movie De Niro has made with Scorsese and the first time Pacino has worked with the director.

“The Irishman” affords the two actors an abundance of fellowship, with De Niro, a producer on the film, playing Frank Sheeran, a mobster and Teamsters official who worked for charismatic Teamsters boss Jimmy Hoffa (played by Pacino), came to regard him like a brother and then, according to Sheeran anyway, murdered him, an act that can be seen both as a betrayal and an expression of love. We sat down on an early winter day in a West Hollywood hotel. De Niro, polite but reticent, let Pacino do most of the talking. “You do an interview and you learn a lot of things — especially about Bob!” Pacino joked about his reserved co-star. Earlier Pacino copped to being a little hyper. “I’m sorry, Bob. I’m taking all the questions!” De Niro flashed a crinkly smile and raised his hands in surrender. “It’s OK, Al. You’re good at this.”

De Niro: “Fluidity and music” is interesting. I love music. I can’t really sing. I can’t play an instrument. But I’d say that music is my first love. I’ve used it at various times in roles, particularly when I was younger. I remember making the Godfather movies, especially “Godfather II.” De Niro begins to loudly hum Nino Rota’s love theme to the film’s music. Pacino: “That’s very good, Bob. (Laughs) It’s close. I went to Mozart. I listened to a lot of Mozart and also Stravinsky and it put me in the mindset of Michael Corleone. I tried different pieces to see where they’d put me. You ever try it?

De Niro: I listen to some music to help get me in an emotional state. Sometimes it works. You can’t rely on it. If you’re going to cry, even a silly thing can help. I’ve listened to things from commercials. There was this one sentimental commercial, years ago, and I’d play it and it would help me.

What are we talking about here? Like the Paul Anka Kodak commercial?

De Niro: (Chuckles) No, no. (Pauses) Though ... I might have to try that. I think mine was a public service thing. But music ... doing a scene, like with Al, I feel there’s a musical connection. Ad-libbing, improvising, it’s like two musicians playing.

Did you do any of that in your scene in “Heat”? (Director) Michael Mann said you do free-form psychological absorption. Al.

Pacino: That’s a lot of multi-syllable words! ... while Bob is determined to be completely in the moment.

De Niro: That’s interesting that he said that. It’s similar to what Marty said.

Tell me about free-form psychological absorption. Pacino: Oh, I will!

De Niro: Michael uses big words sometimes. He has a very extensive vocabulary. Pacino: I did a lot of theater early in my life, and that’s all about rehearsing. The more I rehearsed, the more I played a role, the more things would happen. That’s the psychological absorption, my friend. I love repeats! But you don’t often get that in film. There’s not much rehearsal.

With that scene in “Heat” with Bob, I went off to think about it and learn it. Then you can be in the moment and you listen and look and see what Bob’s doing and it changes. If he does something strange, I have to be there.

De Niro: We didn’t rehearse that scene in “Heat.” I didn’t want to.

Pacino: And that was wise. Because these two guys have never spoken to each other. And when we finally meet for the first time, there’s an energy in that wariness.

De Niro: It’s one of the favorite scenes I’ve ever done.

Do you have a favorite scene you did together in “The Irishman”?

De Niro: I don’t know if I could single one out. Just the fact that we did another film together means a lot.

Pacino: There’s no guarantee that a movie like this happens. You look at (Paul) Newman and (Robert) Redford. They stayed friends. They wanted to work together again. But they didn’t. And people don’t understand why, but it’s just tough for things to line up. I’m thankful they did for us.

De Niro: Al wrote me a beautiful email that meant a lot to me.

Pacino: I did. Immediately after seeing the movie. I called Marty and I wrote Bob. What did you tell him?

Pacino: Hai! (Long pause) You know ... I was moved by it and what he did. And I wanted to tell him that.

De Niro: I didn’t expect that. I was very, very moved by what you wrote.

You’ve known each other since the ‘60s. How did you connect as friends, beyond the work?

Pacino: Early in the ‘70s, without consciously doing it, we bonded because we were both dealing with the fact that, all of a sudden, we were well known. You go from being a young, out-of-work actor to having people recognize you everywhere you go. That’s a peculiar experience, and there was comfort in talking to someone else going through it. Because it was very strange what was going on.

Like what?

Pacino: Well, I remember a friend of mine once told me Lee Strasberg in an elevator, “Oh, I know you.” And Lee says,
**MOVIES**

**From Page 12**

“No. You know who I am. But you don’t know me.” Same friend was with me one time at a grocery store and I’m inside getting a cup of coffee to go. And a woman came up to my friend and asked, “Is that really Al Pacino in there?” And he said, “Yeah. Somebody’s gotta be.” That’s fame.

**De Niro:** It’s disconcerting. You can’t prepare for it.

**Pacino:** We’d call each other and compare notes: “You want to get together?” And we’d get together ...

**De Niro:** ... and it was always frantic. There’s a trust.

**Pacino:** Something always came out of it. And here we are today.

Because you’re playing characters in “The Irishman” who pass through decades, thanks to the de-aging technology, there was a guy on set who’d yell out your character’s age when you were doing a scene.

**Pacino:** Thirty-nine! Because I was getting off the couch like a 70-year-old man! And, in the scene, Hoffa was supposed to be 39. You forget how you moved. Because I was already standing!

**De Niro:** That I could do.

**Pacino:** You forget how you moved. You forget how you run.

**De Niro:** How old do you feel?

**Pacino:** I don’t think I’ve left. I don’t think I’ve left. Why do you think I have left?” (De Niro laughs)

**De Niro:** Who’s older, “How much longer will you be here?”

**Pacino:** Thirty-nine! Because you’re playing character’s age. Thirty-nine and thirty-five. I don’t think I’ve left.

**De Niro:** (Laughing) When I saw him running up those steps, I thought, “Jesus, he really went up those steps!” You couldn’t keep up with him.

**When you think of your age, how old do you feel?**

**Pacino:** My friend said it’s sort of rude asking how old I am. It’s almost like asking someone who’s older, “How much longer do you think you have left?” (De Niro laughs)

**De Niro:** I know how old you are. I’m wondering what age you feel.

**Pacino:** Most of the time, I feel younger than 76. But then sometimes, you look at yourself in the mirror and you say, “Oh, geez.” I remember I was standing outside a building in time and I said, “Who’s that old guy over there?” He had a hat on. Then he turned around and it was somebody well-known and we said hello. But it was weird. And that’s how I probably look to people.

