Reports: White House wanted USS McCain ‘out of sight’ during Trump’s visit to Japan

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The White House asked the Navy to keep a destroyer named for the late Sen. John S. McCain “out of sight” during President Donald Trump’s visit to the home of the 7th Fleet in Japan on Tuesday, according to reports by The Wall Street Journal and The Associated Press.

However, a 7th Fleet spokesman in an email Thursday to Stars and Stripes said McCain’s name, emblazoned across the tail of the ship, was not covered during Trump’s stop at Yokosuka Naval Base to speak to service-members aboard the USS Wasp.

Cmdr. Clay Doss said photos of a tarp over the McCain’s name that were referenced by Wednesday’s Journal report were taken last week.

SEE MCCAIN ON PAGE 3
Navy trades in situps for planking exercises

BY JOSHUA KARSTEN
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is doing away with situps and adding a planking exercise to the physical readiness test, the service’s top officer said in an early morning announcement Thursday.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jon Richardson and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith posted the announcement on the MCPON’s Facebook page after a morning exercise with the crew of the destroyer USS John Paul Jones in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

The service is also adding a rowing machine option for the cardio portion of the test, according to the announcement.

The post stated that the changes will take place in 2020 and were “based on feedback from the fleet and after testing and evaluation.”

“We’re going to eliminate the situps because those have been shown to do more harm than good,” Richardson said in the brief video.

Planking has several forms, but the common forearm plank requires the participant to hold a position similar to a pushup for an extended time, stressing the core muscles.

The Navy physical fitness assessment is broken down into two parts: the body composition assessment and a physical readiness test that grades sailors based on age and completion of pushups, situps and a 1.5-mile run or a different cardio option.

Official guidance has not yet been released but comments have already poured in on the MCPON’s Facebook page.

“Been waiting for this, situps are horrible for the back, planks are a much better measure of core strength,” a commenter said.

While the news was met mostly with cheers, the announcement left some questioning how long they will need to plank before the pushup and cardio portions.

“Planks followed by push-ups are going to be rough, but I am up for the challenge,” another commenter said.

The changes come as other services are revamping or reconsidering their fitness test standards.

The Marine Corps recently added a rowing option for troops who can’t run for medical reasons.

The Marine physical fitness test typically includes a 3-mile run, crunches and pullups or pushups. A separate combat fitness test includes a sprint, an ammunition can lift and a shuttle run involving various combat-related tasks.

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The Navy announced in April that Halter Marine received the contract to build the icebreaker since 1976. It said most work will take place in 2020 and were “based on feedback from the fleet and after testing and evaluation.”

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Rehabilitation and modernization of the Pascagoula shipyard will begin late this year. The Navy expects to deliver the icebreaker in 2024.

“The company’s new contract will enable our country to effectively fulfill missions in the world’s polar regions,” Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant said in a news release Tuesday. “This is a tremendous victory for our state. ... Mississippi once again has proven our deep and abiding commitment to the armed forces.”

Earlier this year, the Corps increased the minimum scores needed to pass both the physical fitness test and the combat fitness test, reduced rest time between events in the combat fitness test, and increased the minimum number of pullups most female Marines would have to do in the physical fitness test.

Meanwhile, the Army is pilot testing its new combat fitness test, which includes the deadlift, a standing power throw and other strength-related exercises. It announced earlier this month that it would develop alternative aerobic exercises for soldiers whose injuries prevent them from completing the new test, which is expected to roll out by fall 2020.

The Air Force is researching a method that would plug a value for an airman’s 1.5-mile run time into an equation that would include waist and height measurements.

Airmen are tested annually with a run, pushups and situps.

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**EUCOM eyes diplomats’ role in exercises**

**BY JOHN VANDIVER**

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — U.S. European Command leaders are developing new military war games in coordination with some unconventional partners: American diplomats in Europe.

"It provides the flexibility," said Air Force Maj. Gen. Christopher Wharton, head of EUCOM’s exercises and assessments division. "Before you get to any kinetic operations, there is going to be a whole-of-government approach that precedes everything."

During the past several years, EUCOM’s war games have grown in size and complexity, with thousands of troops taking part in exercises along NATO’s eastern flank in connection with concerns about a more assertive Russia. What’s gotten less attention is how commanders would coordinate with their civilian counterparts in an unfolding crisis.

Now, there is a push to bring U.S. Embassy teams in Europe into the training fold, with military and civilian officials coordinating their actions in mock crisis management scenarios, Healy said. That means bringing in ambassadors and embassy teams into exercise scenarios, where decisions must be made in real time.

"We need to be faster off the mark if something ever occurs and we need to carry that speed forward," Healy said.

"So that speed of communication, that speed of understanding, that speed of decision making, that speed of execution, is what it all goes down to."

Coordinating with embassies "is a fact of life, from the Baltics to Israel," Healy said. "We absolutely have to incorporate that into the exercises."

So far, embassies in Bulgaria, Greece and Italy have taken part in the exercises, and the effort is expected to expand to other diplomatic missions in the future.

The behind-the-scenes coordination with diplomats is the latest effort to up the EUCOM’s transfor- mation begun soon after Russia’s 2014 intervention in Ukraine, a move that prompted U.S. military commanders to focus training on combat, along with command and control skills.

These are second nature during the Cold War but had atrophied in the years since, officials said.

A high-profile aspect of that effort is EUCOM’s summer series of military exercises, now underway, that brings together air, sea and ground troops and numerous allied contingents that conduct flashy live-fire exercises and large-scale troop movements.

This summer, U.S. and allied forces will be in Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovenia and Ukraine for drills like Saber Guardian, which brings together 8,000 troops next week.

For EUCOM, a key aspect of the drills is ensuring the military can communicate up and down the chain of command when faced with high-end combat. Built into the exercises are cyber-attacks, and the need to operate in a degraded communication environment, which has become an area of focus as the Pentagon seeks to counter technologically sophisticated adversaries like Russia and China that have the ability to disrupt allied communication.

"For us, it’s imperative we work on and continually improve our ability to effectively communicate in C2, command and control," Healy said.

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**McCain: Late senator, Trump often foes**

FROM FRONT PAGE

The tarp was taken down before Trump arrived, he said.

"All ships remained in normal configuration during the president’s visit," Doss said.

According to the Journal report, a May 15 email from an unnamed U.S. Indo-Pacific Command official to Navy and Air Force officials dealing with preparations for Trump’s visit to Yokosuka stated: "USS John S. McCain needs to be out of sight."

The email’s existence was confirmed by the AP, which spoke to U.S. officials Wednesday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss private email correspondence.

Two U.S. officials told the AP that all the ships in the harbor were lined up for Trump’s visit, and they were visible from the Wasp. The officials said, however, that most of their names probably could not be seen since they were side by side but that the name of the McCain could be seen from the pier.

Asked if the tarp was meant to block Trump’s view of the ship, the officials said it had been placed on the ship for maintenance and removed for the visit.

The president and McCain — a former Navy pilot who survived five and a half years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam — were often political foes. During the 2016 election campaign, Trump said McCain was "not a war hero," and that "I like people who weren’t captured."

Trump took periodic swipes at McCain after his August death from brain cancer, sometimes citing the late senator’s vote in July 2017 against legislation to repeal the Obama-era Affordable Care Act.

"I’m not a fan of John McCain and that’s fine," Trump told Fox News in March.

The USS John S. McCain was originally named for the late senator’s grandfather, naval aviator and World War II Pacific commander Adm. John S. McCain Sr., and his father, former Pacific Command chief Adm. John S. McCain Jr.

The late Sen. McCain’s name was added to the ship in July 2018.

It is still undergoing repairs at Yokosuka for extensive damage caused by a 2017 collision near Singapore that killed 10 sailors.

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Trump mentioned a half-dozen warships in his Memorial Day speech to servicemembers aboard the Wasp at Yokosuka, but not the McCain.

After the Journal’s story was published, Trump tweeted: “I was not informed about anything having to do with the Navy Ship USS John S. McCain during my recent visit to Japan. Nevertheless, @FLOTOS and I loved being with our great Military Men and Women — what a spectacular job they do!”

In Jakarta, Indonesia, on Thursday morning, acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan told reporters, “When I read about it this morning, it was the first I heard about it.” Asked if he would investigate, Shanahan said he would need to know more first.

McCain’s daughter, Meghan, tweeted Wednesday that Trump will “always be deeply threatened by the greatness of my dad’s incredible life.”

She added, “There is a lot of criticism of how much I speak about my dad, but nine months since he passed, Trump won’t let him RIP. So I have to stand up for him.

"It makes my grief unbearable."
**Statue to inspire combat control campus**

**By Corey Dickstein  
Stars and Stripes**

WASHINGTON — The lifesized statue of Master Sgt. John Chapman, the Air Force’s lone post-9/11 recipient of the Medal of Honor, will be the image that students and cadets see as they enter or leave the service’s school for future combat controllers.

The statue of the bearded, combat-outfitted Chapman was set to be unveiled Thursday morning at the service’s Combat Control School. The ceremony was moved from the day before due to the weather. Chapman’s family was present to witness the dedication.

Chapman, 32, was killed in combat in March 2002 in Afghanistan.

The statue, which is situated at the entrance of the 352nd’s headquarters building on Pope Army Airfield at Fort Bragg, N.C., is a display of the Medal of Honor that Chapman’s family was present to witness the dedication.

The Chapman statue will sit atop an entry into the 352nd’s headquarters building on Pope Army Airfield at Fort Bragg, N.C., alongside a display of the Medal of Honor that Chapman’s family was present to witness the dedication.

Chapman was the first friend Bain would lose in combat.

“I just glad (Chapman) will be here again,” the major said of the new statue. “He was unique. It’s kind of weird to have the statue of the bearded, combat-outfitted Chapman was set to be unveiled Thursday morning at the service’s Combat Control School. The ceremony was moved from the day before due to the weather. Chapman’s family was present to witness the dedication.

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China’s grip on the global market for rare-earth metals gives it the ability to target American weaponry in its trade war with the U.S.

Everything from Lockheed Martin Corp.’s F-35 Joint Strike Fighter jet to guided missiles and lasers used to determine targets rely on the elements to perform key functions. China accounts for as much as 95% of global output and the U.S. relies on the Asian nation for 80% of its rare-earths requirement.

“Rare earths, which despite the name are more widely available than precious metals in the Earth’s crust, have been thrust into the spotlight by a series of media reports in China signaling Beijing is gearing up to use the minerals as a counter in its trade battle with Washington. Tit-for-tat tariffs on a slew of commodities including soybeans, natural gas and aluminum have already roiled global markets and threatened global economic growth.

“The fact that rare earths are on the menu again means China is using its most powerful political tool in the resources space,” said Simon Moores, managing director at Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, an industry researcher. “Rare earths are a niche specialty and critical to the Defense Department.”

The U.S. imported $160 million worth of rare-earth metals and compounds in 2018, an increase of 17% from the prior year but down from $519 million of refined rare-earths in 2012, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

Each F-35 Lightning II aircraft — considered one of the world’s most sophisticated, maneuverable and stealthy fighter jets — requires approximately 920 pounds of rare-earth materials, according to a 2013 report from the U.S. Congressional Research Service. It’s the Pentagon’s most expensive weapons system and the first fighter designed to serve all three branches of the U.S. military.

Rare earths including yttrium and terbium are used for laser targeting and weapons in Future Combat Systems vehicles, according to the Congressional Research Service report. Other uses are for Stryker armored fighting vehicles, Predator drones and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The Pentagon didn’t immediately respond when asked about the issue. The Department of Defense accounts for about 1% of total U.S. consumption of rare-earth metals, according to a 2016 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office. Still, “rare earths are essential to the production, sustainment, and operation of U.S. military equipment. Reliable access to the necessary material, regardless of the overall level of defense demand, is a bedrock requirement for DOD,” the GAO said.

The elements are also found in iPhones, electric vehicles and wind turbines, and rare-earth permanent magnets are used in miniature motors or generators that allow windshield wipers, electric windows and power steering to function.

While China uses rare earths “to strike fear into the heart of Washington, D.C. politicians,” Moores said his research firm has been trying to ease concerns over its other uses in areas. Growth in rare-earths consumption is flat, and lithium-ion batteries — which use other critical raw materials that China is the biggest exporter of — will grow tenfold over the next decade, he said.

Still, the U.S. does still face a shortage. While America mines about 3,000 to 4,000 metric tons of rare-earth concentrates each month, it exports almost all of that to China, leaving it entirely dependent on supplies from abroad.

“The headline is that this is a trade war, but what if longer term, beneath the trade issues we get locked into a war for technology domination in the 21st century? There are no rulebooks here,” said Dan McGroarty, the founder of Carmot Strategic Group, a consulting company that advises on rare-earths and critical minerals.
**WAR ON TERRORISM**

**Saudi Arabia asks nations to respond to Iran**

**By Aya Batrawy**
**Associated Press**

JIDDAH, Saudi Arabia — Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister on Thursday urged Muslim nations to confront with “all means of force and firmness” recent attacks in the Persian Gulf that U.S. and some Arab officials have blamed on Iran.

