CYBERCOM mulls aggressive plan if Russia meddles with ’20 election

BY ELLEN NAKASHIMA
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Military cyber officials are developing information warfare tactics that could be deployed against senior Russian officials and oligarchs if Moscow tries to interfere in the 2020 U.S. elections through hacking election systems or sowing widespread discord, according to current and former U.S. officials.

One option being explored by U.S. Cyber Command would target senior leadership and Russian elite, although likely not President Vladimir Putin, which would be considered too provocative, said the current and former officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the issue’s sensitivity. The idea would be to show that the target’s sensitive, personal data could be hit if the interference did not stop, although officials declined to be more specific.

“When the Russians put implants into an electric grid, it means they’re making a credible showing that they have the ability to hurt you if things escalate,” said Bobby Chesney, a law professor at the University of Texas at Austin. “What may be contemplated here is an individualized version of that, not unlike individually targeted economic sanctions. It’s sending credible signals to key decision-makers that they are vulnerable if they take certain adversarial actions.”

Cyber Command and officials at the Pentagon declined to comment.

SEE ELECTION ON PAGE 5
BY JEFFREY COLLINS
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A utility company in South Carolina finished removing all the coal ash from the site of a nearly 50-year-old power plant on the Wateree River.

The work to remove the toxic ash byproduct of making power from burning coal was finished at the Wateree Station east of Columbia more than a year ahead of schedule, Dominion Energy announced earlier this month.

The coal ash was being held in pits without a protective plastic liner, which allowed arsenic and other toxic materials to seep into groundwater.

The project started as part of a court settlement in 2012 with South Carolina Electric & Gas, which was bought by Dominion at the start of the year. Since the work started at the Eastover site, arsenic levels in groundwater in the area have dropped by at least 90%, the Southern Environmental Law Center said in a statement.

“When this milestone, the Wateree River and the Congaree National Park are safer than they have been in decades, and the continuing flow of coal ash pollution into the Wateree River has ended,” the center’s senior lawyer, Frank Holleman, said.

The Wateree site had 7 billion pounds of coal ash. Altogether, the environmental group said it has obtained court orders to remove 500 billion pounds of coal ash from sites across the South.

Removal of toxic ash from SC plant completed
Japan to base Ospreys in Chiba

By Matthew M. Burke and Hana Kusumoto
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — A city in Chiba prefecture has agreed to temporarily host Japan Ground Self-Defense Force V-22 Ospreys while negotiations for a more permanent home on the island of Kyushu continue, officials said this week.

The mayor of Kirsaru city, Yo-shikuni Watanabe, on Wednesday announced a temporary five-year deal to host the U.S.-made helicopte- rplane hybrids at Ground Self-Defense Force Camp Kisarazu, about 25 miles southeast of Tokyo.

Watanabe said Wednesday in a statement posted on the city’s website that Watanabe informed Japanese Defense Minister Taro Kono during a meeting that day.

“We are in a position to basically cooperate with national defense policy as one local government (the security environment surrounding our country becomes even more severe.),” Watanabe wrote in his statement. It was a “very difficult decision when thinking about the defense but is necessary”, Watanabe said.

Kirsaru was chosen as an Osprey base because Japan sees the defense of its southern island chain, including Okinawa, Miyako and the Senkakus, as an “urgent issue,” according to a Defense Ministry report in May.

Plans were previously made to permanently base 17 Japanese Ospreys further south at Saga Airport, in Saga prefecture on the island of Kyushu.

However, talks between the prefecture and a local fishery cooperative stalled over using the airport for military purposes, a ministry spokeswoman said Thursday.

Ministry officials plan to continue to try and reach an agreement with the cooperative, she said.

In the meantime, the ministry in May asked Watanabe to accept the temporary deployment, Wata- nabe said. Area residents balled their plan due to their concern over the aircraft’s safety record and that a temporary deployment could lead to a permanent one, Asahi Shimbun reported Wednesday.

Maintenance on U.S. military Ospreys is already performed at Camp Kisarazu by a Japanese contractor, officials have said previously.

Watanabe said Wednesday his cooperation came with conditions, such as assurances that the Ospreys will be stationed in Kirsaruzu no longer than five years and that the ministry will take thorough safety measures. Kono agreed to those stipulations, the ministry’s statement said.

“The Ospreys... will be uti- lized effectively for national de- fense and disaster response,” the Defense Ministry spokeswoman said. “We will take all possible measures to operate them safely.”

The only thing needed to fa- cilitate the deployment is a tem- porary building to house the approximately 430 troops that will call the base home by March 2022, the report said.

Report: US softens its demand for S. Korea to pay more for troops

By JiHyae Lee
Bloomberg News

SEOUL, South Korea — Days before a troop-funding deal was set to expire, the U.S. has dropped its demand that South Korea pay five times more to host its mili- tary personnel after receiving assurances Seoul would purchase more American weapons, a newspaper reported.

The Trump administration also likely eased up after South Korea indicated it would step up its presence in the Strait of Hormuz, helping U.S. efforts to protect oil flows in the region, South Korea’s Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported Thursday, citing an unidentified diplomatic source. The increase now may be about 10% to 20% above the current level of nearly $1 billion, it said.

South Korea’s Foreign Minis- try declined to comment.

Last month, U.S. negotiators walked out of a meeting on troop funding in Seoul after South Korea balked at the fivefold in- crease seen as exorbitant by many in the country. The breakdown at that time raised questions about one of the U.S.’s closest military alliances and a key piece of the Pentagon’s strategy for counter- ing North Korea and a rising China. The two sides resumed talks in December.

Even though the deal known as the Special Measures Agreement technically expires at the end of this year, both sides are likely to agree to some sort of tempo- rary extension as they negotiate, allowing for the continued op- erations of the about 28,500 U.S. military personnel positioned on the peninsula.

The talks with South Korea could affect other countries that also pay for American forces, as the Trump administration is seeking fund- ing increases from other Ameri- cans.

President Donald Trump, argu- ing that South Korea is rich and should pay more for U.S. protection, has demanded Seoul contribute about $5 billion for hosting U.S. troops. The price tag originated with the White House, according to people familiar with the matter, and administra- tion officials justify it by saying it reflects the costs South Korea would incur if it takes operational control of combined U.S.-South Korean forces in the case of a conflict.

The request for more money has been a bone of contention, especially in Seoul, South Korea, where many in President Moon Jae-in’s progressive camp and op- position conservatives have come out against the demands. Moon, facing a sagging support rate, may not want to make any major concessions that further dent his popularity ahead of an election for parliament next year.

Okinawa base relocation cost, time to double

By Mari Yamaguchi
Associated Press

TOKYO — Japan’s Defense Ministry now estimates that moving a U.S. Marine Corps base on Okinawa will require more than twice the cost estimated earlier, prompting the island’s Gov. Denny Tamaki to renew demands Thursday that Japan’s central government halt construction.

Tamaki was responding to a Defense Ministry estimate that the project will take longer and cost more because the seabed at the planned relocation site is as soft as mayonnaise, according to experts, and needs reinforcing.

U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma is to be moved from densely populated Ginowan to the previously undeveloped Henoko area on Okinawa’s southern coast. Futenma’s current base is to be closed and returned to Okinawa. Opponents of the relocation plan for years have moved entirely out of Okinawa.

“in order to achieve a closure and return of Futenma as soon as possible, the con- struction work like this should immediately stop,” Tamaki told reporters.

Delaying the relocation of the base adds to safety risks for the crowded Ginowan area, one of the main reasons for moving Futenma.

The Defense Ministry said moving the Futenma base to He- noko will cost $8.5 billion and take 12 years, pushing its completion and the closure of Futenma into the 2030s. That adds more than a decade to the plan, which has already been delayed by more than 20 years because of local opposition and other reasons.

Under the current plan agreed to by Tokyo and Washington in 2013, construction was to cost $3.2 billion and take five years, with completion expected in about 2022.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshi-hide Suga on Thursday defended the relocation plan as “the only solution, taking into consideration the role of the Futenma air station as deterrence under the Japan-U.S. alliance and a removal of its risks.”

Most of the additional cost and time is required to stabilize and strengthen reclaimed land off the coast of Henoko that will be used for runways, the Defense Ministry said. It presented its new esti- mated Wednesday to a panel of Japanese experts.

“The heavy U.S. military presence on Okinawa is a longstanding source of conflict between the is- land and Washington and Tokyo.

About half of the 50,000 Ameri- can troops in Japan are stationed in Okinawa. The 30 U.S. instal- lations on the island account for more than 70% of the area used by the U.S. military in Japan, leading Okinawa to protest that it is shouldering more than its share of the burden.

Japan’s central government began moving the American military personnel from the Marine Corps Air Station in the southwestern city of Nago, Okinawa, where a U.S. Marine Corps base is to be relocated.

Preliminary construction work is performed last year at Henoko in Nago city, Okinawa, where a U.S. Marine Corps base is to be relocated.

KOJI HARADA, KYODO NEWS/AP

Japan plans to temporarily base its tilt-rotor Ospreys — similar to this Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey — in Chiba prefecture until a permanent base can be found.

MATTHEW M. BURKE/Stars and Stripes
Report: Army company leaders are overworked

By John VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

Army company-level leaders are overwhelmed by their workloads in part because they’re reluctant to push back against excessive demands made on them by leadership, a new study suggests.

Company commanders and their senior enlisted leaders work on average 12.5 hours per day to complete tasks that range from ensuring unit combat readiness to cutting the grass on installations, said the report released this week by Rand Corp., a nonpartisan research group.

“There are so many different things that you have to track and do,” one soldier told researchers who compiled the report on reducing time burdens for Army company leaders. “You are constantly playing Whack-a-Mole.”

Workload could improve for company leaders if on average they worked 12 hours less per week, the study said.

But to make that happen, the relatively junior officers who are today’s company commanders need to learn to “selectively dis- obey” unreasonable orders from their chain of command, something they appear reluctant to do, the report said.

Rather than pushing back on higher command tasking, soldiers may resort to lying, misrepresenting the truth, or seemingly tasking themselves and their subordinates beyond the limits of productivity and effectiveness, the study said.

Army leaders must encourage legitimate, tactful disagreement when garrison tasks consume more time than companies have to complete them, the report said.

Selective disobedience would also require “senior leaders to take the time to engage with their company commanders to ensure only those who have proven to be responsible custodians of unit time can respectfully decline a tasking,” it said.

During focus groups, company leaders also said that the extra time they needed to execute seemingly simple tasks often went unacknowledged by higher command.

Battalion and above have no visibility of what we are doing and what that takes,” the report quoted one soldier as saying.

“Let’s say a $100,000 tent was broken. The leaders that grew up in Iraq and Afghanistan used to be able to just buy a new tent, and it would be here next week. Now we have to go through a process and it takes time,” the report quoted the company commander as saying. “Senior leaders see taskings across the boards but don’t see the build-up.”

In 2018, the Army took some steps to ease the burden on soldiers by abolishing some online training requirements that were unrelated to combat, the report said.

But more measures are needed now that the Army is largely a garrisoned force after the peak war years of the past decade, the report said.

In addition to fostering an environment in which company leaders feel they can speak candidly about their time constraints and question unreasonable orders, the Army would help to ease the burden on them by providing them with more administrative resources, the study said.

Shifting tasks such as maintenance and grass cutting to civilians would enable soldiers to focus on more important tasks, the study said.

“Soldiers don’t think that they are soldiers anymore,” one service member said in the report. “We are gardeners. It’s crazy.”

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Taliban attack Afghan military compound, killing 6 soldiers

By Tameem Aighar
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A powerful suicide car bomb targeted an Afghan army compound in the country’s north Thursday morning, killing six Afghan soldiers, the Defense Ministry said. The Taliban quickly claimed responsibility for the attack.

Shortly after the bomber detonated his car laden with explosives outside the small military base in Balkh province, a group of insurgents stormed into the compound, setting off a shootout with Afghan forces.

The Defense Ministry said in a statement that three Afghan soldiers were also wounded in the explosion and the ensuing “terrorist attack.” The provincial governor’s spokesman, Mumir Muzhad, said fighting inside the compound continued for hours before the attackers were repelled.

The Taliban claimed they inflicted a far greater number of casualties and also that they captured the base and seized huge quantities of weapons and ammunition, according to a tweet by their spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid. The militants routinely exaggerate their claims.

The Ministry of Defense rejected the Taliban claim, saying the insurgents had not taken the base.

The Taliban have been active in Balk in recent days. They targeted an army checkpoint in the province on Tuesday, killing at least seven Afghan soldiers and wounding six other members of the security forces — three soldiers and three intelligence agents. At the time, the Taliban said they also captured four Afghan troops and seized weapons and ammunition from the checkpoint.

On Tuesday, the Taliban ambushed a peace convoy in western Afghanistan and abducted 26 activists, members of a peace movement, a police spokesman said.

The insurgents staged the ambush in the district of Bala Buluk in Farah province on Tuesday. The Taliban forced the six-vehicle convoy to a halt, then got into the cars and drove them and the activists to an unknown location, said provincial police spokesman Mohibullah Mohib.

According to Mohib, police were trying to find and free the activists whose convoy was going village-to-village to rally for peace.

However, Bismillah Watandoost, of the People’s Peace Movement of Afghanistan, to which the activists belong, said that 27 of their members were abducted by the Taliban in the Farah assault. The different figures could not immediately be reconciled.

The Taliban, who have been active in Farah, have not claimed responsibility for the abductions. However, Watandoost also said that tribal elders in the province immediately launched an effort to negotiate with the Taliban to release the abducted activists. He added that phone lines were down in the region, making communication and getting information from the area difficult.

The Taliban now control or hold sway over practically half of Afghanistan but continue to stage near-daily attacks targeting Afghan and U.S. forces, as well as members of the government. They hold peace talks with a U.S. envoy tasked with negotiating an end to the 18-year conflict, America’s longest war. Scores of Afghan civilians are also killed in the crossfire or by roadside bombs planted by militants.

Also Thursday, a roadside bombing struck a police patrol in eastern Khroz province, wounding at least five policemen, said Talib Mangal, the provincial governor’s spokesman.

Tyndall air base to get $2.4B in funds to help rebuild

By Jacqueline Bostick
The (Panama City, Fla.) News-Herald

PANAMA CITY — With President Donald Trump signing into law the $1.4 trillion federal spending bill Friday, Tyndall Air Force Base has secured all of the necessary funding to rebuild.

The $2.4 billion appropriated to Tyndall for construction will be available over the next five years, which means more flexibility to negotiate with contractors, according to Congressman Neal Dunn, R-Panama City.

