

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, December 1, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

GAO: Littoral combat ship 'at a crossroads'

By TONY CAPACCIO
Bloomberg

The U.S. Navy's littoral combat ship program "stands at a crossroads" as the service prepares to ask Congress to authorize spending as much as \$14 billion to buy more of the troubled vessels, congressional auditors say.

Congress must decide "whether a ship that costs twice as much yet delivers less capability than planned warrants an additional investment," the U.S. Government Accountability Office said in a report issued Thursday as the Senate Armed Services Committee met to review the \$29 billion program.

The Navy plans to ask early next year for authorization to build the final 12 of 40 ships as well as equipment for missions. Those final ships are described as "frigates" that will be bet-

ter armed than the existing designs.

The Navy will seek the funding for fiscal 2017 and 2018 "despite significant unknowns about the cost, schedule, and capability of the vessel," the GAO said in its report to the committee headed by Republican Sen. John McCain, of Arizona, a longtime critic of the program. The past two defense secretaries have cut back plans for the ship, built in two versions by Lockheed Martin and Austal.

But the littoral combat ship, designed for operations in shallow, coastal waters, may gain a champion in President-elect Donald Trump, who has vowed to increase the Navy's fleet to 350 ships from 272 today.

In addition, Sen. Jeff Sessions, of Alabama, an early Trump supporter who's now his nominee for attorney gen-

eral, has been a steadfast booster of the program. The Austal version is built in Mobile, Ala. Lockheed builds the other model in Wisconsin.

Still, the GAO assessment, a distillation of 10 years of reports and current information, offers a cautionary tale on depending too heavily on the LCS to boost the fleet. The Navy's buying approach "raises concerns about over-committing to the future acquisition of ships for which significant cost, schedule, and technical uncertainty remains," Paul Francis, the GAO's managing director for acquisition and sourcing management, wrote in the report.

Twenty-six ships of what's now a 28-vessel program of original littoral combat ships are delivered or on contract; the last two are being authorized this year. Over a decade,

the vessels went from an estimated cost of \$220 million per ship to a current average of \$478 million apiece.

In the fiscal 2018 budget, Congress will be asked to authorize a 12-ship "block buy" of modified "frigates" intended to round out the program at 40 vessels. "Authorizing the block buy strategy for the frigate appears premature," Francis wrote.

The Navy has "deviated from traditional shipbuilding acquisition in hopes of rapidly delivering ships to the fleet" with the consequences "well known today — costs to construct the ships have more than doubled from initial expectations, with promised levels of capability unfulfilled and deliveries significantly delayed," Francis said.

First female GIs graduate armor officer course in Ga.

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Thirteen recently commissioned female Army officers graduated Thursday from the Basic Armor Officer Leadership Course at Fort Benning, becoming the service's first female armor officers.

The women were among 68 second lieutenants to graduate the 19-week course that teaches the basic skills officers need to lead tank or cavalry platoons, the Army post in Georgia announced in a brief statement.

The officers were commissioned in the spring either through ROTC, Officer Candidate School or the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

It will be several months before the women take command

of platoons. Army officials said the officers are expected to attend additional training courses before they are assigned to units.

For some of the new armor officers, the training will include Ranger School, from which only three women have graduated.

As with the 10 female infantry officers who graduated from Fort Benning's Basic Infantry Officer Leadership Course in October, the female armor officers are expected to be assigned to units at Fort Hood, Texas, or Fort Bragg, N.C., in the second or third quarter of 2017.

The class began with 15 female officers, according to the Army. It was not clear Thursday whether the two who did

not complete the course would be offered another chance to pass it.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter cleared the way for women to serve in traditionally all-male military fields such as armor and the infantry in December 2015 when he ordered all jobs in the armed forces open to female troops.

The controversial decision was supported by many top military officials. Only the Marine Corps asked Carter to continue the ban on women serving in some front-line combat jobs.

The general at Fort Benning who oversees infantry and armor training said recently that opening infantry and armor positions to women will only strengthen the Army.

"This whole issue has driven

us to ensure that we have the right standards aligned to each occupational specialty in the Army," said Maj. Gen. Eric J. Wesley, the commander of the post's Maneuver Center of Excellence.

It is unclear what impact Donald Trump's election as president could have on women serving in the previously closed roles. The president-elect has said Carter's decision was based on "political correctness" and called for its reversal at times during his campaign.

In the meantime, more than 140 women have enlisted in the Army with the intentions of serving in the infantry or armor fields. Those enlistees are expected to be initial entrance training early next year.

Is Palin being considered to lead VA?

CQ Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, with a post on her public Facebook account, appeared Wednesday to confirm a report that she's under consideration by President-elect Donald Trump to become secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The post included a highly stylized video produced by SARAHPAC, her political action committee, about the former vice presidential candidate's ideas on how to fix the troubled agency, and a link to the ABC news report that first broke the news of her vetting by the Trump transition team. ABC said that both a Palin aide and the Trump transition team confirmed she's under consideration to run the VA.

"We should be grateful we'll soon have a commander-in-chief who will champion our vets and honor the promises our nation made; a pro-private sector individual who surely understands bigger government is NOT the answer; a President who promised to drain the swamp and clean up all government corruption. All things our vets and active duty troops deserve," Palin wrote, followed by an American flag emoji.

