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Saturday, December 10, 2016

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US to send 200 more troops to Syria

Associated Press

MANAMA, Bahrain — U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Saturday that as many as 200 more American troops are being sent to Syria to help Kurdish and Arab fighters capture the Islamic State group's key stronghold of Raqqa.

The extra troops will include special operations forces and are in addition to 300 U.S. troops already authorized for the effort to recruit, organize, train and advise local Syrian forces to combat Islamic State.

Addressing a security conference in Bahrain, Carter also took gentle jabs at U.S. Middle East partners for failing to provide more military muscle in the broader campaign to defeat Islamic State and counter extremism.

Without mentioning any by name, Carter suggested the U.S. has been the target of disingenuous criticism from "regional powers here in the Middle East" for not doing more to help fight extremism.

"I would ask you to imagine what U.S.

military and defense leaders think when they have to listen to complaints sometimes that we should do more, when it's plain to see that all too often, the ones complaining aren't doing enough themselves," he said.

He said it is not unreasonable for Washington to expect regional powers who oppose extremism in the Middle East to do more to help fight it, "particularly in the political and economic aspects of the campaign."

Carter noted that many Sunni-led Gulf countries have expressed concern about the spread of Iranian influence in the region.

"The fact is, if countries in the region are worried about Iran's destabilizing activities — a concern the United States shares — they need to get in the game. That means getting serious about starting to partner more with each other, and investing in the right capabilities for the threat."

Carter said the 200 extra troops going to Syria will help local forces in their anticipated push to retake Raqqa, the de facto capital of the extremist group's self-styled

caliphate, and to deny sanctuary to the Islamic State group after Raqqa is captured.

He said President Barack Obama approved the troop additions over a week ago.

"These uniquely skilled operators will join the 300 U.S. special operations forces already in Syria, to continue organizing, training, equipping, and otherwise enabling capable, motivated, local forces to take the fight to ISIL," Carter said in his address to the IISS Manama Dialogues in the Bahraini capital, Manama, using an alternative acronym for the Islamic State group.

The military push is complicated by the predominant role played by local Kurdish fighters, who are the most effective U.S. partner against the Islamic State group in Syria but are viewed by Turkey — a key U.S. ally — as a terrorist threat.

A senior defense official said the troop boost will give the U.S. extra capability to train Arab volunteers who are joining the Raqqa push but are not well trained or equipped. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of internal Pentagon planning.

Trump team sees major threat in militant Islam

The Washington Post

President-elect Donald Trump is assembling a national security team dominated by retired generals who share a deep distrust of Iran and have characterized the threat of militant Islam in far more dire terms than President Barack Obama's administration officials and intelligence assessments.

The trio of ex-generals represents an emerging core of the Trump administration that is at odds with Obama's efforts to convince the American public that — 15 years after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks — terrorism continues to pose a persistent threat to the nation, but not an existential one.

The generals' views also cut against the grain of U.S. policies seeking to empower moderates in Iran and of U.S. intelligence

assessments that terrorism no longer stands alone atop the rankings of global security threats now crowded by concerns about cyberattacks and renewed aggression by China and Russia.

Their views, though far from uniform, have been heavily influenced over the past 15 years by intensely personal battlefield losses, the country's waning attention to the wars and an up-close view of a ruthless enemy.

Those experiences could lead retired Gens. Michael Flynn, James Mattis and John Kelly to urge caution in Trump administration debates about the use of force. But former colleagues and experts said the generals are also more likely, by virtue of their training and experience, to see malign intent or view the world as a struggle between good and evil.

Statements and online postings by Flynn, Trump's choice for national security adviser, have drawn the most alarm among intelligence analysts and the foreign-policy establishment.

"We're in a world war, but very few Americans recognize it, and fewer still have any idea how to win it," Flynn wrote in his recent book "The Field of Fight." He has also repeatedly depicted Islam as a diseased religion that represents a growing danger. "Fear of Muslims is rational," he wrote in a posting to his Twitter account earlier this year.

Mattis and Kelly — Trump's respective nominees for secretary of defense and secretary of homeland security — have been far more measured in their foreign-policy pronouncements and are widely respected within the foreign-policy establishment

and among the United States' Gulf Arab allies. Yet each has expressed hard-line views about Iran and the threat of terrorism.

A big question is how the perspectives of senior military officers, serving in Cabinet-level positions, will influence the direction of a Trump administration.

"I think it's likely there will be terrorist attacks in the coming years, and I think Trump will feel tremendous pressure to be seen as acting very decisively," said Dan Byman, a former Middle East analyst at the CIA and a professor at Georgetown University.

Trump's advisers may be quicker to see nefarious intent because of their military experience, he said, but be more cautious about U.S. military intervention or retaliation.

Airstrike kills militant linked to Paris attack

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — An Islamic State leader linked to the 2015 attacks at the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo and assassinations in Tunisia was killed in a U.S. airstrike in Syria, U.S. military officials said Friday.

Officials said Boubaker el Hakim was killed in Raqqa on Nov. 26. He is believed to have played a role in planning the Islamic State attack and to have participated prominently in the group's propaganda efforts abroad. The officials weren't authorized to discuss the strike publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

El Hakim, 33, a French Tunisian, was a mentor to the brothers who gunned down cartoonists at the French paper in January 2015.