“Military construction funding is allowed to be held for up to five years at a time, and if you appropriate the money on the front end, you can make a better contract with your contractors,” said Dunn, who has been instrumental in introducing and supporting bills related to recovery from Hurricane Michael. “The contractors now have the guarantee the money is there and they’ll be on the job this year, next year, (and so on). It really saves a huge amount of money to do it that way.”

Alongside the funding to rebuild, the base also secured additional funds for the procurement of 28 F-35s. Also, about $240 million was appropriated to the Naval Surface Warfare Center located on the beach and $70 million to the Panama City station of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Dunn noted he had submitted the disaster tax relief bill back in November 2018 so that tax relief would be available as soon as possible following Hurricane Michael.

“I dropped that bill in 2018 and they just picked that up word for word (this year) and put it in this appropriations (package),” he said. “That’s really outstanding.”

strategicnews@stripes.com

Friday, December 27, 2019
Beginning in October 2018, CYBERCOM used emails, pop-ups and texts to target Russian internet “trolls” who were spreading disinformation on U.S. social media platforms. The trolls worked for the Internet Research Agency, a private entity controlled by a Russian oligarch close to Putin. CYBERCOM also messaged hackers working for Russian military intelligence, indicating their identities were known and could be publicized. Although the command did not sign its messages, the Americans knew there would be no mistake who had sent them, officials said at the time.

When the trolls persisted, CYBERCOM, beginning on Election Day and for at least two days afterward, knocked their servers offline, The Washington Post previously reported. The Americans declared it had achieved spreading confusion and discord among IRA operatives, including computer systems administrators. Some personnel were so perturbed that they launched an internal investigation to root out what they thought were insider leaks. The command was reportedly also putting an emphasis on leaking personnel information, according to U.S. officials.

The 10-year-old command’s thinking several years ago was much more limited and conventional. Then Secretary of Defense Ash Carter approved a position that created a deputy for information to be aligned with other potential U.S. efforts, such as sanctions or indictments, officials said.

Cyberoperations alone are usually not sufficient to transform an adversary’s behavior. “It can serve a useful message of ‘We’re watching and be careful not to go further,’” said Michael Carpenter, a former senior defense policy official in the Obama administration. But generally, he said, it is likely to be more effective when used with other tools such as sanctions — especially those also backed by allies.

CYBERCOM got a boost in August 2018 when Congress clarified that cyber actions that fall below the use of force — what practitioners call “the gray zone” operations — can be conducted as traditional military activities as distinct from covert action. That was a key change that meant that clandestine operations such as the IRA takedown last fall, for instance, would not be delayed by disputes about whether they were covert operations.

Also enhancing CYBERCOM’s flexibility was Trump’s signing the following month of a national security presidential memorandum that revised the process by which cyberoperations are vetted and approved, leaving the final decision with the defense secretary even if other agencies object.

No single office within the Defense Department oversees cyberoperations, electronic warfare and psychological operations. So this month, Congress created a Senate-confirmed position of principal information operations adviser to coordinate strategy and policy in this area across the Pentagon and with other agencies.

Other former U.S. officials are wary of CYBERCOM’s move into information operations. “I’m not a big fan of the Department of Defense doing messaging operations,” said Richard Stengel, a former undersecretary of state for public diplomacy in the Obama administration. “I’m even skeptical of the State Department doing messaging operations. I just don’t think that’s something we’re good at.”

Meanwhile, the Marine Corps has created a position of deputy commandant for information to build information warfare capability. Army Cyber Command has integrated cyberoperations, electronic warfare and information operations into its mission. The 16th Air Force cyber unit is doing the same.

Among the things that cyber officials are discussing are operations that expose adversaries’ malignant behavior.

“Basically, it’s a war of strategic narrative,” said Sean McFate, a foreign policy expert and author of “The New Rules of War.” “We need to get into that domain.”
“We believe that once we have this system in place and are able to start fielding it across the force, we will be able to reduce some of the stress on our force in the future — just by virtue of the way we will employ it in the future," Behrens told Stars and Stripes just moments after the test, dubbed Flight Test 5.

The system is the Army’s primary focus in the air and missile defense sector and one of Army Futures Command’s 31 top priority programs. The development is so critical that the Army has assigned only one Patriots battalion to full time testing program.

The Dec. 12 launch was watched closely by Army senior leaders, including its vice chief of staff, Gen. Joseph Martin, who was there.

“When you talk about 31 signature programs — that’s a lot of activity,” Martin said after the test.

“Lots of testing, lots of activity. When things like this (test) happen, they are critical, so that we can validate that which we think will happen and … move forward with our development process.”

The IBCS has been in development since 2004 and was once aimed to reach soldiers in the field by 2018, but setbacks have delayed the delivery. The new go-to for a single Patriot battalion to field the system in the third quarter of fiscal year 2022.

The IBCS test this month, with soldiers destroying two incoming cruise missiles, comes after the same system in 2019 intercepted a cruise missile at a range well beyond what today’s Patriot missiles can handle.

Those successes, Martin said, have energized the program and left the service hopeful it is on track to reach soldiers around the world.

“We are in the process of achieving significant improvements in modernization program,” Martin said. “And it’s tests like this that maintain that momentum.”

’Clear to engage’

One after another, highly technical battlefield sensors tracked the pair of incoming projectiles flying low and fast over the southern New Mexican desert. Marine Corps TPS-59 Radar first picked up the incoming object, then a pair of Air Force F-35 Lightning II stealth fighters flying higher over the missile tracked the potential targets.

A message to air defense soldiers operating two Patriot Missiles launchers, known as White Sands, led nearly 100-by-40-square-mile site came over a loudspeaker: “Hostile.”

“The commander later said ‘Engage in the kill zone,’” referring to the area where it was deemed safe to shoot down the incoming missiles.

Within minutes, the Army’s Patriot and Sentinel radars picked up their targets.

“You are now free to engage,” the direction came. The soldiers fired two Patriot Advanced Capability-2 Guidance Enhanced Missile-TBM interceptors.

Less than 10 minutes after the cruise missiles flew, the soldiers fired and split off to attack two separate locations, both were destroyed in fiery collisions with the interceptors.

Applause rang out in the viewing area.

“Today, two cruise missiles flew. Two Patriot Missiles hit them,” Martin said minutes after the test. “This is an important part of this program, and these guys involved in it.”

After the test, Grunman, the defense contracting giant building the IBCS program, was just as excited.

“Building on the success of the most recent flight test this past August, today’s test demonstrates that IBCS is achieving the precedent performance in defeating multiple missile threats,” Dr. Jason Miller, the company’s vice president and general manager for missile defense and protective systems, said in a statement.

“IBCS enables the system’s ability to discuss how far or fast the interceptors flew or at what altitude the threat was traveling. Most important, they said, was the system’s ability to detect and track the cruise missiles much earlier than they would have been able to with current systems.

The Patriot Missile systems deployed today in Europe, the Middle East and Asia could not have accomplished what those leaders were able to do with the IBCS system,” Martin said. “And it’s tests like this that maintain that momentum.”

Since the summer, Defense Secretary Mark Esper has surged more Patriot units into the Middle East, largely into Saudi Arabia in the wake of Iranian hostilities, including a drone and cruise missiles attack in September on critical Saudi oil infrastructure.

Pentagon officials have discussed sending more troops to the Middle East to curb future Iranian aggression, which could include even more air defense soldiers, according to several officials who spoke in recent weeks on condition of anonymity. Those officials did not directly identify Patriot units as those under consideration for deployment.

Behrens said 65 percent of Patriot units are deployed, conducting real-time air defense operations or preparing to deploy.

For example, nearly 10 full battalions at all times are committed to air defense missions including one in Europe, three between Japan and South Korea, and five or more battalions in the Central Command area, which covers the Middle East and Afghanistan.

With the success of Flight Test 5, the Army will move into operational testing and will commit an entire Patriot battalion to those efforts at least through the summer, Behrens said.

“The dedication of that battalion is not insignificant to the Army,” he said. “They are extremely busy.”

Removing that battalion — 3rd Battalion, 43rd Air Defense Artillery — could mean added stress in the short term for the other Patriot units, some of which have recently been surged into the Middle East.

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Behrens said the Army is convinced that removing an entire battalion from its Patriot rotation for IBCS testing will be worthwhile because the system is a difference-maker for air defenders. If successful testing continues, the Army will make a decision next summer on how to move forward.

The plan is to field the initial priority programs. The trio — the Army Patriot and Sentinel radar systems — to two battalions each year over a seven-year period.

“This is probably … the most significant change to how we’re going to fight in air and missile defense since the birth of the Patriot Missile system itself, which is close to 40 years now,” he said.

The system might have made a difference in those strikes on Saudi Arabia in September, Behrens said. Defense officials have said the strikes went undetected because they came from the north, while most Saudi and U.S. air defenses were facing south toward Yemen, where Iran-linked Houthis regularly have regularly fired missiles into the Kingdom.

With an operational IBCS system, it is possible that other sensors could have picked up the incoming cruise missiles and drone, Behrens said.

“You still have to have the sensors in the right place,” he said. “You still have to plan that. But today we don’t have the ability to put those sensors on that network. So, even if we had the sensors in the right places, we would not have been able to engage a target that came from that direction.”

Martin downplayed that scenario, but he said he was encouraged by the test and the improvements the IBCS could bring air defense soldiers.

“This allows you to see — to address threats of many kinds,” he said. “You saw cruise missiles today, that’s one sort of threat. You have different threats out there. This system allows you to address threats in a much more agile and flexible and adaptive way.”

"Bigger: Army stresses value in system’s ability to detect, track missiles earlier"
Trump: ‘Carnage’ in rebel stronghold in Syria

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Donald Trump is speaking out against the “carnage” involving thousands of civilians in rebel-held Idlib, Syria.

In a tweet Thursday, Trump wrote: “Russia, Syria, and Iran are killing, or on their way to killing, thousands of innocent civilians in Idlib Province. Don’t do it! Turkey is working hard to stop this carnage.”

The tweet refers to an intense air and ground bombardment by government forces in southern and eastern Idlib province, the last rebel-held bastion in the country.

Syrian government forces about a month ago launched a renewed effort to take the province, which is dominated by al-Qaeda-linked militants and is also home to 3 million civilians. The United Nations has warned of the growing risk of a humanitarian catastrophe along the Turkish border.

A Syrian relief group said Wednesday that more than 200,000 men, women and children fled their homes in buses, trucks and cars in recent weeks. Many have been heading toward the Turkish border for safety.

Before a ground offensive began a week ago, the U.N. reported that some 60,000 Idlib residents had already been displaced since the government’s bombing campaign started late last month.

Videos posted online by activists and the opposition’s Syrian Civil Defense, also known as White Helmets, showed long lines of cars, trucks and buses heading north. People carried their valuables and loaded bags and mattresses on buses.

Trump also addressed the plight of civilians in Idlib in June, accusing Russia, Syria and Iran of “indiscriminately killing many innocent civilians” in a bombing campaign. “The World is watching this butchery,” he tweeted then, imploring them to “STOP!” Several months later he announced a pullout of U.S. troops from northeastern Syria.

Families fight US travel ban in court

BY DEEPTI HAJELA and AMY TAXIN

NEW YORK — Mohammed Hafar paced around the airport terminal — first to the monitor to check flight arrivals, then to the gift shop and lastly to the doors where international passengers were exiting.

At last, out came Jana Hafar, his tall, slender, dark-haired teen daughter who had been forced by President Donald Trump’s travel ban to stay in Syria for months while her father, his wife and 10-year-old son started rebuilding their lives in Bloomfield, N.J., with no clear idea of when the family would be together again.

“Every time I speak to her, she asks, ‘When are they going to give me the visa?’” the elder Hafar said, recalling the days of uncertainty that took up the better part of this year. There was “nothing I could tell her because nobody knows when,” he said.

That she landed at Kennedy Airport on a recent December day was testament to her father’s determination to keep his promise that they would be reunited and his willingness to go as far as suing the government in federal court. Advocates say the process for obtaining a travel ban waiver is still shrouded in unpredictability, which causes delays for thousands of American citizens waiting for loved ones.

The “system is messed up,” said Curtis Morrison, the Los Angeles-based attorney who has filed several federal lawsuits, including Hafar’s, against the administration on behalf of dozens of plaintiffs from countries affected by the travel ban.

Many of those he has represented have received visas. But he said those cases represent only a fraction of the people in need and that the decision to grant those visas is unfair to thousands of other applicants.

The third version of the administration’s ban took effect in December 2017, keeping citizens of Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen and North Korea, and government representatives from Venezuela, from traveling or immigrating to the United States.

The Supreme Court upheld the ban in June 2018, in part because of the promised waiver system that would allow people to come despite the ban if certain criteria were met.

The government says 28,100 immigrant visa applications were filed by people seeking waivers to move to the U.S. between December 2017 and Oct. 31. Of those, 11,325 have been deemed qualified for waivers and 16,775 have not.

It was unclear how many of those who have been deemed qualified have actually received visas and how quickly. At the beginning of 2019, waivers were being issued in a trickle, with only 2,673 granted for both immigrant and nonimmigrant visas from December 2017 to January 2019, according to State Department figures.

In an emailed statement, the State Department said changes made in late June have “significantly” increased the number handed out monthly, and officials “believe this is representative of the new normal.”

But while some applications for immigrant and nonimmigrant visas submitted in recent months are seeing faster processing and approval times, earlier cases are still languishing, with no transparency from the government, said Mahsa Khanabab, an immigration lawyer in North Easton, Massachusetts.

Hafar, a Syria native and naturalized American citizen since 1996, had been living in Syria with his family when civil war started.

Farida Chehata, an immigrant rights attorney for the Council on American-Islamic Relations in Pittsburgh, represented the family in late June and said the case was相遇 with the family before they sued.

After filing the lawsuit in August, Jana’s petition got moving, and she was soon given the go-ahead to come to the U.S.

“It’s been difficult for me to be away from my whole family,” she said. But she believed her father.

“My dad wouldn’t lie to me. He always tells me the truth.”

Pa. dioceses pay $84M to 564 clergy abuse victims

BY MICHAEL RUBINKAM

Associated Press

Pennsylvania’s Roman Catholic dioceses have paid nearly $84 million to 564 victims of sexual abuse, a tally that’s sure to grow substantially in the new year as compensation fund administrators work through a backlog of claims, according to an Associated Press review.

Seven of the state’s eight dioceses launched victim compensation funds in the wake of a landmark grand jury report on sexual abuse by Catholic clergy.

The funds were open to claims for a limited time this year. They are independently administered, though each diocese set its own rules on eligibility.

