

US begins drawdown efforts in Afghanistan

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commander of American forces in Afghanistan said some “local actions” related to the drawdown have already begun, though the U.S. withdrawal from the country is not set to begin formally until Saturday.

“All of our forces are now preparing to retrograde,” Army Gen. Scott Miller said Sunday during a news briefing in Kabul.

Part of the transition includes handing over military equipment and bases to Afghan forces, he said.

“There’s certain equipment that we must take back to our

countries — that’s a requirement,” Miller said, according to a transcript of the briefing. “But wherever possible, if we do not have to, we’re looking to ensure that the Afghan security forces have the bases, pieces of equipment (and) parts that are necessary for the functioning of the military.”

Miller said he aims to leave Afghan security forces “in the best possible security posture” while ensuring the safety of foreign troops as they exit.

“We have the military means and capability to fully protect our force during retrograde as well as support the Afghan security forces,” the general said.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Friday sent two additional B-52 strategic bombers and extended the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower’s deployment to the region to offer Miller “options” to protect the exiting forces as needed, chief Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said.

“It would be foolhardy and imprudent not to assume that there could be resistance and opposition to the drawdown by the Taliban,” he said.

On Monday, Kirby told reporters at the Pentagon that further resources — including troops — could be deployed to the region to assist.

“It is perfectly logical that we may see additional logistics personnel and engineering support to help with the physical movement of assets and people out of Afghanistan,” he said.

The drawdown will mean the only U.S. forces stationed in Afghanistan will be those needed to protect the American Embassy in Kabul.

Miller said Sunday that a “return to violence” by the Taliban would be “senseless and tragic.”

“Make no mistake, we have the military means to respond forcefully to any type of attacks against the coalition and the military means to support the Afghan security forces,” he said.

ISIS remains a threat in Afghanistan while in retreat

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Tribal elder Dawlat Khan still has nightmares about fighters from the local affiliate of the Islamic State terror network who swept across his and other villages in eastern Afghanistan five years ago.

The extremists, including Afghans, Pakistanis, Arabs and men from Central Asia, quickly imposed a reign of terror. They kidnapped some locals who worked for the Afghan government, later dropping off their decapitated corpses in public places. In one instance, villagers were summoned to a beheading where some fainted while others froze as they watched in horror.

Militants of ISIS have since been driven back into the mountains by blistering U.S. and Afghan bombing raids and a fierce ground campaign by the Taliban, Afghanistan’s homegrown insurgents. The Taliban, eager to expand their domestic political power, pledged to the Trump ad-

ministration last year they would prevent any attacks on the West from Afghan soil after foreign troops leave.

Recent success in containing ISIS is central to the calculus of President Joe Biden, who decided earlier this month to pull all remaining U.S. troops out of Afghanistan by the summer. Biden argues that threats to the West, whether by ISIS or remnants of the al-Qaida network, can be defused from a distance.

Yet there are concerns that in the potential chaos of a post-withdrawal Afghanistan, ISIS “will be able to find additional space to operate,” said Seth Jones, senior vice-president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Some note that it took more than three years to dislodge and degrade ISIS fighters, many of them ethnic Pashtuns from Pakistan’s tribal regions and Afghans from the northeastern Nangarhar and Kunar provinces.

The retreating militants left behind mined roads and fields.

Khan, the tribal leader, fled his village of Pananzai with his six brothers and their families at the height of the battles against ISIS. They’re not rushing home, even though the family of 63 people is crammed into nine small rooms in Nangarhar’s provincial capital of Jalalabad.

“We are afraid they will return,” Khan, a father of 12, said of ISIS fighters.

Biden has said he will hold the Taliban accountable for their commitment not to allow terror threats against the United States or its allies from Afghan soil. The U.S. invaded Afghanistan 20 years ago after al-Qaida militants, hosted by the Taliban, staged the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

But there are concerns about ISIS re-emerging, particularly if the Taliban and the Afghan government can’t reach a power-sharing deal.

Ongoing fighting between the

Taliban and the government could further erode the morale of Afghanistan’s security forces who sustain heavy casualties daily and are plagued by widespread corruption. At the same time, ISIS continues to recruit among radicalized university students and disgruntled Taliban, said a former Afghan security official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to reporters.

Evan Kohlmann, a terrorism consultant, said for a while it appeared the ISIS presence in Afghanistan and surrounding regions “was all but dead,” but the group’s operations “have since resumed in earnest.”

“They represent a significant terrorist threat, but their tactics remain in the realm of assassination and sabotage,” said Kohlmann, who has worked with the FBI and the Nine Eleven Finding Answers Foundation that emerged following the assaults on America.

Guam: Navy should share cost of toxic cleanup

By **WYATT OLSON**
Stars and Stripes

The federal government has shielded the U.S. Navy from paying its fair share to clean up a toxic dump on Guam by selective use of two key environmental laws, an attorney for Guam argued Monday before the U.S. Supreme Court.

