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Sailors praise Navy's ratings reversal

BY TARA COPP, TYLER HLAVAC
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Stars and Stripes

The Navy reversed course on its decision to scrap job-oriented enlisted titles, giving an unexpected Christmas gift to tens of thousands of sailors angered by the move to scuttle a centuries-old tradition.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson, who announced the reversal, cited the strong backlash from sailors against the plan to end the system of job-oriented titles, such as gunner's mate or boatswain's mate.

Sailors were to receive more information Wednesday from Richardson and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Steven Giordano, Navy officials said.

The reaction on social media was almost instantaneous and mostly positive, ranging from "good call," to "leave tradition alone."

Sailors around the fleet joined the chorus.

"No one was happy about that," Petty Officer 2nd Class Andrew Miller, a machinist's mate aboard the USS Reagan, said of the September decision to eliminate ratings titles.

"I joined up to be a mechanic and I finally got my rating and then they said, 'You're not

a mechanic anymore.' I don't think anyone is going to be unhappy the ratings are back. No chance," Miller said.

The news was still making its rounds around Naval Support Activity Bahrain. During an interview with Stars and Stripes, Petty Officer 1st Class German Furuken appeared stunned and struggled for words when he heard the ratings were back.

"They are?" Furuken asked. "Having the title back is good, but I feel like the changes they were going to make is going to take longer, the process is going to be longer, a few years, you know. So I don't know if I'm going to be able to see it while I'm still in the uniform."

The Navy had decided to modernize its rating system — affecting 265,000 enlisted sailors — in an effort to align job titles with other services and allow sailors more flexibility to move between job specialties. The drastic change was initiated during a discussion on how to change rating titles to be more gender neutral, a request from Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus.

The backlash was swift, spawning a WhiteHouse.gov petition to get the Navy to reverse its decision, which gathered 103,760 signatures, more than required for an official response from the executive branch. Military.com had previously reported the original

petitioner was Robert D. Weeks, a retired Navy operations specialist. In November, the White House responded to Weeks' petition, saying it supported the Navy's efforts to modernize the ratings system.

Petty Officer 1st Class James Warren, a fire controlman aboard the USS Chancellorsville, said he signed the petition.

"What we know from joining the Navy is your rate is your job and your job defines what you do," Warren said. "The ratings going away threw a wrench in that equation and there was mayhem. I'm glad the ratings are coming back because that's who we are."

Richardson admitted getting rid of ratings titles detracted from accomplishing the Navy's major goals with rating modernization, and that sailors pointed out there is a way to modernize the rating system while keeping rating titles.

But ratings modernization won't go by the wayside, according to Richardson. The Navy will work toward changing its personnel system to provide sailors flexibility, including allowing sailors to have multiple occupational skill sets or ratings.

"We will need to tackle the issue of managing rating names," the admiral said. "We will continue to involve sailors throughout the fleet."

Army set to roll out new fitness test

BY ALEX HORTON
Stars and Stripes

SAN ANTONIO — The Army will roll out a new physical fitness test Jan. 3 for recruits and soldiers who are aiming to reclassify to demanding combat arms jobs, the Army said Wednesday.

After delays this year, the Occupational Physical Assessment Test will be administered to new recruits interested in physically demanding specialties such as the infantry and tank crews, along with soldiers already in the service who are looking to change their mili-

tary occupational specialty.

Recruits will take the assessment test before basic combat training, said an Army Training and Doctrine Command spokesman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. The test will help predict the ability of a recruit or a soldier to meet the physical demands of those jobs.

Officials have pointed to a loss of troops who are fit enough for combat as a concern that drove development of the test. Dr. Whitfield East, a research physiologist with the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training, said in an Army.

mil story in June that the test was designed to lower attrition in demanding jobs. The attrition occurs when soldiers enter combat arms and then fail to physically perform, which can cause manpower and readiness issues, he said.

The Army originally planned to roll out the test in June, the Army spokesman said.

That implementation date "was pushed back so we could better evaluate and refine the assessment through testing and ensure the proper equipment was available at all testing sites around the country," he said. "Our focus is on getting this

right the first time."

The test's four components are the standing long jump, the seated medicine ball power throw, the strength deadlift and the interval aerobic run, according to the Army.mil story.

Test scores are divided into four physical demand categories: heavy (black), significant (gray), moderate (gold) and unprepared (white), according to Army test scoring documents. Combat arms jobs will be restricted to recruits and soldiers who can meet the black standard by scoring high on the test.

VA touts improved crisis line, opens Ga. call center

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Department of Veterans Affairs on Tuesday officially dedicated a new call center for its veterans crisis line — an addition that's nearly doubled the agency's capacity to help suicidal veterans and servicemembers.

The dedication of the new call center, located in Atlanta, comes at the end of a year in which it was revealed the crisis line was sending calls to voicemail or rolling them over to a backup call center.

"Today we follow through on our commitment to give those who save lives every day at the crisis line the training, additional staff and modern call center technology they need to make the veterans crisis line a gold standard operation," VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson, who attended the ribbon-cutting Tuesday, said in a written statement.

The Atlanta facility will have 200 responders who will be able to handle 600 calls daily. They've joined 310 responders at the VA's other call center in upstate New York to answer calls, texts and online messages from veterans, servicemembers and their families. VA officials did not say how many calls they receive each day, overall.