To date, the average payout across all seven dioceses has exceeded $148,000 — a fraction of what some adult victims of childhood abuse might have expected from a jury had they been permitted to take their claims to court.

Under state law, victims of past abuse have until age 30 to sue.

Lawmakers recently agreed to begin the lengthy process of amending the state constitution to allow a two-year window for civil suits against church bodies barred by the statute of limitations, but there’s no guarantee that effort will bear fruit.

Together, Allentown and the four other dioceses that hired Biros and veteran claims administrators Kenneth Feinberg and David Rischer have paid out their funds since 2016, their一片 received more than 1,500 claims.

The dioceses agreed to pay victims after the grand jury concluded that more than 300 predator priests had molested more than 1,000 children since the 1940s — and that church leaders systematically covered it up.

Lawyers who helped administer the funds have received more than $56 million, according to an Associated Press analysis of records provided by the dioceses.

Police find teen suspected in killing of college student

BY MICHAEL R. SISAK

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York City police say they have located a 14-year-old boy suspected of fatally stabbing a Barnard College freshman as she walked through a park near the school.

Chief of Detectives Rodney Harrison tweeted Thursday that the boy had been found but gave no other details.

He is one of three youths police believe were involved in the stabbing of Tessa Majors, 18, on Dec. 11 in Morningside Park in Manhattan.

Police tracked down the teen after taking the unusual step last Friday of releasing photographs of him, but they have not otherwise identified any other information.

A police spokeswoman declined to answer questions about where and how the teen was located, referring back to Harrison’s tweet and saying “the investigation remains active and ongoing.”

Of the two other suspects, only one has been charged.

A 13-year-old boy arrested Dec. 13 and charged as a juvenile with felony murder told detectives he was at the park with the other youths but wasn’t the one who stabbed Majors, police said.

Another juvenile suspect was questioned for several hours, also on Dec. 13, but police let him go, saying they “had exhausted our investigative leads.”

He has declined to say why that boy wasn’t charged.

Majors was stabbed while walking in the park just before 7 p.m. on Dec. 11, according to the start of her medical exams at Barnard, an all-women’s school that is part of the Ivy League’s Columbia University.

Police searched up and down stairways and streets around the park and leveled in a crosswalk.

Her death has troubled city and college leaders, both for its proximity to campus and its apparent randomness.

Associated Press
GOP senator ‘disturbed’ by McConnell remark

Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, a Republican from Alaska, said she was disturbed to hear Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell say there would be “total coordination” between the White House and the Senate over the upcoming presidential impeachment trial.

“...I happened to hear that I was disturbed,” Murkowski told KTUU Tuesday before saying there should be distance between the White House and the Senate.

McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, was planning with the White House.

“We’ll be working through this process, hopefully, in a fairly short period of time in total coordination with the White House counsel’s office and the people who are representing the president as well as the Senate,” McConnell said.

Murkowski was critical of the impeachment process conducted in the House of Representatives, describing it as rushed.

Murkowski says the Senate is now being asked to cure deficiencies in evidence to be presented at the trial, particularly when it comes to whether key witnesses should be brought forward to testify.

House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney and former national security adviser John Bolton.

“How we will deal with witnesses remains to be seen,” Murkowski said before saying the House should have given the courts if witnesses refused to appear before Congress.

Murkowski also spoke of her desire for a “full and fair process,” potentially using the impeachment hearings of President Bill Clinton as a template.

Murkowski remained undecided about how she would vote when the trial takes place.

“For me to prejudge and say there’s nothing there or on the other hand, he should be impeached yesterday, that’s wrong; in my view, that’s wrong.”

Rust Belt region looks to become a hub for new electric vehicles

By John Seewer

Associated Press

The day Youngstown’s steel mills began shutting down 40 years ago remains fresh in the minds of those who live in the blue-collar corner of Ohio. Community leaders don’t want the recent closing of General Motors’ massive assembly plant to leave that same lingering gloom.

The region is embarking on an ambitious plan to become a research and production hub for electric vehicles and carve out a new economy for itself by mixing its industrial past with emerging technology.

There are positive signs already. GM in early December announced it will form a joint venture and hire more than 1,100 people at a new plant that it says will be among the largest electric vehicle battery cell factories in the world.

And the Lordstown assembly plant that GM shut down in March has been sold to a new company that intends to begin making electric trucks by late 2020.

The Youngstown region, which for decades has been a symbol of the American Midwest’s declining industrial might, faces plenty of competition from places like Detroit, Silicon Valley and China—all of which also are positioning to be centers for electric and autonomous vehicles.

While the electric transformation within the auto industry is just beginning to take shape, it’s clear that fewer workers and factories will be needed to make cars that are increasingly driven by software. Those next clusters of electric vehicle manufacturing will sprout in places that have become tech hubs.

U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, a Democrat who represents the Youngstown area, thinks being involved with the development of electric vehicles early on is the best chance his hometown has had in decades to restore what has been lost.

“For a long time in our community, we were chasing smokestacks, chasing things that were on the decline,” he said. “We’re starting to move in a good direction.”

Economic development leaders point out that the Youngstown area already is home to an electric battery testing lab and business incubators that are focused on energy and additive manufacturing through 3-D printing.

Youngstown State University is breaking ground on an advanced manufacturing technology center and wants to play a part in training students to work in the electric vehicle and additive manufacturing industries.

“We want to take charge of our future,” Hripko, the university’s associate vice president for economic development and government relations.

For decades now, those in the Mahoning Valley have been counting on “the next big idea” with investors promulgating to build factories that would make blimps, commuter airplanes and a new version of the Studebaker. The closing of the GM plant that had been churning out cars for 50 years marked the loss of the biggest manufacturing anchor remaining in what once was Ohio’s industrial core.

It will take more than a battery cell plant for the Youngstown region to become a hub for electric vehicles, said Brett Smith, director of research at the Center for Automotive Research, an industry think tank in Ann Arbor, Mich.

Technology and research will be centered largely in South Korea, China, Detroit and California, he said. A big question is whether a place like Ohio that has had a big role in producing traditional engines and transmissions can stake a claim to a new way of making vehicles.

Both GM and Ford Motor Co. announced this year they are investing heavily in their Detroit-area factories, where they plan to build the next generation of electric and autonomous vehicles.

Volkswagen is making Tennessee its North American base for electric vehicle production by expanding its plant in Chattanooga.

Where the manufacturing is centered will be determined by a number of factors, Smith said, including logistics, labor contracts, political influences, workforce training and how quickly car buyers embrace electric vehicles.

Fully electric vehicles currently make up only 1.5% of U.S. new vehicle sales, and LMC Automotive forecasts that will rise to only 7.5% by the end of the next decade.

“We’re still in the early days of this,” Smith said.

Uncertainty also surrounds what will happen with the former GM assembly plant. It was bought by Lordstown Motors Corp., a new company that wants to begin making electric trucks by late 2020 but also needs more investors before manufacturing can begin.

While the new owner plans to start out with just 400 workers, CEO Steve Burns said he has a much bigger vision that includes bringing in other like-minded companies and becoming a center for electric vehicle production.

There’s also talk of potentially building a new generation of mail trucks for the U.S. Postal Service.

“It’s a pretty lofty goal,” Burns said. “But we didn’t buy this plant not to fill it up and get to full production. We really want to put the area on the map.”
Baltimore Police block off Penn Street at Lombard Street in Baltimore on Feb. 4 after a shooting at University of Maryland Medical Center Shock Trauma.

Baltimore man charged with killing pregnant sister

Texas police say a 19-year-old man admitted to strangling an pregnant older sister — and faking her suicide — out of embarrassment for their family.

Eduardo Arevalo is charged with capital murder in the death of his sister Viridiana, 23, who was about a month from her due date. Residents found the body of the soon-to-be mother in a neighborhood alley early Sunday, less than a mile from her family’s home in a Dallas suburb called The Colony.

Eduardo Arevalo has been charged with capital murder in connection with the strangling death of his pregnant sister.

She disappeared from home on Dec. 16, with a family member claiming to police that she had "made some statements about always wanting a little sister."

She had reportedly struggled with mental health problems, and relatives found a suicide note.

Police, however, were skeptical. Footage from cameras in the area where the body was found helped lead them to Eduardo Arevalo. They say he admitted the crime.

"I murdered her ... I murdered her," he told detectives, according to a probable cause affidavit.

He confessed to "protect his family and the unborn child from its mother," blaming the "ongoing conflict" his sister's mental health condition caused in the family, the affidavit said.

The brutal killing unfolded on the morning of Dec. 16, after the siblings got into an argument, according to the affidavit. Eduardo went into his room and tried to go to sleep, but thought to himself, "Maybe it's time to murder her," it said.

According to the affidavit, as Viridiana sat on a couch in the living room, Eduardo approached her neck, squeezed it until she stopped breathing. He wrapped her head in duct tape, the affidavit said, "because he was afraid that she might come back to life."

Then, the affidavit said, he drove her body outside the city and into Fannin County, leaving it in a grassy field where he believed it "would not be discovered."

And he wrote the supposed suicide note, Woodard said.

Six days later, during the early morning of Dec. 22, he allegedly retrieved her sister's body and drove it back to The Colony. He left her corpse in the alley, police said. On his way home, he stopped at Waffle House to get something to eat.

After Viridiana's body was found, investigators brought Eduardo in for an interview, believing that he might be involved in her death based on the evidence. He confessed while being questioned, police said, and provided details only the killer would know. He was handcuffed and arrested at the end of the interview.

The family is devastated by the situation, Diego Arevalo told KTVT-TV, adding that "seeing my parents sad and emotional really breaks my heart." He said he didn't believe his brother was the killer, despite the alleged confession.

"I know my brother," he said. "He wouldn't do something like this."

As the family struggles to process the death of one sibling and the capture of another, the属于《The Colony Police Department》

The Colony police said the man in an orange prison jumpsuit and handcuffs is the suspect in a capital murder case.

Texas man charged with killing pregnant sister

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Disney’s ‘Song of the South’: The Jim Crow-era film that won’t die

More than 40 graves discovered under fairway of Tallahassee, Fla., golf course

By Bobby Caina Calvan

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — The rumors swirled for decades: A dark history long lay buried under the grassy knolls and manicured lawns of a country club in Florida’s capital city.

Over the years, neat rows of rectangular depressions on the 7th fairway deepened in the grass, outrunning what would be confirmed this month: The graves of the slaves who lived and died on a plantation that once sprawled with cotton near the Florida Capitol.

The discovery of 40 graves — with perhaps dozens more yet to be found — has spawned a conversation about how to honor those who lie in rest at the golf course. And it has brought renewed attention to the many thousands of unmarked and forgotten slave cemeteries across the Deep South that enjoyed little to no development or indifference.

“When I stand here on a cemetery for slaves, it makes me thoughtful and pensive,” said DeLaitre Hollinger, the immediate past president of the Tallahassee branch of the NAACP. His ancestors worked the fields of Leon County as slaves.

“They deserve much better than this,” said Hollinger, 26, who runs a funerary service in support of the NAACP. “And they deserved much better than what occurred in that era.”

Wooden crosses had identified the graves have long since decayed. For years, golfers have unknowingly trod through the cemetery.

Leon County was the center of Florida’s plantation economy during the antebellum decades and had the state’s highest concentration of plantation laborers. Just before the Civil War, three of every four county inhabitants were human chattel owned by elite white families.

The Houstouns of Tallahassee were one such family. From the early 1800s through the Civil War, the family operated a 500-acre plantation. In modern times it has been parceled out to developers who transformed fields into an expanse of strip malls and residential neighborhoods.

A huge swath of the property became the Capital City Country Club, now an 18-hole golf course in one of Tallahassee’s most sought-after communities.

“It’s fair to say that the golf course is one of the reasons why this burial ground has been preserved as well as it has for so long,” said Jay Revell, the country club’s resident historian.

“A hundred years ago when the golf course was constructed, there was certainly no technology to decipher what was or wasn’t there,” he said. “It was a very modern, recent visit to the country club.

There had long been talk among some Tallahassee old-timers about the long-lost plantation and its cemetery.

The stories piqued Hollinger’s curiosity. He contacted city officials for help, who in turn reached out to experts.

That’s when Jeffrey Shanks, a National Park Service archaeologist, took up the cause.

Earlier this month, after weeks of scanning 7,000 square meters of the golf course using ground-penetrating radar and two cadaver-sniffing dogs, Shanks issued his preliminary conclusion: The subsurface anomalies at the country club are indeed graves.

Shanks called the discovery a significant historical find because so many slave cemeteries are unaccounted for.

A Florida state task force two decades ago estimated that there could be as many as 1.5 million unmarked and abandoned slave or black cemeteries across the state.

In Leon County, there are only a handful of known slave burial sites — despite the scores of plantations that once existed in the area. Each would have had a cemetery for its enslaved.

“It’s safe to say that there are thousands upon thousands of these graves in Leon County,” said Jonathan Lammers, a historian who drafted a report on the Houstoun property. “And hundreds and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, across the Southeast that remain unknown today.”

At the Capital City Country Club, there are no plans to exhume or disturb any of the remains. How the site will be memorialized is still up for discussion.

“Song of the South” is easily viewed on Disney Plus streaming service, and the Briar Patch gift shop at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., is sporting a “Song of the South” sign near a classic, “Peter Pan,” “Dumbo” and “Peter Pan.”

“Song of the South,” the 1946 movie “Song of the South,” is on a sign near the Briar Patch gift shop at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

“Song of the South” is easily viewed on Disney Plus streaming service, and the Briar Patch gift shop at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., is sporting a “Song of the South” sign near a classic, “Peter Pan,” “Dumbo” and “Peter Pan.”

By Jay Reeves

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Racially segregated movie theaters and white-only water fountains disappeared decades ago after court rulings struck down the legal framework of Jim Crow America, but another element of the era just won’t die: Walt Disney’s 1946 movie “Song of the South.”

With racist stereotypes and Old South tropes, the film isn’t available to the millions of vintage movies because they depict racist stereotypes, the company kept “Song of the South” received a lukewarm reception when it first opened but was a “huge hit” financially when it was released in the 1970s and ’80s.

“Disney had become more of a cultural institution by then. All the old films, whether successful or not upon its original release, were now being rebranded as ‘classics,’” said Sperb, author of “Disney’s Most Notorious Films: Race, Convergence, and the Hidden Histories of Song of the South.”

The continuing fascination that some have with the movie is likely more about the fact that Disney made it than its actual contents, he said in an interview.