**Pacino:** The worst thing is when you’re walking somewhere and, by accident, you see yourself in the mirror and you turn around and say, “Who? Who’s that?” And it’s you! Who am I? It brings you down a little bit.

**De Niro:** But there’s all that hard-earned wisdom that comes with all that experience, right?

**Pacino:** (Laughing) You don’t always want that hard-earned wisdom. It’s like that line Hoffa has in the movie, “Chin up with a gun. With a knife you run.” If Hoffa said it, it’s probably true. He got 13 stitches in the back of his head. So if I had to take anybody’s advice on that, it’d be Hoffa’s. But do you want that hard-earned wisdom in your life? You just have to live with the decisions you’ve made and be grateful.

**De Niro:** Make the best of things. We’re both pretty fortunate.

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**From left: Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), Huntress (Elizabeth Winstead), Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie), Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco) and Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell) star in “Birds of Prey,” the first big superhero movie of the year. It will be released Feb. 7.**

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**2020 will be super**

New films coming from DC, Marvel and Valiant Comic universes

**By David Betancourt**

The Washington Post

His new year won’t give us another “Avengers” movie, but there will still be plenty of superheroines on the big screen.

Warner Bros. and DC Comics are releasing films featuring their two most popular characters of the moment (Wonder Woman and Harley Quinn), Valiant Comics is finally seeing one of its heroes hit the big screen (Bloodshot) and a Venom sequel hopes to best its previous movie’s $856 million worldwide haul.

Marvel Studios is looking to provide a mild Avengers flashback (“Black Widow”) before moving on to out-of-this-world aspirations (“Eternals”).

Here’s the upcoming superhero movie slate for 2020.

**‘Birds of Prey,’ Feb. 7**

Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) gets a new movie and a new team all in one film in this post-Joker-breakup adventure (no Jared Leto in sight, but no worries, he appears later on this list). Helping Quinn in the fight are lethal archer the Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), ultrasonic-voiced Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett-Bell), quick-handed Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco) and veteran Gotham City cop Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez), as they go up against a Batman villain not commonly known by the general public (Ewan McGregor’s Black Mask).

**‘Bloodshot,’ March 13**

Vin Diesel gets a superhero role with a lot more lines than when he played Groot in the “Guardians of the Galaxy” series. He stars as an indestructible soldier looking to put together the mystery of a past he can’t remember. This is the first live-action film from the Valiant Comics universe, which features other heroes hoping to make it to the movies, such as X-O Manowar and Shadowman.

**‘The New Mutants,’ April 3**

Can a classic Marvel Comics series make for a good horror movie without the involvement of Marvel Studios? There’s a scary thought. “The New Mutants” is 20th Century Fox’s last stand with the X-Men universe as this film wrapped before it merged with Disney. Whether it will link to whatever Disney has planned for the X-Men is unknown. What we do know is this film features young mutants from that universe, as they get in touch with their powers for the first time while in a very creepy, prison-like institution of some kind. Magik’s (Anya Taylor-Joy) mystic sword looks cool, though. That’s a start.

**‘Black Widow,’ May 1**

Scarlett Johansson finally gets a solo-starring turn as superhero Russian spy Natasha Romanoff. This movie obviously takes place before her death in “Avengers: Endgame” and involves her connecting some dots about her past. David Harbour also stars as Russia’s version of Captain America, the Red Guardian.

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**‘Wonder Woman 1984,’ June 5**

Is this DC’s most anticipated sequel ever? “Wonder Woman” was DC’s first undisputed hit of the Justice League era and this follow-up, set in Washington, D.C. in the 1980s, could be the biggest superhero hit of 2020. Going up against Gal Gadot’s Princess Diana is Pedro Pascal’s Max Lord, and somehow Chris Pine’s Steve Trevor is back.

**‘Morbius,’ July 31**

Jared Leto’s Joker didn’t work out at DC, so he’s giving the role of Marvel’s second-most-popular vampire a try. (We see you, Blade.) Morbius the Living Vampire is a classic Marvel character, known more by die-hard fans than general moviegoers, and is yet another example of Sony trying to milk its rights to Spider-Man and any character connected to him. A rumored appearance by J.K. Simmons as J. Jonah Jameson could go a long way.

**‘Venom 2,’ Oct. 2**

Speaking of Spider-Man villain movies, Tom Hardy’s Venom is back. This time, he’ll likely be up against the villain everyone wanted to see in the first movie (Carnage, played by Woody Harrelson). Both Hardy and Harrelson should get some top-notch CGI movement instruction from “Venom 2” director Andy Serkis, who’s no stranger to such performances over his career.

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**‘Eternals,’ Nov. 6**

So far all we know about “Eternals” is that Kumail Nanjiani got super-swole for his role as Kingo, and that the film will also feature Salma Hayek, Angelina Jolie, Gemma Chan, Brian Tyree Henry and “Game of Thrones” Richard Madden and Kit Harington. The Eternals, created by the late comic-book legend Jack Kirby, are an advanced alien race with the power of apparently being Marvel Studios’ next big thing.
Police: Man built bomb to hurt ex-girlfriend

MS LAUREL — A Mississippi man is accused of creating an improvised explosive device in his home after watching internet videos about bomb making, prosecutors say.

Brian Richard Sanders intended to maim or kill his ex-girlfriend, a special agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives wrote in a criminal complaint.

Federal agents and the Biloxi police bomb squad searched Sanders’ home in Laurel, the complaint states. The agents say they found the bomb, two bottles of black powder, a fuse, several guns and ammunition.

Sanders vowed to place nails inside “and when it explodes it throws the nails all over,” the complaint states.

Sanders’ ex-girlfriend had been living with him in Laurel. The two had a dispute over drug use in the home and she took his motorcycle and car when she left the residence, the complaint states.

Vaccine fights ‘swamp cancer’ in wild ponies

VA CHINCOTEAGUE — A vaccination program to protect a Virginia island’s wild horses from a swamp disease that killed seven ponies in 2018 is showing encouraging results, the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company said.

The fire company, which manages the herd, said it will continue giving yearly boosters to its efforts to prevent Pythiosis, also called “swamp cancer.” The disease comes from a fungus-like organism that leaves ponies with painful lesions. The Salisbury (Md.) Daily Times reported.