Palin, who unsuccessfully ran on a ticket with Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., in 2008, would take the helm of an agency marked

by scandal and crisis. The VA also stands at a policy crossroads, with many lawmakers in favor of allowing veterans to more widely use private doctors and hospitals, a plan vehemently opposed by many Democrats and some veterans groups.

In 2014, lawmakers scrambled to expand access to VA health care when it was discovered that some veterans seeking care were waiting so long that they died before seeing a doctor.

Palin's video lays out three major platforms for what she wants to see from federal veterans' care: Allow veterans to receive care in the private market through vouchers, allow veterans re-entering the civilian workforce to use military certifications in place of civilian ones for job skills, and maintain veterans' retirement benefits.

Those changes won't come without a price. For example, lawmakers are currently grappling with how to extend a \$10 billion private care program that expires in August or whenever the money allocated to it runs out. Recently, CQ reported that the program, while designed to provide a new route of access for patients facing distance issues or long wait times, was mostly serving veterans who couldn't get the care they wanted at a VA facility. That's triggered questions about whether the program is being administered as it was intended.

Lawmakers want VA to have action plan

By NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Responding to a report released in October that found the Department of Veterans Affairs has been slow to make changes after the 2014 wait-time scandal, two lawmakers have introduced legislation to force the VA to speed reform.

Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Wash., and Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., introduced the VA Management Alignment Act of 2016 to the House on Wednesday. The measure would require the VA secretary to submit plans to the House and Senate veterans committees within 180 days after the bill becomes law and goes into effect, detailing the roles and responsibilities of VA executives and spelling out how they would improve veterans' access to treatment.

"This would force action on persistent problems," Kilmer said. "After the wait-time scandal, we saw a number of good proposals sent to the VA to fix things. As the [Government Accountability Office] report makes clear, a lot of those recommendations were ignored."

Last year, Kilmer called on the GAO to do a comprehensive study of management

problems on the health care side of the VA.

Investigators with the Office of Inspector General previously discovered that some managers at VA hospitals instructed employees to falsify data about how long veterans were waiting for care. Since then, the agency has undergone internal and external reviews and inspections into its management practices, business processes, staffing levels and veterans' access to care.

The reviews came at a cost to taxpayers. One of the reviews cost \$68 million to perform and was mandated by the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, which included an assessment of all areas of the VA's health care delivery system.

Answering Kilmer's request, the GAO released its report in October, stating the VA doesn't have a process for following through with the recommendations that it receives or to effectively make changes.

The report also states that without a process, there's "little assurance" the deliver of health care will improve. It goes on to say the VA can't confirm that it's holding leaders accountable for making improvements.

Vet to 'be at peace' with burial at site of sub wreck

Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. — For a half-century after the deadliest submarine disaster in U.S. history, Navy Capt. Paul "Bud" Rogers struggled with feelings that he — and not his last-minute replacement — should have been on the doomed voyage of the USS Thresher in which 129 men died.

This week, at his family's request, a Navy submarine is bringing his cremated remains to be buried at sea near the Thresher's wreckage some 200 miles off Cape Cod, Mass.

"I'm just so happy. I feel like my husband will be at peace," said his widow, Barbara Rogers, 86, of Wernersville, Pa. "He felt he should have gone down with the Thresher."

It was within a few days of the loss of the Thresher that its captain replaced Rogers with a more experienced sailor for deep-dive testing. On April 10, 1963, the submarine suffered a mechanical failure, descended below crush depth and imploded. The sub's remnants came to a rest on the ocean floor at a depth of 8,500 feet.

At a memorial service for the lost men, Rogers served as an usher and tried, unsuccessfully, to console the wife of the man who took his place on the crew.

"He said that she wouldn't speak to him, and that really made him upset," Barbara Rogers said. "He wanted to apologize to her."

Rogers served 41 years in the Navy, including time spent as a manager for the Trident Missile Program in Washington, before retiring in 1990. When he died in 2015 at 86, he expressed in his will that he wanted to be buried at sea. His son-in-law, Fred Henney, made inquiries about depositing his ashes near the Thresher site.

His ashes and a Navy chaplain were aboard an attack submarine, the USS Springfield, when it left Groton, Conn., on Tuesday. The chaplain, Lt. Cmdr. Paul Rumery, said he plans to recite passages from Scripture, and the submarine's security force will fire a three-round volley before he lowers the ashes over the side of the submarine and into the North Atlantic.

Trump heads to Ind. on victory lap

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump is poised to take a victory lap Thursday, appearing first in Indiana to salute workers at a factory where he says he saved hundreds of jobs from moving to Mexico and then in Ohio on the first stop of a “Thank You Tour” to honor the supporters in states that helped him to his stunning victory.

The Midwest swing will be the first time that Trump, who has shown an early inclination to revel in the role of showman-in-chief, has barnstormed across the country since the campaign. But now his signature rallies will carry the imprimatur of president-elect. And both stops will feature Trump declaring victory after a campaign built on the lament that “we don’t win anymore” as a nation.

Now the question arises: Which Trump will appear at the rally?

Will he be a newly serious Trump embracing the gravity

of the job who will conduct a spirited-but-formal rally befitting a president? Or will he revert to the campaign Trump, flying off the teleprompter with inflammatory remarks and encouraging raucous crowds chanting, “Build the wall” and vilifying critics?