“I think if anyone else in Hollywood had made that movie it would have been almost completely forgotten about by today except for only the most hardcore animation history buffs who would note in passing its role in helping to shape the possibilities of hybrid animation,” said Sperb.

Christian Willis, who runs a “Song of the South” website, said he was enamored with the movie as a child. He hopes the movie is released to the public again.

“I think burying history is the wrong approach,” he said.

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Army vet quits job to fix cars free of charge

By Cathy Free
Special To The Washington Post

Tamesha Rayes climbed behind the wheel of her 2011 Hyundai to drive her son to school one morning last spring, but her car wouldn’t start.

A troubleshooter from her auto insurance company came out and told her she probably needed a new starter or alternator, which are both expensive to acquire and install. Her heart sank.

The single mom and Air Force National Guard veteran from Moore, Okla., wasn’t working because she had returned to college to pursue her degree and become a middle school English teacher. “I didn’t have the money for an expensive car repair,” said Rayes, 39, who used her car to drive her son to school and herself to her college classes.

Then a friend told Rayes about Hard Luck Automotive Services, a nonprofit car repair service started by Adam Ely and his wife, Toni Ely, in the Oklahoma City area.

After Rayes called Adam Ely, he drove to her house the next morning with his toolbox, tinkered around under the hood for a bit and confirmed the car needed a new starter.

“We’ll find you a good deal on a new one,” Rayes said he told her. And then he told her this: He’d do the labor for no charge. The whole thing cost her $200.

“I could hardly believe it,” said Rayes.

When Ely then took her and her 9-year-old son, Tysen, out for ice cream, a new friendship was sealed.

“I can’t say enough about what he did — he’s a blessing,” Rayes said. “Without him, I don’t know what I would have done.”

It’s something that Adam Ely hears often since deciding to repair cars for no charge. It started in the fall of 2017 when he noticed that a car driven by his daughter’s friend was running poorly.

“I said, ‘Hey, let’s get your car fixed,’ and she told me she’d like to, but it would cost $400 that she didn’t have,” recalled Ely, 40. “I told her I’d fix it for free and it ended up costing her $65 (for parts) instead of $400.”

That weekend, said Ely, he did some soul-searching and told his wife he’d like to help others whose cars were just a few miles away from a breakdown. She thought it was a great idea and wanted to help.

After putting a notice on Facebook, they came up with the idea for Hard Luck Automotive. Toni Ely would focus on public relations and fundraising through T-shirt sales to pay for tools, gasoline and oil while her husband would handle the repairs.

A former Army paratrooper and helicopter mechanic, Adam Ely developed asthma, hearing loss and post-traumatic stress syndrome in Afghanistan, where he served for four years. Since 2007, he has received federal financial assistance, which supplemented the paychecks he earned as a civilian aircraft mechanic.

“When I first started fixing cars for free, it was in my spare time when I wasn’t working on aircraft,” he said. “But it wasn’t long before my days off were busier than my days on the job. It was obvious to me that people were in need of some help.”

The Elys have always owned reliable cars, and they live in a cozy three-bedroom, two-bath log cabin on several acres, he said.

“We feel fortunate,” Ely said. “When I first started fixing cars, I had a job to focus on Hard Luck Automotive. Toni is still working, but we have to make house calls in his truck. It made sense to us,” said Adam Ely, who taught himself to repair cars as a hobby when he was younger.

“I give them a safe environment,” he said. “Most families are just one car repair bill from catastrophe. If the engine or transmission blows up in your car, you’re looking at a $4,000 to $5,000 repair. ‘What we’ve done is take away some hands-on training, he said.

After word got out about Hard Luck Automotive called Hard Luck Automotive Services.

“Returning the Favor,” featured Adam Ely on his Facebook page and paid to rent an auto garage for a year so that Ely couldn’t have to make house calls in his truck.

“People have been incredible — we’ve had tools donated and a welder offered to help as needed,” said Ely, who now devotes 40 hours every week to diagnosing problems and repairing everything from alternators to valve trains for about 25 to 30 clients a week.

Several local teens who hope to become mechanics frequently stop by after high school to get some hands-on training, he said. “I give them a safe environment with quality tools and somebody to show them the way. I’m thrilled that they want to be car mechanics — we’re going to need them,” he said.

One junior mechanic, in particular, has been inspired by the good he’s witnessed at Hard Luck Automotive: Tamesha Rayes’ son, Tysen.

On the day Rayes had her car repaired, Ely allowed Tysen to be his assistant. “Tysen was asking him all these questions, and Adam patiently took the time to explain everything and had my son hand him the tools he needed,” recalled Rayes. “Tysen now tells me almost every day, ‘I want to fix cars like Mr. Adam.’ ”

That’s the ultimate compliment to Ely. “That was soul food to me,” he said. “This is the greatest pay-check I’ve never earned.”
A biologist yearns to discover the secrets of Watts Towers’ shells

By Deborah Netburn

LOS ANGELES — Thirteen miles from the coast, marine biologist Bruno Pernet was himself surrounded by concrete, asphalt and an assortment of roughly 10,000 seashells.

There were the iridescent shells of black abalone, the chalky shells of California Venus clams and the sun-bleached shells of Pismo clams. Each such specimen had been on dry land for decades, and some had been on dry land for nearly a century. All of them adorn the Watts Towers, the folk-art monument that rises like a do-it-yourself cathedral above a neighborhood of run-down homes in South Los Angeles.

Pernet spends most of his professional time studying the larval stages of worms and snails that inhabit the Southern California coast. But over the past 10 years, he has channeled some of his scientific expertise into this national historic landmark in pursuit of an unlikely obsession.

His goal is to identify the species and provenance of all the shells on the 17 structures that make up the iconic sculpture. He calls it the Watts Towers Bivalve Inventory Project.

It is an audacious and time-consuming undertaking, but he believes it is scientifically worthwhile.

Though the shells were intended as decorative elements, collectively they create a physical record of the clams, snails, mussels, and other mollusks that inhabited the local shoreline over a 30-year period between the 1920s and 1950s, when the towers were being built.

“Towers were a museum collection, all the shells would have labels,” Pernet said. “Here, the labels were missing.”

Pernet’s friend and colleague, Christine Whitcraft, said the unusual quest is not as crazy as it might sound.

“Creativity and science are usually juxtaposed to each other,” she said. “But I think good science is done with creative thinking.”

The Watts Towers were built by Sabato Rodia, an Italian immigrant who worked odd jobs and had no training in art, sculpture or architecture. He purchased a triangle-shaped property on East 107th Street in 1921 and began building the towers that year. It took him more than three decades to complete the project, working in his spare time. Rodia created his sculpture out of structural steel, chicken wire and mortar. He climbed the towers as if they were monkey bars, and decorated them with recycled materials, including glass bottles, broken tiles and shards of mirrors.

The result is a stunning tour de force among the towers weekdays between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Generally, the public may access the site only on a free guided tour.)

Then he sent a note to Paul Valentich-Scott, a curator at the Santa Barbara Museum of History and author of two comprehensive books on the bivalves of the western United States.

“I definitely need a clam expert to help me solidify my identifications, and you are the obvious person, for sure!” Pernet wrote.

Valentich-Scott was on board.

“It was way out of left field, but I love new challenges,” he said. “My feeling was, ‘Why not?’”

Pernet began identifying shells in the various regions of the towers. When he was stumped, he sent photos to Valentich-Scott.

To organize his research, Pernet used a schematic map that broke Rodia’s sculpture into nearly 100 discrete sections. He tackled a few sections a day, documenting all the species of shells he observed.

In some ways, it was similar to his more traditional fieldwork — identifying species in the coastal marine environment of Southern California, gauging their abundance, and keeping detailed notes of where each specimen was found. But cataloging creatures in a marine ecosystem is more straightforward than taking an inventory of Rodia’s creation, Pernet said.

On a mud flat, he can create a simple square grid, label the sections and record the animal species found in each one. The towers, on the other hand, are rambling and unwieldy. Built free-form from Rodia’s imagination, they don’t lend themselves to easy categorizations or boundaries.

Pernet was able to identify many of the most common shells by sight, taking into consideration the size and shape of the shell, and what biologists call shell sculpture.

“There are all kinds of raised parts of a shell — some that run parallel to the edge, others that are perpendicular,” he said. “We can use all of those to identify it.”

What they couldn’t use was the interior of the shells, which were stuck in the cement.

“The only thing that gives you part of the story,” Valentich-Scott said. “There are a lot of structures inside a shell that help a ton with identification.”

For example, there may be teeth along the top interior edge of a shell that hint at how the animal once attached itself. There may also be indications of the shape of the muscles it used to keep the shell closed.

The results of Pernet’s project appeared this month in the Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies. The research paper also cataloging creatures in a marine ecosystem is more straightforward than taking an inventory of Rodia’s creation, Pernet said.

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The results of Pernet’s project appeared this month in the Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies. The research paper also included a link to a downloadable project database to the shells of the Watts Towers.

While the publication is nice, he said the real inspiration for the work was to satisfy his curiosity.

“It just seemed like a cool question to answer,” he said.
NATION

Hit by lethal bronzing disease

Florida's iconic palm trees threatened by invasive malady spread by treehoppers

By Terry Spencer
Associated Press

Florida's iconic palm trees are under attack from a fatal disease that turns them to dried crisps in months, with no chance for recovery once they become ill.

Spread by a rice-sized, plant-hopping insect, lethal bronzing has gone from a small infestation on Florida's Gulf Coast to a nearly statewide problem in just over a decade. Tens of thousands of palm trees have died from the bacterial disease, and the pace of its spread is increasing, adding to environmental woes of a state already struggling to save its other arborescent icon, citrus trees, from two other diseases.

Florida's official state tree — the tall, broad-leaved sabal palm — is especially susceptible, and Florida nurseries, businesses and homeowners are taking a financial hit as they scrap infected palms. Some preventive measures can be taken, but once infected, uprooting the tree is the only practical solution.

"Getting this disease under control is essential because it has the potential to drastically modify our landscape," said Brian Bahder, an entomologist who studies insect-borne plant diseases and is a leader in Florida's battle against lethal bronzing.

Spread by a rice-sized, plant-hopping insect, lethal bronzing is attacking palms right outside Bahder's office at the University of Florida's agriculture research station near Fort Lauderdale. Some are dying, some are dead. This gives him a lab to test ideas and make presentations, so he is not removing infected trees as recommended.

"To understand the disease, I need to watch it spread and see what it is doing," said Bahder, an assistant professor with the university.

Lethal bronzing's first Florida appearance came near Tampa in 2006, but it's now found from the Keys in the south to Jacksonville in the north. The disease is transmitted solely by the haplaxius crudus, a tiny winged insect sometimes called the American palm cixiid or, generically, a treehopper. These specific treehoppers (there are other kinds) inject the bacteria through their saliva when feeding on the sap from a palm's leaves. Any palm cixiid that later feeds from the tree will pick up the infection and pass the bacteria to more palms.

Once inside a tree, the bacteria migrate to its base, multiplying until they clog the circulatory system — much like human arteries getting blocked by fat and cholesterol. The blockage makes it impossible for the tree's cells to get sufficient nutrients and sugars, starving them. As an infected tree dies, its fronds and central spear leave transform from green to a tell-tale shade of bronze as it succumbs in about six months. The disease doesn't infect human or animal tissues.

Genetic testing shows lethal bronzing likely originated in Mexico's Yucatan region. Bahder's hypothesis is that 2005's Hurricane Wilma, which tracked from the Yucatan to Florida, or a storm with a similar path carried infected treehoppers across the gulf to Tampa. Those insects infected area palms, which infected native treehoppers. The disease spread when winds blew infected bugs to new territories or they hitched rides on vehicles. Bahder said the palm cixiid is particularly attracted to white cars.

To check the spread, the state agriculture department regularly inspects palm nurseries and certifies those found free of the disease. If infected trees are discovered, they're destroyed and the nursery's remaining trees are quarantined for at least six weeks. Calls to about a dozen palm tree farms around the state weren't returned — Bahder said it is a problem owners don't like to discuss publicly, fearing it will hurt business.

Eric Muecke, Tampa's urban forestry manager, said the city has had success containing the disease by keeping its palms healthy and surrounding its more susceptible palm varieties with trees that don't attract the bacteria-spreading bugs.

"It's not like it marches through a tree population — you don't see one dead tree after another," Muecke said. "It hops around, it's pretty sporadic."

Brent Gaffney, a Gainesville landscaper, said Bahder's research is the state's best hope for containing the disease, but only if he gets enough funding. Studies are underway on whether massive doses of antibiotics can save trees in the infection's early stages.

After infected trees are removed, nearby palms need preventive antibiotic injections to halt the spread. Each injection costs $50 and loses effectiveness after three months: that makes injections before the disease is present too costly for most homeowners, businesses and municipal governments, Bahder said. Only high-end resorts that use mature palms to enhance ambience might consider injecting trees without a nearby infection, he said.

Lethal bronzing is sometimes called "Texas Phoenix palm decline" because it appeared in that state in the late 1970s, killing trees in the Rio Grande Valley around Brownsville. That state's agriculture department said outbreaks today are infrequent and isolated. But Bahder said global warming is widening the threat.

"With increased human movement around the region and, especially, stronger weather patterns in regards to climate change, there are more possible routes for invasive insects," Bahder said.
Typhoon kills at least 20 at Christmas in Philippines

By Jim Gomez
Associated Press

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — Thousands of people knelt in prayer in Indonesia’s Aceh province at ceremonies Thursday marking the 15th anniversary of the Indian Ocean tsunami, one of modern history’s worst natural disasters.

The massive Dec. 26, 2004, tsunami was triggered by a magnitude 9.1 earthquake off Sumatra island. The giant wall of water killed more than 230,000 people in a dozen countries as far away as East Africa. Indonesia’s Aceh province, which was closest to the earthquake, was hit first and hardest.

More than 170,000 people died in Indonesia alone, according to the United Nations, or three-quarters of the overall death toll.

“No words can describe our feelings when we tearfully saw thousands of corpses lying on this ground 15 years ago,” acting Aceh Gov. Nova Iriansyah said at a ceremony in Sigli, a town in the province’s eastern region. “And now, we can see how people in Aceh were able to overcome suffering and rise again, thanks to assistance from all Indonesians and from people all over the world.”

Weeping survivors and others attended religious services and memorial ceremonies. Relatives of the dead and religious and community leaders presented flowers at mass graves of victims in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh. Shops and offices were closed, bells were rung to recall the dead, and a moment of silence was observed from 11:58 a.m., the time of the initial earthquake, to 11:58 a.m. Thursday.