Though the hub wasn't dedicated until Tuesday, employees in Atlanta started work in October. As of Dec. 8, the crisis line was answering 44 percent more calls than it was in March, according to the VA. But calls are still being rolled over to backup call centers.

When phone lines are busy, calls from veterans and servicemembers are routed to another contracted call center. A VA inspector general report released in February stated employees and volunteers in the backup call centers lacked training to handle crises. It also confirmed calls at the backup centers were being sent to voicemail, and some veterans and servicemembers seeking

immediate help were never called back.

Gregory Hughes, a former director of the crisis line, resigned several months after the report came out. In September, The Associated Press obtained internal emails from Hughes that said an average of 35 to 40 percent of crisis calls received in May rolled over to a backup call center.

Lawmakers responded by passing legislation, the No Veterans Crisis Line Call Should Go Unanswered Act, requiring the VA to ensure calls made to the hotline are answered "in a timely manner." For backup centers, the VA defines "timely access" as 90 percent of calls being answered within 30 seconds from when they're routed from a main call center.

The legislation mandates VA leadership develop specific performance measures for the crisis line and a plan to test the two call centers and the contracted backup centers. President Barack Obama signed the bill into law in November.

VA leaders said they will continue to hire more responders to meet the high demand. They expect the Atlanta and New York centers to be able to answer every call soon, and get away from routing calls to backup centers.

In March, 30 percent of calls were sent to the backup call centers, according to the VA. That's since dropped to 16 percent, the VA said.

According to VA data, the crisis line answered 510,000 calls in fiscal 2016 and responded to 53,000 online chat requests and 15,000 texts. They dispatched emergency services 12,000 times to veterans, servicemembers or their families.

A VA study released in July found approximately 20 veterans commit suicide each day. Of the 20, six use VA services.

To reach the veterans crisis line, callers dial the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255 and choose option 1. They can also text to 828255 or request a chat at vets.gov.

Trump meets with VA post candidates

Associated Press

PALM BEACH, Fla. — President-elect Donald Trump met Tuesday with candidates for his unfilled Cabinet positions, including prospective hires to run the Department of Veterans Affairs, a beleaguered agency that the Republican businessman has vowed to overhaul.

At Mar-a-Lago, Trump's palatial Florida estate, met with Luis Quinonez, who runs a company with military and health care ties and is said to be under consideration for VA secretary. He also interviewed Toby Cosgrove, the CEO of the Cleveland Clinic, who was a top contender to replace Eric Shinseki when he resigned at the VA in 2014. Cosgrove later withdrew from consideration.

Trump repeatedly pledged during the campaign to fix the woes at the department and said he would "take care of great veterans." But he also came under scrutiny for being slow

in paying out money raised for veterans groups and for suggesting that "strong" veterans don't need treatment for mental health problems.

Others said to be considered for the post include former Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown, Florida Rep. Jeff Miller and Pete Hegseth, an Army veteran and former CEO of Concerned Veterans for America.

Trump is also considering Jovita Carranza for U.S. trade representative. She served as deputy administrator of the Small Business Administration under President George W. Bush. With just a handful of Cabinet posts to fill, Trump is facing some criticism for a lack of diversity in his senior team, which currently includes no Hispanics. The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials said Tuesday that it was "deeply concerned" at the lack of Hispanics considered for top jobs.

DOD: F-35 cost not out of control

Bloomberg

Lockheed Martin's F-35 fighter jet isn't spiraling out of control as President-elect Donald Trump has said, according to Pentagon officials preparing to make their case to the new administration.

Critics of the Pentagon's most expensive weapons system ignore the progress made since the program was reset in 2011, when it was six years behind schedule and \$13 billion over budget, Lt. Gen. Christopher Bogdan, who heads the office responsible for developing and acquiring the fighter jet, told reporters Monday.

"This program is not out of control," Bogdan said. "Since 2011 we have basically been on schedule. Since 2011 we have basically been on budget."

Trump has assailed the F-35's costs on Twitter and at rallies in recent days as he vows to change the Defense Department's business practices. "The F-35 program and cost is out of control," Trump wrote last week on Twitter. "Billions of dollars can and will be saved on military (and other) purchases after January 20th," inauguration day.

But Bogdan also revealed a new, if minor, delay for Lockheed's marquee jet during a briefing updating the F-35's status, saying the Pentagon has directed the program office to plan for development flight-testing to end as late as May 2018 instead of the planned September 2017 completion date because of software delays and other test issues.

Experts have warned about trucks for years

The Washington Post

As authorities in Berlin acknowledged that they might have arrested the wrong suspect in Monday's Christmas market attack, the most important piece of evidence was still being examined Tuesday morning at the crime scene: the truck that was used to kill at least 12 people and injure dozens more.

The crash, which is being investigated as a likely "act of terrorism," evoked memories of the July attack in Nice, France, in which 84 people were killed when a man drove a truck through a crowd celebrating Bastille Day. For experts, both incidents seem to follow an emerging trend: using motor vehicles to kill ever-larger numbers of people.

More organized militants still resort to guns or bombs when launching attacks in Europe, as the Paris and Brussels incidents showed. But the Islamic State and al-Qaida have encouraged "lone-wolf attackers" and sup-

porters to use weapons that are easier to obtain. That can mean explosives made from widely available ingredients, but also vehicles, knives or even stones.