Ibrahim al-Assaf made the comments at a preparatory meeting of foreign ministers of the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, or OIC, ahead of a trio of summits in the kingdom’s holy city of Mecca.

Saudi Arabia hastily called for the meetings in response to the escalating tensions with its key rival, Iran.

That King Salman could quickly bring regional leaders and heads of state to Mecca so rapidly reflects the kingdom’s weight in the region and its desire to project a united position on Iran.

The summits coincide with the final days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a time of intense worship when Muslims believe the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad some 1,400 years ago.

Saudi Arabia will seek to use the optics of the Mecca gatherings to send a clear and powerful message to Iran, which is also a member of the OIC.

In his opening remarks, al-Assaf said the alleged sabotage of oil tankers off the coast of the United Arab Emirates and a drone attack on a Saudi oil pipeline by Yemeni’s Iran-backed Houthis reflect in recent weeks threaten the global economy and endanger regional and international security.

“We should confront it with all means of force and firmness,” he said.

Upon their arrival at the airport, each leader was shown Houthis military items, such as a destroyed drone, missiles and mortar shells used in the conflict with the Saudis. The leaders were given a brief explanation of the weapons on display by Col. Turki al-Maliki, spokesman for the Saudi-led coalition at war in Yemen.

An Iranian official was at the OIC meeting where al-Assaf spoke Thursday, but Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif did not attend.

Iran denies being involved in the attacks, which come amid heightened tensions between Tehran and the U.S. The crisis has its root in the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw last year from Iran’s nuclear deal with world powers.

The first of the three summits will start with a meeting of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council on Thursday evening.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser Al Thani was expected to attend, making it the highest-level visit to Saudi Arabia by a Qatari official since 2017, when the kingdom and three other Arab states cut off ties with the tiny energy-rich Gulf state over its foreign policies.

The GCC meeting will be immediately followed with an emergency summit of the 22-nation Arab League, minus Syria whose membership remains suspended.

The third and final summit, on Friday, is expected to focus largely on Palestinian statehood and independence. It will bring together leaders from the 57-nation OIC, which is headquartered in Saudi Arabia.

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**6 killed in blast near academy in Kabul**

**Associated Press**

KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide bomber targeting a military academy in Kabul killed at least six people and wounded six others on Thursday, the Interior Ministry said.

No militant group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing but both the Taliban and Islamic State militants regularly target Afghan forces. The Mashal Fahim academy, located in a western Kabul neighborhood, has been attacked in the past.

The Interior Ministry said a soldier had noticed a suspicious person and as he approached him, the attacker detonated his explosives near the academy.

If the bomber had come closer, the number of casualties could have been much higher, a security official said adding that the academy cadets were getting ready to leave for their weekend. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations. Police quickly sealed off the attack site.

Ferdus Faramarz, spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said an investigation was underway.

Last year, ISIS militants attacked the academy — sometimes called “Sandhurst in the Sand” in reference to the famous British school — and killed at least 11 troops. It’s named for Mohamed Fahim, the country’s late vice president and a military commander of the Northern Alliance that fought the Taliban.

It was inaugurated in 2013 and British troops in Afghanistan oversaw the establishment of the academy’s officer school and training program.

The academy was also the site where Army Maj Gen. Harold J. Greene lost his life — the highest-ranking U.S. military officer to be killed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Greene, then deputy commander of NATO’s transition force in the country, was shot and killed by an Afghan soldier in a so-called “insider attack” that was later claimed by the Taliban in August 2014.

Separately, the Interior Ministry said Thursday that Afghan special forces rescued at least 28 people from a Taliban-run prison in Nawbahar district in southern Zabul province in the morning hours. It said 16 civilians and 12 members of the security forces were freed in the operation, which involved a gunbattle with the Taliban that also left two insurgents dead.

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**By Aya Batrawy**
**Associated Press**

A man reads a newspaper with pictures of Saudi King Salman, left, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the press center for the upcoming Arab and Islamic summits in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, on Thursday.

BY AYA BATRAWY

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**Top US, Russian diplomats discuss ending Syrian war**

**By Edith M. Lederer**
**Associated Press**

UNITED NATIONS — Top U.S. and Russian diplomats discussed the step-by-step implementation of a 2012 road map to U.N.-supervised elections in Syria that could allow a Syrian government “to move back into the international community,” the U.S. envoy for the war-torn country said Wednesday.

Ambassador James Jeffrey’s comments indicated a new U.S.-Russian engagement on efforts to end the eight-year Syrian conflict that has killed more than 400,000 people and lift Syria’s isolation in the West and elsewhere.

Jeffrey cautioned that “this is just a potential way forward.”

He noted there have been no steps such as a cease-fire in the last rebel-held stronghold in Idlib that the Trump administration is demanding or the convening of a committee to draft a new constitution for Syria as called for in the road map.

“Such steps ‘would give us confidence that the (Bashar) Assad regime actually understands what it must do to help end this conflict,’ he told reporters after a closed Security Council meeting on Syria’s political situation.

Jeffrey, the U.S. special representative for Syria engagement, spoke of discussions that he and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi in mid-May with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

“In terms of working with the Russians in Sochi, we believe that there is a sincere interest in finding a solution to this conflict,” Jeffrey said. “But this is going to take hard decisions — hard decisions not only by us but hard decisions by the Russians and hard decisions, most of all, by the Syrian regime.”

The June 30, 2012, Geneva agreement on a blueprint for peace in Syria was approved by representatives of the U.N., Arab League, European Union, Turkey and all five veto-wielding Security Council members — the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain.

If there is no cease-fire in Idlib, Jeffrey said, the U.S. is looking at “a set of primarily economic and diplomatic steps that will continue to keep this regime under pressure — and as long as the Idlib situation continues, we will look for ways to heighten that pressure.”
IRBIL, Iraq — It was looking to be a good year for farmers across parts of Syria and Iraq. After years of conflict, the harvest test in generations, it brought rich, golden fields of wheat and barley, giving farmers in this war-torn region reason to rejoice.

But good news is short-lived in this part of the world, where residents of the two countries struggle to cope with seemingly never-ending violence and turmoil amid Syria's civil war and attacks by remnants of Islamic State. Now, even in areas where conflict has subsided, fires have been raging in farmers' fields, depriving them of valuable crops.

The blazes have been blamed on defeated ISIS militants seeking to avenge their losses, or on Syrian government forces battling to rout other armed groups. Thousands of acres of wheat and barley fields in both Syria and Iraq have been scorched by the fires during the harvest season, which runs until mid-June.

"The life that we live here is already bitter," said Hussain Attiya, a farmer from Topzawa Kakayi in northern Iraq. "If the situation continues like this, I would say that we will stay here.

"I plant 500 to 600 acres every year. Next year, I won’t be able to do that because I can’t stay here and guard the land day and night.

ISIS militants have a history of implementing a “scorched earth policy” in areas from which they retreat or where they are defeated.

It’s “a means of inflicting a collective punishment on those left behind,” said Emmal Beals, an independent Syria researcher.

ISIS militants claimed responsibility for burning crops in their weekly newsletter, al-Nabaa, saying they targeted farms belonging to senior officials in six Iraqi provinces and in Kurdish-administered eastern Syria, highlighting the persistent threat from the group even after its territorial defeat.

"It seems that it will be a hot summer that will burn the pockets of the apostates as well as their hearts as they burned the Muslims and their homes in the past years," the article said.

Hundreds of acres of wheat fields around Kirkuk in northern Iraq were set on fire. Several wheat fields in the Daquq district in southern Kirkuk burned for three days straight last week.

Farmers in the village of Ali Sartoq, within Daquq's borders, struggled to put out the blazes. The militants had laid land mines in the field, so when help arrived in the village of Topzawa Kakayi, the explosives went off and seriously wounded two people, according to the local agriculture department and farmers.

In eastern Syria's Raqqa province, farmers battled raging fires with pieces of cloth, sacks and water trucks. Piles of hay burned and black smoke billowed above the fields.

"It doesn’t need a bomb or fire," he said.

Estimates based on local farmers suggest that nearly 25,000 acres in Raqqa province were set on fire, valued at $9 million, he said.

But state media blamed the crop fires in Iraq and Syria on ISIS, ruin Iraqi, Syrian harvests.
Levees strained as Arkansas River stays at record levels

By Hannah Grabenstein
Associated Press

FORT SMITH, Ark. — The Arkansas River held steady at record levels Thursday morning, putting enormous pressure on aging levees and offering little relief to areas enduring historic flooding.

In Fort Smith, Arkansas' second-largest city, officials expected hundreds of homes to flood while in nearby Van Buren, officials warned that a levee protecting a mostly rural area was "showing signs of significant leakage and deterioration."

"I am never going to enforce a law that's unconstitutional, and furthermore, especially not one that targets women and girls," said David Cooke, chief prosecutor in Macon, Ga., about my politics, but let me ask you, do you want me to use the authority of my office to violate the constitutional rights of somebody?" he said during a recent phone interview.

The pushback highlights the potential for uneven enforcement of abortion laws within states.

Several prosecutors pushing back on enforcing new state anti-abortion laws

By Sudhin Thanawala
Associated Press

ATLANTA — New state abortion laws likely to become bogged down in legal challenges face another potential obstacle: prosecutors who refuse to enforce them.

The Associated Press reached out to nearly two dozen district attorneys across seven states, and several said they would not file charges against doctors who violate the laws. Even a few who left open potentially charging doctors said they would not prosecute women for having an abortion, which some legal observers say could be a possibility under Georgia's law.

 Mueller said Wednesday that charging Trump with any crime in court was "not an option" because of federal rules, but he used his first public remarks on the Russia investigation to emphasize that he did not exonerate the president.

"If we had had confidence that the president clearly did not commit a crime, we would have said so," Mueller declared.

The special counsel's remarks on indicting Trump marked a counter to criticism, including by Attorney General William Barr, that Mueller should have reached a determination on whether the president illegally tried to obstruct the probe by taking actions such as firing FBI Director James Comey.

He said he believed such an action would be unconstitutional.

 Mueller did not use the word "impeachment" but said it was the job of Congress, not the criminal justice system, to hold the president accountable for any wrongdoing.

 Mueller said his work was complete and he was resigning to return to private life. Under pressure to testify before Congress, Mueller did not rule it out. But he seemed to warn lawmakers that they would not be pulling more detail out of him. His report is his testimony, he said.

Several prosecutors pushing back on enforcing new state anti-abortion laws

By Eric Tucker, Michael Balsamo and Chad Day
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump blasted special counsel Robert Mueller on Thursday, calling him a "never Trumper" who led a biased investigation on Russia's interference in the 2016 election and failed to investigate his political opponents who didn't want Trump to be president.

The president also offered mixed messages on Russia's efforts to help him defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton, first tweeting that he had "nothing to do with Russia helping me get elected," then minutes later, telling reporters, "Russia did not help me get elected."

Trump said Mueller, who is a Republican, was "conflicted" and should have investigated law enforcement officials who the president claimed tried to undermine him.

"Robert Mueller should have never been chosen," Trump said, adding falsely that Mueller wanted the FBI director job, but the president told him no.

Mueller, who was appointed special counsel by Trump's Justice Department, was previously FBI director, appointed by Republican President George W. Bush.

Special counsel Robert Mueller speaks at the Department of Justice in Washington on Wednesday about the Russia investigation.

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The pushback highlights the vast authority of elected prosecutors that prosecutorial discretion is important.

It does not allow prosecutors to ignore whole cloth the laws that our legislature passes. To do so would violate their oath to enforce the laws as well as their ethical obligations to do the same," he said.
Police chiefs call for meeting over immigrant issues

BY TOM JACKMAN
The Washington Post

MIAMI — The police chiefs of America's largest cities on Thursday called on the federal Department of Homeland Security to meet with them as their department struggles with the influx of immigrants from the southern border.

The chiefs said they want to hear how federal immigration authorities plan to deal with relocating immigrants to their cities and how they will handle "sanctuary cities," as they have come to be called. The chiefs also want a voice in the federal policymaking process.

The Major Cities Chiefs Association, comprising the chiefs and sheriffs of the 69 largest law enforcement agencies in the United States, formed an immigration working group at its meeting here, led by Houston police Chief Art Acevedo, who has openly opposed a Texas law banning sanctuary cities.

Acevedo and other chiefs here said they do not take immigration status into account when performing their duties, only whether someone is breaking the law or has been a crime victim. They see immigration enforcement as a federal responsibility, not one for local police.

"From our perspective, there is no such thing as a 'sanctuary city' in terms of taking action against those who would do harm to members of our communities," Acevedo said in an interview.

Police have long felt that taking on immigration enforcement by routinely checking a person's status will deter immigrants from reporting crime or cooperating with investigations. Acevedo said there had been a nearly 43 percent drop in reporting of sexual assaults in Houston by its Hispanic community in 2017.