And some questions remain about the extent of victory at Carrier, which announced this week that it will keep an Indianapolis plant open. In February, the heating and air conditioning company said that it would shut the plant and would send jobs to Mexico, and video of angry workers being informed about the decision soon went viral.

The Republican businessman made it a key theme in his campaign, pledging to save that factory and ones like it as part of his plan to rebuild the American manufacturing industry while preventing jobs from fleeing overseas. He said this week that Carrier had agreed to keep some 800 union jobs at the plant, but details of what’s in the

deal remain unclear.

Trump threatened during the campaign to impose sharp tariffs on any company that shifted its factories to Mexico. His advisers have since promoted lower corporate tax rates to keep jobs in the U.S.

By enabling the plant to stay open, the deal spares about 800 union workers whose jobs were going to Mexico, according to federal officials who were briefed by the company. That suggests that hundreds will still lose their jobs at the factory, where roughly 1,400 workers were slated to be laid off.

Neither Trump nor Carrier has said what the workers might have to give up, or which threats or incentives might have been used, to get the manufacturer to change its mind. The company attributed its decision to the incoming Trump administration and financial incentives provided by Indiana, although earlier offers from the state had failed to sway Carrier.

Fewer Republicans push repeal of Obamacare

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Only about 1 in 4 people in the United States wants President-elect Donald Trump to entirely repeal his predecessor’s health care law.

The postelection survey released Thursday by the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation also found hints of a pragmatic shift among some Republican foes of President Barack Obama’s law.

While 52 percent of Republicans say they want the law completely repealed, that share is down from 69 percent just last month, before the election. More Republicans now say they want the law “scaled back” under Trump and the Republican-controlled Congress, with that share more than doubling from 11 percent before the Nov. 8 election to 24 percent after.

Kaiser CEO Drew Altman said the foundation’s polling experts aren’t quite sure what to make of that finding.

It could be that some Republicans “got a protest vote off their chests, and they’re done with that,” Altman said. “They now have a more moderate position.”

Overall, 30 percent said the new president and Congress should expand what the law does, and 19 percent said it should be implemented as is. On the other side, 26 percent said the law should be entirely repealed and 17 percent called for it to be scaled back.

As Republicans start to make changes in health care, potentially revamping Medicare and Medicaid as well, the politics of the issue could turn against them, Altman said. “They are going to go from casting stones to owning the problem.”

The poll found majorities across party lines support many of the health care law’s provisions, but not its requirement that individuals have coverage or risk fines and its mandate that medium-to-large employers pay fines if they don’t offer health insurance.

Recount set to begin in Wisconsin

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — The first candidate-driven, statewide recount of a presidential election in 16 years is set to begin Thursday in Wisconsin, a state that Donald Trump won by less than a percentage point over Hillary Clinton after polls long predicted a Clinton victory.

The recount requested by Green Party candidate Jill Stein carries none of the drama of the Florida presidential recount of 2000, when the outcome of the election between Al Gore and George W. Bush hung in the balance. Almost no one expects Stein’s push for recounts in Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania to result in a Clinton victory over Trump.

“This is certainly not Bush v. Gore,” said Mike Haas, Wisconsin’s chief elections administrator.

Still, county election officials across Wisconsin have hired

temporary workers, have expanded hours and have dusted off recount manuals to prepare for the work of retabulating nearly 3 million ballots.

Most counties will recount the ballots manually, although Stein lost a court challenge this week to force hand recounts everywhere. The state’s largest county, Milwaukee, was planning to recount the ballots by feeding them through the same machines that counted them on election night. In Dane County, where Clinton won 71 percent of the vote, the ballots will be counted by hand.

Clinton lost to Trump by about 22,000 votes in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin election officials have less than two weeks to complete the recount. December 13 is the federal deadline to certify the vote to avoid having the fate of Wisconsin’s 10 electoral votes decided by Congress. Even if that were to

happen, the votes almost certainly would go to Trump because Republicans control both chambers of Congress.

Stein has argued, without evidence, that irregularities in the votes in all three states suggest that there could have been tampering with the vote, perhaps through a well-coordinated, highly complex cyberattack.

Her critics, including the Wisconsin Republican Party, contend that she’s a little-known candidate who is merely trying to raise her profile while raising millions of dollars. Stein had raised nearly \$7 million, about twice as much as her longshot presidential campaign, to pay for the recounts.

The Wisconsin recount was estimated to cost about \$3.9 million, while Stein paid \$973,250 for the one in Michigan.

Stein filed a lawsuit Monday in Pennsylvania to force a recount there.

Castro's ashes finishing 1st leg of 500-mile journey

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Cuba — Fidel Castro's ashes are completing the first leg of a more than 500-mile journey across Cuba, traveling in a flag-draped, cedar coffin through small towns and cities where his rebel army fought its way to power nearly 60 years ago.

Just after 7 a.m. Wednesday, an honor guard placed the coffin under a glass box on a trailer behind a Russian jeep. Thousands of soldiers and state security agents saluted the remains as they rolled slowly out of Havana's Plaza of the Revolution and the cortege made its way to the Malecon seaside boulevard and east into the countryside.

Tens of thousands of people lined the route, which retraces in reverse the path of the triumphant march of Castro and his rebels across the island to enter Havana on Jan. 1, 1959. Many waved flags and shouted, "Long may he live!"