"Since the [Islamic State] has taken heavy losses on the ground in Syria and Iraq and is losing territory, it has more and more changed its propaganda to trigger lone actor attacks by practically anyone willing to do it," said Daniel Koehler, the director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies.

Cars and trucks are a particular concern. The Islamic State's propaganda magazine, *Rumiyah*, specifically recommended trucks as a way to inflict mass casualties in its November issue. "Though being an essential part of modern life, very few actually comprehend the deadly and destructive capability of the motor vehicle and its capacity of reaping large numbers of casualties if used in a premeditated manner," the magazine said.

Germany begins manhunt for Tunisian suspect

Associated Press

BERLIN — German authorities have launched a Europe-wide manhunt for a Tunisian man with ties to Islamic extremists who has been identified as a suspect in the Berlin Christmas market attack, lawmakers said Wednesday.

The man is being sought in Germany and across Europe's border-free travel zone, Interior Minister Thomas de Maiziere said after briefing Parliament's domestic affairs committee. He stressed "this is a suspect, not necessarily the perpetrator. We are still investigating in all directions."

Twelve people were killed and 48 others injured when

a truck plowed into a popular Berlin market Monday evening. The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility.

Federal prosecutors described 24-year-old Anis Amri as of average height and weight, with black hair and brown eyes.

Germany's chief federal prosecutor told lawmakers that "this Tunisian is a solid lead, his wallet was found in the cab of the truck, but that it's not clear that he was also the perpetrator," said Burkhard Lischka of the Social Democrats, the junior governing party.

The man apparently has used various identities, said Stephan Mayer, a senior lawmaker with Germany's governing conservatives.

Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the former chief spokesman for the Islamic State who was killed in an airstrike earlier this year, also promoted the use of cars and other weapons of opportunity.

"If you are not able to find an IED or a bullet, then single out the disbelieving American, Frenchman or any of their allies. Smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car,

or throw him down from a high place, or choke him," Adnani said in a 2014 message.

As the overall number of attacks in Europe has risen sharply over the past two decades, so has the percentage of plots being conducted by single individuals. Intelligence services in Europe are worried that attacks conducted by such individuals with vehicles, knives or machetes will be hard to prevent.

Rebels: Deal reached to finish Aleppo withdrawal

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian rebels said they reached an agreement with the government in Damascus on Wednesday to complete their withdrawal from Aleppo, the country's largest city.

"An agreement has been reached to resume the evacuation of Aleppo," announced Ahmad Qara Ali, spokesman for the Ahrar al-Sham faction. He said the evacuations would begin "shortly."

The Syrian opposition agreed to surrender their last foothold in the city, last week, marking

the most significant victory for President Bashar Assad since an uprising against his family's four-decade rule swept the country in 2011.

It followed a punishing offensive by the government and its regional allies that drove out tens of thousands of civilians from the east of the city. It had been held since 2012 by the opposition.

The government agreed to allow the remaining residents — fighters and civilians — to leave as part of the agreement brokered by Russia and Turkey in Ankara last week.

But a dispute delayed the final round of evacuations for over 24 hours after some 20,000 civilians and fighters were bused out of the city.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors the conflict through a network of activists on the ground, said 60 buses were waiting to leave.

Rebels and the government traded blame for the delay.

Syrian state media said on Tuesday evening that "differences among terrorist groups" were holding up the evacuations from Aleppo and from two

rebel-besieged Shiite villages in the country's north, Foua and Kfarya. The government calls all armed opposition fighters terrorists.

Ward Furati, spokesman for Aleppo's Fastaqim rebel faction, said fighters in Aleppo "won't leave until the security of all the civilians has been fully guaranteed."

Opposition media activist Ahmad Primo said the government's side was demanding to complete the evacuations from Foua and Kfarya before it would allow buses out of Aleppo.

Mexico fireworks blast levels market

Associated Press

TULTEPEC, Mexico — The San Pablito fireworks market was especially well stocked for the holidays and bustling with hundreds of shoppers when a powerful chain-reaction explosion ripped through its stalls, killing at least 29 people and leaving dozens more badly burned.

The third such blast to ravage the market on the northern outskirts of Mexico's capital since 2005 sent up a towering plume of smoke that was lit up by a staccato of bangs and flashes of light. Once the smoke cleared,

the open-air bazaar was reduced to a stark expanse of ash, rubble and the charred metal of fireworks stands, casting a pall over the country's Christmas season.

Mexico State health officials said 72 people were being treated for injuries from Tuesday's explosion, including for severe burns, in some cases over 90 percent of their bodies. Ten children were among the hospitalized. Authorities have not yet said what may have caused the explosions which took place in Mexico State, which rings the capital.

Survivor Crescencia Fran-

cisco Garcia said she was in the middle of the grid of stalls when the thunderous explosions began. She froze, reflexively looked up at the sky and then took off running through the smoke once she realized everyone was doing so. As she ran she saw people with burns and cuts, and lots of blood.

"Everything was catching fire. Everything was exploding," Francisco said. "The stones were flying, pieces of brick, everything was flying."

Mexico State Gov. Eruviel Avila reported Tuesday night that in addition to the 26 people who perished at the market,

three more victims died later in hospitals.

"We are going to identify who is responsible," Avila said.

Tultepec Mayor Armando Portuguez Fuentes said the market was especially well stocked because demand for noisy firecrackers and rockets soars this time of year.