The fire company, which manages the herd, aims to continue giving yearly boosters to its efforts to prevent Pythiosis, a disease which comes from a fungus-like organism that leaves ponies with painful lesions.

Snow sculpture

A member of the French Snow Sculpting team helps shape a 20-ton block of snow alongside teams from 12 countries during the 30th annual International Snow Sculpture Championships on Wednesday, in Breckenridge, Colo.

2 theives take $200K from mall jewelry store

NC RALEIGH — Two people wearing hooded sweatshirts robbed a jewelry store during the weekend at a North Carolina mall, taking at least $200,000 in merchandise, authorities said.

Raleigh police responded to the Triangle Town Center mall for a reported smash-and-grab robbery at Regent Jewelers, news outlets reported. A person in a green hoodie smashed the display cases using a hammer-shaped object, according to surveillance footage.

Police kill man who held frying pan and cleaver

TX DENTON — A police officer north Texas fatally shot a man at an apartment complex early Tuesday after the man refused to drop a frying pan and cleaver that he was holding, authorities said.

One officer was stabbed in the melee but officials said the injuries aren’t life-threatening.

City frustrated with theft of historic bricks

OH — The ongoing theft of historic bricks has frustrated officials in a small Ohio city who spent a lot of time tracking down the bricks for downtown sidewalks.

At least 50 so-called Nelsonville Star Bricks have been taken since early January, said Nelsonville city manager Chuck Barga. The bricks are a legacy of the city’s brick-making history, and won first prize at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis.

Though millions of Star Bricks were manufactured between the late 1800s and about 1920, the bricks are no longer made, which makes the thefts all the more frustrating, Barga said.

Big rig crash spills load of chickens on freeway

CA CHINO HILLS — A truckload of chickens tipped onto its side on a Southern California freeway early Tuesday, spilling birds out of cages and leaving others trapped in cages.

The big rig overturned shortly after exiting the State Route 71 freeway, the city of Chino Hills posted on its website.

Some loose chickens huddled near the truck while others were being individually removed by responders.
Hunter Biden has to testify, not just in theory

BY DANIELLE ALLEN
Special to The Washington Post

I
n 100 years, what will President Donald Trump be known for? Not for a deficit-stimulated economy. Not for a non-aggression foreign policy. Not for trade wars that make modest adjustments to global economic arrangements. Not for a recognition of the fragile nature of the relationship between religious and secular citizens. Not even for an unstable but consistently cruel approach to immigration, refugee policy and the containment of the Libyan civil war. Perhaps for having dragged the entire country inside the world of conspiracy theorists. He will be the Birther President and his tenure, the Presidency of Lies.

Trump's demand for an announcement by Congress that an investigation into Joe and Hunter Biden is analogous to his demand for an investigation into Barack Obama's birth certificate. The Hunter issue is Joe Biden's equivalent of Birtherism. If the administration's insistence on investigating theexistence of birtherism is that Trump pursued the former without any of the trappings of credibility that come with holding the highest office in the land. Nonetheless, he succeeded in forcing a sitting president of the United States to release claims about himself that are as the only means by which a baseless conspiracy theory could finally be quelled.

Trump brings to all the authority of that same presidency to his mode of operation, yet his mode is no different than when he was peddling birtherism. He follows it the same way to sow just enough doubt to keep baseless allegations alive. Only when production of the proof that the allegations are baseless breaks into the public conversation, can any sense of the message be found now.

Hunter Biden will dog Joe Biden from now until the election just as the birth certificate did Obama.

We are trapped inside the worldview of a conspiracy theorist, and the only way out may be through it.

Conservatives come around on middle-class tax cuts

BY HENRY OLSEN
The Washington Post

P
resident Donald Trump casually mentioned in an interview with Fox Business anchor Maria Bartiromo this week that he plans to introduce a “middle-class tax cut” within the next 90 days. That would help him a lot. But if recent lessons from other countries are a guide, Trump's 2017 tax legislation was pitched as a cut for the “middle class”; in truth, it would mean many of America's billionaires would get significant income tax cuts. The income tax rate paid by those earning above $137,000 a year would not be touched at all.

Britain's Conservative Party proposed something similar ahead of its December 2019 general elections. Out went proposed tax cuts for big business and the upper-middle class. In came cuts to Britain's National Insurance contributions, a payroll tax similar to the U.S. Social Security tax. While in the impeachment trial. It was remarkable for the number of times he used the words “ridiculous” and “outrageous.” Such is the rhetoric of the conspiracy theorist. The opportunity to attack a political opponent in the only way out may be through it.

Danielle Allen is a political theorist at Harvard University and a contributing columnist for The Washington Post.
College football
Bowl schedule
Friday, Dec. 20
PASCO (Tampa) Bowl
Kansas State vs. Utah State (Navy)
Bowl at Atlanta
Buffalo 31, Central Michigan 17

Saturday, Dec. 21
Celebration Bowl
New Mexico vs. Boston College

Saturday, Dec. 22
Gildan Bowl
Montgomery Ala., Jacksonville State vs. Old Dominion

Saturday, Dec. 23
Sonic Bowl
Auburn vs. Oregon State

Saturday, Dec. 24
Haas Bowl
Hawaii vs. Colorado State

Saturday, Dec. 26
Independence Bowl
Louisiana Tech vs. Miami (Fla.)

Sunday, Dec. 27
Cowan's Auto Blitz Bowl
Pittsburgh vs. South Florida

College baseball
Music City Bowl
Tennessee, Tenn. vs. Boston College, N.C.

Florida State vs. Orange Bowl
Florida vs. Wisconsin

Kentucky vs. Rinnel Bowl
Kentucky vs. Miami, Ohio

Kentucky vs. Bowl at Winston-Salem

Kentucky vs. Boca Raton, Fla.

Sports on AFN
Go to the American Forces
Network website for the
most up-to-date TV schedules.
myafn.net

NFL plays
NFC championship
Dallas 26, San Francisco 16

Football
NFL playoffs
Sunday, Jan. 5
Kansas City 35, Tennessee 24

Super Bowl
Sunday, Feb. 2
San Francisco 38, Baltimore 10

NFL calendar
Feb. 24-26 — NFL scouting
combine, Indianapolis.
Feb. 29 — First day for clubs to designate franchise or transition players.
March 13 — Last day for clubs to designate franchise or transition players.