He was arrested in Syria and sent to France, where he was convicted in 2008 and sentenced to seven years in prison.

He was considered at the time to be among the most radicalized of the network of young extremists from the Paris area, which included the brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi.

The Kouachi brothers led police on a two-day manhunt after attacking Charlie Hebdo, then hid out in a printing plant. Police surrounded the building, and the brothers were killed in a

shootout after a daylong siege.

At the same time, another attacker, Amedy Coulibaly, was taking more hostages in a kosher supermarket in Paris. He also was killed when police raided the store.

The attacks that week on Charlie Hebdo, police and the kosher market killed 17 people.

Released from prison in early 2011, el Hakim is believed to have moved to Tunisia, where he claimed responsibility in 2014 for the assassinations of two political figures. By then, he was high up in Islamic State ranks and was believed to play a role in the group's external operations.

Soon after the U.S. inva-

sion of Iraq in 2003, el Hakim wound up in a network of French jihadis and fought with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. The Islamic State group began as an al-Qaida affiliate in Iraq led by al-Zarqawi, who was killed in a U.S. airstrike in June 2006.

El Hakim moved back and forth between Syria and Iraq using networks of smugglers and jihadis, according to court records obtained by The Associated Press.

At one point, he appeared on French television calling on friends in Paris to join him.

"I am in Iraq, I'm doing jihad. And all my brothers who are there should come and defend Islam," he said.

Trump will soon inherit 'forgotten' Afghanistan War

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan has fallen so far from Americans' consciousness that some may have forgotten it's called the forgotten war.

It also is America's longest war. Now in its 16th year, it will soon be the responsibility of Donald Trump, two presidents removed from the October 2001 invasion.

During the presidential campaign, neither Trump nor Democrat Hillary Clinton offered new ideas for breaking the battlefield stalemate. They hardly mentioned the country.

And yet, the war that began as America's response to 9/11 grinds on as nearly 10,000 U.S. troops train and advise the Afghan army and police, hopeful that at some point the Afghans can stand on their own against the Taliban — or that peace talks will end the insurgency.

A look at the war Trump inherits from President Barack Obama, what U.S. troops are doing and why the outlook is so clouded.

The US mission

While Obama was a longtime critic of the Iraq War, he always cast the Afghanistan fight as

vital.

Shortly after taking office in 2009, Obama looked to fix what he saw as U.S. failures in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He tripled troop levels in Afghanistan, but the surge did not force the Taliban to the negotiating table. Pakistan remains a sanctuary for the Taliban.

In December 2014, the U.S. ended its combat role in Afghanistan, but there will be at least 8,400 troops there when Trump takes office.

American troops and their coalition partners perform two tasks: The first, Operation Inherent Resolve, is to train and advise Afghan forces fighting the Taliban. The second, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, is to hunt down and kill al-Qaida militants, as well as those affiliated with the Islamic State and other groups.

The U.S. performs its counterterrorism work in Afghanistan in two ways. First, it goes after al-Qaida and Islamic State operatives as a U.S.-only mission.

Secondly, U.S. forces operate with Afghan special forces in hunting Islamic State fighters.

According to Gen. John Nicholson, the top U.S. commander in the country, of the 98 militant groups designated by the

U.S. as terrorist organizations, 20 are in Afghanistan.

The outlook

Nicholson, like many U.S. generals who preceded him in command of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, sees reason for hope. They point to modest progress against corruption and expanded opportunities for women.

He said he is confident the Afghan army, which suffered heavy losses in 2016, will continue to improve.

Some analysts, however, worry that the Obama administration missed opportunities to improve security and strengthen the Afghan government.

Frederick W. Kagan, a military historian and director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute, says security has deteriorated despite U.S. efforts to build up the Afghan army and police.

Kagan says Obama is leaving a worrisome situation.

Trump's war

Trump will not have an easy time disentangling the U.S. mil-

itary from Afghanistan, short of an unlikely decision to simply walk away. He has said little about the country but has called broadly for an end to "nation-building" efforts.

Michael Flynn, the retired Army lieutenant general who will be Trump's national security adviser, sees Afghanistan as part of a broader war the U.S. must fight over generations.

"We defeated al-Qaida and the Iranians in Iraq, and the Taliban and their allies in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, they kept fighting and we went away," he wrote in his 2016 book, "Field of Fight." "Let's face it: right now we're losing, and I'm talking about a very big war, not just Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. We're in a world war against a messianic mass movement of evil people, most of them inspired by a totalitarian ideology: radical Islam."

Trump's choice to lead the Pentagon, retired Marine Gen. James Mattis, is a veteran of combat in Afghanistan. He has written that the U.S. devotes too few resources, guided by too little strategic clarity, to Afghanistan. But how that translates into action by the next White House is unclear.

Stopgap spending bill passes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With less than an hour to spare, the Senate late Friday backed legislation averting a government shutdown as coal-state Democrats retreated on long-term health care benefits for retired miners and promised a renewed fight for the working class next year.

The 63-36 vote sent the stopgap spending bill to President Barack Obama, who signed the measure early Saturday morning. The Senate also passed and sent the president a \$10 billion water bill with money to respond to lead-tainted drinking water in Michigan and drought in California. The vote was 78-21.