Debris from the tsunami devastated Banda Aceh, a port city at the mouth of the Aek Aceh river, where the city’s population was around 280,000. It killed more than 100,000 people in Aceh, now a province of around 5.2 million people.

Around 2,000 bodies were retrieved from the rubble, officials said, and 100 bodies were still unaccounted for or were not identified. Those missing in Iloilo province were among those killed by a strong typhoon that hit the central Philippines on Christmas Day.

More than 25,000 people were stranded in sea ports across the central region and other parts of the Philippines after the coast guard prohibited ferries and cargo ships from venturing into dangerously choppy waters.

Dozens of international and domestic flights to and from the region were canceled, including flights to popular beach and surfing resorts.

About 20 typhoons and storms batter the Philippines each year. The Southeast Asian nation is also located in the Pacific “Ring of Fire,” where earthquakes and volcanic eruptions often occur, making the country of more than 100 million people one of the world’s most disaster-prone.

Phanfone, a Laotian word for animal, traveled along a path similar to that of Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most ferocious storms on record, which left more than 7,300 people dead and missing, flattened entire villages, swept ships inland and displaced more than 5 million people in the central Philippines in 2013.

Indonesia and Thailand mark anniversary of ’04 tsunami

By Yayans Zamzami and Niniek Karmini
Associated Press

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia — Thousands of people knelt in prayer in Indonesia’s Aceh province on Christmas Eve and then plowed across the archipelago’s central region on Christmas Day, slammimg into seven coastal towns and island provinces without losing power, government forecasters said.

Provincial officials, army troops, police and volunteers spent Christmas away from home to tend to thousands of displaced residents in town gymnasiums and schools turned into emergency shelters. Many more people spent Christmas Eve, traditionally a time for family reunions, in bus terminals.

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A resident checks his home, which was damaged by Typhoon Phanfone, inOrmoc city, central Philippines, on Thursday.

Australia is bracing for a heatwave as fires burn

Associated Press

PERTH, Australia — Firefighters battling wild fires in Australia’s most populous state attempted to make headway Thursday amid favorable conditions before an “extreme heatwave” hits the country this weekend.

Thousands of firefighters in New South Wales took advantage of cooler weather Thursday to strengthen containment lines. More than 70 fires were still burning across the state with areas in the south coast currently at the “watch and act” level issued by fire services.

About 12.35 million acres of land have burned nationwide over the past few months, with nine people killed and more than 950 homes destroyed. New South Wales has received the brunt of the damage, with around 850 homes razed in the state.

Authorities are bracing for conditions to deteriorate as high temperatures return. Sydney is forecast to hit 88 degrees Fahrenheit on Sunday before reaching 95 degrees on Tuesday. The city’s western suburbs could reach 106 on Sunday.

Bureau of Meteorology forecaster Rose Barr said a heatwave was currently building in southern parts of New South Wales before worsening on the weekend.

“Some areas are forecast to reach extreme heatwave conditions,” she said.
By Jeffrey Schaeffer and Angela Chonaston
Associated Press

PARIS — The rector of Notre Dame Cathedral says the Paris landmark is still so fragile that there’s a “50% chance” the structure might not be saved because scaffolding installed before this year’s fire is threatening the vaults of the Gothic monument.

Monsignor Patrick Chauvet said restoration work isn’t likely to begin until 2021 — and described his “heartache” that Notre Dame couldn’t hold Christmas services this year, for the first time since the French Revolution intervened.

“Today it is not out of danger,” he said. “It will be out of danger when we take out the remaining scaffolding.”

“We can say that there is maybe a 50% chance that it will be saved. There is also 50% chance of scaffolding falling onto the three vaults, so as you can see the building is still very fragile,” he said.

The 12th-century cathedral was under renovation at the time of the accidental April fire, which destroyed its roof and collapsed its spire. With no more roof to keep the massive stone structure stable, the cathedral’s surviving vaults are crucial to keep it standing, but they are vulnerable.

Some 50,000 tubes of scaffold-ing crisscrossed the back of the edifice at the time of the fire, and some were damaged. Removing them without causing further problems is one of the toughest parts of the cleanup effort.

“We need to remove completely the scaffolding in order to make the building safe, so in 2021 we will probably start the restoration of the cathedral,” Chauvet said.

A family takes a photo in front of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris on Tuesday.

Once the scaffolding is removed we need to assess the state of the cathedral, the quantity of stones to be removed and replaced,” Chauvet estimated it would take another three years after that to make it safe enough for people to reenter the cathedral, but that the full restoration will take longer. President Emmanuel Macron has said he wants it rebuilt by 2024 when Paris hosts the Olympics, but experts have questioned whether that time frame is realistic.

Another reason it’s still too dangerous to host religious services inside Notre Dame is that the fire released tons of toxic lead dust, and authorities are working to clean it up and assess related health risks.

Erdogan says parliament to support Libya deployment

Bloomberg

Turkey’s government will ask parliament in early January to authorize the deployment of troops to Libya after the international-ly recognized administration in Tripoli requested help, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said.

The legislative motion will be the government’s “first act” after parliament returns from its recess on Jan. 7, Erdogan said Thursday in Ankara.

“We’ll go where we’re invited, and won’t go where we aren’t,” he said, predicting the motion will be passed within two days. “Currently, as there’s an invitation, we’ll accept.”

Turkey has said the troops would be sent to train fighters loyal to Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj, and are meant as a deterrent and not as an active fighting force.

Libyan Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha told reporters in Tunisia on Thursday that the Tripoli-based government had the right to call on Turkey’s assistance if the eastern commander attacking the capital, Khalifa Haftar, continues to receive foreign help.

Erdogan had signaled on Wednesday that the dispatch of Turkish troops to the North African nation was only a matter of time.
When other people were out celebrating the New Year at the end of 2018, Robert Pattinson was staring at an empty calendar, thinking, “God. Nothing. My career is over. I’m nowhere.” It’s not that he’s not interested in finding work in other industries. Music? Maybe. Japanese toilet spokesperson? Why not? His public love for them has made many converts.

Within months though, Pattinson had landed two huge roles, first in Christopher Nolan’s 2020 globe-trotting action-thriller “Tenet” and then the lead role in Matt Reeves’ “The Batman,” set for 2021. His professional anxieties eased, Pattinson soon found another thing to worry about.

“I immediately thought, ‘Oh God, does that mean I’m going to get a really bad disease?’” Pattinson says, laughing. “I just had a really weird feeling about it. I always scared of blowing all my luck, and getting both those roles, one right after the other.”

His modest comments bring to mind Willem Dafoe recently saying of Pattinson, with no small amount of exasperation: How do I deal with this charming self-deprecation?

Dafoe’s question was less an inquiry and more a statement. If no one likes it, you just have to keep going. “That’s what I’ve been doing,” Pattinson says. “I didn’t know what the options are.”

“I feel like you have a thick membrane of consciousness and you’re digging inside yourself, trying to find one little idea and hope it works. It’s an all-consuming terror, and it has been there from the start. I have no idea what I’m doing. I’m just tossing a coin, relying entirely on luck.”

And, yes, this is ridiculous, and Pattinson, 33, knows that full well. But in recalling his transition from playing the vampire roman- tic Edward Cullen in the “Twilight” franchise to making art house movies, Pattinson can peg the pivotal moment.

“It’s when David (Cronenberg) called me for “Cosmopolis,”’ Pattinson says, referring to the 2012 movie in which he played a Wall Street titan. Before that, all his auditions were for mainstream movies. “I didn’t know I could go after the people you wanted to work with. And that’s what I’ve done the last eight movies.”

That includes “The Batman,” Pattinson read about Reeves making a noir “Batman” movie and thought, “I haven’t done a big thing for ages. This is the one I want.” (His agents were shocked.) He badgered Reeves, met with him and producer Dylan Clark a number of times and finally secured an audition.

He spent three weeks preparing for his audition scene only to have all his work cast aside once he put on the Batsuit. The lesson I always learn is don’t ever bother preparing for anything because it’s pointless,” Pattinson says. “Every time I’ve heavily prepared a scene, I go in and they’ll say something like, ‘Oh, by the way, it’s zero gravity.’ Or: ‘It’s raining.’ “And I’m like, ‘But I really wanted to play this way! I’ve been thinking about it every waking minute!’ It never works!”

Pattinson finds all this extremely amusing, and it’s impossible not to get caught up in his casual, good-natured and clear-eyed gravity.” Or: ‘It’s raining.’ “And I’m like, ‘But I really wanted to play this way! I’ve been thinking about it every waking minute!’ It never works!”

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Robert Pattinson

Pattinson, right, stars with Willem Dafoe in the drama “The Lighthouse.”

‘I didn’t know you could go after the people you wanted to work with. And that’s what I’ve done the last eight movies.”

Robert Pattinson

Spacey posts bizarre video on Christmas Eve

New York Daily News

Ho ho holy moly, that was uncomfortable.

Disgraced actor Kevin Spacey, seldom heard from since his #MeToo downfall in 2017, posted a bizarre and disturbing video to YouTube on Christmas Eve in which he appears to channel his malevolent “House of Cards” role, murderous politician Frank Underwood — who was killed off in the wake of the allegations against the actor.

“You really didn’t think I was going to miss the opportunity to wish you a Merry Christmas, did you? It’s been a pretty good year,” Spacey says to the viewer, breaking the fourth wall as his character did on the Netflix series. “And I’m grateful to have my health back, I really mean the health back in light of that, I’ve made some changes in my life, and I’d like to invite you to join me. As we walk into 2020, I want to cast my vote for . . . much good in this world.”

Spacey, 60, added that he’s “dead serious.”

“It’s not that hard, trust me. The next time someone does something you don’t like, you can give them the attack. But you can also hold your fire and do the unexpected. You can . . . kill them with kindness.”

Spacey was hit with an onslaught of sexual assault allegations in 2017 in the wake of those leveled against then-movie mogul Harvey Weinstein.

The actor continues to maintain his innocence and he no longer faces criminal charges, as two of the cases were dropped in July, and an accuser from a third case died.

Since the allegations came to light, Spacey has only ever posted on Twitter three times, including Tuesday’s video.

‘Colors of the Mountain’ author Da Chen dies

Da Chen, the brilliant storyteller who drew from the hardships he suffered as a persecuted child growing up in the midst of China’s cultural revolution to create the critically acclaimed memoir “Colors of the Mountain,” has died at age 57.

Chen died of lung cancer on Dec. 17, his wife, Dr. Sun-Ling Chen, told The Associated Press on Tuesday from his family’s home in Temecula, Calif. He was not a writer, but the book, “Girl Under a Red Moon,” was published just three months ago.

Chen died in late October 1999 with the critically acclaimed “Colors of the Mountain,” in which he recounted the abuses he suffered during the Cultural Revolution.

A New York Times best seller, it has been published in seven languages and, like his other books, taught at schools and universities.

From The Associated Press
Crop duster drops holy water on town

ABBEVILLE — A Roman Catholic church in Louisiana said it decided to disperse some blessings to a local town via crop dusters.

According to a Facebook post from the Diocese of Lafayette on Sunday, members of St. Anne Church in Cow Island called upon crop duster pilots to help spread their blessing to the community.

The Rev. Matthew Barzare and parishioners of the church loaded 100 gallons of holy water into the planes, and the pilots sprayed the water onto the town and nearby farms, KATC-TV reported. Parishioners also bought water from their homes to the airstrip to be blessed by Barzare.

Woman accused of faking cancer for money

IA

NORTHWOOD — An Iowa woman was accused of lying about a cancer diagnosis so she could collect donations.

Jennifer Hope Mikesell, of Northwood, is charged with ongoing criminal conduct, fraudulent practices and forgery.

The Worth County Sheriff’s Office said Mikesell, 43, told people she was diagnosed with cancer and was receiving cancer treatments at Mayo Clinic Health System in Rochester, Minn. Iowa court records said Mayo had no record of Mikesell being diagnosed or treated there.

Mikesell received multiple donations of money, food and other supplies, as well as a bedroom makeover from My Happy Haven, the court records said.

Officials seize $800K in fake merchandise

NC

FAYETTEVILLE — Officials in North Carolina said they’ve seized $800,000 in counterfeit merchandise at shopping centers and flea markets.

The Raleigh News & Observer reported that the sham goods included fake UgG boots, fake Louis Vuitton handbags and fake North Face jackets.

The North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State said the sweep was conducted in the Fayetteville area. And it warned that Christmas shoppers should be wary of bogus goods.

Officials: City Hall hit by bedbug infestation

AZ

TUCSON — Officials said Tucson City Hall had been bugged for several months — with bedbugs that is.

The Arizona Daily Star reported officials said it took nearly three months to remove the small insects from the Arizona municipal building.

Officials believe the bedbugs were brought in accidentally from an outside source.

Tucson spokesman Andy Square said that after the three-month removal, the city had to hire a Phoenix company earlier this month to bring in a specially trained dog to sniff out the remaining bugs.

Surf’s up for fundraisers

George Trosset Jr. and George Trosset, who started surfing in Santa and Christmas costumes 10 years ago behind their house on Christmas Eve, high-five each other during the 10th annual Surfing Santas event in Cocoa Beach, Fla., on Tuesday. Almost 10,000 spectators turned out for the event, which raised $40,000 for two local nonprofits — Grind for Life, which helps with financial assistance for cancer patients, and the Florida Surf Museum.

Police: Thieves stole from rehabbed homes

MO

ST. LOUIS — Two suspects now in custody are accused of stealing more than 800 items from St. Louis homes that were under rehabilitation.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that detectives believe the thieves monitored the rehabbed homes, waited until dark, and took hundreds of items that included stained glass windows, lawn mowers, generators and many other items.

Police said around 150 to 200 stolen items have been returned to their owners.

Thousands flock to giant holiday display at farm

GA

STATESBORO — Roy Thompson’s farm in southeast Georgia lights up after dark like a Christmas wonderland — not just the house, but the fields and even surrounding woods.

He said more than 45,000 carloads of people came to see the massive display during the holidays last year. This year, the family plans to welcome visitors through Sunday.

Tours are free, though the Thompsons encourage visitors to donate canned food, children’s toys, pet food and money to help area families facing hardships.

City mulls ending ban on throwing snowballs

WI

WAUSAU — For decades, those who participated in snowball fights in one Wisconsin city risked getting in trouble with the law. But that may be about to change.

A 1962 ban on throwing projectiles in Wausau sentence snowballs into the same category as rocks and other items that can cause serious harm.

City Council President Lisa Rasmussen said that recent negative national attention over the rarely used ordinance has raised questions about whether it could be time to take snowballs off the naughty list.

The City Council will consider decriminalizing snowball fights at a meeting next month.