College basketball
AP Men’s Top 25 schedule
— Deadline for drafted players
— Last day during the season
— Voluntary reporting date for
— Voluntary reporting date for
— Amateur draft, Omaha,

NCAA men’s basketball — Feb. 11
— Kentucky vs. Florida
— Florida vs. South Carolina
— Missouri vs. Auburn
— Mississippi State vs. LSU
— LSU vs. Kentucky
— Auburn vs. Kentucky
— Mississippi State vs. Ole Miss
— Ole Miss vs. Arkansas
— Arkansas vs. Mississippi State
— Mississippi State vs. Alabama
— Alabama vs. Vanderbilt
— Vanderbilt vs. Tennessee
— Tennessee vs. Missouri
— Missouri vs. South Carolina
— South Carolina vs. Kentucky
— Kentucky vs. South Carolina
— South Carolina vs. Alabama

NCAA women’s basketball
— Sweet 16
— March 24-26
— Regional semifinals
— March 24-26
— Regional semifinals
— Mar. 26
— Regional semifinals
— Mar. 27
— Regional final
— March 27
— Regional final
— March 28
— National semifinals
— March 28
— National semifinals
— March 30
— National championship
— March 30
— National championship

NCAA men’s basketball — March 29-April 1
— Saturday's games
— March 29
— Pac-12 Tournament — March 29-31
— Thursday's transactions
— Feb. 25

College of Charleston
— Name Aron McGuire CEO.
— Reassigned Charles Coughlin and

Georgia State
— Name Steve

Indiana State
— Name Kevin McNaughton and

Kansas
— Name Mike Keyes and

Kentucky
— Name John Calipari and

Louisville
— Name Jeff Walz and

Marquette
— Name Kevin Stallings and

Michigan State
— Name Izzo and

Purdue
— Name Sasha Stefanovic.
— Signed Bill Wilson, of.

University of Florida
— Name Dan Mullen and

Washington State
— Name Mike Leach and

Western Kentucky
— Name Jeff Brohm and

BASKETBALL
National Basketball Association
Golden State Warriors — Signed
Dwight Powell and Jeff Teague.

Los Angeles Lakers — Announced
the retirement of G/F Al Harrington.

NBA G League
— Announced 2019-20 G League
roster.

Los Angeles Sparks — Re-signed
Assistants Dionte Christmas and

Minnesota Lynx — Re-signed
Point Guard Seimone Augustus and

Washington Mystics — Signed
Seimone Augustus and

Women’s Basketball
— First day for players to sign offer sheets.

torr: Tommy Hunter; Ron Blom, rhp; Matt Adams, 1b;

Dayton 80, Duquesne 63

Colorado State 67, Air Force 52

Mississippi State 69, Alabama 62

Mississippi State 78, Kentucky 69

NCAA basketball — Thursday’s transactions
— Feb. 27

NCAA basketball — Thursday’s transactions
— Feb. 27

NCAA basketball — Thursday’s transactions
— Feb. 27

NCAA basketball — Thursday’s transactions
— Feb. 27

NCAA basketball — Thursday’s transactions
— Feb. 27

College basketball
BAMBERGER — Signed CB Nev.
Lawson to a one-year contract exten-

National Basketball Association
Golden State Warriors — Signed
Dwight Powell and Jeff Teague.

Los Angeles Lakers — Announced
the retirement of G/F Al Harrington.

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Women’s Basketball
— First day for players to sign offer sheets.

torr: Tommy Hunter; Ron Blom, rhp; Matt Adams, 1b;
LSU’s Orgeron agrees to new 6-year contract

Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU coach Ed Orgeron has agreed to a new contract extension worth more than $87 million annually and which runs through the 2026 season, the university announced on Friday.

The new six-year agreement comes on the heels of the Tigers’ 15-0 national championship season that concluded earlier this month with a 42-25 victory over Clemson in the national title game in New Orleans.

Contract language, which remains subject to approval by the board of supervisors, calls for a base salary of $6 million plus various performance-related bonuses.

“Coach O has set a new standard at LSU,” athletic director Scott Woodward said. “He has proven that he is not only a championship coach, but also a leader of a program committed to doing things the right way. He has represented our institution and our state with great pride, on and off the field of play.”

Woodward added that the new contract “should make clear our commitment to Coach O and the direction of our football program.”

The 58-year-old Orgeron was the consensus 2019 national coach of the year.

He has led LSU to a 40-9 mark since initially taking over on an interim basis in 2016. Of his 40 wins at LSU, 12 have come against teams ranked in the top 10 at the time of the match-up, including seven in 2019, which stands as the most in college football history for a single season.

His 40 wins through the first 49 games of his career tie for the most by any coach in LSU history.

“I’m happy to represent LSU and this great state,” Orgeron said. “My family and I are very grateful, and I look forward to working as hard as possible to continue to win championships at LSU.”

World Cup downhill win

Shiffrin’s first of 2020

BANSKO, Bulgaria — Mikaela Shiffrin mastered a tricky course to win a women’s World Cup downhill Friday for her fifth victory of the season and first in 2020.

The three-time overall champion from the United States was one third of a second off the lead at her second split but remained flawless on the rest of the technically demanding Marc Girardelli course.

“I was really excited about this track and the challenges in it,” said Shiffrin, who earned the 65th victory of her career. “It’s not easy. It’s a little bit scary. At the start I was like, ‘OK, you got to get tough now.’ It’s for sure a nice track for me.”

Shiffrin beat Federica Brignone of Italy by 0.18 seconds, with Joana Haehlen of Switzerland five hundredths further back in third.

4-time All-Star Beard retires after 15 years

LOS ANGELES — Alana Beard, a two-time Defensive Player of the Year who won a WNBA championship with the Los Angeles Sparks, is retiring after 15 years.

In 2016, she helped the Sparks win a third WNBA title. She is third in all-time steals in the league with 710. Beard won Defensive Player of the Year honors in 2017 and ’18. She also played for the Washington Mystics.

The guard-forward from Shreveport, La., was a four-time All-Star.

“I am so grateful for the many years I’ve been able to play the game I love, for the amazing players I’ve had the opportunity to play with and compete against, and for the tremendous fans I’ve been lucky enough to play in front of,” Beard said. “I am excited for my next chapter and ready to pursue my next career.”