“The bottom line is that the United States wants to have its cake and eat it, too,” said Gregory Garre, a former U.S. solicitor general, representing Guam, according to a transcript of oral arguments.

The Supreme Court has been asked to scrutinize the applicability of provisions found in the Clean Water Act and the so-called Superfund Act, both administered by the Environmental Protection Agency.

At issue is the cleanup of the 23-acre Ordot Landfill, which the Navy created during World War II for the vast amount of refuse generated during that conflict and later during the Cold War. It was also the primary dump used by Guam residents for decades.

The landfill, which the federal government turned over to Guam in the 1970s, has leached toxic waste into the Lonfit River and two of its tributaries.

Guam is faced with more than \$160 million in cleanup costs for the site, according to court documents the territory filed.

“That figure is a staggering sum for the people of Guam, alone comprising nearly a fifth of its total annual budget,” according to Guam’s petition in October to the Supreme Court seeking to overturn a lower court decision.

The Supreme Court agreed in January to hear the case.

In 1980, Congress enacted the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act — or Superfund Act — that imposed the costs of cleaning up hazardous dumpsites on current and past owners of the sites and others who contributed to the hazard.

The EPA, which administers the Superfund Act, listed the Ordot dump as a priority

for cleanup in 1983. The agency named the Navy as one of the parties potentially responsible for the site.

The federal government sued Guam to clean up the site in 2002, but instead of litigating under the Superfund Act it did so under the Clean Water Act. The case was settled by consent decree in 2004 when Guam agreed to close and cover the landfill. Guam did not admit liability in the decree.

Guam sued the Navy in 2017 under provisions in the Superfund Act that could force the federal government to contribute to cleanup costs.

A lower court decided that Guam could seek “contribution” by the Navy under the Superfund Act, even though the consent decree settlement had been wholly under the Clean Water Act.

The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed that decision, which Guam appealed to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court’s decision is expected in the next few months.

Scientists: Up to 25,000 barrels at DDT dump site

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Marine scientists say they have found what they believe to be as many as 25,000 barrels that possibly contain DDT dumped off the Southern California coast near Catalina Island, where a massive underwater toxic waste site dating back to World War II has long been suspected.

The 27,345 “barrel-like” images were captured by researchers at the University of California San Diego’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography. They mapped more than 36,000 acres of seafloor between Santa Cata-

lina Island and the Los Angeles coast in a region previously found to contain high levels of the toxic chemical in sediments and in the ecosystem.

Historical shipping logs show that industrial companies in Southern California used the basin as a dumping ground until 1972, when the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, also known as the Ocean Dumping Act, was enacted.

Resting deep in the ocean, the exact location and extent of the dumping was not known until now.

The territory covered was “staggering,” said Eric Terrill, chief scientist of the expedition and director of the Marine Physical Laboratory at Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Underwater drones using sonar technology captured high-resolution images of barrels resting 3,000 feet below the surface all along the steep seafloor that was surveyed. They also were seen beyond the dumpsite limits.

“It really was a surprise to everybody who’s worked with the data and who sailed at sea,” he told reporters Monday.

Review determines SOCOM tweet was typed in error

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

A social media manager’s online search, not a security breach, resulted in a misleading tweet by Special Operations Command Central over the weekend, according to the unit.

The now-deleted tweet contained only the words “Afghanistan” and “Islamic State” in quotation marks, according to screenshots shared on the social media

platform.

“In the past 12 hours someone hacked our unit’s official account and tweeted a misleading message,” the Tampa, Fla.-based command tweeted Saturday evening. “We apologize for any confusion or insensitive content.”

However, in a statement Monday a spokesman for the command, which is charged with planning special operations throughout the Middle East, Central Asia

and parts of South Asia, said a hacker wasn’t responsible.

“After review, it was determined our Twitter account was not hacked and a social media administrator inadvertently tweeted the words while conducting a search for current topical events,” Army Maj. Tony Hoefler said in an email.

“No security breach took place, and we apologize for any confusion this may have caused,” he said.

US has slowest population growth in decades

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. population growth has slowed to the lowest rate since the Great Depression, the Census Bureau said, as Americans continued their march to the South and West and onetime engines of growth, New York and California, lost political influence.

Altogether, the U.S. population rose to 331,449,281 last year, the Census Bureau said Monday, a 7.4% increase over the previous decade that was the second-slowest ever. Experts say that paltry pace reflects the combination of an aging population, slowing immigration and the scars of the Great Recession more than a decade ago, which led many young adults to delay marriage and families.

The new allocation of congressional seats comes in the first release of data from last

year's headcount. The numbers generally chart familiar American migration patterns: Texas and Florida, two Republican Sunbelt giants, added enough population to gain congressional seats as chillier climates like New York and Ohio saw slow growth and lost political muscle.

The report also confirms one historic marker: For the first time in 170 years of statehood, California is losing a congressional seat, a result of slowed migration to the nation's most populous state, which was once a symbol of the country's expansive frontier.