"We are obviously in the high season," Portuguez said. "There was more product than usual because we are a few days away from Christmas, a few days away from New Year's, and those are the days when the products made here are consumed the most."

Obama bans future oil leases in much of Arctic, Atlantic

Associated Press

HONOLULU — President Barack Obama on Tuesday designated the bulk of U.S.-owned waters in the Arctic Ocean and certain areas in the Atlantic Ocean as indefinitely off limits to future oil and gas leasing.

The move helps put some finishing touches on Obama's environmental legacy while also testing President-elect Donald Trump's promise to unleash the nation's untapped energy reserves.

The White House announced the actions in conjunction with the government of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which also placed a moratorium on new oil and gas leasing in its Arctic waters, subject to periodic review.

Obama is making use of an arcane provision in a 1953 law to ban offshore leases in the waters permanently. The statute says that "the president of the United States may, from time to time, withdraw from disposition any of the unleased lands of the outer Continental Shelf."

Environmental groups hope the ban, despite relying on executive powers, will be difficult for future presidents to reverse. The White House said it's confident the president's order will withstand legal challenge and said the language of the statute provides no authority for subsequent presidents to undo permanent withdrawals.

The Atlantic waters placed off limits to new oil and gas leasing are 31 canyons stretching off the coast of New England south to Virginia, though some had hoped for a more extensive ban that would have extended further south.

Existing leases aren't affected by the president's executive actions.

The administration cited environmental concerns in both regions to justify the moratorium.

Still, industry officials objected to Obama's memorandum, calling it "last minute political rhetoric."

Alaska Gov. Bill Walker, an independent, said Obama's move marginalized local voices.

Unsealed pages show why FBI reopened email probe

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The FBI was trying to get a look at thousands of Hillary Clinton's emails on disgraced former congressman Anthony Weiner's computer partly to see if anyone had hacked in to steal classified information, according to court documents unsealed Tuesday.

Investigating possible hacking appeared to be a secondary rationale for the email search, which FBI Director James Comey launched in the waning days of the presidential election.

When the FBI asked a magistrate judge in New York to issue a search warrant for Weiner's computer on Oct. 30, an agent spent pages describing concerns it might contain evidence Clinton had mishandled classified information.

The warrant application, made public Tuesday, was filed two days after Comey informed Congress that investigators had discovered email correspondence which could be pertinent to his recently closed probe of Clinton's use of a private email server while she was secretary of state.

In the document, the agent wrote that thousands of emails between Clinton and top aide

Huma Abedin had been discovered on a laptop used by Weiner, Abedin's estranged husband.

At the time, investigators had yet to look at the content of those emails, but based on previous work in the case the agent wrote they had reason to suspect they might contain classified material, possibly including top-secret information that could cause "grave damage to national security" if disclosed.

A magistrate judge signed off on the search warrant that day.

The FBI hasn't publicly revealed whether it found any evidence of a hacking attempt.

After getting court consent to delve into the newly discovered emails on Weiner's computer, agents spent several days analyzing them before Comey announced they contained no new evidence of wrongdoing by Clinton.

Clinton supporters have blamed the investigation for her loss to Republican Donald Trump.

Weiner's laptop was initially seized by agents investigating his online relationship with a teenage girl in North Carolina. That inquiry is ongoing.

Los Angeles lawyer E. Randol Schoenberg had sued to obtain the court papers.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mummified body found; police charge caretaker

CA FORT BRAGG — The caretaker of a bedridden Mendocino County woman has been accused of neglecting her charge for so long that officials said the woman's body appeared emaciated and mummified.

The Santa Rosa Press Democrat reported that a 56-year-old woman was charged Monday with felony elder abuse causing death and false imprisonment in connection with the death of Arlene Potts. Neighbors identified Potts, but she has not been formally identified.

Authorities discovered Potts' body on Dec. 14 after neighbors complained about the smell coming from Potts' apartment. The caretaker was arrested Friday when she returned to submit paperwork.

Crash kills Mrs. Claus actress; husband hurt

IA DES MOINES — An Iowa woman who played Mrs. Claus on yearly holiday rounds with her husband as Santa has been killed in a traffic accident on an icy road.

The Des Moines Register reported that Joyce Daniels, 79, was killed, and her husband, Jack Daniels, also 79, was injured in the Saturday morning accident.

The St. Charles couple was heading home after playing Santa and Mrs. Claus at a bank in the town of Winterset.

Authorities said the vehicle hit ice on the road and rolled over once before landing upside down in a ditch.

Jack's brother, Larry Daniels, told the newspaper Jack had broken bones and other injuries.

He said the couple had been playing the holiday roles for at least 15 years.

Ex-nanny for Penguins player doing jail time

PA PITTSBURGH — The former nanny of Pittsburgh Penguins player Chris Kunitz has been sentenced to five years in federal prison on charges that she set fire to her rental residence and then filed fraudulent insurance claims for the contents.

Andrea Forsythe, 28, unsuccessfully sought a term running concurrently to one she'll receive next month for ripping off the Penguins player. She also was ordered to pay more than \$179,000 restitution.

In the other case, Allegheny County authorities said Forsythe stole \$12,000 diamond earrings from the player's home in 2013 and sold them to jewelry stores. The earrings were a birthday present for Kunitz's wife, Maureen. Forsythe is also awaiting sentencing in thefts from another couple for whom she worked.