Hoosiers upset No. 11 Spartans

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — Joey Brunk made an immediate impact from the moment he arrived on Indiana’s campus.

Joerger, Hunter needed to be more patient.

On Thursday night, the graduate transfer from Butler and the redshirt freshman teamed up for the Hoosiers’ final flurry. Brunk scored 14 points including a layup with 1 minute to go, Hunter grabbed a rebound with 0.2 seconds left and made two free throws to seal Indiana’s 67-63 victory over No. 11 Michigan State.

“He had 14 and six (rebounds) tonight and he earned them all,” coach Archie Miller said when asked about Brunk. “It’s not measurable what Joey has meant to us. He’s giving his absolute max on everything he does. He’s improved as much as any player I’ve been around from month to month.”

Without Brunk — or Hunter — the Hoosiers may not have salvaged this one.

The Hoosiers (15-4, 5-3 Big Ten) have won two of their last three and four of their last five and now trail conference co-leaders Michigan State and Illinois by just one game.

Cassius Winston, the league’s preseason player of the year, could have forced overtime when he drove through the lane in the waning seconds. But when Hoosiers forward Trayce Jackson-Davis slid toward Winston, he flipped the ball to Xavier Tillman for a layup that rolled off the rim and into the hands of Hunter.

Winston scored 13 of his 17 points in the second half as the Spartans (14-5, 6-2) lost their third straight in the series.

“We just didn’t play good enough to win on the road,” coach Tom Izzo said. “I think he tried to get it up on the rim and I thought he had a wide open layup. He just missed it.”

No. 12 Oregon 79, Southern California 70 (2OT): Chris Duarte had 30 points and 11 rebounds, Payton Pritchard reached a Pac-12 milestone for career points, rebounds and assists, and the host Ducks outlasted the Trojans in double overtime.

With 24 points and seven assists, Pritchard became the first player in Pac-12 history with 1,500 points and 600 assists, joining Oregon State’s Gary Payton, Arizona’s Damon Stoudamire and Jason Gardner, USC’s Jordan McLaughlin and UCLA’s Tyus Edney.

Oregon’s Chris Duarte, left, and Payton Pritchard react in overtime of the Ducks’ 79-70 win over Southern California on Thursday in Eugene, Ore.

Duarte also had eight steals, one shy of the Oregon (16-4, 5-2) record.

Onyeka Okongwu had 23 points and 14 rebounds for Southern Cal (15-4, 4-2).

No. 23 Colorado 78, Washington State 56: Lucas Siewert scored 16 points, D’Shawn Schwartz had 13 and the host Buffaloes pulled away in the second half to beat the Cougars.

Evan Battey added 12 points and joined Siewert in pulling down 10 rebounds for Colorado (15-4, 4-2). Pacific (12), which bounced back from a loss at Arizona last week. The Buffaloes outrebounded the Cougars 45-28 despite playing without Tyler Bey, the leading rebounder in the conference.

No. 25 Houston 63, UConn 58: DeJon Jarreau had 18 points, 11 rebounds and eight assists, Caleb Mills scored 20 points and the Cougars beat the visiting Huskies for their third straight win.

Jarreau and Mills combined for the final 17 points, including 12 free throws, as Houston overcame a six-point deficit in the final 5:15.
James’ triple-double leads Lakers to win

NEW YORK — LeBron James had 27 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists in his 10th triple-double of the season and the Los Angeles Lakers made a season-high 19 three-pointers to pull away and beat the Brooklyn Nets 128-113 on Thursday night.

James closed within 17 points of Kawhi Leonard for third place in the NBA’s career scoring list with a flurry in the fourth quarter. He can pass Bryant on Saturday at Philadelphia, where he faced the five-time champion with the Lakers was born.

The Lakers has 33,626 points. Bryant finished with 33,643.

Anthony Davis had 16 points and 11 rebounds, and Dwight Howard finished with 14 points and 12 boards in his first start of the season.

Kyle Irving scored 20 points after missing a game with right hamstring tightness, but the Nets lost by their fifth straight. Brooklyn has won just two of its last 14 games.

Mavericks 133, Trail Blazers 125: Luka Doncic scored 27 points to go with nine assists and six rebounds, and Dallas made 22 three-pointers in a win over Portland.

The 43 combined three-pointers made by Dallas and Portland tied an NBA record.

One game after scoring a career-high 61 points, Damian Lillard finished with 47 points for Portland in the loss. He became the first player in franchise history to score 100 points over two games.

Trevor Ariza, recently acquired in a trade from Sacramento, scored a season-high 21 in his Portland debut.

Wizards 124, Cavaliers 112: Bradley Beal scored 36 points and wore a Washington, overcoming an overtime loss and early morning arrival in town, defeated visiting Cleveland.

The Wizards started slowly after not getting in until around 4 a.m. following an OT defeat in Miami on Wednesday, but took over in the first quarter and pulled away.

Cleveland has lost six in a row and 11 of 13.

Nets guard Kyrie Irving was an overwhelming fan vote for the NBA All-Star Game, but was denied a starting spot based on player and media voting, which instead gave the nod to Boston Celtics guard Kemba Walker.

Irving, Walker can be a legit debate, but some player voting was comical.

Zion Williamson got two votes, which on the surface doesn’t look so bad; after all he was the No. 1 overall pick last season. Consider, however, that the two votes were cast before he made his NBA debut on Wednesday.

Tacko Fall — the 7-foot-5 Boston center who has spent most of his rookie season in the G-League — got seven votes from players. He’s appeared in four games.

Justise Winslow, who has missed most of Miami’s season, got one vote. So did Heat teammate KZ Okpala, which is one more vote than he has NBA points.

Thanas Antetokounmpo got six player votes. Kostas Antetokounmpo got five, a big number for someone who hasn’t scored yet this season. Perhaps those votes got confused. Perhaps those votes were supposed to go to Giannis. Who knows?

Bo Boy got a vote. He hasn’t played yet. Mije Oni got a vote. He’s made three scoreless appearances. The list of ‘this guy got vote?’ goes on and on and on.

In all, 292 players got at least one vote from their peers. That’s a new record, three more than the ridiculous number set last year.

The system changed four years ago after 768,112 people voted for Zaza Pachulia in 2016 and nearly made him a starter. Pachulia’s “candidacy” was fueled by social-media influencers and many votes from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, his homeland.