The votes came hours after Democrats dropped threats to block the spending measure in hopes of using the shutdown deadline to try to win a one-year reprieve for 16,500 miners facing the loss of health care benefits at year's end. Instead, the legislation provides benefits at a cost of \$45 million for four months.

Democrats invoked President-elect Donald Trump's promises to coal country as they pressed to continue the benefits. Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., a potential member of the Trump Cabinet, led coal-state Democrats' fight.

But House Republicans were unrelenting and had already vacated the Capitol for a three-week holiday, forcing Democrats to concede. Manchin acknowledged Friday night that he did not have the votes to block the bill but said "the fight will continue" next year.

"I'm born into a family of coal miners. If I'm not going to stand up for them, who is?" he asked reporters.

The fight gave Democrats, who suffered devastating election losses a month ago at the hands of working-class voters, a chance to cast themselves and not the GOP as the champions of the common man. Manchin was joined by other coal-state Democrats who face re-election in 2018 in states Trump won last month, including Pennsylvania and Ohio.

"We're just getting warmed up," said Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., vowing a fight next year. "These miners and their families kept their promise, put their lives at risk. ... It's not too difficult for a senator or House member to keep a promise."

The dispute over health benefits and a separate fight over controversial legislation to shift more of California's scarce water resources to inland farmers were the final battles of a two-year session marked by constant quarreling. It was capped by a burst of productivity on legislation to authorize hundreds of water projects; repair the lead-tainted water system in Flint, Mich.; and keep the government running through April.

Congress will take a break before reconvening on Jan. 3 to get a swift start on repealing key elements of the Affordable Care Act and confirming Trump's Cabinet.

The underlying funding bill would keep the government running through April 28 to buy time for the incoming Trump administration and Congress to wrap up more than \$1 trillion in unfinished budget work. It also provides war funding, disaster aid for Louisiana and other states, and an expedited process for considering Trump's nominee for defense secretary, retired Gen. James Mattis.

VMI leader defends coloring for cadets

Associated Press

LEXINGTON, Va. — The leader of Virginia Military Institute is defending a program that offers coloring as a way for cadets to ease stress amid widespread attention on social media.

Superintendent J.H. Binford Peay issued a response Tuesday to what he said were recent social media postings regarding VMI behavioral health programs.

According to Peay, the institute's "stress busters" program, which includes several activities such as yoga and therapy dogs that are designed to relieve stress before exams, is being inaccurately portrayed.

A widely read Washington Free Beacon story Tuesday reported that coloring books were also being offered.

"There is a one-sheet handout with an intricate design that may be used to color, within discreet, small lines as part of the information packet along with other modalities that are recognized as ways to reduce stress," Peay, a retired general, said.

In his statement, Peay said VMI has one of the nation's hardest four-year academic, physical and discipline experiences.

"The reality is that suicide rates and mental health issues continue to be on the rise, particularly for young adults," Peay said.

Although the number has been low at the institute, Peay noted "VMI has not been exempt from these tragedies."

"No one should assume that VMI coddles its cadets or has become soft," he said.

VMI has since removed a posting about the program on its website. VMI spokesman Stewart MacInnis said it was attracting "more attention than was necessary."

'Midshipman' rank won't change

The (Annapolis, Md.) Capital

Navy officials say they have decided to not change the name "midshipman" because it's a rank, not just a job title.

In January, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus issued a memo to the chief of naval operation seeking an "update of position titles and descriptions to demonstrate through this language that women are included in these positions."

Mabus asked for a review of "the position titles throughout the Navy and ensure that they are gender-integrated ... removing 'man' from their titles."

"Midshipman" will not change because it's a rank according to U.S. law, Naval Academy Superintendent Vice Adm. Ted Carter said last week. He

added that officials only looked at changing the name "very briefly."

The only change that came from the January memo was the Navy announcing that rating titles for sailors will be modernized, said Nate Christensen, spokesman for chief of naval personnel.

Navy officials said the decision, announced in September, will let sailors have more flexibility in advancement. For example, sailors with less than three years experience will be called "seamen."

In December 2015, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that the military would welcome women into positions, specifically the Navy's remaining all-male units. This year also marks the 40th an-

niversary of the integration of women at the Naval Academy.

About 25 percent of women make up the Brigade of Midshipmen. The Class of 2020 includes 331 women.

"Midshipman" has been used long before the opening of the Naval Academy in 1845. The word originally was used for those who worked or slept in a certain area of the ship, amidships. It later became a term for officers in training.

Women were first allowed to enlist in the Navy and the Marine Corps in 1917, right before the U.S. entered World War I. They were referred to as yeomen (F) or yeomanettes.

At the Military Academy and the Air Force Academy, students are called cadets.

Trump dismissive of probe into hacking

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's order to intelligence officials for a full-scale review of campaign-season cyberattacks met with a cool reception from President-elect Donald Trump, whose transition team said it's "time to move on."

Trump has been repeatedly dismissive of the intelligence community's determination that Russia sought through hacking to disrupt the U.S. election, and Obama's new initiative was similarly brushed off at Trump Tower.

Trump's transition office issued a statement reflecting the deep divisions that emerged between his campaign and the intelligence agencies over Russian meddling. "These are the same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction," the statement said. "The election ended a long time ago in one of the biggest Electoral College victories in history. It's now time to move on and 'Make America

Great Again.'"