Man gets 32 years for string of robberies

KS WICHITA — A southern Kansas man has been ordered to spend more than 32 years in prison for his role in abducting people he forced to withdraw money from their bank accounts.

Kristopher Williams, 23, of Wichita, was sentenced Monday in Sedgwick County. That's where he was convicted of kidnapping, aggravated robbery, aggravated burglary, aggravated assault and robbery.

Those charges related to a Subway restaurant holdup in November of last year and robberies of people throughout Sedgwick County in December 2015 and April of this year.

Prosecutors said Williams accosted residents returning home after dark and forced them at gunpoint to get back

into their vehicles and drive to ATMs to withdraw cash.

Dreamcatchers used in meth smuggling bid

NM COLUMBUS — A Mexican woman tried to smuggle liquid methamphetamine into the U.S. by hiding it inside Native American-style dreamcatchers when she crossed the border into New Mexico over the weekend, federal officials said Monday.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials said the woman was detained Sunday in Columbus when she crossed from Puerto Palomas, Mexico, and a drug-sniffing dog alerted customs officers.

The officers found six dreamcatchers in the woman's car with rings made of rubber tubing filled with a liquid that tested positive for methamphetamine, the officials said.

Hearing in murder case ends in court melee

MA BOSTON — Dozens of police officers had to respond to a Boston courthouse after a verbal altercation at a murder arraignment escalated into a brawl involving up to 30 people.

A court officer said the brawl broke out at the arraignment of two men Monday charged with killing Shawn Borden, 41. Authorities said the families of the defendants and of the victim exchanged words. The exchange reportedly turned into shoving and then a fight that spilled onto the street. Officers placed at least two people in handcuffs.

Prosecutors said Borden was fatally shot while vacuuming his car Oct. 18 in the city's Dorchester section. A third suspect is scheduled to be arraigned this week.

Woman fights city to keep 6 pet chickens

OH PERRYSBURG — An Ohio woman is fighting to keep her six chickens after she was told her pets had to go.

Raising poultry within 200 feet of an adjacent home violates Perrysburg's agricultural use code. But The Blade reported that Krista Kiessling has owned chickens for three years and told the city in June her chickens weren't raised for agricultural purposes.

Kiessling has proposed a new ordinance that would allow up to six chickens on properties zoned for a single family. Residents would have to obtain a \$25 permit. Roosters would be banned. Regulations would be created for chicken coops and squawking hens.

Record-breaking bass caught in bar reservoir

CA SACRAMENTO — A Northern California man may have caught a world-record-worthy spotted bass in Yuba County.

The Sacramento Bee reported that Cody Meyer, 33, of Auburn, hooked a 10.8-pound spotted bass on Friday while fishing at New Bullards Bar Reservoir in Yuba County.

Meyer's catch was weighed according to International Game Fish Association procedures, though it could take months before the fish is certified as a world record.

The current International Game Fish Association world record holder caught a 10.6-pound fish in January 2015. Other anglers have reportedly caught larger fish in New Bullards Bar, but those catches weren't officially certified for the world record.

From wire reports

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Raiders lead Pro Bowl picks with seven

Associated Press

NEW YORK — After more than a decade as the NFL's black hole, the Oakland Raiders are back in the playoffs and filling up the Pro Bowl.

The resurgent Raiders, enjoying their first winning season in 14 years, lead the league with seven players selected for next month's all-star game.

Quarterback Derek Carr, wide receiver Amari Cooper, center Rodney Hudson, defensive end Khalil Mack, safety Reggie Nelson, guard Kelechi Osemele and tackle Donald Penn were picked from the Raiders, who occupy first place in the AFC West going into Week 16.

The Raiders (11-3) had three players selected from their sturdy offensive line, a big reason the team has finally clinched its first playoff berth since losing the 2003 Super Bowl.

"It means a lot. It's a great honor to be recognized for what you do," Hudson said. "It's very humbling. I give a lot of thanks to our teammates because you can't do any of it by yourself."

Six members of the Atlanta Falcons (9-5) were selected, most among NFC teams. Outside linebacker Vic Beasley,

kicker Matt Bryant, running back Devonta Freeman, wide receiver Julio Jones, center Alex Mack and quarterback Matt Ryan were chosen from the NFC South leaders.

Despite missing the first four games of the season because of his "Deflategate" suspension, New England quarterback Tom Brady was picked for the 12th time in his career. Cleveland tackle Joe Thomas and Arizona wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald were honored for the 10th time.

Fitzgerald's 10 Pro Bowl selections are the second-most in NFL history by a wide receiver. Only Hall of Famer Jerry Rice (13) has more.

Twenty-six of the 32 teams had at least one player picked. Twenty players were chosen for the first time, including three rookies: Ezekiel Elliott and Dak Prescott from Dallas, and Kansas City's Tyreek Hill.

Among the notable omissions was Detroit quarterback Matthew Stafford. The first-place Lions, who lead the NFC North at 9-5, did not have a single representative.

Carolina's Cam Newton, last season's NFL MVP, was not picked, either. Other star quarterbacks left out were

New Orleans' Drew Brees, Indianapolis' Andrew Luck and Seattle's Russell Wilson.

After the Raiders and Falcons, the Cowboys, Steelers and Titans were next with five players selected.