Nonprofit repairs, gives away nearly 50 bikes

MI

LANSING — A Lansing nonprofit distributed nearly 50 bicycles to children after a dozen volunteers spent several weeks cleaning and repairing them.

The Lansing Bike Co-op staged the giveaway, offering the 49 used bikes to anyone on a first-come, first-served basis, the Lansing State Journal reported. There were no rules or requirements.

Every bike came with a red, green or blue helmet.

Thief sends money for stolen receptacle

KS

TOPEKA — A Kansas City has an extra $75 in its coffers thanks to a former thief with a guilty conscience.

The Topeka Capital-Journal reported that someone anonymously sent the money to Shawnee County along with a letter dated Dec. 18.

The letter states that the sender is in a 12-step program and working to make financial amends. It states that many years ago the writer stole a receptacle meant for cigarette ashes that was in front of the courthouse.

Influx of seagulls brings beach sounds to city

IN

TERRE HAUTE — Usually large flocks of seagulls descended on a western Indiana city, bringing the sounds of the beach to a local reservoir where the birds began gathering in late November.

Peter Scott, a retired Indiana State University ecology professor who directed an annual Christmas Bird Count around Terre Haute, estimated that between 400 and 1,000 of the birds have congregated at the lake.

He said ring-billed gulls aren’t uncommon in Indiana but they prefer to winter around larger bodies of water.

Scott said the birds are most likely feeding on small fish in the lake.
Brewer aims for quality, depth

Company avoids the temptation to go big after initial success

By B.A. Morelli
The (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) Gazette

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Fresh off the RAGBRAI bicycle ride, Big Grove Brewery began fielding messages from beer distributors in Oregon, Colorado, Washington and elsewhere who believed their customers would embrace the product.

Thousands of people from around Iowa and the country had just been exposed for the first time to a handful of Big Grove’s brews during RAGBRAI. Big Grove signed a five-year agreement as the main beer sponsor of the statewide bicycle ride at the end of each July, meaning its beers were in virtually every official beer garden and many local bars and gas stations along the route.

But for now, Big Grove is saying no to anywhere not in Iowa.

“We are taking the philosophy of going deeper rather than wider,” said Matt Swift, co-founder of Big Grove. “As far as our distribution goes, we want to make sure Iowa is completely saturated with beer before we take a leap to go to another state.”

Earlier this year, Big Grove — which routinely packs its Solon and Iowa City locations — attempted to raise its profile and grow its brand by aligning with one of the state’s signature tourism draws, according to the Cedar Rapids Gazette.

This comes at a key time when competition is increasing. Microbreweries are opening in even the smallest of Iowa cities. Iowa has 114 native breweries and brew pubs, or four breweries per 100,000 people aged 21 and older, according to the Iowa Alcoholic Beverages Division and the Brewers Association.

Native gallons of beers sold annually has climbed each of the past five years, and 42% over the five years to 683,858 gallons, according to the Alcoholic Beverages Division.

While overall sales in the $27.6 billion craft beer industry are up about 7% nationally, the Brewers Association also reports signs of saturation. The number of openings of brew pubs and microbreweries is declining, while the number of closures is increasing. However, openings still vastly outnumber closures — 1,046 openings and 213 closures, according to the association.

Big Grove Brewery, which opened in Solon in 2013 and added the significantly larger Iowa City location in 2017, was looking to set itself apart when it became the first Iowa brewery to sponsor RAGBRAI. Until this year the ride had turned to mass production, including Michelob Ultra and Goose Island, which is owned by Anheuser-Busch InBev.

“Half joking, I said, ‘I know we are the small guys, but this is something that would really align with our brand, and if there’s ever an opportunity, let’s have a conversation,’” Swift said of early conversations with RAGBRAI Director TJ Juskiewicz.

“Two or three weeks later, I got a phone call, and he said, ‘Matt, there might be an opportunity. What do you think?’ I said I’d love to align with an Iowa brand.”

Biking and craft beer have long drawn traditional crowds. Juskiewicz said he thought his crowd, which can number well over 10,000 people a day, would appreciate the Iowa connection.

“It is great to work with an Iowa brewery like Big Grove,” Juskiewicz said. “Our riders really like to drink our local Iowa brews, so it made sense to partner with Big Grove.”

RAGBRAI and Big Grove previously had partnered on events, including the first series of official RAGBRAI training rides around the state. Big Grove helped host a ride called Big Rove in June.

The first step for Big Grove was developing a new limited-release beer — an easy drinking called Tailwind Golden Ale — just for RAGBRAI, using the biking lingo for when a breeze is at your back. The can also served as a collectors’ item for some as it featured the RAGBRAI route and logo.

Because they ordered a printed can, they had to take a truckload, or about 6,000 cases, which translates to about 140,000 16-ounce cans, said head brewer Andy Loyet.

Distribution was primarily focused in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, the Quad Cities area and the Des Moines metro.

“We’ve never done anything on this scale,” Swift said of the sponsorship. “Really, it’s about long term. If you play the long game, what are the best brands in Iowa to be associated with.

“You have the Hawkeyes, RAGBRAI, the state fair.

“The cool thing about RAGBRAI it is goes everywhere — side to side. You’re going to hit a lot of places you never been before, and we always felt like Big Grove would translate to any part of Iowa.”

Staff set out to determine how to use the sponsorship to maximize their exposure around the state.

They forged new partnerships — Golden Eagle Distributing of Mount Pleasant signed on to supply the southern part of Iowa, and Doll Distributing supplied the western part of the state.

Staff rode along on RAGBRAI in Big Grove jerseys, and others spent time in local bars to personally introduce bartenders and customers to the beers.

The gamble paid off on the ride and appears to be paying off since, as many of the relationships have continued and their market has expanded.

On the ride, Big Grove outsold what several unofficial surveys suggest is Iowa’s favorite beer — Busch Light. In the beer tent in Atlantic, Big Grove sold 180 cases, compared with 120 cases of Busch Light, according to Goetttsch.

When asked about plans for expansion, Goetttsch and Swift are not making commitments. They noted they still have room in their Iowa City location, even as production volumes have grown from 600 barrels in the first year to more than 10,000 barrels this year.

Their focus is brewing quality, developing stories for each beer and marketing the beers.

Sticks of empty Big Grove Brewery IPA aluminum cans stand in the warehouse.

PHOTOS BY JIM SLOSIAREK, THE (CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA) GAZETTE/AP

RAGBRAI this year toured through southern Iowa communities including Council Bluffs, Atlantic, Winterset, Indianola, Centerville, Fairfield, Burlington and Keokuk. But they believed the credibility of RAGBRAI would help persuade the participants to give them a try, Swift said.

“It was a commitment on our part, but it paid off,” said Doug Goetttsch, another co-founder.

Until last summer, Big Grove had some exposure outside Iowa City, but it was fairly limited. More than a year ago, they began canning their beers to be sold in stores, such as Hy-Vee — some of which also sell Big Grove apparel — and a number of bars carried their cans.

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Stacks of empty Big Grove Brewery IPA aluminum cans stand in the warehouse.

PHOTOS BY JIM SLOSIAREK, THE (CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA) GAZETTE/AP

RAGBRAI this year toured through southern Iowa communities including Council Bluffs, Atlantic, Winterset, Indianola, Centerville, Fairfield, Burlington and Keokuk. But they believed the credibility of RAGBRAI would help persuade the participants to give them a try, Swift said.

“It was a commitment on our part, but it paid off,” said Doug Goetttsch, another co-founder.

Until last summer, Big Grove had some exposure outside Iowa City, but it was fairly limited. More than a year ago, they began canning their beers to be sold in stores, such as Hy-Vee — some of which also sell Big Grove apparel — and a number of bars carried their cans.

Distribution was primarily focused in Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Dubuque, the Quad Cities area and the Des Moines metro.

“We’ve never done anything on this scale,” Swift said of the sponsorship. “Really, it’s about long term. If you play the long game, what are the best brands in Iowa to be associated with.

“You have the Hawkeyes, RAGBRAI, the state fair.

“The cool thing about RAGBRAI it is goes everywhere — side to side. You’re going to hit a lot of places you never been before, and we always felt like Big Grove would translate to any part of Iowa.”

Staff set out to determine how to use the sponsorship to maximize their exposure around the state.

They forged new partnerships — Golden Eagle Distributing of Mount Pleasant signed on to supply the southern part of Iowa, and Doll Distributing supplied the western part of the state.

Staff rode along on RAGBRAI in Big Grove jerseys, and others spent time in local bars to personally introduce bartenders and customers to the beers.

The gamble paid off on the ride and appears to be paying off since, as many of the relationships have continued and their market has expanded.

On the ride, Big Grove outsold what several unofficial surveys suggest is Iowa’s favorite beer — Busch Light. In the beer tent in Atlantic, Big Grove sold 180 cases, compared with 120 cases of Busch Light, according to Goetttsch.

When asked about plans for expansion, Goetttsch and Swift are not making commitments. They noted they still have room in their Iowa City location, even as production volumes have grown from 600 barrels in the first year to more than 10,000 barrels this year.

Their focus is brewing quality, developing stories for each beer and marketing the beers.
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Eugene Sheffer Crossword

ACROSS
1 “Unh-unh” 53 Fury
4 Sharil of 54 Uses scissors
8 Differ 55 Label
12 — Dabi 23 Implement
13 Sushi wrapper 24 Big fair, for short
14 Cruising 25 Accomplishes
15 Curry powder spice 26 Campus mil.
17 Dark blue 27 — (Seltzer) group
18 Canada’s capital 28 Mr. Stravinsky
19 Barbie’s 29 Motorist’s org.
companion 32 Not brand-name
21 Lass 33 Frenzied
22 Euphoric 35 “The Bells”
26 Like April author
weather 38 “Ta-da!”
29 Cash dispenser 39 Orlando
30 Tic-tac-toe loser 42 Close
31 Gymnast Korbut 43 Arizona city
32 Carefree 44 Male deer
33 Suk 45 Honey holder
34 Ring decision 46 Ms. Thurman
35 Pod veggie 47 Yule quaff
36 Head lights? 49 Post-op area
37 Milk container
39 Poetic dusk
41 Spectrum
42 Haw precider
44 Flag Day month
45 Glancing
46 rebound
48 Latin love
50 PC picture
51 PCs Passos trilogy
52

DOWN
1 Peacekeeping org.
2 Border on
3 In pain
4 Type of street
5 Aesopian
6 “Entourage”
7 Unstable, role
8 Woman of
letters?
9 Red — beet
10 Gun the engine
11 “Rahl!”
16 — Carta
20 Shade tree

Answer to Previous Puzzle

12-27 CRYPTOQUIP

KT PA GOFKZI XJUL LC YCZJR
UDPU DJ KL CYHKCGLVE
RPERZJPOKAX, K LGFFCLJ
UDPU’L ZJTJZJJ ZJHJZKJ.

Yesterday’s Cryptoquip: VERY POWERFUL SOLAR RAYS THAT CAUSE PEOPLE TO WANT TO FIGHT EACH OTHER: ULTRAVIOLENT LIGHT.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: G equals U
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**STARS AND STRIPES**

**OPINION**

**PROPER IMPLEMENTATION CRUCIAL FOR SPACE FORCE**

**BY JAMES STAVRIDIS**

**Bloomberg Opinion**

With the recent passage of this big Pentagon bill, Congress has created a sixth branch of the armed forces — the United States Space Force. This has profound implications for ownership and control of the world’s space capacity. It is an idea whose time has come. But the public has questions: What will it look like in practice? How will it work?

It’s worth pointing out that the U.S. hasn’t created a new branch of the military since the Vietnam War. After decades of controversy at the time, that move simply recognized the reality at the time that air operations were going to become increasingly large and complex. That necessitated a cadre of true experts who would “grow up” through planning, programming and actually operating space aircraft, with significant dollars involved.

The basic mission of the Space Force will be to create, equip and organize to conduct military operations in space. That means running the extensive constellation of U.S. military satellites currently managed by the other services. That will require a unique chain of command, centers that operate space operations — and actually conducting pure aviation in that domain — alongside the Navy at sea and the Army ashore.

That is why the Space Force is so essential: The U.S. Space Force — given the complexity and scale of operations in space, that domain requires a dedicated branch of the military. If Russia and China, which each have dedicated space forces, the U.S. has relied largely on the Air Force to conduct space operations, with supporting efforts from the Army and Navy. In many cases, that puts space operations in a disadvantage in a fight against a stronger and more powerful player.

The basic mission of the Space Force will be to create, equip and organize to conduct military operations in space.

**BY BOBBY GHOSH**

**Bloomberg Opinion**

**How will Saudi prince employ situational awareness?**

In a year when he was under especially intense scrutiny abroad and at home, MBS lifted a ban on women driving, opened a dialogue with Israel and organized a major arms deal with a rogue nation. The basic question going into the new year is: Is this a prince who is going to make peace or one who will continue to court controversy?

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**STARS AND STRIPES**

Friday, December 27, 2019

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What newspapers are saying at home

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

NDAA cost too much, didn’t address military quagmires

The Orange County (Calif.) Register

President Donald Trump and other Republicans, including most veterans, recognize that the costs have not been worth what we’ve gotten in return.

With the nearly $740 billion National Defense Authorization Act, Congress had the opportunity to address the quagmires that threaten the United States. But conflicts the United States is involved in, or at least put hard limits on existing or future military adventures that have not been approved by the House and Senate did nothing of the sort.

A proposal to end the unauthorized U.S. military involvement in the brutal Saudi-led war in Yemen was removed from the NDAA amid White House pressure. Proposals to require Congress to finally examine the outdated 2001 and 2002 military force authorizations that have allowed endless wars in the Middle East were also killed in the Senate. Likewise a proposal to make clear that an unauthorized war with Iran would require congressional authorization was also prevented from making it to the final NDAA.

On top of it all, the NDAA marked yet another unjustified ballooning of military spending. Over the past six years, overall defense spending has grown by $120 billion.

On Dec. 11, the House overwhelmingly approved legislation (H.R. 7378-47) despite the many problems with it.

But, alas, the bipartisan consensus proved to be just another big spending defense bill that passed the House.

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"Congratulations Congress! Thank you!"

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UNBIASED NEWS WHATEVER WAY YOU WANT IT.
Bowl schedule

Friday, Dec. 20
Balboa Bowl

Buffalo State (2-9) at Fitch (1-1)

Florida (2-0) vs. Arizona State (3-8)

Tampa Bay (3-8) vs. New Orleans (1-10)

Monday, Dec. 31

New Year’s Day Classic

At St. Petersburg, Fla.