The chiefs' working group wants to discuss the federal policy on Immigration and Customs Enforcement civil detainers for undocumented immigrants, which some chiefs told Acevedo that their local social service agencies are being overwhelmed by busloads of suddenly relocated immigrants.

"There needs to be a sense of urgency, when we see asylum-seekers that are being distributed throughout the country," Acevedo said. "We need to know what is the plan and what is the impact on public safety. We need to be part of the discussion because while immigration enforcement is a federal issue, these decisions have an impact on the safety and security of the American people, and that is our primary responsibility."

Report: Pollution is 'significant' problem at 401 national parks

BY MICHAEL MCGOUGH
The Sacramento (Calif.) Bee

More than 96% of national parks assessed in a recent report are "plagued by significant air pollution problems," and some of California's most iconic parks are among the most troubled, according to one of the nation's largest nonprofit conservation associations.

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The worst days are usually in the national Preserve — measured four California parks — Sequoia, Kings Canyon, Joshua Tree national preserve and Mojave National Preserve — measured "unhealthy" air conditions for visitors and park rangers more than two months out of the year. The worst days are usually in the summer.

"Much of the air pollution in these parks comes from vehicles and the agriculture industry in the San Joaquin Valley — one of the most polluted areas in the nation — where residents are frequently exposed to unsafe air," the report reads.

Unhealthy air was measured in NPCA's report in terms of high ozone levels. Air pollution at those four California parks is at times worse than that found in cities like Los Angeles and Houston, the report claims.

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The report claims that temperatures at national parks are rising at double the rate of the U.S. as a whole, "threatening the very existence of nameplate features at Glacier, Joshua Tree and Saguaro National Parks."

Climate change, the report says, is "intensifying flooding, drought and wildfires." All three have had an especially large presence in California over the past decade.

NPCA's report also alludes to hazy skies at Yosemite and Sequoia National Park, the latter of which frequently sees days where visibility is cut down by 90 miles due to air pollution.

The study says unhealthy air is a "significant" problem at 85% of the 417 parks monitored; harm to nature at 88%; hazy skies at 89%; and climate change at 89%.

In proposing possible solutions for those issues, the report sharply criticizes Trump administration environmental policies for reversing progress made by the Clean Air Act, first implemented in 1963.

"The Trump administration has grossly limited public process and environmental review of its oil and gas leases with fast-tracking development proposals, including one from the Bureau of Land Management in California that would open 1.6 million new acres to drilling."

The recent BLM plan in question could have an impact at Yosemite, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and other California parks, NPCA says.

NPCA is a nonpartisan advocacy group on behalf of national parks, with more than 1.3 million members and supporters, according to its website.

NPCA's Polluted Parks report is subtitled, "How America is Failing to Protect Our National Parks, People and Planet from Air Pollution."

Its final section notes that solutions currently being implemented include a number of pilot programs, including Yosemite's Zero Landfill Initiative, an effort to significantly reduce landfill waste.

The data used in the report comes from the National Park Service and Environmental Protection Agency.
**Dems’ policy blitz lacking on immigration**

**By Will Weissert**  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Democratic presidential contenders are in a feverish battle to one-up each other with ever more ambitious plans to beat back global warming, curb gun violence, offer universal health care coverage, slash student debt and preserve abortion rights. Largely left out of the policy parade: immigration.

The field of 24 candidates is united in condemning President Donald Trump’s support for hard-line immigration tactics, particularly his push to wall off as much of the U.S. border with Mexico as possible, rules for separating families for refuges and since-suspended efforts to separate immigrant children from their parents. But only two contenders — former Obama Housing Secretary and former Rep. Beto O’Rourke — have released detailed, written policies addressing the future of the immigration system.

The dearth of formal policy plans signals the challenge that immigration could pose for Democrats. White House hopefuls can easily rally their bases with broad, passionate attacks on what they see as Trump’s failures, but it’s riskier to grapple with the complexity of immigration.

Trump, meanwhile, has tapped into fervor around immigration to energize his own supporters and has worked to seize on it as an issue of strength — territory Democrats risk ceding to him ahead of 2020 if they don’t find a way to go deeper.

“For the most part, the Democrats aren’t even trying to make the case to a centrist voter of what a reasonable immigration plan would look like,” said Ali Noorani, executive director of the Washington-based National Immigration Forum, which works with faith leaders and law enforcement to promote the value of immigration. Undecided voters “know that Trump’s simplistic approach to this isn’t working,” Noorani said, “but they’ve got nowhere else to go.”

The issue isn’t likely to recede as the presidential campaign intensifies. Much of the Democratic field is heading this weekend to California, home to the largest Hispanic population in the U.S., for a state party convention. Meanwhile, the U.S. Border Patrol has said it plans to fly hundreds of immigrant families out of Texas as it struggles to process the large numbers of Central American families that are reaching the U.S. border with Mexico and asking for asylum.

Castro called in April for ending criminalization of illegal border crossings entirely. O’Rourke didn’t go that far in a plan he unveiled Wednesday, instead pledging to use an executive order to mandate that only people with criminal records be detained for crossing into the U.S. illegally.

O’Rourke also promised to send thousands of immigration attorneys to the border to help immigrants with asylum cases while wiping out Trump policies separating immigrant families and banning travel to the U.S. from several mostly Muslim countries.

Other 2020 hopefuls have mostly focused on criticizing Trump rather than offering deeply articulated alternatives. Former Vice President Joe Biden, the early Democratic front-runner, has called Trump administration immigration policies an example of the president’s “demonization” of entire groups of people, but he hasn’t made the topic a top issue.

New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand has laid out a case for “comprehensive immigration reform” on her campaign website while Sens. Amy Klobuchar, of Minnesota; Cory Booker, of New Jersey; and Kamala Harris, of California, have all previously voted for or sponsored plans to loosen immigration rules.

Then there’s Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, who has issued a steady stream of sweeping plans on such issues as forgiving nearly all student debts and offering free tuition at public universities but hasn’t released a written immigration proposal. Speaker Chris Hayden noted Wednesday that Warren has previously praised Castro’s plan and said the senator supports an immigration overhaul that creates a pathway to citizenship for immigrants in the country illegally, including those who came to the U.S. as children.

The Trump administration has proposed its own overhaul that would bolster border security while creating a “merit-based” immigration system prioritizing people with in-demand job skills rather than relatives of people already in the U.S. But that was last month’s symbolic, and the president has repeatedly returned to his calls for extending the U.S.-Mexico border wall and imposing stricter immigration policies to excite his base.

Feelings on the issue, meanwhile, are far from settled. About 54% of national voters said they disapproved of Trump’s handling of immigration policies, compared with 45% who approved, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the 2018 national electorate.

**Sanders: My ideas now seen as mainstream**

**By Scott Sonner**  
Associated Press

RENO, Nev.  — Sen. Bernie Sanders said Wednesday many of the campaign themes his critics dismissed as too radical when he ran for president in 2016 are now viewed as much more mainstream, including “Medicare for all.”

The Vermont Democrat told a crowd of more than 500 at an outdoor rally in downtown Reno that many said he was living in a “dream world” when he campaigned four years ago for a minimum wage of $15 per hour.

Since then, he said seven states have adopted that minimum wage and the U.S. House will vote in the coming months on a proposal to make it the national standard.

“The message there is that when an idea seems so radical, it can happen if people stand together and fight for that idea,” he said to cheers.

Sanders said many states also have embraced his call to “end the so-called war on drugs” and legalize recreational use of marijuana.

“For years ago, when I was here in Nevada I talked about the need to legalize marijuana. Four years ago, that was seen as a radical idea. Not so radical today,” he said.

Sanders said polls also show more and more people support “Medicare for all” — the plan for a national, single-payer health care insurance program that he campaigned for when he lost the 2016 Democratic nomination to Hillary Clinton.

“A lot has changed in four years,” he said.

Sanders was popular with progressives in the early caucus state in 2016 and carried northern Nevada’s Washoe County the last time around, including Reno and Sparks. He lost Nevada’s statewide Democratic caucus vote to Hillary Clinton, 55% to 45%, based largely on her strength in Las Vegas.

“The last time we came pretty close to winning Nevada. This time we’re going to win Nevada,” he said.

The crowd at Wednesday’s event was larger than the 200 to 300 people who turned out for his presidential campaign rallies in Reno in recent months for Democratic Sens. Kamala Harris, of California, and Cory Booker, of New Jersey, and former Texas Rep. Beto O’Rourke.

Democratic presidential candidate Julian Castro, left, and Beto O’Rourke are the only 2020 contenders who have released detailed, written policies on immigration.

Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Bernie Sanders speaks during a campaign rally at City Plaza in downtown Reno, Nev., on Wednesday.

Gillibrand picks up NH endorsement

**Associated Press**

WASHINGTON — Democratic presidential candidate Kirsten Gillibrand has picked up her first New Hampshire endorsement, announcing that state Rep. Sue Ford says she’s “the best person” for the White House.

Ford released by Gillibrand’s campaign, Ford says the New York senator “cares for New Hampshire families and her own.”

She calls Gillibrand a “four-term member of the Legislature from Grafton. She says Gillibrand “will always fight for the silenced, marginalized or ignored.”

New Hampshire holds the nation’s first presidential primary on Feb. 11, eight days after the leadoff Iowa caucuses.

Gillibrand has continued to lag behind Vice President Joe Biden, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and other top 2020 Democratic presidential candidates in early polls despite repeated visits to Iowa and New Hampshire.
Body believed to be missing Utah girl is found; uncle charged

By Emily Wagster Pettus
Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — A body believed to be a 5-year-old Utah girl was found Wednesday less than a block from her home, bringing a wide-ranging search to a grim close five days after the child was taken from her home and killed by her uncle, police said.

The discovery came hours after Whipple was charged with aggravated murder and other counts.

Cochran, longtime senator, dies at 81

By Emily Wagster Pettus
Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Former U.S. Sen. Thad Cochran, who served 45 years in Washington and was a champion of the state's economic development, has died at 81.

Cochran's chief of staff, Brad White, said Cochran died Thursday at a veterans' nursing home in Oxford, Miss.

"We've never known a more powerful man, nor a more humble man — a true Southern gentleman that loved the state of Mississippi," White said.

Cochran was elected to the U.S. House in 1972. Eight years later, he won a Senate seat in 1978, he became the first Republican since Reconstruction to win statewide office in Mississippi.

He led the Appropriations Committee in 2005-06, channeling more than $100 billion to Mississippi and other Gulf Coast states for Hurricane Katrina recovery after the 2005 storm, and regained the committee chairmanship in January 2015, when the GOP again took control of the Senate.

Cochran won reelection in 2014, but announced in 2018 that he was retiring because of his health.

Republican U.S. Sen. Roger Wicker, of Mississippi, said Thursday that Cochran was "a dear personal friend for decades."

"Thad Cochran was a giant in the United States Senate and one of the greatest champions Mississippi has ever known," said Wicker, who was elected to the U.S. House in 1994 and has served in the Senate since 2007.

"When Thad Cochran left the Senate, I was reminded of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who wrote, 'Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime, and departing leave behind us footprints on the sands of time,'" Wicker said.

Cochran was also a big practitioner of earmarks — home state projects, economic development grants and university research dollars.

GOP leaders bashed earmarking, but Cochran backed Navy shipbuilding efforts in 2015. In-galls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, which makes Navy ships, has long been one of Mississippi's largest private employers.

Mild-mannered and known for working across party lines, Cochran won most of his reelection campaigns easily. However, he struggled in 2014 amid a Republican primary challenge from state Sen. Chris McDaniel, a tea party favorite who had financial support from libertarian-leaning national groups that criticized Cochran as a big spender.

The campaign turned ugly as his opponent's supporters photogographed Cochran's bedridden wife, without permission, in the nursing home where she had lived a dozen years with dementia. Images of Rose Cochran were posted briefly online in a video that attempted to show Cochran was having an inappropriate relationship with one of his longtime staff members, Kay Webber — an accusation that Cochran denied.

Weeks after four men were arrested and charged in the photo case, Cochran placed second, behind McDaniel, in a three-person Republican primary. Cochran defeated McDaniel in the runoff, but McDaniel never conceded. Instead, McDaniel filed a lawsuit trying to overturn the results.


Rose Cochran died in December 2014, weeks after the election and before her husband was sworn in for his seventh six-year term in the Senate.

On May 23, 2015, Thad Cochran married Webber in a small ceremony in Gulfport, Miss.

"Thad Cochran was born in the small town of Pontotoc, in north Mississippi. He spent three years in the Navy before moving to Jackson, where he was in a private law practice for seven years before being elected to the House."

The lawsuit asks a judge to prohibit Mississippi from using its current requirements in the 2019 elections. It does not suggest an alternative way of determining winners, but former U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder said a judge could order Mississippi to do what most states already do — "count all the votes and the person who gets the greatest number of votes wins."

Holder is chair of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee, whose affiliated foundation is providing financial and legal backing for the lawsuit.