The investigation ordered by Obama will be a "deep dive" into a possible pattern of increased "malicious cyber activity" timed to the campaign season, White House spokesman Eric Schultz said Friday, including the email hacks that rattled the presidential campaign.

It will look at the tactics, targets, key actors and the U.S. government's response to the recent email hacks, as well as incidents reported in past elections, he said.

The president ordered the report earlier in the week and asked that it be completed before he leaves office next month, Schultz said.

"The president wanted this done under his watch because he takes it very seriously," Schultz said. "We are committed to ensuring the integrity of our elections."

The Washington Post reported Friday that the CIA has concluded that Russia aimed specifically to help Trump win the

presidency.

The Kremlin has rejected the hacking accusations.

In the months leading up to the election, email accounts of Democratic Party officials and a top Hillary Clinton campaign aide were breached, emails leaked and embarrassing and private emails posted online. Many Democrats believe the hackings benefited Trump's bid.

Schultz said the president sought the probe as a way of improving U.S. defense against cyberattacks and was not intending to question the legitimacy of Trump's victory.

"This is not an effort to challenge the outcome of the election," Schultz said.

Obama's move comes as Democratic lawmakers have been pushing Obama to declassify more information about Russia's role, fearing that Trump, who has promised a warmer relationship with Moscow, may not prioritize the issue.

Giuliani removes self from Cabinet consideration

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani formally withdrew from consideration for a post in President-elect Donald Trump's administration Friday, putting an end to his ill-fated bid to lead the State Department. Trump is now seriously considering Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson for the post.

Giuliani's prospects had already dimmed, in part because of questions about his overseas business ties.

Mitt Romney, the 2012 GOP presidential candidate, is still in the mix.

The deliberations have divided Trump's senior advisers, with some bluntly warning in public that tapping Romney would anger the president-elect's loyal supporters.

The president-elect is said to be intrigued by the prospect of filling the diplomatic post with an international businessman and has told those close to him that he likes the idea of an impressive-looking Cabinet stocked with generals, the busi-

ness elite and the extremely successful. And while he is said to be enamored with how Romney looks the part of a statesman, he also likes how Tillerson projects success and gravitas from running a massive global corporation, according to a person not authorized to speak publicly about private discussions.

Tillerson has led Exxon since 2006, a period when record high oil prices and record corporate profits helped make it the most valuable public company in the world. He rose to prominence through the company's Russian energy business and was awarded Russia's Order of Friendship last year.

Giuliani's financial ties, as well as his frequent public campaigning for the job, are said to have given Trump pause. Those close to the president-elect said he had concerns that the 72-year-old Giuliani may lack the stamina and charisma for the high-profile, globe-trotting position.

The former mayor said he removed himself from consideration on Nov. 29.

Seoul crowds revel in Park's impeachment

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The previous time South Korea's parliament voted to impeach a president, ruling party lawmakers bawled and hurled ballot boxes, a man set himself on fire in front of the National Assembly, and thousands glumly held candlelight vigils night after night to save late liberal President Roh Moo-hyun.

Twelve years later, the mood couldn't have been more different, with massive crowds returning to Seoul's streets on Saturday, a day after lawmakers voted in favor of removing disgraced President Park Geun-hye.

The vote for impeachment left protesters basking in pride, believing they had repaired a damaged democracy with their weekly demonstrations.

Thousands of people marched near streets close to the presidential palace where the notoriously aloof Park will remain mostly alone for up to six months until the Constitutional Court rules whether she must

step down permanently.

Carrying signs, flags and yellow balloons, they gleefully shouted for her to quit immediately rather than weather the court process.

Protest organizers said about 600,000 people turned out on Saturday. On Friday, the parliament passed an impeachment motion against Park, which stripped her of her presidential duties and pushed Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn into the role as government caretaker until the court rules.

The impeachment came after millions of people demonstrated for weeks demanding the removal of Park, who state prosecutors accuse of colluding with a longtime friend to extort money and favors from South Korea's biggest companies and to give that confidante sway over government decisions. Park has apologized for putting trust into her friend, Choi Soon-sil, but denied legal wrongdoing.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Rezoning of Field of Dreams site is upheld

IA DES MOINES — An Iowa Supreme Court ruling cleared the way for a baseball complex to be built at the “Field of Dreams” site in Dyersville.

Friday’s ruling upholds a lower court decision that the City Council acted properly when it rezoned the property from agricultural to commercial.

Some Dyersville residents had appealed the earlier decision because of their objections against the City Council approving the rezoning.

That move paved the way for the development of a 24-field youth baseball and softball complex where the 1989 movie was filmed, but petitioners feared the complex would disrupt farm operations and traffic.

More than 50 vehicles damaged in crash

OH PAINESVILLE — Snowy conditions on an Ohio road led to a chain-reaction crash involving more than 50 vehicles.

The Lake County sheriff’s office said at least 19 people were injured in the Thursday afternoon crash in Painesville.

The sheriff’s office said on Facebook early Friday that towing companies were trying to clear cars and trucks from Interstate 90 by the morning rush hour. Heavy snow squalls were in the forecast.

Bus passenger Greg Carmichael told Fox 8 News he was heading home to Buffalo, N.Y. He said about an hour into the ride the weather conditions worsened and a truck hit the bus from behind on I-90, causing a domino effect crash.