Others filmed the procession with cellphones, a luxury prohibited in Cuba until an ailing Castro gave up power in 2006 to his younger brother, Raul, who began a series of slow reforms.

The ashes were to arrive late Wednesday in the central city of Santa Clara, where they would spend the night at a memorial to fellow revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, whose remains are interred in Santa Clara.

An enormous Cuban flag hung outside the memorial to Guevara and hundreds of sol-

diers and city residents turned out for the arrival.

The second leg of the journey on Thursday is to take the ashes to the eastern city of Camaguey. They will be interred Sunday in the far-eastern city of Santiago, ending a nine-day period of mourning that saw Cuba fall silent as thousands paid tribute to photographs of Fidel Castro and signed oaths of loyalty to his socialist, single-party system across the country on Monday and Tuesday.

Wednesday's procession was the first moment in which ordinary Cubans saw the remains of the man who led a band of young fighters out of the Sierra Maestra mountains, overthrew strongman Fulgencio Batista, faced off against the United States for decades and imposed Soviet-style communism on the largest island in the Caribbean.

For many Cubans, seeing the coffin of a man who dominated life here for a half-century made the idea of a Cuba without Fidel Castro real for the first time since his death Friday night at age 90.

Juan Carlos Gonzalez, 26, owner of a private restaurant that serves traditional Cuban food in Santa Clara, said there was a greater sense of uncertainty without Fidel, and he couldn't say whether that was positive or negative.

"The one who ruled the country was Fidel, in my opinion," Gonzalez said. "Now I don't know how things are going to be."

Putin eyes better US ties, anti-terror effort

Associated Press

MOSCOW — President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that Russia hopes to normalize ties with the U.S. and to join efforts in the fight against international terrorism.

Speaking in a live state-of-the-nation address, Putin said that Russia is ready to take part in tackling global challenges if its interests are respected.

"We don't want confrontation with anyone," he said in a speech before officials and lawmakers in an ornate, white-marble Kremlin hall.

"Unlike our foreign colleagues who are seeing Russia as an enemy, we have never been looking for enemies; we need friends," Putin said. "But we won't allow any infringement on our interests and neglect of them."

Russia's relations with the West have plummeted to a post-Cold War low over the Ukrainian crisis and the war in Syria. During the U.S. election campaign, President Barack Obama's administration accused Russia of hacking American political sites and email accounts in an effort to interfere with the vote. The Kremlin has rejected the accusations.

"In the last few years, we have faced attempts of foreign pressure with all tools involved — from the myths about Rus-

sian aggression, (allegations) of meddling in elections to the hounding of our athletes," Putin said, referring to doping scandals.

Putin said that Russia is looking forward to mending ties with the U.S. after President-elect Donald Trump takes office.

"We are ready for cooperation with the new American administration," he said. "It's important to normalize and develop our bilateral ties on an equal and mutually beneficial basis. We share responsibility for ensuring global security and stability and strengthening the nonproliferation regime."

Putin added that Moscow hopes to pool efforts with Washington in confronting international terrorism.

"Our servicemen in Syria are fulfilling that task," he said.

Russia has conducted an air campaign in support of Syrian President Bashar Assad, helping his forces make significant gains, most recently in Aleppo, Syria's largest city before the war.

Putin said that Russia is open to a "friendly and equal dialogue" about global security. He pointed to the European migration crisis as an example of even "seemingly prosperous countries and stable regions" facing new divisions.

Philippines police: 2 held over bomb near US Embassy

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — Philippine police officials have captured two local sympathizers of the Islamic State group who are suspected of trying to detonate a bomb near the U.S. Embassy, prompting authorities to raise a terrorism alert.

National police chief Director-General Ronald de la Rosa said Thursday the two militants, who were arrested separately on Wednesday, initially wanted, but failed, to detonate the homemade bomb at Manila's seaside Rizal Park, their initial target.

The bomb, which was designed to explode remotely with the use of a cellphone, also failed to explode near the embassy on Nov. 28 in Manila's tourist and diplomatic section.

Police presented the handcuffed suspects at a news conference in which they also announced a terrorism alert, which means more road security checkpoints would be set up, and possibly more raids on suspected militant hideouts.

"Don't get alarmed, but stay alert," de la Rosa said.

The militants, Rashid Kilala and Jiaher

Guinar, belong to a small, Muslim militant group called Ansar Al-khilafa Philippines. After failing to set off the bomb, which was made from an 81 mm mortar round, the two decided to leave the explosive in a trash bin near the U.S. Embassy but again failed to set it off.

They wanted to impress the Islamic State group and to secure possible funding from the Middle East-based terrorist group, de la Rosa said. They also wanted to divert the military's focus from an offensive against fellow Muslim militants in the south, he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Ape goes missing from primate exhibit at zoo

FL NAPLES — Authorities say a blind, white-handed gibbon is missing from the primate exhibit at the Naples Zoo.

The Naples Daily News reported that zoo officials believe the female ape may have wandered into the water and drowned. Divers from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission were searching the water for the ape.

The zoo remains open to the public, but boats are not running because divers are in the water.

Man accused in 2 bank robberies is arrested

NH MANCHESTER — Police in Manchester accused a man of robbing two banks and attempting to rob a third.

Michael Giles was arrested Sunday as he was trying to start a scooter near a TD Bank. Police said Giles had clothing seen in surveillance video from the bank.