The committee gave The Associated Press a copy of the lawsuit before it was filed.

"The election system in Mississippi has really kind of perpetuated a history of racial discrimination that finally has come to an end," Holder told the AP.

Mississippi Republican House Speaker Philip Gunn, who's named as a defendant in the lawsuit, declined to comment. The longtime chairman of the House Elections Committee, Republican Rep. Bill Denny, of Jackson, said that during his 32 years in office, there has been no serious effort to change Mississippi's method of electing statewide officials.

"I'm comfortable with it," Denny said of the current system.
Girl believed to be tiniest newborn weighed just 8.6 ounces

By Julie Watson

SAN DIEGO — When she was born, the baby girl weighed about the same as an apple.

A San Diego hospital on Wednesday revealed the birth of the girl and said she is believed to be the world's tiniest surviving micro-preemie, who weighed just 8.6 ounces when she was born in December.

The girl was born 23 weeks and three days into her mother's 40-week pregnancy. Doctors told her father after the birth that he would have about an hour with his daughter before she died.

“She's a miracle, that's for sure,” said Kim Norby, another nurse featured in the video.

Saybie, born at 23 weeks and three days, is believed to be the world's tiniest surviving baby.

BY JULIE WATSON

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Saybie, born at 23 weeks and three days, is believed to be the world’s tiniest surviving baby.

The hospital said the girl officially weighed 7 grams less than the previous tiniest baby, who was born in Germany in 2015. In the video produced by the hospital, the mother described the birth as the scariest day of her life.

She said she was taken to the hospital after not feeling well and was told she had preeclampsia, a serious condition that causes skyrocketing blood pressure, and that the baby needed to be delivered quickly.

“I kept telling them she’s not going to survive; she’s only 23 weeks,” the mother said.

But she did. The tiny girl slowly gained weight in the neonatal intensive care unit.

A pink sign by her crib read "Tiny but Mighty." Other signs kept track of her weight and cheered her on as the girl gained pounds over the months.

“You could barely see her in the bed she was so tiny,” nurse Emma Wiest said in the video.

It shows photos of Saybie wearing a mint bow with white polka dots that covered her entire head, her tiny eyes peering out from under them.

Nurses put a tiny graduation cap on her when she left the unit.

She faces enormous challenges as a micro-preemie, who is an infant born before 28 weeks of gestation.

Some preemies can experience vision and hearing problems, developmental issues and a host of other complications.

Eight is the first year, said Michelle Kling, of the March of Dimes, a nonprofit that works to improve the health of mothers and babies.

So far Saybie has beaten the odds.

“She’s a miracle, that’s for sure,” said Kim Norby, another nurse featured in the video.
A giant spider, large enough for a grown man to walk beneath, looms near Martin Freed's home.

Spiders, a praying mantis and other bugs are scattered along a half-mile stretch of road in Loomis. While the giant insects may appear to be characters in a science fiction movie upon first glance, they are the creation of Freed.

“My daughter and wife saw an aluminum bug at a place in Lincoln and took a picture of it and showed it to me, and said, ‘Can you do something like that?’ So I did one of the first ones to kind of make a Mother's Day present; a big bug to go in the garden. The funny part of that is my daughter is an entomologist, so I have to do them correctly,” Freed said.

Expressing his creativity dates back to high school.

The Loomis farmer said he wasn’t the best at creating typical pieces of artwork in art class, but he did enjoy doing body work and painting cars in his shop class.

“I would do some of the weird paint things and try to do airbrushing stuff in shop class, and the art teacher thought that was art. Lots of times instead of going to art class, I would get a pass to go to the shop class and work on my shop projects which she graded as art,” he said.

After receiving an associate's degree in agriculture from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Freed returned to Loomis and worked at an auto body shop for his former shop teacher, Kenton Thompson. Freed eventually returned to farming, and he continues to do body work, custom painting and creating sculptures on the family farm, the Kearney Hub reported.

Enormous wind chimes with bowling balls as the centerpiece fill part of the yard. Each chime is properly tuned. Different animals — wiener dogs, fish, a turtle — have been created from bits of scrap metal he’s collected during the years, and they can be found all around the yard. Some of the bugs have lights in their eyes that are solar- or battery-powered. He also has transformed bowling balls into gazing balls. Music blares in both of Freed's sheds while he works. He keeps both sheds toasty warm because he hates working in the cold.

His sculptures sell for $100 to $2,500, depending on their size. If he doesn’t keep the tractors, vehicles or other pieces he fixes and custom paints, he will sell them.

“I live off of other people’s junk,” he said. “That’s made me a lot of money over the years because I buy a tractor that is ugly and nobody wanted. I see a gem. I’d fix it up and then run it for two, three, five, seven years.”

A 1997 Case IH 8940 Magnum currently sits in Freed's heated garage, stripped of most of its body while he paints each individual piece. He’s fixed up many tractors during the years, but one of his favorite projects is motorcycles. Freed began riding motorcycles in high school, but he sold his bike after getting married and having children.

“One of my buddies got back into it the one day. His wife had bought him a repo from the bank. I took it out for a ride, and it was like, ‘Oh I remember why I liked to do this,’” he said.

Freed owns two Harley-Davidson motorcycles, and in May 2018 he completed the Southern California Motorcycling Association’s USA Four Corners Tour. He was inspired by his uncle, Kenneth Seeman, to do the tour after Seeman completed it at the age of 71.

Freed had 21 days to ride to San Ysidro, Calif.; Blaine, Wash.; Madawaska, Maine; and Key West, Fla., using any route and sequence. The ride is approximately 7,000 miles depending on the route, which doesn’t include the travel to the first corner and the return trip. Freed completed the four corners in eight days, and he pulled into his shop in rural Loomis after 12 days and three hours.

Freed continues to experiment and make an array of sculptures. Whether it’s painting flames or wild colors on a motorcycle or making an enormous bug, he isn’t afraid to branch out to try new things.

“If you are going to have a sculpture, why not make it a huge one?” he said. “I’d rather be over the top.”
Japan, Russia accuse each other of military buildups

**By Mari Yamaguchi**
Associated Press

TOKYO — Russia and Japan accused each other of military buildups as their foreign and defense ministers met in Tokyo on Thursday for talks that failed to make progress on decades-long island disputes.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said at a joint news conference after the talks that Russia was concerned about Tokyo’s plan to build a pair of land-based Aegis Ashore missile defense systems, saying they pose a “potentially serious threat” to Russia. The Aegis Ashore systems, planned for deployment in Akita on Japan’s northern coast and in Yamaguchi in the southwest, are part of Japan’s rapidly expanding missile defense system to bolster its ability to counter potential threats from North Korea and China. Under guidelines approved in December, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s government plans to increase purchases of expensive American military equipment including F-35 stealth fighter jets and cruise missiles as Japan continues to expand its military cooperation with the U.S.

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono accused Russia of a military buildup on Russia-controlled islands claimed by both countries. The dispute over the islands, which Russia calls the southern Kurils and Japan the Northern Territories, has prevented the two countries from signing a peace treaty formally ending their World War II hostilities.

“Over 90% of the islands are not under the control of the Japanese government,” Kono said.

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Japan’s Defense Minister Takeshi Iwaya told his counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, and Lavrov that the Aegis Ashore interceptors are “purely for defensive purposes and never for use to threaten Russia or other countries.”

In November, Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to accelerate negotiations based on a 1956 Soviet proposal to return two of the islands to Japan, but progress has since stalled.

**Quake hits off coast of El Salvador**
Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador — A strong earthquake hit off the coast of El Salvador early Thursday, sending frightened residents running out of their homes in the predawn hours.

Authorities said a small tsunami was possible, but there were no immediate reports of serious damage or injuries.

“Monitoring of the entire country reflects that there has not been grave or widespread damage,” El Salvador’s Civil Defense agency said.

The U.S. Geological Survey reported the quake had a preliminary magnitude of 6.6. Its epicenter was about 17 miles southwest of La Libertad, a suburb of the regional capital, Santa Tecla, and it was recorded at a depth of 40 miles.

Via Twitter, El Salvador’s Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources warned people to stay away from the Pacific Ocean for the next four hours.

The ministry said sea-level rises of up to 11 inches were possible along the length of El Salvador’s coast.

It reported that seven aftershocks were recorded over the next four hours.

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Assange misses court hearing; WikiLeaks says he’s ill

**By Gregory Katz**
Associated Press

LONDON — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange missed a court hearing Thursday, apparently due to health problems. He had been expected to appear from prison via video link at a brief extradition hearing at Westminster Magistrates’ Court.

Lawyer Gareth Peirce told the court Assange was “not very well.”

Assange, 47, is in Belmarsh Prison serving a 50-week sentence for jumping bail in Britain while fighting extradition to the United States, which accuses him of violating the Espionage Act by publishing secret documents containing the names of confidential military and diplomatic sources.

Sweden also seeks him for questioning about an alleged rape, which Assange has denied.

It is not clear which claim would take precedence. The decision would likely be made by Britain’s home secretary.

Judge Emma Arbuthnot said a more substantive extradition hearing set for June 12 may be moved to a court next to Belmarsh to accommodate for safety concerns.

WikiLeaks said in a statement it has “grave concerns” about Assange’s health. The anti-secrecy group says he has been moved to the prison health ward.

The group says Assange has “dramatically lost weight” and recently “it was not possible to conduct a normal conversation with him.”

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Israel's parliament dissolves; snap election planned

**By Aron Heller**
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel embarked Thursday on an unprecedented snap election campaign — the second this year — after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to form a governing coalition and instead dramatically dissolved parliament.

In what seemed an improbable scenario just days ago, Israel's newly elected Knesset dissolved itself in an early morning 74-45 vote and set a new election date for Sept 17.

The parliament’s disbanding comes just a month after it was sworn in and sets the stage for a second election in the same year — a first in Israeli history.

The developments were a stunning setback for Netanyahu, who had appeared to secure a comfortable win in last month’s election. But he was unable to build a parliamentary majority because his traditional ally, Avigdor Lieberman, refused to bring his Yisrael Beiteinu faction into a new government when he was asked to do so by Netanyahu.

Lieberman, a veteran nationalist politician, demanded that current legislation mandating that current legislation mandating that, young ultra-Orthodox men be drafted into the military has run its course.

Years of exemptions for ultra-Orthodox men have generated widespread resentment among the rest of Jewish Israelis who serve the ultra-Orthodox, backed by Netanyahu, refused to bend and the showdown quickly devolved into a full-blown crisis that imploded the prospective government.

“The public chose me, and Lieberman, unfortunately, deceived his voters. From the beginning he had no intention to do what he said,” Netanyahu said after the vote, accusing Lieberman of aligning with “the left.”

Netanyahu, a former top aide to Netanyahu who for two decades has alternated between a close alliance and bitter rivalry with his former boss, retorted that the new election was indeed unfortunate but a result of Netanyahu caving in the ultra-Orthodox.

The new election gives the anti-Netanyahu forces in Israel, led by Blue and White leader Benny Gantz, another shot at toppling the longtime leader. It also complicates Netanyahu’s efforts to pass the proposed bills to protect himself from prosecution.

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Taiwan’s military trains for a Chinese invasion

Associated Press

FANGSHAN, Taiwan — Taiwanese tanks and soldiers fired at simulated Chinese forces and aircraft on Thursday in an annual exercise designed to show readiness in the face of the Chinese military threat.

The live firing was part of annual exercises designed to showcase the military’s capabilities and resolve to repel any attack from across the Taiwan Strait. The Han Kuang exercises wrap up Friday.

China and Taiwan split during a civil war in 1949, but China claims the self-governing island as its territory.

Asked about the exercises, Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman Wu Qian said China would strive for peaceful reunification with Taiwan.

“What should be pointed out is that seeking Taiwan independence is suicide and resorting to force is no way out,” he said.

The simulated response to a Chinese beach landing included fighter jets and missiles launched at targets in the sea.

The Defense Ministry said the joint army-navy-air force operation tested the island’s combat readiness in the face of the Chinese military threat.

Malaysia’s PM seeks change in waste disposal practices

By Simon Denyer
The Washington Post

Kuala Lumpur — It’s grossly unfair for rich countries to send their plastic waste to poor countries who are already struggling to cope with their own waste problems, and the practice needs to stop, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Thursday.

His comments, made on a visit to Kuala Lumpur, came after Malaysia announced this week it was sending back more than 3,000 tons of non-recyclable plastic waste to countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and Japan that had apparently been smuggled into the country.

Malaysia’s government says it has become a dumping ground for rich nations after China banned the import of plastic waste last year.

China’s decision has sparked a crisis in the global waste disposal industry because neither the richer nations nor poorer ones have the capacity to process all the waste they are producing.

“This is going to be a problem for the whole world,” Mahathir said. “We are producing too much waste and you have a problem trying to get rid of the waste.”