East Carolina (9-4) vs. Memphis (7-6)

Peach Bowl winner vs. Fiesta Bowl


Saturday, Jan. 1

Bowl at Annapolis, Md.

Army (11-2) vs. Navy (10-3)

Cotton Bowl Classic

Wednesday, Jan. 8

Armed Forces Bowl

Ft. Worth, Texas

Air Force (10-3) vs. Washington State (9-4)


Friday, Jan. 10

Alamo Bowl

San Antonio

Colorado St. (8-5) vs. St. John’s (6-6)


Saturday, Jan. 11

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

SFU (10-3) vs. Boston College (6-6)


Monday, Jan. 13

Morehead St. at Ohio

Chattanooga (2-10) vs. Mississippi St. (3-9)


Tuesday, Jan. 14

SUN BELT CFB

Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl

 Florida St. vs. South Florida at Sunrise, Boca Raton, Fla.


Monday, Jan. 20

Orlando, Fla.

Pinstripe Bowl

Fordham (4-7) vs. Florida A&M (5-6)


Wednesday, Jan. 22

Mobile, Ala.

Hula Bowl

Georgia (3-9) vs. Louisiana-Monroe (6-6)


Thursday, Jan. 23

Cotton Bowl Classic

Dallas

North Carolina (6-6) vs. Temple (8-4)


Saturday, Jan. 24

Orange Bowl

Miami

North Carolina (7-5) vs. Miami (8-4)


Saturday, Jan. 25

Navy

Florida State at South Florida at Sunrise, Silverton, Fla.


Friday, Jan. 31

West Virginia

East Carolina

West Virginia (8-5) vs. East Carolina (8-4)


Saturday, Feb. 2

Louisiana-Lafayette Classic

At New Orleans

Louisiana-Lafayette (7-5) vs. Tulane (6-6)


Saturday, Feb. 9

NSL Bowl Classic

At Hamilton, Ohio

Northern Illinois (6-6) vs. Southern Miss (6-6)


Saturday, Feb. 16

Peach Bowl winner vs. Sugar Bowl

At Atlanta

Washington (4-8) vs. Texas (8-4)


Friday, Feb. 22

Honda Pier Bowl

Los Angeles

California (9-4) vs. Utah (6-6)


Saturday, Feb. 23

Ashland Classic

At Arlington, Texas

Ashland (5-7) vs. Abilene Christian (4-8)


Wednesday, March 5

Boca Raton (Fla.) Bowl

Florida St. vs. South Florida at Sunrise, Boca Raton, Fla.


Thursday, March 6

Pinstripe Bowl

Fordham (4-7) vs. Florida A&M (5-6)


Friday, March 7

Hula Bowl

Georgia (3-9) vs. Louisiana-Monroe (6-6)


Saturday, March 8

Cotton Bowl Classic

Dallas

North Carolina (6-6) vs. Temple (8-4)


Saturday, March 15

Orange Bowl

Miami

North Carolina (7-5) vs. Miami (8-4)


Saturday, March 16

NSL Bowl Classic

At New Orleans

Northern Illinois (6-6) vs. Southern Miss (6-6)


Saturday, March 23

Peach Bowl winner vs. Sugar Bowl

At Atlanta

Washington (4-8) vs. Texas (8-4)


Friday, March 29

Honda Pier Bowl

Los Angeles

California (9-4) vs. Utah (6-6)


Saturday, March 30

Ashland Classic

At Arlington, Texas

Ashland (5-7) vs. Abilene Christian (4-8)
Blues cruise into holiday break

St. Louis atop conference with six-game streak

By Dan Greenspan

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Christmas marked a turning point for the St. Louis Blues last season and it seems like they are taking the Blues in a similar direction this year. Heading into the three-day break this year, the Blues are on top of the Western Conference and look more than ready to defend their title.

Brayden Schenn scored twice in St. Louis’ four-goal first period and the Blues won their sixth straight game, 4-1 over the Los Angeles Kings on Monday night.

“It’s crazy what a little bit of winning and confidence can do to a hockey team, and you, obviously we’re feeling it as a group right now,” Schenn said after the Blues improved to 55-20-11 in the regular season since last Christmas.

“Now we believe in one another coming to the rink.”

Vince Dunn had a goal and an assist, and Jaden Schwartz scored on the power play for the Blues. Jordan Binnington made 29 saves in his first start since Dec. 16 against Colorado when Alex Pietrangelo and David Perron each had two assists.

St. Louis had a power-play goal and Jonathan Quick made 24 saves, but the Kings lost their third in a row.

Kings coach Todd McLellan was wary about the last game before time off, and his concerns were justified when the Blues scored four times in the first 12:21.

Schenk opened the scoring at 4:51 and wrapped the flurry by getting a power-play goal that gave St. Louis a 4-0 lead with his 17th of the season. Schenn has the same number of goals in 38 games this year as he had in 72 games last season.

“I’ve started getting some puck luck, which has been huge,” said Schenn, who has three goals and two assists in his past three games. “Every player definitely needs that, and just try and shoot the puck at the right time and it’s been going in.”

Schwartz tipped in Pietrangelo’s shot on the power play for a 2-0 lead at 5:43, and Dunn made it 3-0 at 11:22.

Everything seems to be clicking for the Blues, who have won eight straight games against Western Conference opponents. The power play is 5-for-12 in the past four games after needed just 3:33 seconds to convert two chances against the Kings.

But Schenn insists the lessons from last season’s turnaround will keep this Blues team focused on the next game, not the bigger picture.

“I mean, we’re obviously not going to get too far ahead of ourselves by any means,” he said. “It’s very hard to repeat as we’ve seen, but we feel — just kind of locked in in the moment and just trying to play the game the right way every night.”

It was an extraordinary public accusation that former Flames coach Bill Peters had directed racist slurs at him when the two were in the minors a decade ago and then tried to make sure he’d be demoted.

The tweets went viral and soon the text messages were piling up for Aliu.

“I was like, ‘Woah, like this is for real,’” he said.

The posts sent Nov. 25 were thunderclaps heard around hockey, alleging coaching Bill Peters had directed racist slurs at him when the two were in the minors a decade ago and then tried to make sure he’d be demoted.

It was an extraordinary public accusation in perhaps the most private of professional sports in North America. The allegations proved true and prompted Peters’ resignation as coach of the Calgary Flames. Over the past month, other claims have cropped up and the NHL has swiftly moved to strengthen its personal conduct policies regarding racism and bullying.

Suddenly, Aliu was no longer just a long-forgotten defenseman who’s played for 21 teams in six countries over the past 10 years. He was an agent of change coming hard on the heels of two incidents that hovered, still, over the first half of the NHL season.

Long-time Canadian broadcaster Don Cherry was let go last month after calling immigrants “you people” during his Hockey Night in Canada segment. Then came Babcock’s firing and word he had embraced Marner by revealing a list he asked the player to write that ranked Leafs players by work ethic.

With hockey already buzzing, Aliu kicked things up a notch by accusing Peters, a Babcock protege, of openly using the ‘N-word’ in questioning Aliu’s choice of music in a locker room all those years ago.

It was later revealed Peters had kicked and punched his own players during his four years as coach Carolina.

Aliu’s allegations also led to Chicago Blackhawks assistant Marc Crawford being suspended for physically and verbally abusing his players at past stops as a head coach.

Aliu’s timing turned out to be perfect in sparking much-needed discussions.

“It seems different,” said Anson Carter, a former player and broadcaster. “It really does because it has the NHL’s attention.”

Scoreboard

BY JOHN WAWROW

Associated Press

The Blues’ Alex Pietrangelo, left, passes to Brayden Schenn, center, who scored past Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick during the first period of Monday’s game in Los Angeles. Schenn had two goals.

NHL

JEFF MCINTOSH, THE CANADIAN PRESS

Journeyman Aliu sparks reckoning

BY JOHN WAWROW

Associated Press

VAUGHAN, Ontario — There was no breaking point or seminal moment that prompted Akim Aliu to post two tweets less than a minute apart that rocked the NHL in a matter of hours.

Aliu was scrolling through the timeline on his phone when he saw a report of how just-fired Toronto Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock had mistreated Mitch Marner, his prized rookie forward.

“It was a spur of the moment kind of thing,” Aliu explained during an interview on the heels of two incidents that hover, still, over the first half of the NHL season.

Babcock had mistreated Mitch Marner, just-fired Toronto Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock’s firing and word he had embraced Marner by revealing a list he asked the player to write that ranked Leafs players by work ethic.

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Note: No games scheduled for Wednesday’s games.

No games scheduled for Thursday’s games.

No games scheduled for Friday’s games.

No games scheduled for Saturday’s games.

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The tweets went viral and soon the text messages were piling up for Aliu.

“I was like, ‘Woah, like this is for real,’” he said.

The posts sent Nov. 25 were thunderclaps heard around hockey, alleging coaching Bill Peters had directed racist slurs at him when the two were in the minors a decade ago and then tried to make sure he’d be demoted.

It was an extraordinary public accusation in perhaps the most private of professional sports in North America. The allegations proved true and prompted Peters’ resignation as coach of the Calgary Flames. Over the past month, other claims have cropped up and the NHL has swiftly moved to strengthen its personal conduct policies regarding racism and bullying.

Suddenly, Aliu was no longer just a long-forgotten defenseman who’s played for 21 teams in six countries over the past 10 years. He was an agent of change coming hard on the heels of two incidents that hover, still, over the first half of the NHL season.

Long-time Canadian broadcaster Don Cherry was let go last month after calling immigrants “you people” during his Hockey Night in Canada segment. Then came Babcock’s firing and word he had embraced Marner by revealing a list he asked the player to write that ranked Leafs players by work ethic.

With hockey already buzzing, Aliu kicked things up a notch by accusing Peters, a Babcock protege, of openly using the ‘N-word’ in questioning Aliu’s choice of music in a locker room all those years ago.

It was later revealed Peters had kicked and punched his own players during his four years as coach Carolina.

Aliu’s allegations also led to Chicago Blackhawks assistant Marc Crawford being suspended for physically and verbally abusing his players at past stops as a head coach.

Aliu’s timing turned out to be perfect in sparking much-needed discussions.

“It seems different,” said Anson Carter, a former player and broadcaster. “It really does because it has the NHL’s attention.”
Clippers rally to knock off rival Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The Los Angeles Clippers, led by Kawhi Leonard, upended the Los Angeles Lakers, 111-106, in the Western Conference on Wednesday night at Staples Center.

Leonard scored 23 points, including eight in the fourth quarter, and had eight rebounds and seven assists to help the Clippers end the Lakers' four-game winning streak.

Paul George added 24 points and seven assists, while Patrick Beverley had 16 points and five rebounds.

The Clippers improved to 38-23 overall and 19-10 in the Western Conference, while the Lakers dropped to 42-20 and 19-12 in the Western Conference.

Leonard set an NBA record of 10 or more rebounds six times this season, tying the single-season record held by Tim Hardaway Jr.

Despite the loss, Lakers forward LeBron James had 25 points and 10 rebounds, connecting on 8 of 13 shots from the field. He also dished out five assists.

The Clippers took a 3-1 lead in the series with the win, as Leonard scored 50 points in the team's previous game.

Clippers guard Patrick Beverley, left, causes Lakers forward LeBron James to lose control of the ball in the closing moments of Wednesday's game in Los Angeles. The Clippers won 111-106.

76ers 121, Bucks 109: Joel Embiid outplayed Giannis Antetokounmpo in his team's first home Christmas game in 41 years, finishing with 31 points and 11 rebounds to help three-point happy Philadelphia beat Milwaukee.

Tobias Harris sank five threes, Josh Richardson and Furkan Korkmaz each had four and even Embiid hit three as part of Philly's season-high 21 threes (on 44 attempts) against a Bucks team that had the best record in the NBA.

Harris and Al Horford hit threes over the final 90 seconds to push back a late Bucks run, and the Sixers improved to 16-2 at home.

Pistons 112, Nuggets 100: Brandon Ingram scored 31 points, Derrick Favors grabbed 13 rebounds and visiting New Orleans halted Denver's seven-game winning streak.

The 9-2-0 Pelicans are now 2-0 against the Nuggets this season.

They stole the festive mood at the Pepsi Center as the Nuggets snapped an eight-game losing streak north of the border and became the first Atlantic Division opponent to win in Toronto in more than four years.

Toronto had gone an NBA-record 34 games without home losses to division foes. The Raptors' last home loss to an Atlantic team was a 111-109 defeat to the New York Knicks on Nov. 10, 2015.

Warriors 116, Rockets 104: Draymond Green scored 16 of his 20 points in the second half, Damion Lee had 22 points and a career-high 15 rebounds and host Golden State beat Houston.

D’Angelo Russell added 20 points, and Glenn Robinson III had 18 to help the Warriors win their third straight and end the Rockets’ four-game winning streak.

Despite committing 19 turnovers, The Pelicans pulled away late courtesy of the long-range shooting of Lonzo Ball and Ingram. They also out-rebounded the Nuggets, including 14 offensive boards.

New Orleans finished a four-game trip with a 3-1 mark, which includes consecutive wins for the first time in a month.

Celtics 118, Raptors 102: Jaylen Brown scored 30 points, Kemba Walker had 22 and Boston beat Toronto in the first Christmas Day game played in Canada.

Enes Kanter had 12 points and 11 rebounds as the Celtics snapped an eight-game losing streak north of the border.

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The Associated Press

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Michigan State's Willekes finishing up remarkable run

BY NOAH TRISTER
Associated Press

Almost a year to the day after breaking his leg, Kenny Willekes is ready for his Michigan State swan song.

As usual, he's trying to think of himself as an underdog.

"Always," he said. "That's the way you've got to play, that's the mentality I play with. I play with a chip on my shoulder regardless. I still feel like I got a lot to prove."

Willekes already holds a school record with 49½ tackles for loss in his career, and the senior defensive end has nine sacks this season. But the honor that best exemplifies his path at Michigan State may be the one he received earlier this month. Willekes was the 2019 winner of the Burlsworth Trophy, which goes to the nation's most outstanding player who began his career as a walk-on. Brandon Burlsworth was a walk-on who eventually became a standout at Arkansas. He died in a car accident 11 days after being drafted by the Indianapolis Colts in 1999. The award bearing his name has gone to players such as Baker Mayfield and Hunter Renfrow.

"It's pretty cool. Everyone loves the underdog. Everyone loves the underdog story," Willekes said.

"There's a lot of people that truly are the underdog, and they're working to get noticed, so the fact that they brought that trophy in to acknowledge some of those underdogs and show other walk-ons that there's a way to do it — it can be done, and here's an example of it."