In addition to Prescott and Elliott, offensive linemen Travis Frederick, Zack Martin and Tyron Smith were picked from Dallas.

For the Steelers, running back Le'Veon Bell, wide receiver Antonio Brown, guard David DeCastro, center Maurkice Pouncey and quarterback Ben Roethlisberger were selected. Roethlisberger, Pouncey and Brown were all chosen for the fifth time.

For the surprising Titans, tied with Houston for first place in the AFC South, it's their most players picked for the Pro Bowl since they had six in 2008.

Running back DeMarco Murray leads the group. He has 1,224 yards rushing, second in the NFL behind Elliott. Left tackle Taylor Lewan earned his first Pro Bowl honor in his third season, while linebacker Brian Orakpo earned his fourth Pro Bowl trip overall and first since signing with Tennessee in March 2015. Tight end Delanie Walker and defensive line-

man Jurrell Casey also were selected.

Another high-profile player chosen was wide receiver Odell Beckham Jr., one of four New York Giants picked along with safety Landon Collins, cornerback Janoris Jenkins and special teams player Dwayne Harris.

Beckham is tied for third in the NFL with 85 receptions and 10 touchdown catches, and is fourth with 1,173 yards receiving. He became the first Giants player to be voted to three consecutive Pro Bowls since guard Chris Snee from 2008-10.

"It is exciting," Beckham said. "It is cool to be on a team with multiple Pro Bowlers, so it is a huge accomplishment for myself and my teammates."

The Pro Bowl will be played on Sunday, Jan. 29, in Orlando, Fla. The game will return to the NFC vs. AFC format after three years. Former stars Jerome Bettis, Tony Gonzalez, Ray Lewis and Charles Woodson will serve as "Legends Captains."

The Pro Bowl players were determined by the consensus votes of fans, players and coaches. Each group's vote counted one-third toward determining the selections.

Peterson's return a dud, but he says he'll keep going

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Adrian Peterson was hoping his faster-than-expected return would help catapult the Minnesota Vikings into the playoffs.

Instead, the Vikings fell flat in a 34-6 loss to the Indianapolis Colts on Sunday, a curiously uninspired performance that all but eliminated them from postseason contention. Peterson, who had not played since September because of a torn meniscus in his right knee, had just 22 yards on six carries, including a crucial fumble in the first half on a rare trip into Colts territory.

Before he came back, Peter-

son said he would not play the remainder of the season if the Vikings were out of contention. He didn't want to risk any further injury with an uncertain future. But after the Colts loss, Peterson said he planned to play Saturday in Green Bay.

"Definitely not what I envisioned coming into this game," Peterson said. "It's unfortunate that it ended the way it did."

The U.S. Bank Stadium crowd gave him a rousing ovation when he was introduced before the game, but he had runs of 2, 1, 0, 2 and 4 yards behind an offensive line that has struggled to open holes in the running game all season long.

He popped one solid run — a 13-yarder — but had the ball stripped out by Mike Adams to stunt one of the few drives the offense had going in the first half. The Vikings managed just two first downs in the first two quarters and trailed 27-0 at the break.

"There were some runs he probably needed to do a little bit better, and there were some times where there wasn't much there," coach Mike Zimmer said Monday. "He only had 12 plays."

With the Vikings facing such a big deficit, they had to shift to a pass-heavy offense in the second half. Peterson watched

nearly the entire half from the sideline while Jerick McKinnon and Matt Asiata — backups more proficient in receiving and pass blocking than Peterson — shared the workload.

"It was tough. You look at the scoreboard and you're down by a couple touchdowns. The running game is irrelevant at that point," Peterson said. "Of course I don't like being on the sideline, but I have faith in Matt and Jerick. Those guys do a great job."

The Vikings (7-7) have two more games left, at Green Bay on Christmas Eve and home against Chicago in the season finale.

Jagr ties Messier on career points list

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. — Jaromir Jagr isn't even thinking about retiring after having three assists to pull into a tie for second place on the NHL's career points list as the Florida Panthers beat the Buffalo Sabres 4-3 after a shootout on Tuesday night.

Jagr pulled even with Mark Messier with 1,887 points, trailing only Wayne Gretzky (2,857). Jagr received a long ovation from the fans after tying Messier and acknowledged the crowd.

"When I retire, I'll look back at what I did, maybe I'm going to think about it a little more, but right now I just enjoy every moment I get a chance to play in this league and try to do everything I can to stay in this league," the 44-year-old Jagr said.

"I love it so much. I know when I said I want to play until 50 everybody was laughing at me, but I'll work every day to

do it."

Roberto Luongo stopped 33 shots, including both attempts in the shootout, to pull into a tie with Terry Sawchuk for fifth all-time in the NHL with 447 wins.

Jagr had his last three-point game on Nov. 19 against Ottawa.

"We're really lucky," Panthers interim coach Tom Rowe said. "This doesn't come around a lot. When you have two guys with Jagr, who is definitely going to be in the Hall of Fame, [Luongo] is going to be in the Hall of Fame, and to be able to watch it front row is a lot of fun."

Blue Jackets 3, Kings 2 (SO): Cam Atkinson had two goals and scored in the shootout, helping host Columbus get its franchise-record 10th straight victory.

Curtis McElhinney made 44 saves and Sam Gagner scored the decider in the shootout, keeping the Blue Jackets unbeaten since Nov. 26.