He said several people on the bus were seriously injured.

Board seeks to rename peak for fallen SEAL

AZ PHOENIX—The Maricopa County Board of Supervisors wants the tallest peak in a mountain range south of Phoenix named in honor of a fallen Navy SEAL.

The board on Wednesday asked the county Parks and Recreation Department to help petition state and federal officials to name the Estrella Mountains peak in honor of Charles Keating IV.

“This young man was the best of the best. He was dedicated, part of an elite, special-operations force. He set his goals sky high, and then he achieved them,” said Supervisor Andy Kunasek.

Keating was killed May 3 in Iraq during a battle with Islamic State fighters.

The 31-year-old grew up in Phoenix and was a cross country star at Arcadia High School.

His grandfather, Charles H. Keating Jr., was an Arizona financier who served prison time for his role in the costliest savings and loan failure of the 1980s.

The grandson was part of a quick-reaction force that on May 3 went to rescue U.S. military advisers caught in a gunbattle with more than 100 Islamic State militants.

Keating was awarded the Silver Star for his actions in Iraq and posthumously promoted to chief petty officer.

Jogger, dog attacked by moose along trail

WY JACKSON HOLE — A dog has suffered serious injuries after the mutt and its owner were attacked by three moose on a trail in Jackson.

The Jackson Hole News & Guide reported that Brad Walsh

said he and his dog Memphis startled two cow moose while jogging on Saturday.

Walsh was able to put distance between himself and the animals, but Memphis was not so lucky. The dog suffered a traumatic brain injury and damage to her internal organs after a bull moose stomped on her. The dog received 80 sutures and numerous staples on her forehead, legs and abdomen.

Walsh says he won’t be running on that trail again now that snow has pushed larger animals down toward Cache Creek.

Textbook with slave passage is pulled

CT NORWALK — A social studies textbook that says some slaves in Connecticut were cared for like family members is being pulled from fourth-grade classrooms in Norwalk.

Norwalk public school officials said they began reviewing the book, “The Connecticut Adventure,” after a parent raised concerns last month about its depiction of slavery.

The district’s chief academic officer, Michael Conner, said in a letter to parents that the textbook minimizes the impact and implications of slavery, Hearst Connecticut Media reported.

The book by John W. Ifkovic was published in 2001 by Gibbs Smith Publishing. In a chapter on slavery in Connecticut, the book says, “Compared to other colonies, Connecticut did not have many slaves. Some people owned one or two slaves. They often cared for and protected them like members of the family. They taught them to be Christian, and sometimes to read and write.”

Schools officials said hundreds of the books will be removed in January.

A district spokeswoman,

Brenda Wilcox Williams, said the 250-page book has been in use for several years at 10 of the 12 Norwalk elementary schools. Concerns about the book were brought to district officials Nov. 29, and within a week they announced the decision to stop using the book.

Mother settles suit after son flown to wrong city

NY NEW YORK — A New York City woman has agreed to settle her lawsuit against JetBlue Airways after it mixed up her 5-year-old son with another boy and flew him to the wrong city.

Maribel Martinez’s lawyer announced the settlement on Tuesday, saying the matter was resolved amicably. No other settlement details have been released.

The New York-based airline has declined to comment.

Robbery suspect caught after Facebook warning

PA BRIDGEVILLE — State police have helped cops in a Pennsylvania town keep a Facebook promise they made to an armed robbery suspect: “We WILL find you.”

The Meadville Tribune reported that Robert Watkins III, 32, was arrested Sunday in Rockdale Township. That’s near Meadville, which is Watkins’ hometown.

About 100 miles away in Bridgeville, police got a warrant charging Watkins with a Thanksgiving Day gas station robbery.

Bridgeville police had posted a message on Facebook saying, “It’s only a matter of time before we find you.” The post included several pictures of Watkins, and said he had been identified through surveillance video.

From wire reports

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Playoff races tighten with 4 games left

Associated Press

And down the stretch they come.

The Cowboys already are in the playoffs. The Patriots and Seahawks almost certainly will qualify soon, too. Believe it or not, Raiders fans, your team is about to end its 13-season drought.

As for the rest, well, the scramble is on. Here's what's ahead in the frantic final four weeks of an already unpredictable season:

AFC

It would seem that the wild cards will come out of the West, by far the best division in football. Whether it's Denver, Kansas City or Oakland, those teams will provide quite a test for the North or South winner in the first round of the postseason.

Whoever wins the West almost certainly will have a first-round bye, too. After the Chiefs' win Thursday night and their sweep of Oakland — plus a win over Denver in their pocket — they hold most of the cards in the division.

Defending Super Bowl champ Denver (8-4) has the toughest road with games against Tennessee, New England, Kansas City and Oakland.

The other bye figures to go

to the Patriots — no surprise there. It would be the seventh straight year New England was off for the first weekend of the playoffs.

The other two divisions are murky, with the South a tossup.

Houston has led the division all season, but is in the midst of a major swoon, its offense unreliable, its defense banged up. Indianapolis has Andrew Luck back, and he could be a difference maker, but losing its best defender, linebacker D'Qwell Jackson to a four-game suspension, is damaging to a mediocre unit.

Tennessee, a team to watch out for in 2017, must play Denver and Kansas City before finishing with the Jaguars and Texans.