Michigan State faces Wake Forest in the Pinstripe Bowl on Friday. For Willekes, it's a chance to finish his college career on a positive note — and another opportunity to move on from his difficult experience last year, when Willekes broke his leg in a 7-6 loss to Oregon in the Redbox Bowl.

After that injury, Willekes returned to Michigan State for his senior season. He remained a force on the defensive line. With one game to go, it would have been hard to blame him if he'd decided to sit out this bowl — especially after what happened last year. Instead, he's playing.

"Obviously something that crossed my mind," he said. A lot of people actually told me I shouldn't play in it, but I want to play in it. I want to play last game with my teammates." Willekes redshirted in 2015, and he hardly played the following season, but coach Mark Dantonio eventually saw the potential.

"Kenny is relentless. I started thinking he could be a player for us in the spring of 2017 when he finally got opportunities," Dantonio said. "He's a smart player, a tough player.

Willekes earned a scholarship that spring and had seven sacks in the 2017 season. Then he added 8½ more sacks in 2018. He was a first-team selection to the AP's All-Big Ten team in 2018, and although the injury was a sour way to finish that year, he was able to recover in time for this season.

The broken leg was just another obstacle for him to overcome, and although the Spartans have had their setbacks this season, Willekes moved up to fourth on the school's career list with 24½ sacks. He's only a half-sack behind Julian Peterson for third. Willekes broke his leg in a 7-6 loss to Oregon in the Redbox Bowl.

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teams relying more on lightning fast, shifty pass catchers with sticky hands.

“There’s no doubt things have changed,” he said.

It was only four years ago LSU was a run-heavy team with Leonard Fournette leading the charge. His 22 touchdowns were more than the 13 the Tigers passed for that 2015 season.

Now, Heisman Trophy winning quarterback Joe Burrow has LSU in Air Raid mode with his school-record 48 TD passes.

Tigers coach Ed Orgeron acknowledged his defense has had to adjust sometimes to their fast-paced attack.

“But we’re not going to slow down,” he said.

None of the four teams in the CFP are expected to slow down, not with the pieces in place to blow opponents out.

LSU’s Chase won the Biletnikoff award as the game’s top receiver. His 18 touchdowns tied the Southeastern Conference’s single season mark — one its seems likely he’ll obliterate with more games left.

“Ja’Marr is a special talent,” Orgeron said. “Not only is he fast, but he’s very strong.

“He loves to win the one-on-one matchup,” Orgeron continued. “He’s physical. He works hard. He catches everything. He’s got big hands, a route runner. I think he’s a phenomenal player.”

Chase said his route-running has improved considerably this season, particularly because he has gotten better at creating separation early when defensive backs try to disrupt his pass pattern.

“Executing coming off the line most of the time has been a big difference from last year to this year,” Chase said. “It’s more about footwork and hand-eye coordination.”

All the talented receivers in the CFP have shown great hand-eye coordination.

Perhaps the most talked-about play in Clemson’s 62-17 destruction of Virginia in the Atlantic Coast Conference title game was Higgins’ highlight-reel sideline grab — reaching out of bounds while keeping his toes inbounds to complete the catch.

“Every time I see that I say, ‘Man, I really caught that. It’s crazy,’” Higgins said with a smile.

Typically, Higgins or Ross (he had three TD catches in Clemson’s 44-16 blowout of Alabama to win the national title a year ago) has created enough space to catch passes from quarterback Trevor Lawrence.

Ross said teams can’t put extra defenders on him, given Clemson’s deep, talented group of playmakers.

Oklahoma’s Lamb also has been a nightmare for defenders, even with his frustration at times when he feels he is not getting the ball when he’s open.

Oklahoma coach Lincoln Riley said it’s Lamb’s competitiveness that stands out.

Lamb is “so invested in this team and sometimes he wants it so much you’ve got to take a deep breath and go on to the next one,” Riley said.

At Ohio State, Hill has already surpassed David Boston’s career mark with 195 catches. A reception against Clemson will give him another Buckeyes’ record with a catch in 49 straight games.

Second-year Buckeyes coach Ryan Day wasn’t at Ohio State for all of Hill’s five seasons, but appreciates what he has seen firsthand, saying Hill has consistently excelled.

“He’s been clutch,” Day said, “very, very productive.”

He’s not alone, and that could make for an entertaining College Football Playoff.
Lynch provides spark in Seattle morale

Did you know...

Seahawks running back Marshawn Lynch averaged 4.2 yards per carry last season with the Oakland Raiders.

SOURCE: Associated Press

Lynch’s provisions spark in Seattle morale

By Tim Booth

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — Marshawn Lynch played his last game for Seattle in January 2016, a playoff loss to Carolina, the idea of him ever wearing a Seahawks uniform again seemed preposterous.

There was Lynch on Tuesday, going through his first practice with Seattle in nearly four years, and potentially that playing a major role on Sunday against San Francisco with the NFC West title on the line.

“My heart is where his heart is. Is he in it and does he want to go for it, which he totally does,” Seattle coach Pete Carroll said. “He’s worked to prove that. I don’t doubt him one bit about that. He’s very sincere about how he presents himself to this game and it’s very important to him to be at his best and do well, and he’s going to do everything he can to make that happen.”

The arrival of Lynch was a spark of energy inside a Seattle locker room that was left reeling after Sunday’s 27-13 loss to Arizona. Not only were the Seahawks reeling over their Cardinals, they lost their most direct path to the No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs and their top two running backs to injury.

Lynch may end up being great, but he does need to prove he can open up the roster spots that have been waiting for him.

Lynch made a surprise media appearance after practice for all of 9 seconds, saying, “Happy holidays. Merry Christmas. You all have a great day. It’s a great feeling to be back.”

But he did expand on his decision in a video posted on his Beast Mode Productions YouTube channel after more than a year away, but that video was shot back in Seattle.

“What's uncertain is what Lynch will bring to the Seahawks,” Carroll said. “It’s going to be a very sincere about how he presents himself to this game and it’s very important to him to be at his best and do well, and he’s going to do everything he can to make that happen.”

The spark of energy inside Seattle’s backfield. He may end up being great in Seattle's backfield. He may end up looking like a 33-year-old-year who hasn't played in more than a year. But the idea of “Beast Mode” carrying the ball once again in a Seattle uniform galvanized not only the fan base, but a locker room of players who mostly haven’t had Lynch as a teammate.

Linebacker K.J. Wright, one of the few holdovers from Lynch’s last season, said some of the younger players seemed a bit in awe of Lynch being back in Seattle’s locker room.

“Only one person can pull this off and that’s No. 24,” Wright said. “Back in the building, it feels good. When I heard the news I was like, ‘Perfect.’ He’s just the ultimate teammate, cool dude, just ballin’. I’m glad to have him back.”

Seattle made official the signings of Lynch and Robert Turbin — the same backfield combo it used from 2012-14 — on Tuesday. The Seahawks placed injured running backs Chris Carson (hip) and C.J. Prosise (arm) on injured reserve to open up the roster spots that have been waiting for him.

Weekly statistics

AFC individual leaders

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AFC team statistics

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I was done,” he said. “I didn’t even
the postseason not long after he
ning he might be able to return for
raising it up.
from moving his arm forward or
ward, but it will not restrict him
practices. The harness keeps his arm
protect himself during team prac-
tices. That he’ll continue to wear that to
felt good during those workouts.
staff away for a while and said he’s
4-5, they’ll have to activate him
the injured reserve and add him
home-field advantage throughout
their path to the Super Bowl.
three important spots to ease
process and everything’s been
“We’ve worked extremely hard at
an injury that required surgery.
t o n  T e x a s  o n  T u e s d a y ,  c l e a r i n g
Turned to practice with the Hous-
No team has reached the Super
Bowl without a first-round bye
and playing for this city.”
back out there helping my team
field with everybody and to get
“I’m sure it’s not going to be
an every play type of thing, just
for the first one back,” he said. “I
don’t think that would be the best
surgery would be to watch it feel
over the next two weeks and get a
gauge for it before we go into that
situation. But we’ll see how it feels
a n  e v e r y  p l a y  t y p e  o f  t h i n g ,  j u s t

Six teams still battling for
Nine important spots to ease
their path to the Super Bowl.
While 10 teams have clinched
playoff spots entering Week 17,
only the Baltimore Ravens (13-
2) have earned a first-round bye.
The Ravens secured the AFC’s
No. 1 seed for the first time in franchise
history.
New England (12-3) and Kan-
sas City (11-4) are battling for the
No. 2 spot.
In the NFC, the top two seeds
are still up for grabs. San Fran-
cisco (12-3), Green Bay (12-3),
New Orleans (12-3) and Seattle
(12-3) each have a chance to clinch
home-field advantage throughout
the playoffs.
No team has reached the Super
Bowl without a first-round bye
since the 2012 Ravens. Eighteen
of the last 25 Super Bowl cham-
ionships have been either a No. 1
or No. 2 seed.
The 2010 Packers were the last
wild-card team to advance to the
Super Bowl. Over the last 25 years, 39
of the 50 teams that played in the Super
Bowl were either a No. 1 or a No.
2 seed.
Here’s a look inside more
numbers entering the final week of
the regular season:
Running Ravens: Lamar Jack-
on and Mark Ingram have the
Ravens on the verge of break-
ing the league’s seasons rushing
record. The Ravens have 3,073
yards rushing. The 1978 Patriots
had 3,075.
Jackson (1,206) and
Ingram (1,018) are the seventh
rushed seasons
and first since Carolina’s John-
than Stewart and DeAngelo Wil-
liams in 2009.

against Tennessee on Sunday.
That is the third time in four
seasons that the three-time NFL
Defensive Player of the Year has
had a major injury. He missed the
last 13 games of 2016 with a back
injury that required surgery and
played just five games in 2017 be-
fore breaking his leg. He played
all 16 games last season and was
a first-team All-Pro.
Watt said that recovering from
his most recent injury was much
easier than his rehabilitation from
his leg and back injuries.
(Those were) two massive,
massive things that really affect
movement,” he said. “But the nice
thing about this surgery was this
whole time I’ve been able to run.
I’ve been able to work out my legs,
agility drills, position drills.
So that has been a huge help
mentally and physically for this
recovery.”

Garoppolo faces Seattle
crowd noise for first time
CenturyLink is one of noisiest places for opponents

49ers quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo has a 20-5 record as a starter, but he has yet to play in Seattle.
The Seahawks have one of the loudest stadiums and are especially hard on young quarterbacks.

Garoppolo missed the 49ers’ game at Seattle last season with a torn ACL. His backup, Nick Mullens,
throw for 414 yards — the most a quarterback with 25 or fewer career starts has ever recorded against
the Seahawks in Seattle. Although Mullens handled the noise well, the 49ers lost 43-16.
How will Garoppolo fare?
“I can tell Jimmy it will be exactly like New Or-
leans was,” Shanahan said. “I’ve been in New Or-
leans a bunch, but it was different last time we were
there. It was as loud as I’ve ever been anywhere. So last
time in New Orleans was tied with how Seattle is. I
thought Garoppolo handled himself well there, and
expect him to do the same in Seattle.”

Garoppolo passed for 349 yards and four touch-
downs at New Orleans on Dec. 8, and the 49ers beat
the Saints 48-46. That was perhaps the best game of
Garoppolo’s career, and it showed him what to ex-
pect Sunday in Seattle.
“It’s going to be a 60-minute game,” Garoppolo
said. “You have to have your mind ready for that.
When you get to these big games, two good football
teams, it’s always going to go up until the last whis-
tle, and we’ve had multiple experiences this year
like that.”

The 49ers kept it close earlier this season at home
against the Seahawks before losing in overtime.
Garoppolo played poorly: His quarterback rating
was 66.2, he fumbled twice and the Seahawks
covered both times.
Garoppolo played that game without his top tar-
get, tight end George Kittle, and wide receiver Em-
manuel Sanders missed most of that game with broken
ribs. Sanders and Kittle will play Sunday in
Seattle, giving Garoppolo more weapons against the
hostile crowd.
“There’s a chance they’re going to be frickin’
off the top of the roof,” Seahawks coach Pete
Carroll said of the home crowd. “And there’s a re-
ally good chance it’s going to be as loud as it ever
gets and as exciting as it ever gets.”

There’s a really good chance it’s
going to be as loud as it
ever gets and as
exciting as it ever gets.

Pete Carroll
Seahawks coach

They’ve had as good of a 10-year run defensively
as probably anyone in the history of football,” 49ers
head coach Kyle Shanahan said of the Seahawks.
“You then add in the elements of their stadium,
where you can’t hear. When you can’t use cadence
and you’re going up against a very skilled team with
a pass rush, it’s extremely hard.”
Cedric is a quarterback’s snap count. Garop-
polo won’t be able to verbally communicate on the
field in Seattle, so the 49ers will have to use a silent
count, which the Seahawks’ pass rushers can time
and anticipate. Advantage: Seattle.
Blues enter holiday break in far different position from last year » NHL, Page 26

Clippers steal spotlight from Lakers in marquee Christmas game » NBA, Page 27

**COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF**

**Wide open**

Postseason matchups will showcase dynamic group of pass catchers

By Pete Iacobelli
Associated Press

A flick of the wrist, a slight shift of the shoulder and they're off. Talented receivers are a big part of this year's College Football Playoff. Never before have there been four teams in the CFP so prolific at scoring points. And it's in large part due to a growing — think 6-foot or taller — list of game-breaking receivers keen on quick cuts, one-handed grabs and the ability to catch almost any pass thrown their way.

"Not always sure how we do it," said Clemson's top receiver Tee Higgins. Neither is anyone else who has seen the impressive weekly grabs by Higgins and the other receivers in the CFP who have become must-see TV:

- **No. 1 LSU** has a pair of 1,000-yard receivers in Ja'Marr Chase and Justin Jefferson, who have combined for 32 touchdowns this season.
- **No. 2 Ohio State** features K.J. Hill and Chris Olave. The duo has 21 touchdown catches between them.
- **Third-ranked Clemson** pairs Higgins with Justyn Ross, a combination that has helped the defending national champions win their past 28 games.
- **Oklahoma** showcases CeeDee Lamb. All Lamb has done is average nearly 21 yards a catch and haul in 14 touchdown receptions.

It's the first time the four CFP participants enter the national semifinals averaging more than 43 points a game — which gives offense-crazed fans the promise of two potentially explosive showdowns when LSU faces Oklahoma in the Peach Bowl and Ohio State takes on Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl on Saturday.

CBS Sports analyst Gary Danielson has seen the evolution of the game go from big, physical bruisers getting 35 carries a contest to...