The state population figures, known as the apportionment count, determine distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal spending each year. They also mark the official beginning of once-a-decade redistricting battles. The numbers released Monday,

along with more detailed data expected later this year, will be used by state legislatures or independent commissions to redraw political maps to account for shifts in population.

It's been a bumpy road getting this far. The 2020 census faced a once-in-a-century coronavirus pandemic, wildfires, hurricanes, allegations of political interference with the Trump administration's failed effort to add a citizenship question, fluctuating deadlines and lawsuits.

Texas was the biggest winner — the second-most populous state added two congressional seats, while Florida and North Carolina each gained one. Colorado, Montana and Oregon all added residents and gained a seat each. States losing seats included Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

The new numbers contain

some surprises. Though Texas and Florida grew, the final census count had them each gaining one fewer seat than expected. Arizona, another fast-growing state that demographers considered a sure bet to pick up a new seat, failed to get one. All three states have large Latino populations that represent about half their growth, and this could be an early sign that Hispanics shied away from the Trump administration's count.

Still, Thomas Saenz, president of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, said he wasn't ready to "sound the alarm" over the underperformance of states with large Hispanic populations. He noted that he believes Hispanic growth helped states like Colorado and Oregon each gain seats and prevented states like New York and Illinois from losing more.

Iran nuke deal talks resume in Vienna amid new complications

Associated Press

BERLIN — World powers were set to resume high level talks in Vienna on Tuesday focused on bringing the United States back into the nuclear deal with Iran, in their first session since comments surfaced from the Iranian foreign minister alleging that Russia once tried to sabotage the pact.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has thus far refused to comment on the remarks from Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, made in a seven-hour interview with a think tank associated with the Iranian presidency that leaked over the weekend.

Russia's top representative at the Vienna talks, Mikhail Ulyanov, who has outwardly been one of the most optimistic about the possibility of getting Tehran and Washington to agree to terms for the U.S. to rejoin the 2015 deal, also made no mention of the allegations before the meetings, saying in a tweet only that "the participants will continue negotiations on restoration of the nuclear deal."

Ulyanov is joining representatives from China, Germany, France and Britain — the

other parties to the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA — for the talks chaired by the European Union.

"Participants will continue their discussions in view of a possible return of the United States to the JCPOA and on how to ensure the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA," the EU delegation said before the talks.

The U.S. is not at the table because it unilaterally pulled out of the deal in 2018 under former President Donald Trump. President Joe Biden wants to rejoin the deal.

The deal promises Iran economic incentives in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. The reimposition of American sanctions has left the country's economy reeling, and Tehran has reacted by steadily increasing its violations of the restrictions of the deal, such as increasing the purity of uranium it enriches and its stockpiles, in a thus-far unsuccessful effort to pressure the other countries to provide relief.

Explosive-loaded 'drone' boat targets Saudi port of Yanbu

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A remotely piloted boat packed with explosives targeted the Saudi port of Yanbu in the Red Sea on Tuesday, the kingdom said, with the blast sending black smoke into the sky off the coast.

Saudi Arabia claimed to have intercepted and destroyed the attack boat. Private security firms, however, suggested that commercial traffic near the port may have been hit in the assault.

Details remained scarce, but the incident comes after a series of attacks on shipping in the wider Mideast region amid a shadow war between Iran and Israel and against the backdrop of ongoing negotiations between Tehran and world powers over Iran's tattered nuclear deal.

The incident also comes amid the kingdom's yearslong war against Yemen's Houthi rebels. The Houthis have used bomb-laden drones and explosive-packed boats in attacks targeting the kingdom in the past. The rebels did not immediately claim any assaults Tuesday, however, and did not respond to a request for comment.

Biden to raise contractors' minimum wage

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is set to sign an executive order to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour for federal contractors, providing a pay bump to hundreds of thousands of workers.

Biden administration officials said ahead of Tuesday's signing that the higher wages would lead to greater worker productivity, offsetting any additional costs to taxpayers.

"This executive order will promote economy and efficiency in federal contracting, providing value for taxpayers by enhancing worker productivity and generating higher-quality work by boosting workers' health, morale, and effort," the White House said in a statement.

The officials could not provide an exact figure on how many workers for federal contractors would receive a raise, only that

it would be hundreds of thousands. There are an estimated 5 million contract workers in the federal government, according to a posting last year for the Brookings Institution by Paul Light, a public policy professor at New York University.

The increase could be dramatic for workers who earn the current minimum of \$10.95 an hour. Those workers would receive a 37% pay hike, though the increase would be rolled out gradually, according to the terms of the order.

The White House said the workers would include cleaning professionals and maintenance workers, nursing assistants who care for veterans, cafeteria workers providing for the military and laborers who build and repair federal infrastructure.

All federal agencies would need to include the higher wage in new contract of-

ferings by Jan. 30 of next year. By March 30, agencies would need to implement the higher wage into new contracts. The increase would also be in existing contracts that are extended.