Police also linked him to a robbery that happened Nov. 23 at a Citizens Bank after reviewing surveillance footage, and to an attempted robbery in January at another Citizens Bank.

Giles has been charged with two counts of robbery and one count of attempted robbery. He's being held without bail.

Ban on convenience store liquor sales mullied

WI GREEN BAY — The Green Bay City Council is considering banning hard liquor sales at convenience stores.

Another proposal before the

council would give city leaders greater authority to revoke liquor licenses.

Alderman Randy Scannell told the Green Bay Press-Gazette the lack of a city policy has led to a piecemeal approach to granting licenses.

Since October, the council has denied three requests by convenience store owners to sell liquor while approving two others. The owners who didn't get licenses said the decisions put them at a competitive disadvantage.

Police to get refresher course on pot laws

NM SANTA FE — The Santa Fe Police Department plans to give its officers a refresher course on a municipal law that makes possession of small amounts of marijuana the lowest law enforcement priority in the city.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported the refresher is coming after City Councilor Joseph Maestas told police Chief Patrick Gallagher that officers should apply the ordinance over state law.

In turn, Gallagher promised to provide his officers more training on marijuana laws.

In 2014, the City Council approved an ordinance that decriminalized possession of one ounce or less of marijuana, making it a civil infraction punishable by a \$25 fine. But police have continued to cite people under the state criminal statute.

2 sought in robbery with use of machete

PA ALLENTOWN — Police are trying to find two machete-wielding robbers who held up an eastern Penn-

sylvania convenience store.

Colonial Regional Police said the incident happened about 5:10 a.m. Sunday in Hanover Township, Lehigh County.

The masked men, one holding the machete, entered Taylor Family Fuel and Mini Mart and stole \$455 worth of cash and cigarettes after threatening employees.

Man accidentally fires gun into nearby home

VT ST. JOHNSBURY — Vermont State Police said charges are expected against a man after he accidentally fired a shot when preparing for hunting, sending a bullet into a neighbor's home.

Police issued a citation to Shawn Young, 33, of St. Johnsbury, on suspicion of reckless endangerment. He has been ordered to appear in court in February.

Police received a call from a 68-year-old woman around 11:45 a.m. Sunday reporting that someone had shot into her home.

Police said an investigation showed Young had accidentally shot his firearm. The bullet entered the woman's home and continued to go through several rooms, narrowly missing her before coming to rest.

Rules on tattoo parlors, adult businesses eased

VA ISLE OF WIGHT — Isle of Wight County is making it easier for people to open tattoo parlors and adult entertainment businesses.

The Daily Press reported the county has loosened several zoning restrictions to encourage businesses.

Until now, adult entertainment businesses were virtually blocked. They couldn't exist

within a mile of a school, church or residential area. The restriction is now 2,500 feet.

Tattoo parlors are no longer under the adult entertainment designation, making it easier for them to open.

Suspect is sought in woman's kidnapping

GA LOGANVILLE — Authorities are searching for a man suspected of carjacking and kidnapping an elderly woman in Walton County.

The Walton County Sheriff's Office told local news outlets that John Christopher Calhoun, 29, kidnapped an unidentified 81-year-old woman from her Loganville home and put her in the trunk of her vehicle Sunday.

Authorities later found the vehicle and a brief chase ensued. The vehicle eventually crashed and the suspect fled on foot.

Sheriff Joe Chapman said officials rescued the woman and took her to the hospital for treatment.

Woman killed after her son commits suicide

MO KIRKSVILLE — A series of deaths last month has shaken the northeast Missouri town of Kirksville.

The Kirksville Daily Express reported that Echo Welte, 41, got a call Nov. 13 from her son, who was threatening suicide. By the time she reached him, Danny Welte Jr., 19, had died of what police believe was a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

Hours after burying her son on Nov. 17, Echo Welte was dead, too, fatally shot in the parking lot of a Days Inn. Danny Welte Jr.'s father, Danny Welte, is charged with first-degree murder and jailed on \$1 million bond in her death.

From wire reports

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Has Jackson done enough for Heisman?

Associated Press

Lamar Jackson stumbled down the stretch, leaving the rest of the field one last chance to catch him in the Heisman Trophy race.

An avalanche of sacks and turnovers the last two weeks have taken some of the luster off an otherwise spectacular season for the Louisville quarterback.

His numbers still stack up with the best in the country this season and some of the best in recent college football history. But he has been on the losing side of his final two regular-season games and no player who has won the Heisman has picked up the trophy on a two-game skid since Tim Brown of Notre Dame in 1987.

Working against Jackson is that on championship weekend, when there are few games and many Heisman voters are paying closer attention than they have all season, he is out of the game.

Meanwhile, Clemson's Deshaun Watson, Washington's Jake Browning and Oklaho-

ma's Baker Mayfield and Dede Westbrook are playing in high-stakes games, with a chance to make a lasting impression.

Ballots are due Monday and the finalists will be announced later that same day. The ceremony is Dec. 10.

Lamar Jackson, QB, Louisville

Number to know: While Jackson is the seventh FBS player to ever reach 20 touchdowns scored and 20 touchdown passes in a season (including three Heisman winners in Tim Tebow, Cam Newton and Johnny Manziel), he is the first to reach 20 touchdowns scored and 30 touchdown passes in the regular season.