Houston, Indy and Tennessee all are 6-6. Will 8-8 be good enough to sneak off with the South — and then get hammered by a wild-card team?

As for dropping the hammer, that's the operating standard for the North, best personified by the Ravens and Steelers. Both are 7-5, both are hitting their stride, and both face off Christmas night. Can't wait.

NFC

Dallas has so separated itself from the rest of the conference that not only can it secure the East title with a win at the Gi-

ants on Sunday night, it also can nail down home-field advantage throughout the playoffs if Detroit and Seattle lose.

Let's pencil in the Cowboys as the top seed, then sit back and watch an intriguing race for the other bye between the Seahawks and Lions.

Detroit (8-4) almost is as much a surprise as Dallas, but it hasn't yet convinced folks it will win the North. Its final three games are at the Giants and Cowboys, then hosting the Packers (6-6) on New Year's Day. Green Bay won the first meeting, and Aaron Rodgers has been playing lights-out football for weeks.

But give Detroit its due: No team has been more impressive in close games, Matthew Stafford is having his best season, and its plus-6 turnover margin is among the NFL leaders.

The Packers, who must navigate through three divisional games to finish the schedule after hosting Seattle on Sunday, look more like a wild-card chaser.

Seattle (8-3-1) might have the league's most talented roster when everyone is healthy. That's hardly the case now, and losing perennial All-Pro safety Earl Thomas for the rest of the season is damaging.

The good news for the Seahawks is their offense, while

streaky, has playmakers such as Russell Wilson — also in the midst of an MVP-caliber year — Jimmy Graham and Doug Baldwin, plus, at last, a threat at running back with Thomas Rawls' return to the lineup.

And the Seahawks have little reason to look behind them in the West.

Atlanta (7-5) hadn't been looking in the rearview mirror since it took hold of the South at 4-1. Now it has been caught by Tampa Bay, and the Falcons have thrown away some games, making everyone wonder how much staying power they have.

They do, however, have a huge edge in the remaining schedule. While they face the Rams, 49ers, Panthers and Saints (total record: 14-34), Tampa gets New Orleans twice, Carolina — and Dallas.

The wild-card race is such a jumble that diving deep into tiebreakers on Jan. 1 might be needed to settle things. The Giants (8-4) have the inside track, but also a difficult schedule (Cowboys, Lions, Redskins, Eagles) and a major injury with Jason Pierre-Paul done for 2016.

It's possible the runner-up in the North and South, perhaps even the Cardinals or Vikings if they ever get things straightened out, will be alive beyond Christmas.

Oakland unveils stadium plan in effort to keep Raiders

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Oakland and Alameda County leaders will vote Tuesday on a financial and development plan to build a \$1.3 billion football stadium at the Coliseum site to keep the Raiders from moving to Las Vegas.

Mayor Libby Schaaf and other local leaders on Friday presented details of the plan reached with the Ronnie Lott Group and Fortress Investment Group that includes public money only being used for infrastructure upgrades.

"This term sheet agreement puts Oakland in the running to keep the Raiders in a way that is responsible to the team, the league, the fans and the taxpayers," Schaaf said. "Everything the city and county and the investor team is doing is about putting forward the best offer to encourage the Raiders ownership and the NFL to keep the Raiders in Oakland, where the team belongs."

The Raiders had no comment on the plan and owner Mark Davis is committed to moving to Las Vegas, where a \$1.9 billion stadium project has been

approved. Nevada will raise \$750 million from a hotel tax to fund the stadium with billionaire casino mogul Sheldon Adelson contributing \$650 million and the Raiders and NFL kicking in \$500 million.

The Raiders must get approval from 24 of the 32 NFL owners before being allowed to move.

That put pressure on Bay Area officials to put together an alternative plan to keep the Raiders from moving. The parties have identified \$1.25 billion in potential financing.

The city will invest \$200 mil-

lion on infrastructure in the area as well as provide land worth \$150 million. The Lott Group will contribute \$400 million to the project with the NFL and the Raiders contributing \$500 million. The NFL has already pledged \$300 million to a stadium in Oakland when it prevented the Raiders from moving to Los Angeles earlier this year.

The city and county still must figure out how to deal with the nearly \$100 million in debt on the current stadium before finalizing the deal.

Russia's lab wizard made drug cocktails

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Even as he worked to cover up doping by Russian athletes, Grigory Rodchenkov was developing technology which would help to catch them years later.

The former head of the Moscow anti-doping laboratory is the star witness for World Anti-Doping Agency investigator Richard McLaren, whose report Friday accused Russia of operating a state-backed doping program which covered up more than 1,000 tainted drug test samples, including for medalists at the 2014 Winter Olympics.

However, Rodchenkov's role in helping catch drug cheats isn't widely known outside a small circle of the world's leading anti-doping scientists.

Methods devised by Rodchenkov and his former assistant at the lab, Timofei Sobolevsky, to detect two common steroids have become a crucial weapon for drug testers in a wave of retesting carried out this year by the International Olympic

Committee, though some dispute the Russians' work.

So far, 62 athletes — almost half of them Russians — have been disqualified from the 2008 and 2012 Olympics in IOC retests after testing positive for turinabol, a banned substance which Rodchenkov helped make much easier for labs to find in samples.