The wage would be indexed to inflation, so it would automatically increase with each year to reflect changes in prices. The tipped minimum wage of \$7.65 an hour for federal contractors would be replaced by the standard minimum by 2024.

Biden has pushed to establish a \$15 hourly minimum wage nationwide for all workers, making it a part of his coronavirus relief package. But the Senate parliamentarian said the wage hike did not follow the budgetary rules that allowed the \$1.9 trillion plan to pass with a simple majority, so it was not included in the bill that became law in March.

Calif. recall has enough signatures to make ballot

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Organizers of the recall effort against California Gov. Gavin Newsom collected enough valid signatures to qualify for the ballot, state election officials said Monday, likely triggering just the second such election in state history.

"The people of California have done what the politicians thought would be impossible," said Orrin Heatlie, the retired county sheriff's sergeant who launched the recall effort last year. "Our work is just beginning. Now the real campaign is about to commence."

Heatlie spearheaded the signature collection effort that began last June and then picked up momentum in the fall as frustration grew over Newsom's coronavirus-related actions. The California secretary of state's office said more than 1.6 million signatures had been deemed valid as of Monday, about 100,000 more than required.

People who signed petitions now have 30 days to withdraw

their signatures, though it's unlikely enough will do so to stop the question from going to voters.

The recall against Newsom, a first-term Democrat seen as a possible White House hopeful someday, will be among the highest-profile political races in the country this year. He launched a campaign to fight the effort in March alongside endorsements from Democrats including U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. So far no other Democrats have jumped in to run against him.

"I am not going to take this fight lying down," read a fundraising appeal sent by Newsom shortly after Monday's announcement about the signatures. "There is too much at stake, and I intend to win."

If Newsom survives the recall he will be up for reelection in 2022.

The only other time a governor has faced a recall election was in 2003, when Democrat Gray Davis was voted out and replaced with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger.

In first open press conference in months, NY Gov. Cuomo claims he did nothing wrong

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — In his first face-to-face encounter with journalists in months, Gov. Andrew Cuomo on Monday flatly denied he had done anything inappropriate with any of the women who have accused him of sexual misconduct and harassment.

Speaking to reporters at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse, the Democrat abandoned his past approach of expressing contrition for some past behavior while declining to address whether specific allegations were true.

"You were in those rooms. You know the truth. So can you tell the people of the state of New York yes or no? Did you do the things you were accused of?" asked New York Times reporter Jesse McKinley.

"To put it very simply, no," Cuomo said.

"All the groping, the sexual harassment, you deny all of that?" McKinley said.

"That's right. Yes," Cuomo said.

Several current and former state employees and other women have accused Cuomo of making unwanted sexual remarks and advances, giving them unwanted kisses or touching them inappropriately.

Asked if he would consider disciplining himself or resigning if the state attorney general, who is investigating the claims, reports he did harass women, Cuomo dismissed that possibility.

"The report can't say anything different because I didn't do anything wrong," Cuomo said.

This was the first time Cuomo has allowed a group of journalists to question him in person since sexual harassment allegations surfaced in December.

Cuomo has urged the public to await the results of investigations being conducted by Attorney General Letitia James and the state Assembly's judiciary committee, which is exploring whether there are grounds to impeach him.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Teacher may avoid tax hit for grocery fundraising

CT MANSFIELD — A Connecticut teacher who raised more than \$40,000 to help people buy groceries during the pandemic may not be hit with a big tax bill after all.

Louis Goffinet received a form telling him he owed \$16,000 in taxes on the money. But Goffinet told the Hartford Courant that after consulting with experts, he believes the money will be classified as a gift exemption and not taxed.

The 27-year-old middle school teacher began spending some of his own money to pick up groceries for elderly neighbors afraid to go to the store during the early days of the pandemic. He later organized two fundraisers on Facebook, with a donation limit of \$200. Goffinet eventually bought holiday gifts and paid rent for people in need, in addition to groceries.

Canadian teen arrested, accused of bomb threat

LA SOUTH VACHERIE — A 15-year-old boy from Canada was arrested in Louisiana on a charge accusing him of making a phony bomb threat to an Ivy League university in New Jersey, prompting evacuation of four buildings.

A May 3 hearing is scheduled to decide whether the teen, whose name was not released because of his age, can be sent to Mercer County, N.J., to face a criminal count of second-degree false public alarm, The Times-Picayune/The New Orleans Advocate reported.

Princeton's art museum,

chapel, main library and Nasau Hall were evacuated Sept. 19 because of the call naming them, according to a university alert.

St. James Parish Sheriff Willy Martin Jr. said deputies arrested the boy without incident March 24 at his grandparents' house in rural South Vacherie, a community between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

Deputy kicks alligator out of backyard pool

FL ST. PETERSBURG — A sheriff's deputy got one of those "only in Florida" calls when she had to wrangle a small alligator out of a backyard swimming pool.

Pinellas County Sheriff's Deputy Heather Harris "played lifeguard" in St. Petersburg, the sheriff's office said in a Facebook post.