Next: Bowl game.

Deshaun Watson, QB, Clemson

Number to know: Watson is closing strong, much as he did last season. The competition has not been the best, but in his last four games Watson has completed 76 percent of his passes, with 12 touchdown passes and four interceptions (three of which came in the loss to Pitt).

Next: vs. No. 19 Virginia Tech in the ACC championship game Saturday. The Hokies are fourth in the ACC in defense, allowing 4.89 yards per play.

Dede Westbrook, WR, Oklahoma

Number to know: Eleven of his 15 TDs from scrimmage have covered 40-plus yards, the most by any player since 1998.

Next: vs. No. 10 Oklahoma State for the Big 12 championship Saturday. The Cowboys are tied for fourth in the Big 12 in pass defense, allowing 7.3 yards per pass attempt.

Jake Browning, QB, Washington

Number to know: Browning is second among Power Five quarterbacks with 40 touchdown passes. He has one fewer than Texas Tech's Patrick Mahomes, who has thrown 262 more passes.

Next: vs. No. 9 Colorado in the Pac-12 championship game Friday. The Buffaloes have the No. 1 pass defense in the Pac-12 by yards allowed per pass (5.4) and passer efficiency rating against (97.65).

Jonathan Allen, DL, Alabama

Number to know: The best player on the No. 1 defense in the country, allowing 3.96 yards per play, and a total of 824 yards rushing. No other team has allowed less than 1,175 yards rushing.

Next: vs. No. 15 Florida in the SEC championship game Saturday. The Gators are second-to-last in the SEC in offense, gaining 5.27 yards per play.

Baker Mayfield, QB, Oklahoma

Number to know: Leads the nation in yards per attempt (10.9) and passing efficiency (194.7).

Next: vs. No. 10 Oklahoma State for the Big 12 championship Saturday. The Cowboys are fifth in the Big 12 in defense, allowing 5.77 yards per play.

Dalvin Cook, RB, Florida State

Number to know: Cook has rushed for 160.8 yards per game against four ranked opponents, the most of any Power 5 player.

Next: Bowl game.

After historic season, Raiders' Mack steps up game

Associated Press

ALAMEDA, Calif. — With the game on the line, the Carolina Panthers sent three blockers in Khalil Mack's direction to no avail.

He overpowered Trai Turner, beat a chip attempt by running back Fozzy Whittaker and then knocked the ball out of Cam Newton's hands for a game-sealing strip sack before guard Chris Scott could get over to help.

Those types of plays are becoming commonplace for Mack, who has put together quite the encore following last season's historic campaign when he became the first player ever picked as a first-team All-Pro at two positions in one season.

With sacks in six straight

games, his first career interception and first career touchdown last week and relentless pressure every game, Mack is a major reason for this year's success for the Raiders (9-2) and perhaps the league's most dominant defender.

"I think him and Von Miller are the two best in the league right now, the two best edge pass rushers and they can do it all," Bills coach Rex Ryan said on a conference call ahead of Buffalo's game against the Raiders this Sunday. "That's what I'm seeing from him, a guy that can play with speed, power, finesse. You name it, he's got it. When you look at those two, they're the only two, in my opinion, that are comparable."

Mack has showed continual improvement since coming into the league as the fifth overall

pick out of Buffalo in 2014. He made a big impact as a rookie in Oakland although he only managed four sacks. He added a few new wrinkles last year and boosted his production to 15 sacks, including five in one game against eventual Super Bowl champion Denver.

This year, he's doing it all. From his athletic interception and return for a score last week against Carolina to his nine sacks to his 60 quarterback pressures which lead all edge rushers, according to Pro Football Focus, to his new role as defensive leader now that Justin Tuck and Charles Woodson have retired.

Mack gives motivational talks before games and has come up with the motto "By any means" that his teammates have adopted as the mantra for

this year's Raiders.

For Mack, the personal numbers mean far less than the team's success. He took it personally when the defense got off to a rough start, allowing more than 500 yards in each of the first two games of the season and ranking near the bottom of the league in most categories early.

"You just see him go out there and he does exactly what he says he's going to do," quarterback Derek Carr said. "He does exactly what he does out there at practice. He's not a guy that just comes out here, shows up and shows up on Sunday and says, 'Yeah, I'm just freakishly talented and I'm going to make all the plays.' Which, he very well could, but I think what separates him is his work ethic."

MLB, union reach tentative labor deal

Associated Press

IRVING, Texas — Baseball players and owners reached a tentative agreement on a five-year labor contract Wednesday night, a deal that will extend the sport's industrial peace to 26 years since the ruinous fights in the first two decades of free agency.

After days of near round-the-clock talks, negotiators reached a verbal agreement about 3½ hours before the expiration of the current pact. Then they worked to draft a memorandum of understanding, which must be ratified by both sides.

"It's great! Another five years of uninterrupted baseball," Oakland catcher Stephen Vogt said in a text message.

In announcing the agreement, Major League Baseball and the players' association said they will make specific terms available when drafting is complete.

"Happy it's done, and baseball is back on," Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Brandon McCarthy said.

As part of the deal, the experiment of having the All-Star Game determine which league gets home-field advantage in the World Series will end after 14 years, a person familiar with the agreement told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal had not yet been signed.

Instead, the pennant winner with the better regular-season record will open the Series at home.