Wild 2, Avalanche 0: Devan Dubnyk made 18 saves for his NHL-leading fifth shutout this season and host Minnesota won its eighth straight.

Islanders 4, Bruins 2: Thomas Greiss stopped 48 shots, Anders Lee scored twice and had an assist, and visiting New York snapped a five-game winless streak.

Penguins 7, Rangers 2: Sidney Crosby scored his NHL-leading 22nd goal, Evgeni Malkin had a goal and two assists and host Pittsburgh moved into a tie with the Rangers atop the crowded Metropolitan Division.

Canadiens 5, Ducks 1: Jeff Petry had a goal and two assists and host Montreal beat Anaheim.

Ironman Andrew Coglianone scored for the Ducks in his 738th consecutive game to pass Jay Bouwmeester for the fifth longest streak in NHL history. It's the longest since Steve Larmer played his 884th in a row in 1993.

Blues 3, Stars 2 (OT): David Perron put in a wraparound goal at 1:55 of overtime, lifting St. Louis past host Dallas.

Senators 4, Blackhawks 3: Derick Brassard and Tom Pyatt scored 10 seconds apart during Ottawa's three-goal second period, and the visiting Senators won their third straight.

Lightning 4, Red Wings 1: Andrei Vasilevskiy made 22 saves in relief of Ben Bishop as host Tampa Bay beat Detroit in a game where both starting goalies left due to injuries.

Predators 5, Devils 1: James Neal scored twice in the first period, Juuse Saros stopped 27 shots and Nashville beat host New Jersey.

Sharks 4, Flames 1: Joonas Donskoi scored twice to lead host San Jose to its fifth win in six games.

Canucks 4, Jets 1: Jannik Hansen scored twice and Bo Horvat got his 10th goal of the season, helping host Vancouver beat Winnipeg.

Western Kentucky routs Memphis in Boca Raton Bowl

Associated Press

BOCA RATON, Fla. — The Western Kentucky Hilltoppers threw to their tackle, ran a trick play from their victory formation and kept scoring touchdowns for Nick Holt, their one-and-done interim coach.

Senior Anthony Wales gained 329 yards from scrimmage and Western Kentucky earned a bowl victory for the third year in a row by beating Memphis 51-31 Tuesday night in the Boca Raton Bowl.

"Coach Holt gave us great energy," Wales said. "We all love him, and we were able to show everybody how great we are."

Odds makers had projected the game to be the highest-scoring of the bowl season, and even Western Kentucky left tackle Forrest Lamp got into the act, scoring on a 9-yard, razzle-dazzle catch-and-run.

The Hilltoppers (11-3) totaled 598 yards for Holt, who was filling in after coach Jeff Brohm left this month to become coach at Purdue.

Notre Dame offensive coordinator Mike Sanford was chosen over Holt as Brohm's replacement next season, and attended the game.

"I told the kids it has been two weeks of some of the happiest football of my life," Holt said. "They don't care really right now who's the head coach. They believe in each other."

Wales ran for a career-high 245 yards on 35 carries, added 84 yards on four catches and scored three times. Teammate Mike White threw for 336 yards and three touchdowns. Taywan Taylor had nine catches for 144 yards and his 17th touchdown of the season.

It was another successful finale for the Hilltoppers, who won the Miami Beach Bowl last

year and the Bahamas Bowl in 2014.

Memphis (8-5) lost in a bowl game for the second consecutive year. The Tigers' Riley Ferguson threw for 372 yards and four scores, but they couldn't keep up with the Hilltoppers.

"They're good," Memphis coach Mike Norvell said. "A missed assignment, a bust in communication, and they can expose you."

Trickery

Holt, the defensive coordinator during the regular season, oversaw some creative play calling.

The Hilltoppers scored their second touchdown when Lamp, their 300-pound senior tackle, retreated from an unbalanced line, caught a lateral and scored for the first touchdown of his career.

"The last time I scored a touchdown was probably in

my backyard against my little brother," Lamp said.

With 45 seconds left in the first half, the Hilltoppers lined up in the victory formation as if running out the clock. Instead Wales swept around left end for a 53-yard gain, but Western Kentucky failed to capitalize, throwing an interception on the next play.

Memphis milestones

Ferguson set a school season record with 32 touchdown passes. Anthony Miller had a career-high three touchdown catches and increased his season total to 14, a school record.

Jake Elliott kicked four extra points to finish 202 for 202 in his career, extending a streak of successful kicks that's the nation's longest. He did miss a 43-yard field goal try when it hit the left upright.

Cousins' crazy day ends with 55 points

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Fined, ejected and then retrieved from the locker room, DeMarcus Cousins capped a tumultuous day with his dominant performance on the court.

Cousins returned from a brief ejection in the fourth quarter and finished with a season-high 55 points, ending a wild night for the hot-tempered big man and sending the Sacramento Kings past the Portland Trail Blazers 126-121 on Tuesday.

Hours after he was fined by the Kings for his profanity-laced tirade against a newspaper columnist last week, Cousins pulled down 13 rebounds and rallied Sacramento in the fourth quarter.

"Kind of a crazy game," Kings coach Dave Joerger said. "Certainly Cousins had a nice game. OK, that's an understatement. But I was very impressed. That any of us who

would get thrown out in what we think is a questionable deal, then to come back and step out and make the free throw was very impressive."