After posing for a quick selfie with the gator still lurking in the pool, Harris "kicked this guy out," the post said.

In the second photo, Harris was photographed holding the gator, whose snout was taped shut.

Officials said it might be a good idea to take a look in the pool before jumping in.

"It's just another interesting day in Tampa Bay!" the sheriff's office post said.

Volunteers help frogs, salamanders cross road

MA BOSTON — Residents of one Massachusetts town are helping some local amphibians get where they need to be this mating season.

WBZ News Radio reported

volunteers in Pepperell are working with the local conservation administrator to assist salamanders and wood frogs who venture out onto local streets at night.

This time of year, salamanders and frogs travel from their winter homes to wetlands where they will mate, making them especially vulnerable to traffic.

Conservation Administrator Paula Terrasi said the volunteers "stand guard and try to let them cross on their own."

Police allege man left explosive at police station

IN TERRE HAUTE — A 50-year-old man was arrested for allegedly leaving an improvised explosive device and causing a fire outside the Terre Haute Police Department.

Curtis T. Hogan, of Terre Haute, was booked on charges of possession of a destructive device and attempted arson.

A small fire was found outside the station and officers found a gas container converted into an improvised explosive device, police said. No one was injured.

Police said Hogan was identified after authorities posted information on social media with surveillance photos.

'Gothic Hanging Jail' reopens for tours

LA DERIDDER — A century-old Louisiana jail called the Gothic Hanging Jail is back open for tours, except when it's raining.

The Beauregard Parish Tourist Commission had halted

daytime and lantern tours of the 107-year-old jail with a third-floor gallows because of the coronavirus pandemic and damage from hurricanes Laura and Delta.

"Because of roof and concrete damage done to the jail, we will have to cancel tours on rainy days or nights," Beauregard Parish Tourist Commission Executive Director Lori Darbonne told The American Press.

The concrete jail with walls 1 foot thick opened in 1914. Its gallows was used only on March 9, 1928, for two men who had robbed and killed a taxi driver, according to an article in the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities publication "64 Parishes."

Moths that cause itchy rash primed for big year

ME BANGOR — The Maine Forest Service is warning residents that this could be an especially bad summer for those affected by a species of invasive moth that causes an itchy rash in people.

The browntail moth first arrived in Maine a century ago and their caterpillars have poisonous hairs that irritate human skin. Officials said there will be more moths this summer and their range has also expanded, the Bangor Daily News reported.

The moths have been aided by dry spring conditions last year that was followed by a warm fall. That created good conditions for the moths to reproduce and spread.

— From wire reports



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Unusual offseason complicates NFL Draft

Associated Press

About the only certainty in the confounding 2021 NFL Draft is Trevor Lawrence going to the Jaguars with the first overall pick.

Beyond that, it's really anybody's guess following the most unorthodox of run-ups to the league's annual parade of prospects.

COVID-19 opt-outs and shortened or shelved seasons in the fall were followed by the combine cancellation and the elimination of in-person interviews this spring because of the pandemic.

Teams had to rely on Zoom calls to get to know players.

"I've said this before: what we're doing is educated guessing," Giants general manager Dave Gettleman said. "So, this makes us a little more uneducated, not having this personal touch with these players."

Although all 32 teams received the videos from all 103 pro days, the lack of uniform, electronic timing resulted in suspect 40-yard dashes on fast surfaces clocked by hand.

"It's hard to compare apples to oranges. You'd like to have everybody run on the same surface," Chargers GM Tom Telesco said. "That's the biggest part

of the Indianapolis combine when the players go in and get their physicals done."

Only 150 players went to Indy this month for physicals, leaving spotty medical reports on many of the athletes heading into the 259-pick draft.

All of this should result in a wild weekend of buildup for the 2021 season, when the NFL hopes sellouts replace opt-outs and normalcy returns in sports and society alike.

"It's a very complicated draft," ESPN analyst Mel Kiper Jr. said. "I always say, 'mysterious/complicated' draft" because teams didn't have uniform 40-yard dash times and other measurements and didn't get to poke and prod the prospects themselves.

"The opt-outs complicate things even more," added Kiper.

"It's a year like no other," agreed Bengals player personnel director Duke Tobin. "There are players in this draft who have really only played one year of college football. You're projecting."

More so than ever.

"There are guys in this draft that (come) August it'll be the first time in 20 months they'll have put pads on," Gettleman

marveled. "And some of those guys are very, very highly rated."

Hall of Fame executive Bill Polian called this year's draft a throwback to a bygone era before technology changed the scouting world.

"I think it will probably be less homogenous than it's been in the past — which is not a bad thing," Polian said.

NFL Network analyst Daniel Jeremiah said consensus this year was as elusive as Tyreek Hill is in man coverage.

"Look, group think is a real thing," Jeremiah said. "When you get scouts that pal around together, we go to the same schools and you'd be at the same places watching the same players. Everybody ends up talking and you kind of end up getting some consensus on some players."

Same thing at the combine.