Another important change: The minimum time for a stint on the disabled list will be reduced from 15 days to 10.

The luxury tax threshold rises from \$189 million to \$195 million next year, \$197 million in 2018, \$206 million in 2019, \$209 mil-

lion in 2020 and \$210 million in 2021.

Tax rates increase from 17.5 percent to 20 percent for first offenders, remain at 30 percent for second offenders and rise from 40 percent to 50 percent for third offenders. There is a new surtax of 12 percent for teams \$20 million to \$40 million above the threshold, 42.5 percent for first offenders more than \$40 million above the threshold and 45 percent for subsequent offenders more than \$40 million above.

Union head Tony Clark, presiding over a negotiation for the first time, said in a statement the deal "will benefit all involved in the game and leaves the game better for those who follow."

Key changes involve the qualifying offers clubs can make to their former players after they become free agents — the figure was \$17.2 million this year. If a player turns down the offer and signs elsewhere, his new team forfeits an amateur draft pick, which usually had been in the first round under the old deal.

Under the new rules, a player can receive a qualifying offer only once in his career and will have 10 days to consider it instead of seven. A club signing a player who declined a qualifying offer would lose its third-highest amateur draft pick if it is a revenue-sharing receiver, its second- and fifth-highest picks (plus a loss of \$1 million in its international draft pool) if it pays luxury tax for the just-ended season, and its second-highest pick (plus \$500,000 in the international draft pool) if it is any other team.

A club losing a free agent who passed up a qualifying offer would receive an extra selection after the first round of the next draft if the player signed a contract for \$50 mil-

lion or more and after competitive balance round B if under \$50 million. However, if that team pays luxury tax, the extra draft pick would drop to after the fourth round.

Among other details:

■ For a team \$40 million or more in excess of the luxury tax threshold, its highest selection in the next amateur draft will drop 10 places.

■ While management failed to obtain an international draft of amateurs residing outside the U.S., Puerto Rico and Canada, it did get a hard cap on each team's annual bonus pool for those players starting at \$4.75 million for the signing period that begins next July 2.

■ There is no change to limits on active rosters, which remain at 25 for most of the season and 40 from Sept. 1 on.

■ Smokeless tobacco will be banned for all new players, those who currently do not have at least one day of major league service.

■ The regular season will expand from 183 days to 187 starting in 2018, creating four more scheduled off days. There are additional limitations on the start times of night games on getaway days.

■ The minimum salary rises from \$507,500 to \$535,000 next year, \$545,000 in 2018 and \$555,000 in 2019, with cost-of-living increases the following two years; the minor league minimum for a player appearing on the 40-man roster for at least the second time goes up from \$82,700 to \$86,500 next year, \$88,000 in 2018 and \$89,500 in 2019, followed by cost-of-living raises.

■ As part of the drug agreement, there will be increased testing and biomarker testing for HGH will begin next year.

Indiana surprises 3rd-ranked Tar Heels

Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. — OG Anunoby spent most of Wednesday night helping Indiana restore its national image.

He wound up needing two staff members to assist him into the locker room with a bad ankle.

Anunoby scored 16 points and grabbed five rebounds and James Blackmon Jr. added 14 points to help No. 13 Indiana shock No. 3 North Carolina 76-67 in the ACC-Big Ten Challenge.

Now the questions are all about Anunoby.

"He's getting evaluated in there. He couldn't have gone back in there, but it was high," coach Tom Crean said. "His spirit is good so we'll see how that turns out."

No. 7 Virginia 63, Ohio St. 61: London Perrantes scored 15 of his 19 points in the second half for host Virginia in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

No. 9 Baylor 79, Sam Houston St. 45: Reserve King McClure scored 14 points and host Baylor remained unbeaten.

No. 11 UCLA 98, UC-Riverside 56: Isaac Hamilton scored 27 points, tying his career-high with seven three-pointers, and host UCLA improved to 8-0, the Bruins' best start since coach Steve Alford's first season in Westwood three years ago.

No. 12 Saint Mary's 66, Stanford 51: Calvin Hermanson scored a career-high 25 points and knocked down a career-best seven three-pointers for undefeated Saint Mary's.

No. 14 Louisville 71, No. 15 Purdue 64: Ray Spalding and Mangok Mathiang each

scored 11 points and Donovan Mitchell contributed seven critical points down the stretch to help host Louisville in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.

No. 16 Arizona 85, Texas Southern 63: Lauri Markkanen scored 19 points and hit five three-pointers, helping host Arizona bounce back from its first loss of the season.

No. 23 Oregon 93, W. Oregon 54: Preseason All-America Dillon Brooks scored 21 points and Roman Sorkin had 15 for host Oregon.

Another triple-double for Westbrook

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — For more than 47 minutes, Russell Westbrook could barely hit a shot.

For the next 5-plus minutes, he rarely missed.

Oklahoma City's fearless star was 7-for-28 from the field before he drained a three-pointer late in regulation that forced overtime. He followed that by scoring 14 of his 35 points in the extra period to help the Thunder defeat the Washington Wizards 126-115 on Wednesday night.

"Never stop believing in yourself and your capabilities of doing what you're able to do on the basketball floor," Westbrook said.

Bradley Beal, who led the Wizards with 31 points, couldn't believe Westbrook hit the shot with 8.5 seconds remaining. It was the only three-pointer he made in six tries.