The NBA was right to act then and change the rules, going to a formula where starters are chosen by influencers and many votes from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, his homeland.

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It’s good to have a backup plan

By Jimmy Golen
Associated Press

BOSTON — Alex Stalock picked up six wins when starter Devan Dubnyk was out 15 games. Minnesota went 9-3-3 during that stretch.

The Bruins had to put off a ceremony honoring goaltender Jaroslav Halak, above, after he reached his milestone 500th game in the NHL. When starter Tuuka Rask went down, the Bruins needed Halak.

The Bruins’ Johnson 2-0-0, 2.60 goals-against average, .901 save percentage    * 1-2-0, 2.88 GAA, .915 SV%    3-1-0, 2.22 GAA, .929 SV%    4-0-1, 2.00 GAA, .933 SV%    5-0-0, 3.24 GAA, .891 SV%...

The Blues had a hoary bullpen and needed to upgrade the back end.

The Blues had to put off a ceremony honoring goaltender Jaroslav Halak, above, after he reached his milestone 500th game in the NHL. When starter Tuuka Rask went down, the Bruins needed Halak.

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Coco Gauff of the U.S. makes a backhand return to Japan's Naomi Osaka during their third-round match Friday at the Australian Open in Melbourne, Australia. Gauff won in straight sets, 6-3, 6-4.

**Youth served**

15-year-old Gauff surprises No. 3 Osaka; Serena ousted

By Howard Fendrich  
Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — The Australian Open is no match for a 15-year-old who can’t legally drive a car.

And maybe the Coco Gauff, still just 15, never will earn her first major championship.

Sure felt, though, as if a generation shift was being signaled Friday at the Australian Open, with a pair of monumentally significant third-round results hours apart in the same stadium: a surprising first-week loss by Williams, then a historic victory by Gauff.

First, Williams faltered down the stretch for her earliest exit at the Australian Open, losing 6-4, 6-7 (2), 7-5 loss to 27th-seeded Wang Qiang of China. It pushed Williams even deeper between Slam trophies to three years.

“I’m way too old to play like this,” William said. “I don’t do this again.”

It certainly is remarkable.

With a booming serve, a top-flight backhand and a winner’s mentality, Gauff reversed the result from the first time she was across the net from Osaka, a former No. 1 who already owns two major titles at the age of 22.

When they played each other at the U.S. Open last year, Osaka won in two quick sets and consigned Gauff, encouraging her to speak to the spectators who were pulling for her.

One reminder of just how young Gauff is: Most of the entrants in this year’s junior Australian Open are older than she is.

Another: She doesn’t have an official driver’s license quite yet, stuck practicing behind the wheel with a learner’s permit.

But put a tennis racket in her hands and move out of the way.

Gauff is now 8-2 in her nascent Grand Slam career, with three of those wins coming against women who have multiple major titles.

Her next match is against No. 14 Sofia Kenin, a 21-year-old American who beat Zhang Shuai of China 7-5, 7-6 (7).

The most intrigue in men’s action came at the very end of the night — at nearly 1 a.m., actually, when Roger Federer reeled off the last 10 points of a 47th-ranked Australian John Millman 4-6, 7-6 (2), 6-4, 6-7 (8).

Federer had lost to Millman at the 2018 Open and it seemed this one might be headed that way again.

“Oh, God, it was tough,” Fe-

derer said.

Williams vs. Wang was a re-

match from Flushing Meadows last August — and the reverse result also happened for them. At the U.S. Open, Williams won 6-0, 6-1 in 44 minutes.

Wang credited that with prompting her to spend more time in the gym so she could add more oomph to her shots.

“I always believed I could do this one day,” Wang said with a laugh. “I didn’t know how though.”

Like Wang, Gauff was much better Friday than in New York.  
Gauff’s improvement revealed itself in her serving — she put 15 of her initial 16 first serves in play — and her steadiness.

Gauff declared herself more calm for this matchup.

“That,” she decided, “made the difference.”

**Photos by Lee Jin-man/AP**

Serena Williams of the U.S. wipes her face during her third-round match against China’s Wang Qiang.

Serena Williams wipes her face during her third-round match against China’s Wang Qiang.

Wang celebrates her 6-4, 6-7 (2), 7-5 victory over Williams. The two also met at the U.S. Open last year, with Williams winning 6-0, 6-1.

Juan Sebastian Cabal, Colombia, and Juan Pablo Murillo (4), Colombia, def. Ivan Dodig, Croatia, and Filip Polasek (4), Slovakia, 6-4, 6-4.

**Scoreboard**

**Friday**

At Melbourne Park  
Melbourne, Australia

**Men’s Singles**

Third Round

Diego Schwartzman (14), Argentina, def. Dusan Lajovic (24), Serbia, 6-2, 6-3, 6-2.

Marton Fucsovics, Hungary, def. Tommy Paul, United States, 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.

Andrew Harris, Australia, def. Hugues Herbert (1), France, 6-4, 7-6 (3).

**Women’s Singles**

Third Round

Ashleigh Barty (1), Australia, def. Elena Rybakina (8), Kazakhstan, 6-3, 6-2.

Petra Kvitova (7), Czech Republic, def. Ekaterina Alexandrova (22), Russia, 6-2, 2-6, 7-5.

Ons Jabeur, Tunisia, def. Caroline Wozniacki, Denmark, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (3).

Wang Qiang (31), China, def. Serena Williams (8), United States, 6-4, 6-7 (2), 7-5.

Maria Sakkari (22), Greece, def. Madison Keys (10), United States, 6-4, 6-4.

Allison Riske (18), United States, def. Julia Georges, Germany, 6-4, 7-6 (4), 6-2.

Cori Gauff, United States, def. Naomi Osaka (1), Japan, 6-8, 6-2, 6-1.

Sofia Kenin (14), United States, def. Zhang Shuai, China, 6-4, 6-3, 6-4.

**First Round**

Xi Sung Nam and Minh Hoang Song, South Korea, def. Kiefer Hewitt and Jordan Thompson, Australia, 6-2, 6-3.

Jamila Duพบuch and Marc Polmans, Australia, def. Christopher Coevel and Andrew Harris, Croatia, 7-6 (4), 7-6 (4).

Jesse Huta Galung, Iran, def. Marcelo Guimaraes, Brazil, 6-4, 6-2, 6-2.