Landfills don’t serve any purpose any more, while waste can’t just be burned because of air pollution, he said. “So it is grossly unfair for rich countries to send waste to poor countries simply because the poor countries have no choice; maybe it contributes a little to their economy,” he said.

On Tuesday, Malaysian Environment Minister Yeo Bee Yin said 60 containers of contaminated waste would be sent back to their countries of origin.

She showed reporters a container full of cables from Britain, contaminated milk cartons from Australia and compact discs from Bangladesh, as well as bales of electronic and household waste from the United States, Canada, Japan, Saudi Arabia and China.

The Associated Press reported.

“We cannot accept that kind of idea, that waste from rich countries should be sent to poor countries,” Mahathir said at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan. “We don’t need your waste because our own waste is enough to give us problems.”

Last week, the Philippines also said it would ship back dozens of containers of garbage which officials said had been illegally shipped there from Canada.

Mahathir said Malaysia had taken steps to reduce the use of plastic bags and plastic straws.

Several dead, missing in Hungary after boat sinks

By Pablo Gorondi and Hyung-Jin Kim
Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary — Rescue workers scoured the Danube River in downtown Budapest on Thursday for 21 people missing after a sightseeing boat carrying South Korean tourists sank in a matter of seconds after colliding with a larger cruise ship during an evening downpour.

Seven people are confirmed dead and seven were rescued, all of them South Koreans, Hungarian officials said. Police launched a criminal investigation into the incident.

The South Korea-based Very Young Tour agency, which organized the trip, said the boat — a 70-year-old vessel built in the former Soviet Union — had been on its way back after an hourlong night tour Wednesday evening when the accident happened.

Nineteen South Koreans and two Hungarian crew members — the captain and his assistant are missing. The tour party had consisted of 30 tourists, two guides and a photographer on a package tour of Europe. Pal Gyorgy, spokesman for the National Ambulance Service, said those rescued were hospitalized in stable condition.

The sunken boat was located early Thursday near the Margaret Bridge, not far from the neo-Gothic Parliament building on the riverbank.

Video displayed by Hungarian police showed the sightseeing boat, identified as the Hableany (Mermaid), traveling closely side by side in the same direction as the Viking cruise ship as they approached the bridge Wednesday night.

The Hableany then appeared to steer slightly to its left, into the path of the cruise ship, which continued to sail on at the same speed.

The two collided and the sightseeing boat was then seen tipping to its side between the bridge’s two supports.

“As the Viking comes into contact with (the Hableany), it overturns it and in about seven seconds, as it turns on its side, it sinks,” Police Col. Adrian Pal said.

Pal said it’s unclear what caused the Hableany to steer into the path of the Viking. He said several people aboard the Hableany fell into the water after the collision. The South Korean government said none of those on board was wearing a life jacket.

Police said rescue operations were hampered by the rain and the fast flow of the rising Danube. The search for the 21 missing extended far downstream, even into Serbia, where the Danube goes after leaving Hungary.

The river, which is 500 yards wide at the point of the accident, was fast-flowing and rising as heavy rain continued in the city. Water temperatures were about 50-53 Fahrenheit.

Hajoregisztaler.hu, a local ship-tracking website, lists the Hableany as having been built in 1949 in what was then the Soviet Union.

CCTV footage recorded on Wednesday night showed that the river was busy with boats of different sizes traveling in both directions.

Budapest has enjoyed a boom in overseas tourism in recent years. Long-haul flights from as far away as Dubai and Beijing increasingly fly visitors from Asia and the Middle East to the Hungarian capital, a relatively affordable but history-rich European destination.

Earlier, the news website Index.hu said one of those rescued was found near the Petofi Bridge, which is about 2 miles south of Parliament.

Dozens of rescue personnel, including from the military and divers, were involved in the search. Employees from the South Korean Embassy in Budapest were assisting Hungarian officials in identifying those rescued and the deceased.

Budapest Disaster Management Office Chief Col. Zsolt Gabor Palotai said the Hungarian army is setting up a pontoon near the capsized ship’s wreck and divers will go into the Danube from there.

Police have questioned the Ukrainian captain of the Viking, but no details have been released. Authorities said both vessels’ captains are experienced, with many years of service with their companies.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in instructed officials to employ “all available resources” to support the rescue efforts in Hungary.
Following Franklin's lead

After canceled flight, Jennifer Hudson drove nearly 13 hours for luncheon honoring Pulitzer Prize winners, Queen of Soul

By Mesfin Fekadu
Associated Press

With bad weather in Chicago on Monday and her flight canceled, Jennifer Hudson fretted at the thought of missing her performance at Tuesday's Pulitzer Prize awards ceremony to pay tribute to honoree Aretha Franklin.

But then Hudson said she felt the spirit of the Queen of Soul — who refused to fly but traveled by tour bus to concerts and events — and drove nearly 13 hours to New York to make the luncheon.

"I looked up and I thought, 'You know what, it's like Aretha's spirit is in me. She didn't believe in flying; she would drive,'" Hudson told The Associated Press. "I got here in time, five minutes early to sing, because I wasn't going to go to it. Here I am. I said, 'If I got to walk, if I got to crawl, I'm going to get there.' And here I am — so it's in my heart."

Hudson embodied Franklin's spirit and vocal prowess as she brought the ceremony to church with a rousing, fiery performance of "Amazing Grace."

"She always with me, I feel," Hudson said of Franklin. "I always feel, an Oscar in my mind and in my heart, and try to lead in a way that I know that she would want me to.

Franklin, who died last August at 76, was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize Special Citation honor Tuesday, becoming the first individual woman to earn a special citation prize since the honor was first awarded in 1930. The Pulitzer board said the award was given to Franklin for "her indelible contribution to American music and culture for more than five decades."

Collaborator and close friend Clive Davis and longtime publicist Gwendolyn Quinn accepted the honor on behalf of Franklin's family.

South Florida's Sun-Sentinel won the prize in public service for its coverage of last year's mass shooting at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., where 17 students and staff were killed.

Hudson posed for photos with Parkland school students at the luncheon held at Columbia University, which also featured performances by Damien Sneed and Brandie Inez Sutton. She also spoke to the students backstage about the effects of gun violence. One of the students told singer that experiencing a mass shooting is a club no one wanted to be a part of.

"Exactly. And you have no choice," said Hudson, whose mother, brother and 7-year-old nephew were shot to death in 2008. "No one knows when it's gonna happen or who it's gonna happen to, and you never know how life-changing it is until it happens, but the only way we can ever make a difference is for those who have not experienced it, to look from the perspective of those who have. And that's when the change will happen, you know?"

Hudson, a Grammy winner, will play Franklin in an upcoming biopic. She said she always felt connected to Franklin.

"Even when I auditioned for 'American Idol,' I sang 'Share Your Love with Me' by Aretha Franklin. ... I'm like, 'Wow! It's like her presence was always there,' " Hudson said.

"... (Aretha) called me when I was on Broadway and she was like, 'And I've made my decision, and it is you.' I was like, 'Yes ma'am, I'm ready. I will give it every bit of my all.' Hudson continued. "That's why I had to get on that road trip last night to get here, because if I said I'm in, I'm in."

Jennifer Hudson sings "Amazing Grace" in tribute to Aretha Franklin, who received a special music citation during the Pulitzer Prize awards luncheon at Columbia University on Tuesday in New York.

Moby backs off of claim, cancels book tour

From wire services

"Chi" actor loses MTV awards bid amid misconduct claims

MTV on Wednesday cut Jason Mitchell from contention at next month's MTV Movie & TV Awards following reports of alleged misconduct by "The Chi" actor.

MTV announced that Mitchell was removed as a nominee for best performance in a show in light of recent developments.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, Mitchell has been dropped from the upcoming "The Chi" after he was fired in late April from the Netflix film "Desperado." In a statement to The Hollywood Reporter published Wednesday, "The Chi" showrunner Ayanna Floyd said there were multiple human resources complaints against Mitchell, including one she filed against the actor, after she became what she described as "a target of his rage and inappropriateness."

Debbie Harry says memoir reflects 'a very full life'

Debbie Harry says her upcoming memoir, "Face It," comes out Oct. 1. Dey Street Books announced Wednesday. The singer writes about her years in 1970s New York and her rise with Blondie, and shares stories about everyone from fellow New York bands Talking Heads and the Ramones to encounters with Rita Hayworth and David Bowie. Blondie is known for such hits as "Heart of Glass" and "Call Me."

In a statement, Harry said parts of her life were funny and warm and others chilling "to the bone." Writing the book led to her discovery that she had led "a very full life."
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Hosted by Michelle Harven and Air Force veteran Desmon Farris.
Man captures video of caterwauling lynx

BANGOR — A Maine man who was scouting fishing locations came across a rare sight: a pair of Canada lynx facing off on a dirt road.

Daniel Wadeleigh, of Belgrade, told the Bangor Daily News that the two cats were so focused on their showdown that they didn’t notice him. He stopped his truck and shot video showing them caterwauling at each other.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is drafting a rule to revoke Canada lynx’s threatened listing across the Lower 48 states under the Endangered Species Act. The government announced last year that the lynx no longer need special protections.

Residents advised to watch for rogue bison

ROCHESTER — Authorities in Rochester were asking residents to keep an eye out for a rogue bison that’s been on the loose since the weekend.

A farmer spotted the bison walking through his fields in southwest Rochester on Sunday. Officers approached the animal, but it started acting aggressively. Olmsted County sheriff’s officials have been in touch with the bison’s owner. Capt. Scott Behrens said people should stay away from the bison if they see it because it could charge if it feels threatened.

Bald eagle back in air after stay in hospital

METAIRIE — A bald eagle caught this spring in a New Orleans suburb was released Tuesday in the same neighborhood after two weeks in Louisiana State University’s Wildlife Hospital.

Dozens of neighbors who had watched over the eagle family cheered as the mottled brown bird hopped out of the cage in which it had traveled from Baton Rouge and launched itself into the air in Metairie.

The eagle sat for a while on the roof of a house in the shadow of its nest, flapping its wings before taking off. It then flew off.

The eagle had been taken to the LSU veterinary school’s Wildlife Hospital on May 11. It was being treated for a scale infection. It was being released at the LSU veterinary hospital’s office. It was being released after its stay in hospital.

The approximate value of drugs that washed ashore in Orange Beach, Ala., Orange Beach police told WALA-TV that beachgoers found the drugs last week. One package contained 21 pounds of marijuana and one kilogram of cocaine. Another bundle contained 36 kilograms of cocaine. Police said at least one of the packages had barnacles on it, indicating it had been in the water for some time.

Authorities search for bear that bit hiker

ASPEN — Wildlife officials were searching for a black bear that bit a woman’s leg as she hiked in Colorado.

The woman and her husband told wildlife officials they saw the bear Monday walking toward them on a trail near Aspen and stepped aside to give it space to pass.

As the bear walked by, they say it charged the woman and bit her thigh before running off, Colorado Parks and Wildlife said.

Officials said her injury did not appear serious.

Because the bear was aggressive, wildlife officers plan to euthanize it if they find it.

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Slippery slope

Ethan Paro, 7, left, and Skylar Watson, 5, make their way down the water slide at the Sprayground Splashpad at Citizens Park in Aiken, S.C., on Tuesday.

The South Florida SunSentinel reported the Coral Springs Humane Society took the snake to a veterinarian’s office. It was being treated for a scale infection.

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Woman found living in van with 21 dogs, bird

WETHERSFIELD — A Massachusetts woman was charged with animal cruelty after police in Connecticut said they found her living in a van with 21 dogs and a bird.

Wethersfield police said Suzanne Muzzaffer Esor, 58, of Peabody, Mass., was arrested after a traffic stop.

Police said the van was strewn with garbage and animal waste.

Police said Esor told them she and the animals had been living in the Ford Transit van for several months.

The dogs and the macaw were taken to local animal shelters. Police said several of the dogs appeared to have serious health issues.

Famed maestro’s stature sports Bruins helmet

BOSTON — Count the late conductor Arthur Fiedler among the Boston Bruins’ fans as they skated into the Stanley Cup Final.

The nonprofit Esplanade Association installed a giant Bruins helmet atop a statue of the beloved conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra — just in time for Game 1 against the St. Louis Blues.

The helmet crowns a likeness of Fiedler that stands on the Charles River Esplanade, where the orchestra performs outdoor concerts during the summer. Organizers said it’s 17 feet in circumference.

From wire reports
Flying vehicle must clear hurdles before its takeoff

By Christopher Weber
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A transportation company is betting its sleek new hydrogen-powered electric flying vehicle will someday serve as taxis, cargo carriers and ambulances of the sky, but experts say they will have to clear a number of regulatory hurdles before being approved for takeoff in the future.

With six rotors on the roof and seats inside for five people, a passenger model of the Skai (pronounced "sky") unveiled Wednesday near Los Angeles resembles an oversized drone crossed with a luxury SUV.

Like a drone, the vehicle from Alaka'i Technologies takes off and lands vertically. It’s one of many similar electric flying crafts in production, including prototypes from Boeing and Airbus that made successful test flights this year, according to Vertical Flight Society, an industry group.