There are also six cases involving oxandrolone, another steroid on which Rodchenkov carried out research, though all but one of those also tested positive for turinabol, a black-market steroid developed in the old East Germany which bulks up muscle and has plagued global sport for decades.

"Even if they are old and quite well-known substances, there is continuous research on the metabolic behavior of these substances," said Tiia Kuuranne, head of the laboratory in Lausanne, Switzerland, which handles retests for the International Olympic Committee.

"These advances are the ones that lead to these kinds of

breakthroughs or leaps in doping control."

Those who tested positive for turinabol in IOC retesting competed for 10 different countries, mostly in the former Soviet Union, and range from Kazakhstan's Ilya Ilyin, who used his record-breaking weightlifting career to build a following of 400,000 on Instagram, to a Belarusian runner and a Russian wrestler. Many of them deny doping, including Ilyin.

The key advance was the discovery of new turinabol metabolites, the chemical traces left when complex steroids break down in the human body. Turinabol produces a wide range of metabolites, some of them quickly flushed out of a doped athlete's system, others which can linger for much longer.

If the steroid can be detected for longer, drug testers can catch dopers who ended their steroid use a few weeks before a major event like the Olympics, expecting they could never be caught.

"It's very non-sexy science to find these metabolites, but it's really cool what it can do, so many dopers. It's just amazing," says Marcus Ericsson, director of a WADA-accredited lab in Sweden.

Research conducted in 2011 by Rodchenkov and Sobolevsky found six new metabolites. One referred to as M3 in their research proved to be the key, raising the detection window from a few days of last use to as much as seven weeks, Rodchenkov and Sobolevsky estimated.

Rodchenkov and Sobolevsky "had excellent scientific knowledge on methods, on steroid metabolism, really excellent," says Peter Van Eenoo, who runs a drug testing laboratory in Belgium and frequently met both men at conferences.

"Grigory, I need to say, also had knowledge which was better than most other lab directors, if not all lab directors, on usage, how people were using, the doses they were using ... It did make some people wonder how he knew about this."

No. 10 Creighton has no trouble getting by Longwood

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — No one at Creighton's basketball game had to go hungry Friday night.

Fans win free pizza when the 10th-ranked Bluejays score 75 points. That was taken care of less than five minutes into the second half against Longwood.

By the end of a 113-58 victory, Creighton had set the CenturyLink Center record for points and posted their most lopsided victory since beating Texas-Arlington by 56 in November 2002.

Players hungry for minutes were satisfied, too. All 13 Creighton players who suited up scored, and all but one got at least 10 minutes.

Marcus Foster and Khyri Thomas led the way with 16 points apiece, and reserve Martin Krampelj had 11 points,

eight rebounds and two blocked shots.

"Obviously I liked the way we played tonight. Our efficiency offensively once again was off the charts," coach Greg McDermott said.

The Bluejays shot 58.6 percent, made 12 of 22 three-pointers and dunked 10 times against their overmatched opponent from the Big South Conference.

Leading 62-25 at the break, the Bluejays scored their most points in a half in McDermott's seven seasons.

"What a prolific scoring basketball team," Longwood coach Jayson Gee said. "Dominant in transition. Tremendous depth and something we were not prepared to combat tonight, for sure."

Maurice Watson Jr. had 10 points and 11 rebounds for

his third double-double of the season. Toby Hegner and Isaiah Zierden also had 10 points apiece.

Khris Lane and JaShaun Smith scored 12 points apiece for the Lancers (2-5), who are missing three players because of injuries.

Creighton's two-day turnaround from a 77-62 win at in-state rival Nebraska was no issue.

"There's risk of a little hangover from that," McDermott said, "and, fortunately, our guys are mature enough that that didn't happen."

The Bluejays made 5 of their first six threes, 10 of their first 13 shots overall and led by 20 points 12 minutes into the game.

The crowd's interest waned as the margin grew wider in the second half. The last big

roars came when world junior welterweight boxing champion Terence "Bud" Crawford was shown on the video board and when the score of the Creighton volleyball team's NCAA regional match against Michigan was announced.

Creighton is among eight remaining unbeaten teams in Division I and is the first to win 10 games. The Bluejays are off to their best start since the 2003-04 team opened 12-0.

"We try not to focus on everything that's said in the media, although it's great and we're very honored to be mentioned and talked about so highly," Zierden said. "We know that we have a long ways to go to be where we want to be and we have to try to stay focused and get a little bit better."

James moving up career scoring list

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Another game, another milestone for LeBron James.

The four-time MVP scored 27 points to move into ninth place on the NBA scoring list, and the Cleveland Cavaliers defeated the Miami Heat 114-84 on Friday night.

James passed Elvin Hayes on a driving layup with 6:58 remaining and has 27,315 career points. The Cavs star was removed about a minute later and received a loud ovation from the Cleveland crowd.

“Whenever you’re great, you’re going to move up a lot of lists,” Cavaliers coach Tyronn Lue said. “It’s a tribute to his hard work and his dedication.”

James moved past Hakeem Olajuwon earlier and could pass Moses Malone (27,409) for eighth place in the next few games.

“Anytime I’m mentioned

with the other greats, it’s very surreal and very humbling,” James said.

Kevin Love, a game-time decision because of back spasms, scored a team-high 28 points and had 15 rebounds after missing the morning shootaround.