"I felt like I did a great job of cutting him off to the basket," Beal said. "He wasn't making any jumpers all game. The only 3 he makes is the one to go into overtime."

Westbrook was 4-for-6 from the field and 6-for-6 on free throws in the extra period. He

finished with 14 rebounds and 11 assists for his fourth straight triple-double, his ninth this season and the 46th of his career. The Thunder have won all four games during his triple-double streak, and he heads into December averaging a triple-double through 20 games this season.

Knicks 106, Timberwolves 104: Kristaps Porzingis had 29 points and eight rebounds in a thrilling duel with Karl-Anthony Towns, helping New York beat host Minnesota.

Carmelo Anthony capped a quiet night with a game-winning 18-footer over Andrew Wiggins with 2.3 seconds to play, helping the Knicks avoid what would have been an epic collapse in the fourth quarter.

Towns had a career-high 47 points and 18 rebounds for the Wolves, who tied the game in the final minute after trailing by 17 with 7:30 to play.

Lakers 96, Bulls 90: Julius Randle made a strong move against Nikola Mirotic for a tiebreaking layup with 45.1 seconds left, and visiting Los Angeles held off Chicago.

Spurs 94, Mavericks 87: Patty Mills scored 15 of his team-high 23 points in the

fourth quarter and Kawhi Leonard added 21 points, helping San Antonio rally over host Dallas.

San Antonio became just the third team to start the season 11-0 on the road, following last year's Warriors (14-0) and the 1969-70 Knicks (12-0).

Raptors 120, Grizzlies 105: Kyle Lowry had 29 points and eight assists, DeMar DeRozan scored 24 points and Toronto ended Memphis' six-game road winning streak.

Pistons 121, Celtics 114: Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 25 points and Tobias Harris had 21 to lead balanced scoring that carried visiting Detroit over Boston.

Andre Drummond added 20 points and 17 rebounds, one night after he was ejected in the second quarter of a victory at Charlotte for a flagrant-2 foul.

Heat 106, Nuggets 98: Hassan Whiteside had another big game with 25 points, 16 rebounds and four blocks to lift Miami over host Denver.

Wayne Ellington scored 22 points and Tyler Johnson had 18 points and seven assists for Miami in his return after missing one game. Goran Dragic

had 16 points and seven assists for the Heat, who have more wins on the road (four) than at home (two).

Trail Blazers 131, Pacers 109: Damian Lillard had 28 points and 10 assists to help host Portland beat Indiana and former coach Nate McMillan.

Maurice Harkless added 23 points for the Trail Blazers, who led by as many as 28 in their fifth consecutive victory over the Pacers.

Suns 109, Hawks 107: Brandon Knight scored 23 points off the bench and Phoenix reserves combined for 54 as the host Suns held off slumping Atlanta thanks to a key fourth-quarter run.

Eric Bledsoe's bank shot with 28.4 seconds left gave the Suns a 104-99 lead and all but sealed Atlanta's fourth consecutive defeat.

76ers-Kings postponed

PHILADELPHIA — A scheduled game between Sacramento and Philadelphia was postponed by the NBA because of condensation on the court at the Wells Fargo Center.

Lee's late goal lifts Islanders over Penguins

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After losing twice on goals in the closing minutes during their recent road trip, the New York Islanders were relieved to get a late win after blowing a three-goal lead in the third period.

Anders Lee scored the tiebreaking goal with 27 seconds remaining to lift the Islanders to a 5-3 victory over the defending champion Pittsburgh Penguins on Wednesday night.

Thomas Hickey took a pass from Johnny Boychuk and fired a slap shot from the point that deflected off Lee's stick and past goalie Matt Murray.

"We had that puck luck," Lee said. "We just have to grind it out. Tonight we were able to come through with a game-winning goal. Was a great shot and I was able to tip in. We've faced enough adversity for a sea-

son. Tonight we were able to find a way."

Hickey called it "relief more than elation," adding, "It was nice to get something to go our way. ... It was a great pass by Johnny and a great tip by Anders."

Then, with Murray pulled on the ensuing faceoff, Nikolay Kulemin scored into the empty net 3 seconds later to seal the win and give the Islanders consecutive victories for the second time this season.

Boychuk got the Islanders on the scoreboard first, firing a slap shot from outside the right faceoff circle into the left side of the net on Murray's blocker side with 13 seconds left in the opening period. It was Boychuk's third of the season, and first since Oct. 23.

Sharks 4, Kings 1: Logan Couture had two goals and an assist, Ryan Carpenter scored his first NHL goal and San Jose extended its recent mastery over host Los

Angeles.

Kevin Labanc also scored and Martin Jones made 26 saves against his former team as the Pacific Division leaders won for the fifth time in six games. Couture and Carpenter scored 30 seconds apart in the final minute of the first period, and Los Angeles couldn't recover.

Flames 3, Maple Leafs 0: Freddie Hamilton and Kris Versteeg scored in the first minute and Chad Johnson made 39 saves in host Calgary's victory.

Hamilton one-timed a centering pass from Micheal Ferland past Jhonas Enroth high on the glove side for his first of the season 19 seconds in. Thirty seconds later, Versteeg buried his third of the season. Sean Monahan was initially stopped from the slot, but Enroth kicked the rebound to Versteeg.