Alaka'i says it’s planning a test flight near its Massachusetts headquarters.

It would be flown by an onboard pilot using a pair of joysticks, but the technology exists to eventually fly it remotely and even autonomously, Hanvey said.

It will be years before the Federal Aviation Administration allows the autonomous flight of passenger vehicles, said attorney Thaddeus Lightfoot, a partner with the firm Dorsey & Whitney who helps companies navigate FAA rules.

Regulators are still grappling with the proliferation of smaller drones — those under about 50 pounds flown by hobbyists and filmmakers. The FAA just this year eased restrictions on flying small drones over crowds and at night.

Dronelike vehicles such as the Skai must first simply prove their airworthiness, like any common plane, Lightfoot said. After that, getting commercial certification is another convoluted process, he said.

“The technology is interesting, but the regulatory road will be very long,” said Lightfoot, adding that the idea of allowing people to fly in a large aircraft without a pilot is "well outside the current regulatory regime."

Hanvey conceded that it could take at least a decade before the company realizes its vision of a fleet of electric flying vehicles ferrying passengers over major cities at nearly 120 mph.

Before that, he hopes to see Skai aircraft used by first responders to send in food or water following disasters like hurricanes or wildfires that can destroy infrastructure.

It could be used as an ambulance and to evacuate people, Hanvey said. Outfitted with a transmitter, one could serve as a mobile cell tower, hovering for up to 10 hours near a neighborhood to provide communication services, he said.

The interior of The Skai vehicle is shown.

MARKET WATCH

May 29, 2019

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MOVING AROUND

The Skai vehicle, developed by Alaka'i Technologies in Newbury Park, Calif., is displayed on Tuesday.

PHOTOS BY MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ/AP

EXCHANGE RATES

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

INTEREST RATES

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WEATHER OUTLOOK

The weather forecast is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.
Eugene Sheffer Crossword

58 Brownstone feature
57 “The Bells” author
56–58 “See yal”
55 Allow
54 Hobbyist’s abbr.
53 Conk out
52 Outback bird
51 Brit. sports cars
50 Onassis
49 Not ‘neat
48 “Star Wars”
47 Royal
46 Straight, for short
45 Clinch
44 Mogul
43 Begrimed
42 Roofing material
41 Get ready, briefly
40 Rule, Britannia!
39 Composer
38 Prokofiev
37 Med. plan options
36 21st century
35 “I’m not sure, lemon. You should be committed for life. Meaning what you think it means.”
34 Do sums
33 “It’s a snow globe. And inside, the snow globe is an entire universe filled with people who each secretly have their own snow globes.”
32 “We can’t afford to waste...”
31 “It’s a snow globe. And inside, the snow globe is an entire universe filled with people who each secretly have their own snow globes.”
30 “I’m not sure, lemon. You should be committed for life. Meaning what you think it means.”
29 Author Umberto
28 “Once upon a time...”
27 “I’m not sure, lemon. You should be committed for life. Meaning what you think it means.”
26 “Give—break!”
25 Send forth
24 “First-rate”
23 Author Umberto
22 “Once upon a time...”
21 “I’m not sure, lemon. You should be committed for life. Meaning what you think it means.”
20 “Send forth”
19 “Once upon a time...”
18 “Mafia boss”
17 Med. plan options
16 “First-rate”
15 “Takes too much, briefly”
14 Oklahoma city
13 “Scary cry”
12 “Serpico” director
11 “49th state”
10 “Reddy,” e.g.
9 “Web address”
8 “Web address”
7 “Chantilly, e.g.”
6 Wizardry
5 “Reddy,” e.g.
4 “49th state”
3 “Sin city”
2 “Home”
1 “Home”

4 Across
1 Fire...
For Mueller, self-effacement is patriotic

By NOAH FELDMAN

The sphinx finally spoke. But much like his ancient predecessor, special counsel Robert Mueller didn’t have an important role to play. At his surprise news conference Wednesday to announce his retirement, Mueller essentially repeated what he had written in his report. He didn’t promise to say anything more about Barr’s summary of his report — which he called “my testimony.”

But the only new point that Mueller made was to stand up for his team and justify their investigation of obstruction of justice. His team of prosecutors didn’t come up with any evidence of obstruction — or anyone else for that matter.

Then there was Mueller’s rather restrained statement on the investigation itself. Although there had been “talk” of an appearance by him before Congress, he would not be testifying about it. He added that “the public can see” the report. This was comprehensible only as a direct message to Democratic House leaders: If you subpoena me, I won’t say anything beyond what’s in the report. This was comprehensible only as a direct message to Democratic House leaders: If you subpoena me, I won’t say anything beyond what’s in the report. This was comprehensible only as a direct message to Democratic House leaders: If you subpoena me, I won’t say anything beyond what’s in the report.

But that may not matter as a political reality. Mueller understands perfectly well that the House Democrats now have the power to make a political calculation about whether they would gain more by bringing Mueller in to testify and drawing renewed attention to Trump’s possible wrongdoing, or whether they would end up losing ground if they appeared to be badgering Mueller.

The second part of the meaning of Mueller’s minimalistic statement is that it can be counted as a win for the Trump administration. To be sure, Mueller made a point of saying that if he could have concluded that Trump committed a crime, he would have done so. And he reiterated the extremest tenors reasoning contained in the report to the effect that he would not have stated that Trump committed a crime, because doing so would be unfair to a president who would not get charged and so would not get a day in court to defend himself.

Perhaps in Mueller’s mind — the mind of a lawyer and a jurist — because this explanation is meant to suggest that Trump may very well have been guilty of obstruction of justice, but he didn’t want to go to the well with it. With whatever collusion with Russia, Mueller stated only that his investigation didn’t reveal enough evidence of obstruction.

But to the rest of the world, the upshot of Mueller’s choice of words is to enable Trump and his supporters to say that the report cleared the president. Which Trump did in a tweet, just a half-hour later.

The third and final takeaway is surely that Mueller believes that his future silence is good for the republic. As a patriot and public servant, Mueller is doing everything he can to avoid becoming a politicized or partisan figure.

No doubt there is some personal preference in this choice of words. But he must have known the signal that true public servants avoid making the story about themselves — that self-effacement is a form of patriotism.

This viewpoint is so archaic in the era of Trump that it may seem naive or deluded. It could easily be argued as a result of a realpolitik that by withdrawing from the public fight, Mueller is enabling Trump. Mueller, it seems, doesn’t care. He’s thrown back the bards and may be in the ancient past.

The sphinx has spoken his mysterious truth. Now he just wants to be left alone.

Noah Feldman is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist. He can be reached at nadfeldman@bloomberg.com. Follow him at @fledman. Feldman is the author of “The Three Lives of Walter Sisulu,” a biography of the anti-apartheid leader. He is a professor of law at Harvard University and is a member of the board of the American Constitution Society.

Will voters back message Trump is controlling? By ANDREW MALCOLM

The distinctive characteristic of every presidency, regardless of political stripe, is the ability to control the flow of information about it. This is especially true during a midterm election, as the desire for a second term intensifies.

As you may have noticed, President Donald Trump seeks to manage the news flow from the White House by flooding the zone with news, usually of his own making, from his own mouth or cellphone. It worked in 2016.

This is a precarious business in politics because like most humans, you see and hear what you want to.

What’s happened since then is that Trump has gone through five communications directors in 28 months and currently has none. Or rather, the director of communications is the president himself.

An experienced user and consumer of both print and electronic media for many years, Trump thinks he knows better than any communications professional. Actually, he knows he knows better. Hence, you may also have noticed that Trump has disregarded the almost-daily White House news briefing.

“The reason Sarah Sanders does not go to the ‘podium’ much anymore,” Trump tweeted as his cover story, “is that the press has learned to not trust her, and it’s also regarded as a waste of time in certain particular members of the press. I told her not to bother, the word gets out anyway.”

Of course, the word gets out because the president himself puts it out his way on his schedule, which often sets the daily news agenda and sets it around guess who?

He does this through tweets to his 61 million followers and brief exchanges with pool reporters on the lawn or during activities at the White House.

This strategy has the distinct advantage for Trump of going over the heads of an already media-resistant media and delivering the unfiltered news to his base relatively free of the professional interrogatory pushback during a more favorable content environment.

It also keeps the focus on Trump, which you may have additionally noticed is very important to him. Not always advantageous to him, but important.

Take last week, for instance. The president was scheduled to meet with Democratic congressional leaders to discuss a large spending measure for infrastructure repairs. Most everybody agrees this is necessary and seems to want to see the political agendas of both parties.

Three minutes into the meeting, the president of the United States walked out, citing briefs by a presidential spokesman.

Polls are not predictions, especially this far out. And naturally much of the 2020 outcome depends on the Democrats’ ticket, its financing and its effectiveness on the campaign trail. But a combination of polls this month found that 54% said they would definitely vote for Trump. This is a majority party; 90% of a minority party is an even smaller minority. Trump’s approval rating, over the last three months, has never once been above 50%.

Trump lost the 2016 popular vote to Hillary Clinton by just 2% in the Electoral College. Polls were in just the right places needed to capture 57% of the Electoral College. Polls are not predictions, especially this far out. And naturally much of the 2020 outcome depends on the Democrats’ ticket, its financing and its effectiveness on the campaign trail. But a combination of polls this month found that 54% said they would definitely vote for Trump. This is a majority party; 90% of a minority party is an even smaller minority. Trump’s approval rating, over the last three months, has never once been above 50%.

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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.

**What should happen when cyber tools reach bad actors**

**The Washington Post**

American taxpayers may be funding attacks on themselves. A report in The New York Times tracks the fallout from a 2-year-old hack of the National Security Agency hacking tools — designed to target U.S. adversaries but harnessed by cybercriminals to attack people, businesses and governments all over the globe.

The Times connects the NSA’s loss of control over malware called EternalBlue to the viral kneecapping of Baltimore. Hackers are demanding roughly $100,000 in bitcoin to restore access to thousands of computers and bring back essential services to civilians. Some information in security experts dispute the connection in this case, but the striking reality remains: The NSA built powerful tools to go after bad actors to cause billions of dollars in damage, and there are still no answers on how it happened or who was responsible.

This is a great responsibility, too. Weaponized computer code can be a crucial tool in counterterrorism and counterintelligence investigations, and in the case of EternalBlue, it was. Yet this code can also be crucial to enemies. The NSA has a process in place for evaluating when to release vulnerabilities and how to ensure critical infrastructure, companies and cities alike should try to ensure their systems are not vulnerable to attacks depending on them — setting them up to be robust against attack rather than just to work.

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**The White House last week granted U.S. Attorney General William Barr, above, broad authority to declassify intelligence information as he probes the origins of special counsel Robert Mueller’s probe of the Trump campaign’s relationship with Russia.**

**The U.S. Climate and Health Alliance**

said Hurricane Harvey dealt Texas a harder blow two years ago because climate change produced stronger storm surges, increased precipitation and created more powerful winds. Harvey dumped nearly of rain on the eastern edge of Harris County. Researchers said that 40 percent more rain than a similar storm would have produced decades ago. Not even scientists within President Donald Trump’s administration have been able to weaken his skepticism. He paid no attention to the physics that made Harvey possible, and he has placed accomplices in key positions to hide the truth from the rest of us.

One culprit is former astronaut James Reilly, who heads the U.S. Geological Survey, one of the federal agencies charged with keeping tabs on climate change and predicting its impact. Reilly, a geologist who also once worked for an oil exploration company, has ordered USGS scientists using computer-generated climate models to project the impact of climate change only through 2040.

If you think it’s mere coincidence that the president is repeating the word “is” never came out of Pompmoe’s mouth that the White House and let Trump know you don’t want to live in fear of more storms even worse than Harvey, tell him it’s time to acknowledge human activity’s role in creating the greenhouse gases that cause global warming and to do something about it.

**Not airing show on same-sex marriage helped Ala. parents**

**Dothan (Ala.) Eagle**

Alabama Public Television is defending its decision to pull the episode of a popular children’s program, “Arthur,” because the episode includes a same-sex marriage. It’s unfortunate that APT officials feel the need to defend the move. For its audience, it was the prudent course.

Dothan’s decision was made by the station itself in coordination with the episode’s creators. It was a clear and strong stance against a message that many in the community would find objectionable.

**Barr’s probe of the probe undermines Trump’s argument**

**San Francisco Chronicle**

President Donald Trump’s witch hunt has been filled with conspiracy theories. The latest: the Mueller investigation, headed by Bob Mueller, is a witch hunt set up to destroy the president. Barr, who also served as attorney general under George H.W. Bush, is a longtime共和党的 mercifully discontinued leader of the House of Representatives. He was in key positions to hide the truth from the rest of us.