"So there's just been less gathering. I think in some ways it's better because you get individual evaluations," Jeremiah said. "But I can't remember more variance just talking to buddies around the league about specific players where the (evaluations) are so wildly different."

Jeremiah also considers this

shakeup a positive development.

"That makes it fun," he said. "I think a lot of teams that I've talked to have really tried to shrink their draft board more so than in years past."

You know what else has dwindled?

The entire pool of candidates.

With the NCAA granting an extra year of eligibility because of the pandemic, a crush of players stayed in school. By mid-April, fewer than 700 players had signed a standard representation agreement with an NFL agent, about one-third the usual number.

That left this thinnest of draft classes with their college pro day performances to replace the one-stop scouting combine — unless they were lucky enough to get invited to the Senior Bowl, where every team got 15 minutes of face time with them.

The result of all these factors is a puzzling draft loaded at the top but blindfolded at the bottom.

Teams were allowed up to five one-hour videoconferences with prospects this spring, so that softened the blow of not getting to fly them in or interview them at the combine.

Essential Quality is 2-1 favorite for Kentucky Derby

Associated Press

LOUISVILLE, Ky. — Essential Quality is the 2-1 morning line favorite and will start from the No. 14 post for Saturday's 147th Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs.

The \$3 million, 1¼-mile marquee race for 3-year-old colts is back on the first Saturday of May after being delayed to Labor Day weekend last fall because of the coronavirus pandemic. The race is expected to be viewed in-person by 45,000 spectators.

Rock Your World is the 5-1

second choice from the No. 15 slot with Known Agenda the 6-1 third choice despite drawing the rail in the 20-horse field. Hot Rod Charlie drew 8-1 odds as the fourth choice from the No. 9 slot.

The obvious focus is on Essential Quality, the reigning 2-year-old champion who enters the Run for the Roses 5-0. His haul of graded stakes victories includes a gutsy Blue Grass victory at Keeneland on April 3 that vaulted the gray son of Tapit to the top of the Derby standings with 140 points and ce-

mented him as the projected favorite.

He's one of two entries trained by Brad Cox, who grew up a few blocks from Churchill Downs and is trying to become the first Louisville native to win the race. The Eclipse Award-winner will also saddle Mandalous from the No. 7 as a 15-1 choice in his Derby debut.

Unbeaten Rock Your World, trained by John Sadler, comes in 3-0 following a 4¼-length victory in the Santa Anita Derby.

Known Agenda leads Todd Pletcher's four-horse contin-

gent that includes Bourbonic, who drew the outside No. 20 post; Dynamic One (No. 11, 20-1 odds) and Sainthood (No. 5, 50-1). The chestnut colt has won two of three starts this season and has three wins, a second and a third in six career starts.

Hot Rod Charlie's post draw in the middle brought a loud cheer from his contingent as the colt avoided being bunched inside out of the gate. Trainer Doug O'Neill's colt won the Louisiana Derby by two lengths and was second to Essential Quality with 110 Derby points.

Ohtani pitches, hits Angels to victory

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — That was quite a two-way Sho in a big league start like none since Babe Ruth a century ago.

Shohei Ohtani struck out nine after a shaky first inning on the mound, and also scored three runs and drove in two as the Los Angeles Angels beat the Texas Rangers 9-4 on Monday night.

“A pretty complete game of baseball,” Angels manager Joe Maddon said. “If you weren’t entertained by watching him tonight, you can’t be entertained watching the game of baseball.”

A day after hitting his seventh homer to tie for the MLB lead, Ohtani (1-0) became the first home run leader to be the starting pitcher for a game since Ruth for the New York Yankees against Detroit on June 13, 1921. It was the second time this season Ohtani pitched and batted second.

After giving up four runs while throwing 28 pitches in the first inning — when he

walked two, hit another batter and threw a wild pitch — Ohtani got the Angels even at 4-4 in the top of the second when he had a two-run double and then scored on a single by Mike Trout, who had four hits in his return to the lineup.

“I was able to drive in those two runs, that was huge for me, and we were able to tie the game up in the second inning,” Ohtani said through his translator. “So it felt like a fresh start, I treated it like a brand new ballgame.”

The Japanese right-hander retired 14 of the last 15 batters he faced in five innings, with all of his strikeouts in that span. It was his first big league win since 2018, before Tommy John surgery that kept him off the mound for all of 2019 and most of last season.

“I’m very happy for the team victory,” Ohtani said. “Personally that first inning was terrible, so I can’t be overly satisfied.”

Ohtani drew a one-out walk and scored on Jared Walsh’s single in the Angels first. He bunted against the shift for a single in the sixth and scored on Walsh’s double, and was

done.

“He’s impressive. Clearly, he’s vulnerable in the first inning, and he’s shown that twice against us,” Rangers manager Chris Woodward said. “But, you know, to watch him settle down ... just amazing. Then he’s doing some things with the bat. You just don’t see kind of what he can do.”