**Second Round**

Juan Dodig, Croatia, and Filip Polasek (4), Slovakia, def. Kristina Mladenovic, France, and Taylor Townsend, United States, 6-1, 6-0.

Bruno Soares, Brazil, and Mate Pavic (13), Croatia, def. Artem Stoltenberg, Germany, 6-4, 6-3.

Alex De Minaur, Australia, def. Jonny O Mara, Britain, and Marcelo Aroncovici Gonzalez, El Salvador, 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

Nikola Mektic, Croatia, and Roque Vazquez, Austria, def. Adrian Mannarino and Fabrice Martin (19), France, 6-7 (3), 6-2, 7-6 (2).

Maximo Gonzalez, Argentina, and Fabrice Martin (13), France, def. Dustin Lajovic and Nikoal Cacic, Serbia, 7-6 (3).

Juan Sebastian Cabal, Colombia, and Robert Farah (11), Colombia, def. Ivan Dodig, Croatia, and Filip Polasek (4), Slovakia, 6-4, 6-4.

**Women’s Doubles**

First Round

Daria Jurak, Croatia, and Nina Stojanovic, Serbia, def. Katerina Bondarenko, Ukraine, and Aleksandra Krunic, Serbia, 6-1, 6-4.

Kroto Peschke, Czech Republic, and Demi Schuur, Netherlands, def. Fanny Stollar, Hungary, and Dayana Yastremska, Ukraine, 6-2, 6-4.

Kristina Mladenovic, France, and Timea Babos (2), Hungary, def. Kralicekova and Danielikova, Czech Republic, 7-6 (2), 6-2.

Hernandez, Spain, def. Anastasia Potapova, France, and Gabriela Dabrowski (8), Canada, 6-4, 6-2.

**Second Round**

Juan Sebastian Cabal, Colombia, and Filip Polasek (4), Slovakia, def. Martin Kuhn, Denmark, 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (3).

Pella (22), Argentina, def. Marta Kostyuk, Ukraine, 776 (0), 6-2, 6-3.

Anna Bondarenko, Ukraine, and Anastasia Potapova, France, def. Nicole Melichar and Nicole Melichar, United States, 6-2, 6-3.
Giants’ Manning announces retirement

QB steps away after 16 years, 2 Super Bowls

By Tom Canavan
Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — Eli Manning retired from the NFL after 16 seasons just the way he wanted, as a starting, career-long New York Giant who did it his way in leading the franchise to two Super Bowls.

Manning had said he had no immediate plans, although he admitted he would miss the time with teammates, the preparation and the beers in the back of the bus after wins. He plans to spend some time reliving the positive memories, enjoying himself and being an assistant coach on his daughter’s third-grade basketball team. A job with the Giants is a possibility, he said.

“I am. Undoubtedly, I would have made the fans, the media, even the front office more comfortable being a rah-rah guy. “But that’s not me,” Manning said. “Ultimately I choose to believe that my teammates and the fans learned to appreciate that. What they got was pure unadulterated Eli.”

The Giants also got their career

New York Giants quarterback Eli Manning holds his son Charles after announcing his retirement Friday in East Rutherford, N.J.

Police say the driver suffered injuries including scratches on his neck, shoulder and arm, a cut on his finger and a scrape on his stomach.

Number of concussions increased slightly

NEW YORK — The NFL said on Thursday that the number of concussions players suffered increased slightly this season over 2018.

The league said there were 224 reported concussions, 10 more than in 2018. But those totals are way down from the 281 in 2017.

““We want to see head contact reduced,” said Dr. Allen Sills, the league’s chief medical officer.

The total includes concussions from practices and games in both the preseason and regular season. The league said that it did 485 concussion evaluations in preseason and regular-season games this season.

The league said about one-third of concussion evaluations in the regular season “have some element of self-report.”

A prominent recent example was Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz, who reported a concussion after Seattle’s Jadeveon Clowney hit him helmet-to-helmet from behind in the first quarter of a 17-9 loss in an NFC wildcard game.

After that game, Sills called Wentz “heroic” for reporting his concussion.

NFL free agent Antonio Brown appears at the Broward County Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., via video link Friday. Brown was granted bail after spending the night in a Florida jail.

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — NFL free agent Antonio Brown was granted bail on Friday after turning himself in at a Florida jail on charges that he and his trainer attacked the driver of a moving truck that carried some of his possessions from California.

Brown’s Hollywood home. Holt was arrested and charged with one count of burglary with battery, but officials couldn’t make contact with Brown at the time.

According to a police arrest report, the altercation began as an argument over Brown’s refusal to pay $4,000 to the driver to release his household goods. The driver called police and reported vandalism after he said Brown threw a rock as he drove away, causing a small dent and chipping the paint, an officer wrote.

The driver later returned when the manager of his company told him that Brown would now pay the $4,000, and an additional $860 for the damage and the driver’s time. Brown then paid the $4,000, but refused to pay the rest, so the driver returned to the van to call his company, and that’s when Brown “started another verbal argument,” police said.

“A Hollywood police statement said Brown’s arrest warrant included charges of burglary with battery, burglary of an unoccupied conveyance and criminal mischief. Officials responded Thursday afternoon to a disturbance call where the alleged victim said Brown and his trainer, Glenn Holt, hit him outside

Police say the driver suffered injuries including scratches on his neck, shoulder and arm, a cut on his finger and a scrape on his stomach.

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Police find marijuana in car of Browns’ Hunt

CLEVELAND — Browns running back Kareem Hunt was cited for a traffic violation and police say they found marijuana in his car.

He was pulled over Tuesday afternoon in Rocky River, Ohio, while driving on Interstate 90. An incident report said officers smelled marijuana in the car.

Hunt, who was suspended eight games by the NFL last season for two physical altercations, was put in a police cruiser while his car was searched. The report said police found a black backpack on the rear seat and “small amounts” of marijuana were found in three places. The marijuana was seized as evidence.

Hunt was cited for speeding only and released. There was no drug charge and no indication of how fast he was driving.
Super Bowl notebook

Miami makeover: Workers hurry to prepare stadium

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — The pounding of a single hammer echoed through the stands Tuesday in the Miami Dolphins’ stadium, the reverberations from the Super Bowl’s return to South Florida just beginning.