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### College baseball

#### NCAA Tournament

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<th>Game 2</th>
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<th>Game 5</th>
<th>Game 6</th>
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<td>Game 1</td>
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<td>Florida (33-24) vs. Dallas Baptist (41-18)</td>
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<td>Game 4</td>
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<td>Game 4</td>
<td>Game 5</td>
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#### Pro baseball

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<td>Los Angeles Dodgers</td>
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<td>Seattle 1 1 .500 1</td>
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<td>Seattle Mariners</td>
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<td>Las Vegas 1 0 1.000 ½</td>
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<td>Las Vegas Aces</td>
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<td>Minnesota 72, Seattle 61</td>
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<td>Portland 3 1 2 11 13 10</td>
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<td>Portland Timbers</td>
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<td>Colorado 0 1—1</td>
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<td>Colorado Rapids</td>
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<td>Colorado 1, Philadelphia 1, tie</td>
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<td>Colorado Rapids</td>
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<td>Atlanta 3, Minnesota United 0</td>
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<td>Atlanta United FC</td>
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<td>New England 3 8 4 13 15 32</td>
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<td>New England Revolution</td>
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<td>Orlando City SC</td>
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<td>Vancouver 4 6 5 17 16 19</td>
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<td>Toronto FC 1, Montreal 1</td>
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<td>D.C. United 1 0 1.000 ½</td>
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<td>Chicago Fire 2, New York City FC 1</td>
<td>Game 2 winner vs. Game 3</td>
<td>Chicago Fire</td>
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### Wednesday’s games

- ***Sam Houston State*** vs. ***Vanderbilt***
- ***Western Kentucky*** vs. ***Louisiana***
- ***South Alabama*** vs. ***Oklahoma***
- ***Mississippi State*** vs. ***Arkansas***
- ***Florida State*** vs. ***FAU***

### Up-to-date TV schedules

- **Baseball**
  - ***Arizona Diamondbacks*** vs. ***San Diego Padres***
  - ***Los Angeles Dodgers*** vs. ***San Francisco Giants***
  - ***New York Mets*** vs. ***Boston Red Sox***

- **Hockey**
  - ***Minnesota Wild*** vs. ***Seattle Kraken***
  - ***Vancouver Canucks*** vs. ***San Jose Sharks***

- **Pro soccer**
  - ***Vancouver Whitecaps FC*** vs. ***Minnesota United FC***
  - ***Real Salt Lake FC*** vs. ***Orange County SC***

### Western Conference

- ***Los Angeles FC*** vs. ***LA Galaxy***
- ***San Jose Earthquakes*** vs. ***Vancouver Whitecaps FC***
- ***Portland Timbers*** vs. ***Seattle Sounders FC***

### Wednesday’s dates

- ***Arizona State*** vs. ***Minnesota***
- ***Montreal*** vs. ***Chicago***
- ***Colorado*** vs. ***San Jose***
- ***Los Angeles FC*** vs. ***Orange County SC***

### College football

- ***North Carolina*** vs. ***Syracuse***
- ***Mississippi State*** vs. ***Washington State***
- ***Florida State*** vs. ***Georgia Tech***

### Sports on AFN

- ***Baseball***
  - ***Atlanta Braves*** vs. ***Washington Nationals***
  - ***New York Mets*** vs. ***Philadelphia Phillies***

- ***Hockey***
  - ***Minnesota Wild*** vs. ***Seattle Kraken***
  - ***Vancouver Canucks*** vs. ***San Jose Sharks***

- ***Pro soccer***
  - ***Vancouver Whitecaps FC*** vs. ***Minnesota United FC***
  - ***Real Salt Lake FC*** vs. ***Orange County SC***
**American League**

**East Division**

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**National League**

**East Division**

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### Wednesday's Games

- **Kansas City** at **Chicago**
  - Kansas City 8, Chicago 3
  - HR: Y.Sanchez (2), S.Fernandez (3)
  - 2B: M.Maldonado (3)

### Thursday's Games

- **Milwaukee** at **Pittsburgh**
  - Milwaukee 9, Pittsburgh 2
  - HR: M.Olson (7), A.Cabrera (7)

- **Washington** at **Cincinnati**
  - Washington 8, Cincinnati 2
  - HR: T.Kemp (2), T.Bowling (2)

- **Milwaukee** at **Pittsburgh**
  - Pittsburgh 7, Cincinnati 2
  - HR: J.Bruschi (9), K.Henderson (2)

- **L.A. Angels** at **Seattle**
  - L.A. Angels 11, Seattle 7
  - HR: O.Fant (3), K.Schwertz (3)

### Friday's Games

- **San Francisco** at **Cleveland**
  - San Francisco 5, Cleveland 4
  - HR: B.Hunter (3), A.Montes (3)

- **Boston** at **New York**
  - Boston 7, New York 0
  - HR: T.Davis (12)

### Saturday's Games

- **New York** at **San Diego**
  - New York 1, San Diego 0
  - HR: D.Venable (2)

- **St. Louis** at **San Francisco**
  - St. Louis 2, San Francisco 1
  - HR: T.Bowling (2)

### Sunday's Games

- **Chicago** at **Minnesota**
  - Chicago 6, Minnesota 5
  - HR: J.Golding (3), T.Henderson (3)

- **Los Angeles** at **Oakland**
  - Los Angeles 6, Oakland 3
  - HR: J.Carter (4), T.Coolidge (2)

### Sunday's Games (continued)

- **Kansas City** at **Chicago**
  - Kansas City 5, Chicago 2
  - HR: Z.Fisk (3), J.Carter (4)

- **St. Louis** at **San Francisco**
  - San Francisco 1, St. Louis 0
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

### Monday's Games

- **New York** at **San Diego**
  - New York 7, San Diego 2
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

- **St. Louis** at **San Francisco**
  - San Francisco 7, St. Louis 2
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

### Tuesday's Games

- **San Francisco** at **Cleveland**
  - San Francisco 9, Cleveland 5
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

### Tuesday's Games (continued)

- **New York** at **San Diego**
  - New York 1, San Diego 0
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

### Thursday's Games (continued)

- **Chicago** at **Minnesota**
  - Chicago 6, Minnesota 5
  - HR: J.Golding (3), T.Henderson (3)

- **Los Angeles** at **Oakland**
  - Los Angeles 6, Oakland 3
  - HR: J.Carter (4), T.Coolidge (2)

### Monday's Games (continued)

- **New York** at **San Diego**
  - New York 7, San Diego 2
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

- **St. Louis** at **San Francisco**
  - San Francisco 7, St. Louis 2
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

### Tuesday's Games (continued)

- **San Francisco** at **Cleveland**
  - San Francisco 9, Cleveland 5
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

- **New York** at **San Diego**
  - New York 1, San Diego 0
  - HR: T.Goldsmith (1)

### Thursday's Games (continued)

- **Chicago** at **Minnesota**
  - Chicago 6, Minnesota 5
  - HR: J.Golding (3), T.Henderson (3)

- **Los Angeles** at **Oakland**
  - Los Angeles 6, Oakland 3
  - HR: J.Carter (4), T.Coolidge (2)
Roundup

Santana leads Indians to rout of Red Sox

Associated Press

BOSTON — Carlos Santana homered and hit Cleveland’s first triple of the season, Greg Allen added a pair of three-baggers and the Indians pounded out a season-high 18 hits in a 14-9 win over the Boston Red Sox on Wednesday night.

Santana, who finished a single shy of the cycle, was 3-for-4 with five RBIs as Cleveland matched its season best for runs.

Jose Ramirez hit two doubles and two RBIs. Allen and Kevin Plawecki also drove in two runs apiece for the Indians, who won two of three against the World Series champions in Boston.

Cleveland, shut out over the first seven innings Tuesday night before rallying with seven runs over the last two for a 7-5 win, scored at least one run in each of the first seven innings Wednesday.

Mookie Betts, Jackie Bradley Jr., Andrew Benintendi and Xander Bogaerts homered for the Red Sox. Boston scored three in the eighth, two on Bogaerts’ 10th home run of the season, to pull to 14-9 and loaded the bases with one out in the ninth before the Indians called on Brad Hand to close out the 15th save.

Dodgers 9, Mets 8: Cody Bellinger hit a tying double in the ninth inning and host Los Angeles scored four runs off All-Star closer Edwin Diaz to rally past New York.

Joc Pederson and Max Muncy opened the bottom of the ninth with consecutive singles off Diaz (1-3), who was pitching for the fourth time in five days. Justin Turner doubled and scored on Bellinger’s double. The Dodgers have won 10 in a row.

Phillies 11, Cardinals 4: Bryce Harper hit his 10th homer, his 36th career double and drove in four runs in a 11-4 rout.

After fouling a ball off the top of his right foot, Harper drove a two-run homer in the third and followed an inning later with a two-run double. He had three hits when he left the game with the Phillies ahead by 10 runs.

The hot-hitting Harper drove a two-run homer in the third and followed an inning later with a two-run double. He had three hits when he left the game with the Phillies ahead by 10 runs.

Angels 12, Athletics 7 (11): Gold Glove first baseman Matt Olson made a rare throwing error in the 11th inning to allow the go-ahead run to score and Los Angeles went on to host Oakland to its second straight loss after a 10-game winning streak.

Mike Trout was advised not to share any details. But God willing I’ll be able to have a relationship with this little girl for the rest of my life. But just prayers for her now, to be a jerk and then it at 7 in an unexpected pinch-hit appearance to set up Texas’ ninth-inning rally.

Texas scored three runs in the first against Wade LeBlanc, but LeBlanc settled in and worked through the fifth inning, leaving with Seattle down 3-0. Things went very wrong when LeBlanc was replaced.

Marlins 4, Giants 2: Jorge Alfaro had a career-high four hits and host Miami handed San Francisco its seventh straight loss.

Neil Walker had a tying breaking, pinch-hit double in the seventh and Starlin Castro hit the first triple of the season for the Marlins, who have won nine of 12.

San Francisco’s Madison Bumgarner (3-5) allowed two runs and six hits in six innings.

Diamondbacks 4, Rockies 3: Jonny Venters allowed a solo homer to Joc Pederson in the 11th inning, driving in the winning run as host Tampa Bay beat Toronto.

Adames’ hit came off Justin Shafer (0-1), who walked two and allowed one with Avisail Garcia. With one out and the infield jampacked with fielders, Adames drove a ball to deep center field.

The Tigers took two of the three games and won their first road series since April 1-3 against the Indians.

Rodriguez releiver Mychal Givens allowed a solo homer to John Hicks that tied the game 2-2 in the eighth.

Rays 4, Blue Jays 3 (11): Willy Adames delivered a long single in the 11th inning, driving in the winning run as host Tampa Bay beat Toronto.

Adames’ hit came off Justin Shafer (0-1), who walked two and allowed one with Avisail Garcia. With one out and the infield jampacked with fielders, Adames drove a ball to deep center field.

The Rangers capitalized on three errors and a wild pitch by relief pitchers in the sixth inning, leading to one of four lead changings. Shin-Soo Choo then hit a two-run single in the eighth to tie it at 7 in an unexpected pinch-hit appearance to set up Texas’ ninth-inning rally.

Texas scored three runs in the first against Wade LeBlanc, but LeBlanc settled in and worked through the fifth inning, leaving with Seattle down 3-0. Things went very wrong when LeBlanc was replaced.

The Chicago Cubs’ Albert Almora Jr., center, takes a knee as Jason Heyward, left, and manager Joe Maddon talk to him after his foul ball hit a young fan Wednesday.
Running a reverse: NCAA denies more waivers

Transfer and play right away? Don’t bank on it, the numbers are showing

By Ralph D. Russo
Associated Press

A string of recent high-profile transfers gave the college football world the impression of easier eligibility for players to switch schools and compete right away.

The reality is much different, with the percentage of waiver approvals dropping during 2018-2019 — even as the NCAA changed rules to give athletes a better shot at transferring without needing to sit out a year.

Through May 24, the NCAA committee for legislative relief approved 66% of tranfer waiver requests across all sports for the 2018-19 academic year, down from 73% in the four previous years combined, according to the NCAA. In football, the transfer waiver approval rate for 2018-19 was 68%, down 2 percentage points compared with the previous four academic years.

Players frustrated by denials vented on social networks, while coaches question the NCAA’s consistency. Their complaints, along with those from fans, illustrate how a dearth of public information muddles comparisons and leads onlookers to draw conclusions without knowing the full story behind each case.

“If we’re going to have an ambiguous waiver system let’s just either have a one-time transfer, everybody can play (immediate- ly) and its only one time you can transfer and you got to sit and you can get (the year of eligibility) back,” Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald said. “One way or the other, it eliminates this ambiguity that’s in this waiver process.”

The NCAA Division I council plans to review the rules next month.

Guidelines haven’t changed for what justifies a waiver. The shift in April 2018 simply put immediately eligible back in play for all cases. Previously, the option was tightly restricted to only instances of egregious behavior by the school the player wanted to leave.

Generally, athletes must sit out a year of competition after transferring. In many sports, a one-time exception can be used for an athlete to play right away, but not in high-profile sports such as football and basketball.