Justin Upton and Albert Pujols put the Angels ahead to stay with back-to-back homers to start the third off Texas starter Jordan Lyles (1-2), who allowed seven runs and 10 hits in 2⅓ innings. José Iglesias later went deep off Hyeon-Jong Yang.

Trout also had an RBI double while raising his average to .426. He had missed three games because of a bruised left elbow after getting hit by a pitch in the series opener at Houston on Thursday.

Texas led on Nate Lowe’s sixth homer, a three-run shot that gave him an MLB best-matching 21 RBIs. David Dahl’s sacrifice fly made it 4-1.

Indians top Twins on Luplow homer in the 10th

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Jordan Luplow hit a two-run homer in the 10th inning off Alex Colomé, giving the Cleveland Indians a 5-3 victory over the Minnesota Twins in their series opener Monday night.

Luplow’s second career game-ending homer was a leadoff shot that easily cleared the wall in left field, scoring free runner César Hernández from second base. Minnesota fell to 0-5 in extra-inning games.

Emmanuel Clase (2-1) worked a perfect inning, helping Cleveland to its second straight win. Luplow was the only batter faced by Colomé (1-3).

It was the first of 19 meetings this season between teams that have combined to win the last five AL Central titles. The Twins are the two-time defending champions.

Luis Arraez gave Minnesota a 3-2 lead in the eighth when he singled home Jake Cave with two

outs, but José Ramírez answered in the bottom half with a homer off Tyler Duffey.

Astros 5, Mariners 2: Jose Altuve had three hits and two RBIs in his return to the lineup after testing positive for COVID-19, leading Houston over visiting Seattle.

Yordan Alvarez and Yuli Gurriel both had three hits and drove in a run as the Astros won for the fourth time in five games after losing their previous three.

José Urquidy (1-2) yielded two runs in six innings and Ryan Pressly worked a scoreless ninth for his second save.

Braves 8, Cubs 7: Freddie Freeman hit a three-run homer and host Atlanta woke up offensively after a grim doubleheader.

The Braves were coming off two shutout losses to Arizona the previous afternoon — managing just a single hit, by Freeman, over 14 innings. Madison Bumgarner held Atlanta without a hit in his seven-inning victory, though it did not qualify as an of-

ficial no-hitter.

Phillies 2, Cardinals 1: Zack Wheeler took a one-hit shutout into the ninth inning and Rhys Hoskins homered twice as Philadelphia won at St. Louis.

Hoskins’ seventh career multi-homer game and second this season helped the Phillies improve to 3-1 against the Cardinals.

Reds 5, Dodgers 3 (10): Jesse Winker’s two-run homer in the 10th inning sent Cincinnati to a win at Los Angeles to snap a seven-game losing streak.

Winker led off the 10th by taking Kenley Jansen (0-1) deep with the free runner on second base. The Reds lead the majors with 34 home runs, including five by Winker, who tops the National League with a .382 batting average.

Marlins 8, Brewers 0: Trevor Rogers pitched six spotless innings and Corey Dickerson finished a triple shy of the cycle in Miami’s win at Milwaukee.

Dickerson drove in three runs, two against Brewers starter Cor-

bin Burnes (2-2).

Royals 3, Tigers 2: Jarrod Dyson doubled and scored the go-ahead run in the fifth inning and Kansas City completed a four-game sweep on the road for the first time since 1999.

The surprising Royals have won a season-high five straight.

Orioles 4, Yankees 2: Cedric Mullins hit two home runs and a double, Matt Harvey pitched six impressive innings and host Baltimore moved one game ahead of last-place New York in the AL East.

Athletics 2, Rays 1: Sean Murphy homered, Sean Manaea got some key defensive help and Oakland bounced back with a road win a day after its 13-game winning streak ended.

Giants 12, Rockies 0: Anthony DeSclafani pitched a three-hitter, Evan Longoria had a two-run double and an RBI single after sitting out three games with a sore left hamstring, and host San Francisco routed Colorado.

Lakers rally in fourth to beat Magic

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Devin Booker scored 33 points and the Phoenix Suns capped a grueling road trip with a 118-110 victory Monday night that snapped the New York Knicks' nine-game winning streak.

Chris Paul scored the final seven Phoenix points as the Suns held on to finish 3-2 on their trip that included visits to the top four teams in the Eastern Conference.

Mikal Bridges added 21 points, Paul had 20 and Cameron Johnson hit three three-pointers in the final period after the game was tied at 87 through three.

Derrick Rose had 22 points, six rebounds and six assists for the Knicks, who were on their longest winning streak since a 13-game run late in the 2012-13 season. Julius Randle scored 18 points but was off his form from most of the streak, shooting just 6-for-17 with six rebounds and

four assists.

Lakers 114, Magic 103: Dennis Schroder scored 13 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, Anthony Davis added 18 points and eight rebounds, and visiting Los Angeles rallied to beat Orlando.

Trailing 80-79 following a sluggish third quarter, the Lakers' offense came alive late to end their losing streak at three games. LA outscored Orlando 35-23 in the fourth period, improving to 19-12 on the road and 9-20 when trailing after three quarters.