Cousins hit two huge three-pointers and scored 17 in the fourth, one point shy of his career high of 56. The win avenged an earlier overtime loss this season in Portland and snapped Sacramento's seven-game losing streak to the Blazers.

Cousins made 17 of 28 shots, connecting on five threes, and 16 of 17 free throws. He also had three blocks and five of Sacramento's 10 turnovers.

"No, we didn't stop him," Portland guard CJ McCollum said. "We tried to make it difficult for him, but he's a skilled player. He's got a lot of ways to score. He hit some threes tonight, got to the free throw line, played bully ball. He did a little bit of everything."

It appeared Cousins' night was

over before the game ended.

In the final minute, the All-Star center put the Kings back in front when he drove the lane for a layup and was fouled by Mason Plumlee. But then Cousins initially was given a second technical foul and ejected for spitting his mouthpiece in the direction of Portland's bench after making the shot.

He ran into the tunnel toward the locker room, but the officials huddled and changed the call. Lead official Brian Forte conferred with the others and determined Cousins "did not throw the mouthpiece and that it came out of his mouth."

In a most unusual scene, Cousins then returned to the court and made the free throw for a three-point play, giving the Kings a 122-119 lead with 35 seconds left.

Immediately after the game, Cousins called the temporary ejection "ridiculous" and

claimed he gets mistreated by officials "on a nightly basis."

"It's obvious what's being done out here," he said. "I hope the world can see now what's going on."

But after watching the replay, he toned down his comments.

"I can see why people could be mad," he said. "I was just talking to the bench and it came out. No intent. I would never spit on anybody. I'm not like that."

Blazers coach Terry Stotts had a little different version.

"From my vantage point, I thought that he taunted our bench and as he was taunting, the mouthpiece flew out," Stotts said. "The referee asked me if it was his mouthpiece and I said that it was. Then he asked me if he threw it, then I said no he didn't, and that's why he came back. Whether it was intentionally spitting it out or not, I don't know the intention."

Spurs end Rockets' streak

Associated Press

HOUSTON — There was no trick or secret to how Patty Mills got wide open for the winning shot on Tuesday night.

"I have no clue, mate," the Australian said. "I didn't do anything other than just stand there. It was a [heck] of a pass right in the shot pocket."

Mills hit a three-pointer with 12.9 seconds left to lift the San Antonio Spurs over the Houston Rockets 102-100. James Harden's three-point attempt bounced off the rim at the buzzer.

"The biggest thing that happened is that we had about three or four wide open shots we missed," Houston coach Mike D'Antoni said.

The victory is San Antonio's fifth straight and improves the Spurs to 15-1 on the road. It also snaps Houston's NBA-best 10-game winning streak.

Kawhi Leonard led the Spurs with 21 points.

Cavaliers 114, Bucks 108 (OT): LeBron James made a go-ahead three-pointer with 24 seconds left in overtime as visiting Cleveland held on to avenge a late November loss.

Warriors 104, Jazz 74: Stephen Curry scored 25 points with four three-pointers

while Kevin Durant had 22 points as host Golden State whipped Utah.

Clippers 119, Nuggets 102: J.J. Redick scored 27 points, including 7-for-9 shooting on three-pointers while Chris Paul had 16 points, 15 assists and eight rebounds as host Los Angeles beat Denver.

Hornets 117, Lakers 113: Kemba Walker had 28 points and 10 assists while Marco Belinelli scored 11 fourth-quarter points as host Charlotte rallied.

Celtics 112, Grizzlies 109 (OT): Isaiah Thomas scored a career-high 44 points, including 36 after halftime, to lead Boston past host Memphis in overtime.

Magic 136, Heat 130 (2 OT): Nik Vucevic had 26 points and 12 rebounds while Evan Fournier scored 26 and hit the three-pointer that put Orlando up for good.

Knicks 118, Pacers 111: Carmelo Anthony matched a season high with 35 points as host New York used a big second-half turnaround to beat Indiana.

Raptors 116, Nets 104: Kyle Lowry had 23 points while Norman Powell scored a season-high 21 for host Toronto.

Pelicans 108, 76ers 93: Anthony Davis had 31 points and 16 rebounds to lead New Orleans over host Philadelphia in a matchup of struggling teams.

Bluejays up to 12-0

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Creighton's players found themselves alone on the perimeter quite a bit against Arizona State and knocked down most of those open shots.

Even when the Bluejays weren't open, they quickly worked the ball around, leaving the Sun Devils unable to catch up. They knocked those shots down, too.

Hitting Arizona State with a barrage of three-pointers, No. 9 Creighton overcame a slow start and remained undefeated with a 96-85 victory on Tuesday.

No. 11 West Virginia 84, Radford 57: Esa Ahmad led three West Virginia players in double figures with 17 points.

No. 17 Xavier 85, Eastern Washington 56: At Cincinnati, Edmond Sumner scored 12 of his 14 points while Xavier took control in the first half for its third straight win.

No. 18 Arizona 77, New Mexico 46: Chance Comanche scored a career-high 14 points and host Arizona had five players reach double figures.

No. 19 Saint Mary's 67, Texas A&M-CC 46: Calvin Hermanson scored 18 of his 19 points in the first half for the host Gaels.

No. 20 Oregon 75, Fresno St. 63: Jordan Bell scored a career-high 23 points and the host Ducks won their ninth straight.