Immediate eligibility for transfers was effectively taken off the table after the 2014-15 academic year, though from 2015-18 athletes could attempt to restore a year of eligibility after switching schools. Waiver requests dipped during those three years, then bounced back in 2018-19 after the NCAA softened its rules.

The requests fall into several categories, each with specific guidelines but governed by the same basic principle: Schools have to show the transfer is because of “circumstances outside of the student-athlete’s control and directly impacts the health, safety or well-being of the student-athlete,” according to NCAA bylaws.

The most common waiver requests are for:

- Injury or illness to a family member;
- Being pushed out of the program by a coach at the original school;
- Egregious behavior by the original school;
- Mental health;
- Waiver requests are judged individually and subjectivity bakes into the process — which can make results seem ambiguous.

“If you get lawyers, you’re going to get it, but if you can’t afford the lawyers, you’re not,” Fitzgerald said. “If somebody’s sick, you will, but if somebody’s better you won’t. If you say the coach ran you off, but he really didn’t, is the coach going to come back and fight?”

Attorney Tom Mars, who has assisted Fields, Patterson and others with successful waiver requests, said it was unclear at the NCAA over rulings might be misdirected, as individual schools are responsible for applying and presenting their cases.

“Whatever real or apparent inconsistencies there are in these waiver decisions are driven, in large part, by the varying levels of effort, resources, and quality of the advocacy that go into the preparation,” Mars said. “The compliance personnel who make your decision are being in the whole process.”

Illinois tight end Luke Ford (from Georgia), Cincinnati offensive lineman James Hudson (from Michigan) and Virginia Tech defensive lineman Brock Hoffman (from Coastal Carolina) all garnered headlines recently when the NCAA denied their waiver requests. All three new schools are currently asking for reconsideration or appealing.

Hoffman said he was transferring to be closer to his ailing mother and the denial was based on Virginia Tech’s location more than 100 miles away from his home and his mother’s improving health issues prompted his transfer but because he did not reveal that information publicly.

“Time after time in the past year, I’ve seen college football fans accept as fact something someone else said on Twitter about the merits of a student-athlete’s waiver request or the NCAA’s decision to grant or deny the student-athlete’s waiver,” Mars said. “Despite being clueless about what the actual grounds were, or what evidence was submitted to the NCAA to support a waiver, those fans seem to uncon- trovably jump to the conclusion that the NCAA made another horri- ble decision and start throwing rocks at the people in Indianapolis. In at least some of those cases, those angry fans might have been throwing their rocks in the wrong direction.”

The NCAA does not comment on specific waiver cases and rarely do schools, even when an athlete waives protection under federal privacy laws.

“When appropriate, we do weigh in to educate about the process and give details we can, but we will not compromise personal information for the sake of a better headline for us,” NCAA spokeswoman Emily James said.

The absence of information leads to speculation.

In Fields’ case, it was reported an incident involving a Georgia baseball player directing a racial slur at him during a football game last year was part of his waiver request. But the people who know for sure what case was made on behalf of Fields have never revealed that information publicly.

Mars declined to give details but said there was more to Fields’ case than what was widely speculated.

Brock Hoffman, who said he transferred from Coastal Carolina to Virginia Tech to be closer to his ailing mother, was denied his waiver to be eligible to play immediately. Despite some high-profile waivers, the percentage of players permitted a waiver request to transfer and play immediately is down.

By the numbers

66%

Percentage of transfer waiver requests across all sports that the NCAA committee for legislative relief allowed for the 2018-19 academic year, down from 73% the four previous years combined.

68%

The approval rate for transfer waiver requests for 2018-19 in football, down from 70% the four previous years.

THE NUMBERS

By the numbers

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68%

The approval rate for transfer waiver requests for 2018-19 in football, down from 70% the four previous years.

Tate Martell, after playing sparingly at Ohio State over two seasons, transferred to Miami and will be able to play this season.

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World: International flavor to first finals played outside US

FROM BACK PAGE

His first four trips to the finals pitted him against Cleveland, not far from Akron, Ohio — where he and LeBron James both were born. Toronto has even more direct ties than Cleveland does for Curry, who is the only one of them to play outside US. His father Dell Curry played for the Hornets, Minnesota Timberwolves, New Orleans Pelicans and Memphis Grizzlies, and Curry; his wife Ayesha was born in Toronto. So Stephen Curry lived in Toronto for a half-dozen years, from 1982-2014), Cleveland (2015-2018) and Golden State (2019-present). His first four trips to the finals will be in Toronto.

The Raptors' Kawhi Leonard hoists the trophy after the Raptors defeated the Milwaukee Bucks 100-94 in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference finals on Saturday in Toronto. Leonard has averaged 31.2 points in the playoffs, along with 8.8 rebounds and 3.8 assists while shooting 51 percent.

The last player from Villanova to actually play in a series where he won the title was 14, and his father Dell Curry lived in Toronto for a half-dozen years. Toronto has even more direct ties than Cleveland does for Curry, who is the only one of them to play outside US. His father Dell Curry played for the Hornets, Minnesota Timberwolves, New Orleans Pelicans and Memphis Grizzlies, and Curry; his wife Ayesha was born in Toronto. So Stephen Curry lived in Toronto for a half-dozen years, from 1982-2014), Cleveland (2015-2018) and Golden State (2019-present). His first four trips to the finals will be in Toronto.

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BY TIM REYNOLDS

Associated Press

TORONTO — Draymond Green believes he's the best defensive player in basketball. Klay Thompson sought inclusion on the NBA's all-defensive team for years. Andre Iguodala, even at 35 years old, can still neutralize just about any opponent.

Golden State has some big-time defenders, with a certain amount of smarts.

And they all respect Kawhi Leonard's offensive game.

"They will probably all get a turn at guarding Toronto's best player at some point during the NBA Finals, whether the assignment is by design or just sort of happens organically when defenders get tired during a Raptors possession. When the title series starts on Thursday night, the biggest key for the Warriors will likely be slowing Leonard — the dominant player so far in this playoff run." He's been playing amazing this whole playoff run and really all season," Warriors star Stephen Curry said. "He's always at his own pace, and never seems to get rushed or be in a hurry. He's obviously physically gifted and strong. He can get to his spots, but he's become a really good shooter. Off the dribble, getting to a spot, rising up. ... But we have some capable — beyond capable — defenders to guard him.

Those capabilities will be tested.

The only thing that has slowed Leonard in these playoffs was the flu, which he was dealing with when he shot 5-for-19 in Game 3 against Orlando. Not even a leg injury has been able to derail Leonard. He's averaged 31.2 points in the playoffs, along with 8.8 rebounds and 3.8 assists while shooting 51 percent.

The numbers he's put up so far in the playoffs compare to what LeBron James did in his last four playoff runs with Cleveland.

The East isn't owned by James anymore. Thompson also tipped his cap to Leonard, saying he's MVP-caliber. And Iguodala went a step further, saying the Warriors have to be ready to "throw the whole kitchen at him."

"He's kind of got a different game than anybody," Iguodala said. "He's very unique with his strength, with his quickness, being able to explode to the basket but also being a threat from the perimeter. He's pretty much got it all."
No. 1 Osaka hangs tough; Williams, Djokovic cruise

By John Leicester
Associated Press

PARIS — Naomi Osaka is grinding her way through the French Open the hard way.

To cling to her quest for a third consecutive Grand Slam title, the top-ranked Osaka again had to rally from first-set woes to beat former No. 1 Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 7-5, 6-3, at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris on Thursday. It was the second straight match in which the No. 1 seed lost the first set and rallied to win.

Williams will play Sofia Kenin, an American ranked No. 35, in the third round. The 23-time major champion defeated Japan's Kurumi Nara 6-3, 6-2.

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Williams will play Sofia Kenin, an American ranked No. 35, in the third round. The 23-time major champion defeated Japan's Kurumi Nara 6-3, 6-2.
BOSTON — Blues defensemen Carl Gunnarsson bumped into coach Craig Berube in the bathroom before the start of overtime and told him: “I just need one more.”

“He hit the post in the third there, and he just felt good about himself, obviously. Which he should have,” Berube said. “I liked hearing it.”

After clanging the potential winner off the post in the final two minutes of regulation, Gunnarsson scored on a delayed penalty 3:51 into overtime to give St. Louis a 3-2 victory over the Boston Bruins and tie the Stanley Cup Final at a game apiece.

Jordan Binnington made 21 saves, and Robert Bortuzzo and Vladimir Tarasenko scored in regulation to send a game in the championship series to overtime for the first time since 2016. It was the Blues’ first victory in the Stanley Cup Final in franchise history after 13 straight losses.

“I guess that’s a little bonus and pretty cool if you think about it that way,” Gunnarsson said. “We’re pretty sure we’re not going to stop here.”

Charlie Coyle and Joakim Nordstrom scored and Tuukka Rask made 34 saves for Boston, which won 4-2 in Game 1 on Monday night for its eighth straight post-season victory.

Gunnarsson also assisted on Bortuzzo’s first-period goal and then hit the post behind Rask with about two minutes left in regulation. In the final minute, Boston’s David Pastrnak had a chance off a faceoff, but Binnington turned it away.

“Would have loved to have it in the third, but who cares?” Gunnarsson said on the ice moments after the victory. “It’s great, taking this home.”

After a furious first period that ended in a 2-all tie, the teams went on defense in the second. Despite four penalties, including a high-sticking, blood-drawing double-minor against Boston’s Connor Clifton, neither team was able to score.

It stayed tied through a hard-hitting third period, with both teams failing to convert good scoring chances.

But after the break, it was all Blues.

Boston did not get off a shot in overtime, and the Eastern Conference champs struggled to clear it out of their own zone. Alexander Steen drew a hooking penalty in front of the net, and the Blues pulled Binnington for an extra skater.

Gunnarsson worked around it and to the blue line, passed it to Oskar Sundqvist and then got it back for a rifle shot over Rask’s stick side into the corner of the net.

“He got a second chance at it and made the most of it,” forward Brayden Schenn said. “The boys are happy for him.”

Bruins’ top line has just one goal through first two games

The winning shot by the St. Louis Blues’ Carl Gunnarsson sails into the goal past Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask as Torey Krug watches during overtime Wednesday of Game 2 of the Stanley Cup Final in Boston. The Blues finished with 37 shots while evening the best-of-seven series at one game apiece.

The St. Louis Blues’ Robert Bortuzzo, right, tangles with the Bruins’ Joakim Nordstrom during the second period of Game 2. Nordstrom scored one of the Bruins’ goals in Wednesday’s 3-2 overtime loss.

“Yeah, we need to do better. We can’t play like that. We can control the mistakes that are made.”

Brad Marchand
Bruins forward, on first line’s lack of productivity

“Yeah, we need to do better. We can’t play like that. We can control the mistakes that are made.”

During the winning streak, Boston held a 32-11 scoring margin, scored a startling 34.5% of the time on the power play and limited opponents to 3.8% with the man advantage (1-for-26). Goaltender Tuukka Rask also was a virtual wall between the pipes, with a 1.38 goals-against average and two shutouts. Six of Boston’s eight wins also came by two or more goals.

None of it mattered in Game 2. Despite being handed five power-play opportunities for the second time in as many games, Boston’s lone power-play goal came 3:55 into the game when Coyle capitalized on a goallender interference penalty called on Blues’ winger Sammy Blais.

The Blues finished with 37 shots while evening the best-of-seven series at one game apiece.

The Blues finished with 37 shots while evening the best-of-seven series at one game apiece.
‘World’ champions
Finals between Raptors, Warriors has a distinctly international feel

BY TIM REYNOLDS
Associated Press

TORONTO

S
ometime in the next couple of weeks, either the Toronto Raptors or the Golden State Warriors will proclaim themselves to be world champions.

They won’t be true “world” champions, of course. But these NBA Finals have a very distinct international feel.

Game 1 of the series on Thursday was played in Canada, the first time a finals game was played outside the U.S. Raptors President Masai Ujiri was born in Nigeria. There are players from eight countries — the U.S., along with Canada (Chris Boucher), Spain (Marc Gasol), Britain (OG Anunoby), Cameroon (Pascal Siakam), Congo (Serge Ibaka), Australia (Andrew Bogut) and Sweden (Jonas Jerebko).

“It says a lot that the first NBA Finals outside of America is being played here,” Ujiri said. “Maybe one day it will be real ‘world champions’ or something, but this is what we dream of.”

It’s even a homecoming of sorts for Warriors guard Stephen Curry, again.

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The first NBA Finals to be played outside of the United States will showcase the league’s rapid overseas growth. Pictured, clockwise from top: Serge Ibaka (Congo), Marc Gasol (Spain), Masai Ujiri (Nigeria), Jonas Jerebko (Sweden), Pascal Siakam (Cameroon) and Chris Boucher (Canada).

AP, TNS photos

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- Golden State’s dynamic defenders face toughest challenge yet in Toronto All-Star Leonard, Page 29

No. 1-ranked Osaka tops Azarenka in second round » French Open, Page 30