Painters sprayed a logo on the newly laid grass while two men in hard hats dangled from a scaffold under a video board. Workers on the sprawling grounds outside the stadium also busily prepared the complex for the NFL title game on Feb. 2 between the Kansas City Chiefs and San Francisco 49ers.

“We have upwards of 6,000 people working behind the scenes to get everything set up,” said Eric Finkelstein, NFL senior director of event operations. “You can hear it around us. And there’s a lot more work to go. But we feel really good about where we are in getting everything prepared.”

The league offered a sneak peak at the stadium as Miami prepares to host the Super Bowl for the 11th time, the most of any city. It has been 10 years since the last title game in South Florida, however, and the Dolphins’ home has since undergone a $550 million renovation.

The NFL said the upgrades were needed for Miami to remain competitive in bidding to host Super Bowls.

“People who haven’t been here since the last Super Bowl will feel like they’re in a totally different stadium,” said Tom Garfinkel, the Dolphins’ president and CEO.

Changes include four large video boards and a canopy to protect fans from rain, while the stands and suites have been reconfigured. A plaza outside the main entrance now provides an inviting setting for pregame entertainment.

Favre sees some of his own traits in Mahomes

Brett Favre sees some of his own traits as a football player in Patrick Mahomes.

The mobility and passing outside the pocket, usually on the run. The willingness to stick with a play and see if it can develop into something grand. The howitzer of an arm.

The Hall of Fame quarterback, who is appearing weekly on SiriusXM NFL Radio for a third NFL season, isn’t exactly looking into a mirror when he watched Mahomes. But it isn’t far off.

“I see the comparison,” Favre said of the Kansas City star. “He may not admit this but he probably feels there is no throw he can’t make or no angle he can’t make it from. Whether he’s flashed left or to the right, his vision always is down the field. I was always looking for the big play first and knew I could always react underneath if I needed to.

“You do have to have a certain confidence or air about you that you can make any throw, and it has been proven he can make any throw. I always felt like, yeah.”

With one major alteration that Mahomes and San Francisco’s Jimmy Garoppolo probably benefit from.

The one big difference with me and present-day quarterbacks, when I came into the league I was very unprepared from a passing standpoint,” Favre said. “I could throw it a mile, make any throw, but in college we ran an option offense and when we threw it was off a sprint out. I didn’t know anything about protections in general, throwing hot. Never had to worry about anything in college, played free-spirit football, and if there’s a busted play, make something happen with my arm.

“I didn’t know if I could adapt enough to the offense Mike Holmgren or future coaches would want to run before they run me off. I had to make plays outside the pocket.”

Pro Bowl provides players a chance of a role reversal

By Mark Long

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Pittsburgh’s Cameron Heyward jogged through the end zone, stretched out his right arm and received one-handed catch to start Pro Bowl practice Wednesday.

Not bad for a defensive lineman.

And no one should be surprised to see Heyward do it again in the NFL’s all-star game Sunday.

The annual event looked a lot like a backyard pickup game last year, with trick plays and position swaps being more prevalent than deep balls and defensive indifference.

“It’s definitely more than just a game,” Tennessee defensive tackle Jurrell Casey said. “We work hard all year long, beating each other down, so to come out and switch positions for one or two plays, I don’t think it hurts anybody.”

“A lot of guys, they played a different position back in the day, so let them come out and mess around with that a little bit.”

Casey already put in his request, asking Baltimore coach John Harbaugh if he can get a goal-line carry.

“I used to play a little running back,” said the 6-foot-1, 305-pound Casey. “He said he’s going to try, but he doesn’t want to mess up the system too much. I’m going to keep on trying to feed him all week. They’ve got to let me touch the ball at least once.”

It wouldn’t be a shock considering what happened last year in Orlando.

Jacksonville cornerback Jalen Ramsey caught a touchdown pass in the closing seconds of the AFC’s 26-7 victory. Tampa Bay receiver Mike Evans had a pass breakup and an interception on consecutive defensive snaps.

Minnesota receiver Adam Thielen threw the interception on a trick play. A trio of running backs — New York’s Saquon Barkley, Dallas’ Ezekiel Elliott and New Orleans’ Alvin Kamara — rushed the passer on third-down plays.

Elliott also lined up as an up-back in punt formation on a fourth-and-13 play and gained 22, his longest run of the game.

“It was just spur of the moment,” Elliott said. “It makes it more fun. Fun for the players, fun for the fans. It’s nice to be a little different.”

It might just be the evolution — some might call it devolution — of the exhibition game that’s become less and less intense over the years. There’s little, if any, tackling and barely any contact along the lines of scrimmage.

It often looks more like a walk-through than a workout — two-handed touch at the most.

“It’s supposed to be about fun,” Atlanta tight end Austin Hooper said. “That’s the whole reason the NFL says do this — for it to be fun. So why not switch up positions a little bit, give the fans something to be excited about and shake things up?

“At the end of the day, this is all a celebration. If you’re Mike (Evans), who played DB in high school, and you want to play a little bit in the NFL all-star game, go for it. If you’re Jalen Ramsey and you played receiver in high school and you want to play a little in the all-star game, have at it.

“There are a lot of cool, fun wrinkles in this game and that’s what makes it special.

Not everyone is down to clown around, especially since players on the winning team get double the payout — $70,000 instead of $35,000.

“Everybody has dreams of playing another position,” Jacksonville defensive end Calais Campbell said. “When you have those dreams, you have to realize that one day they might come true. Some might call it devolution — some might call it evolution — of the exhibition game that’s become less and less intense over the years. There’s little, if any, tackling and barely any contact along the lines of scrimmage.

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ON BASKETBALL

Vote for change

Player ballots making mockery of All-Star selection process

By Tim Reynolds
Associated Press

Once again, LeBron James and Giannis Antetokounmpo are All-Star captains.
Once again, the fans — mostly, anyway — got who they wanted as the game's starters.
And once again, too many NBA players made a mockery of their vote to decide which colleagues should start the league's showcase exhibition.
It's time for the NBA to take the vote away from the players. It's clear too many don't want the job.
While fan voting pretty much set the tone for who will start Feb. 16 in Chicago, an AP analysis of the numbers shows that 380 players took part in

SEE VOTE ON PAGE 19

Pictured, clockwise from top right: All-Star captains Giannis Antetokounmpo and LeBron James; All-Star vote-getters Tacko Fall, Justise Winslow and Zion Williamson.
AP, TNS photos