Spurs 146, Wizards 143 (OT): DeMar DeRozan had 37 points and 10 assists, and visiting San Antonio ended Washington's season-best eight-game winning streak.

DeRozan scored nine of his points in the fourth quarter and overtime. Neither team led by more than three points after DeRozan's jumper pulled the Spurs within 118-115 with 5:13

left in the fourth.

Timberwolves 105, Jazz 104: D'Angelo Russell had a season-high seven three-pointers and scored 27 points, and Karl-Anthony Towns had 21 points and 11 rebounds as host Minnesota rallied to beat Utah.

Mike Conley gave the Jazz a 104-103 lead with 6.4 seconds left, but Ricky Rubio found Russell for a layup on the ensuing possession. Conley then lost the ball in a scramble as time expired.

Pelicans 120, Clippers 103: Zion Williamson scored 23 points on an array of power moves, spinning dribbles and even a three-pointer, and host New Orleans beat Los Angeles.

Bulls 110, Heat 102: Nikola Vucevic scored 24 points, Daniel Theis added 23 and visiting Chicago moved closer to the last play-in spot in the Eastern Conference by beating Miami.

Nuggets 120, Grizzlies 96: Michael Porter Jr. erupted for

31 points, courtesy of a torrid shooting night, Paul Millsap added nine of his 12 points in the fourth quarter and short-handed Denver beat visiting Memphis.

76ers 121, Thunder 90: Joel Embiid scored 21 points, Ben Simmons had 12 in his return to the lineup and host Philadelphia sent Oklahoma City to its franchise record-tying 14th straight loss.

Pistons 100, Hawks 86: Jerami Grant and Frank Jackson scored 18 points apiece to lift host Detroit over Atlanta.

Raptors 112, Cavaliers 96: At Tampa, Fla., Pascal Siakam scored 25 points, rookie Malachi Flynn added 18 and Toronto pulled away in the second half to beat depleted Cleveland.

Kings 113, Mavericks 106: Tyrese Haliburton had 14 points and 10 assists in his second straight start in place of leading scorer De'Aaron Fox, and host Sacramento beat Dallas.

McDavid's hat trick leads Oilers past Jets, into 2nd place

Associated Press

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Connor McDavid recorded his third hat trick of the season and the ninth of his career, leading Edmonton to a 6-1 win over Winnipeg on Monday night that lifted the Oilers past the Jets and into second place in the North Division.

Leon Draisaitl had a goal and an assist and Alex Chiasson and Darnell Nurse also scored for Edmonton, which has two games in hand on the Jets. Mike Smith made 36 saves.

McDavid, who leads the NHL in scoring with 81 points, also had an assist.

The Oilers improved to 6-2-0 against Winnipeg and have won five straight versus the Jets, allowing just six goals over that span.

Mark Scheifele scored for Win-

nipeg (27-18-3). The Jets dropped a fourth straight game in regulation.

Blues 4, Avalanche 1: David Perron had a goal and two assists as host St. Louis beat Colorado.

Vladimir Tarasenko, Brayden Schenn and Robert Thomas also scored, and Jordan Binnington made 30 saves as the Blues won their second straight game against the Avalanche. Colorado won the season series 5-3.

Canadiens 2, Flames 1: Tyler Toffoli's goal in the second period was the winner as Montreal won at Calgary.

Toffoli scored his fourth goal in as many games and his team-leading 25th of the season. Shea Weber also scored for the Canadiens. Jake Allen made 21 saves for the win.

Senators 2, Canucks 1: Drake Batherson scored a tiebreaking

goal midway through the second period and host Ottawa defeated Vancouver.

Josh Norris also scored for the Senators, and Brady Tkachuk had two assists.

Stars 4, Hurricanes 3 (OT): Jamie Benn scored the overtime winner for the second straight game and assisted on Dallas' three regulation goals in a win over visiting Carolina.

Benn scored on a pass from Jason Robertson at 2:44 of overtime. He scored 32 seconds into overtime Saturday to beat Detroit 2-1.

Predators 4, Panthers 1: Juuse Saros made 39 saves, and host Nashville beat Florida to hold on to the fourth and final playoff spot in the Central Division.

Saros improved to 13-4-1 in his last 18 starts and helped the Predators stay two points ahead of

Dallas by beating the Panthers for the first time this season in Nashville.

Kings 4, Ducks 1: Sean Walker and Mikey Anderson scored, Jonathan Quick made 21 saves and host Los Angeles defeated Anaheim.

Dustin Brown and Trevor Moore added empty-net goals for the Kings, who are six points behind St. Louis in the race for the final playoff spot in the West Division.

Sharks 6, Coyotes 4: Alexander Barabanov scored his first NHL goal and rookie goalie Josef Korenar made 21 saves in his first NHL win as San Jose beat Arizona in its first home game with fans in 13 months.

Korenar made 21 saves as the Sharks snapped an eight-game losing streak, their longest since 2005.