Kyrie Irving added 23 points for the Cavs, who have won three straight after losing three in a row.

Derrick Williams scored 17 to lead the short-handed Heat, who dressed only eight players and have lost four straight.

Miami center Hassan Whiteside, who spent most of the third quarter on the bench, had eight points and 12 rebounds in 28 minutes. Whiteside entered averaging 17.6 points and 14.7 rebounds.

Miami coach Erik Spoelstra was clearly displeased with his center’s effort.

“This league is for competitors only,” Spoelstra said. “I

just wanted more energy.”

Rockets 102, Thunder 99: James Harden scored 21 points, and Houston overcame Russell Westbrook’s seventh consecutive triple-double to beat host Oklahoma City.

Westbrook finished with 27 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists. He has the longest triple-double streak since Michael Jordan had seven straight in 1989. The most in a row is nine by Philadelphia’s Wilt Chamberlain in March 1968.

Raptors 101, Celtics 94: Kyle Lowry scored 21 of his season-high 34 points in the second half for visiting Toronto.

Pistons 117, Timberwolves 90: Andre Drummond had 22 points and 22 rebounds for his second straight 20-20 game and Detroit cruised past host Minnesota.

Mavericks 111, Pacers 103: Wesley Matthews matched a season high with 26 points, Harrison Barnes had 25

and Dallas beat visiting Indiana for just its third win in 15 games.

Hawks 114, Bucks 110: Dennis Schroder scored a career-high 33 points and Atlanta rallied from 20 down in the second half to beat host Milwaukee.

Hornets 109, Magic 88: Nic Batum and Michael Kidd-Gilchrist each had 16 points, and Charlotte routed visiting Orlando for its third straight victory.

Suns 119, Lakers 115: Eric Bledsoe had 30 points and nine assists, Leandro Barbosa added 21 points and Phoenix ended its three-game losing streak with a victory over slumping host Los Angeles.

Knicks 103, Kings 100: Carmelo Anthony scored 33 points, including two free throws with 14.8 seconds remaining, and visiting New York held on to beat Sacramento for its fifth victory in six games.

Dubinsky, Bobrovsky help Blue Jackets win 5th in row

Associated Press

DETROIT — Almost every game is a productive one for the Columbus Blue Jackets these days — whether they play well or not.

Brandon Dubinsky scored a tiebreaking goal in the second period, and the surging Blue Jackets won their fifth straight game, 4-1 over the Detroit Red Wings on Friday night. Lukas Sedlak got his first NHL goal for the Blue Jackets, who have earned at least a point in 12 of their last 13 games.

Sergei Bobrovsky had 32 saves for Columbus.

“I didn’t think we were all that good, but Bob had another great game. You are going to need games like that and he’s been giving them to us,” Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella said. “There hasn’t been enough to our game lately. We need more grit and more checking.”

Cam Atkinson contributed a short-handed goal in the first

period for Columbus, which is three points behind the first-place New York Rangers in the Metropolitan Division. Dylan Larkin’s power-play goal in the second was the only scoring of the night for the Red Wings.

Sam Gagner scored into an empty net with 13.9 seconds left.

Detroit goalie Petr Mrazek was pulled in favor of Jimmy Howard after Sedlak’s goal made it 3-1 in the second.

Mrazek was miffed after the goal that put the Blue Jackets up 2-1. He came well out of his crease to cover up a rebound, but there was no whistle, and he ended up playing the puck around the boards. A Columbus player was waiting and shot it back toward the net, and Dubinsky scored easily on a rebound.

“When that puck goes out that far, you can’t cover the puck. There’s a little bit of grey area in the rule, but because it’s not in his sphere and it bounces

further away, then at that point you’re trying to play it and not covering an immediate rebound,” Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill said. “They were telling him to play it, he played it, and it ended up in our net.”

Ducks 3, Sharks 2: Hampus Lindholm got his first goal of the season with 5:38 remaining, helping host Anaheim beat San Jose after blowing a two-goal lead.

Goals by Brent Burns and Kevin Labanc brought San Jose back after Rickard Rakell and Antoine Vermette scored in the first period for Anaheim.

Rangers 1, Blackhawks 0 (OT): Nick Holden scored 55 seconds into overtime, Antti Raanta made 26 saves against his former team and visiting New York beat Chicago.

Derek Stepan passed from the boards to a streaking Holden in the middle of the ice, and he beat Scott Darling on the stick side for his fourth goal of the season.

Wild 3, Oilers 2 (SO): Eric Staal scored in the sixth round of a shootout and host Minnesota beat Edmonton.

Matt Dumba and Jason Zucker scored in regulation for Minnesota, which has won three straight.

Capitals 4, Sabres 1: T.J. Oshie and Marcus Johansson each scored a goal, Philipp Grubauer made 27 saves and visiting Washington beat Buffalo for its third straight win.

Jakub Vrana and John Carlson also scored, helping Washington beat Buffalo for the third time in 15 days.

Blues 4, Devils 1: Robby Fabbri scored twice and Vladimir Tarasenko had three assists, lifting visiting St. Louis over New Jersey.

Tarasenko had eight of St. Louis’ 32 shots on goal, while Ryan Reaves and Jaden Schwartz also scored for the Blues.