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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Army issuing more waivers for weed

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Smoked pot? Want to go to war? No problem.

As more states lessen or eliminate marijuana penalties, the Army is granting hundreds of waivers to enlist people who used the drug in their youth — as long as they realize they can't do so while in the military.

The number of waivers granted by the active-duty Army for marijuana use jumped to more than 500 this year from 191 in 2016. Three years ago, no such waivers were granted. The big increase is just one way officials are dealing with orders to expand the Army's size.

"Provided they understand that they cannot do that when they serve in the military, I will waive that all day long," said Maj. Gen. Jeff Snow, head of the Army's recruiting command.

The marijuana use exclusions represent about a quarter of the total misconduct waivers

the Army granted in the budget year that ended Sept. 30. They accounted for much of the 50 percent increase overall in recruits who needed a waiver for some type of misconduct.

Snow said the figures probably will rise further as more states legalize or decriminalize marijuana.

Eight states — Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon and Washington — and the District of Columbia have fully legalized possession of small amounts of marijuana for adults' recreational use. An additional 13 states have decriminalized it, meaning possession of small amounts is considered the equivalent of a traffic citation or a low-end misdemeanor with no chance of jail. Twenty-nine states, along with Puerto Rico, Guam and the District of Columbia, allow the use of medical marijuana.

Army leaders have faced

increased scrutiny in recent weeks amid worries in Congress and elsewhere about a decline in quality among new enlistees.

Army data show more than 8,000 recruits received waivers in 2017, compared with about 6,700 last year. Most waivers concerned physical or mental health.

Almost 2 percent of the recruits were considered "category four," meaning they scored 31 or less, out of 99, on the aptitude test. Just over a half-percent were in that category in 2016.

In total, the Army enlisted almost 69,000 recruits this year, close to 6,000 more than last year.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Snow said he went to his Army leadership early this year to ask if he could bring in more of the category four recruits to meet higher enlistment goals. He said he promised that the Army would stay well below a 4 percent limit on the group

allowed by the Pentagon.

Recruits who score lower than 31 on the test must meet specific criteria for the job they are requesting. There is no leeway on previous pot smoking for them. They also can't require a health or conduct waiver.

The Army's top officer, Gen. Mark Milley, told reporters during a recent briefing that the service is not reducing standards.

The increases in the category four enlistees, however, are fueling concerns the Army could repeat mistakes made during the peak of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars more than a decade ago, when it hurriedly added soldiers to the ranks to meet deployment needs. At the time, the Army brought more recruits in with criminal records and misconduct waivers. As the years passed, discipline problems and other behavioral issues increased as well.

Milley and Snow insist that won't happen again.

Special ops forces carry freeze-dried plasma in aid kits

Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. — All of the U.S. military's special operations fighters now being sent to war zones have freeze-dried blood plasma, a crucial addition to first-aid kits that can prevent badly wounded troops from bleeding to death on the battlefield.

Last month, all Marines Corps' special ops units began carrying freeze-dried plasma into the field. The plasma helps clot blood and can prevent badly wounded troops from bleeding to death on the battlefield.

It saved Army Cpl. Josh Hargis' life. He lost parts of both legs in 2013 when he stepped onto a land mine during a midnight raid in Afghanistan.

The medic in his Ranger unit used the freeze-dried plasma to keep him alive on the battlefield for more than 90 minutes until he could be evacuated by helicopter.

The medic, Sgt. Bryan Anderson, said having plasma ready made the difference in helping stanch internal bleeding after the blast shattered Hargis' pelvis.

"Wherever blood is oozing out, it's helping to clot that blood up," Anderson said. "It blows my mind that Josh was able to stay alive, and I think about that night every day of my life."

During their raid on a Taliban leader's compound, four Americans and even more friendly troops were killed by suicide

bombers and land mines. Anderson's life-saving labor continued despite seven explosions within 10 yards, leading to a Distinguished Service Cross, the second-highest military honor for heroism.

The plasma Anderson used was stored in a thick glass bottle and kept in a kit with IV lines and distilled water. The medic has to pour the water into the bottle, swirl it around and inject it. Before his injury, Hargis used to think the freeze-dried equipment took up too much room in the medic's bag.

"It really seemed like something that was a little unrealistic to carry out in the field, but it ended up working out," said Hargis, who lives in Peyton,

Colo., with his wife and kids. A photo of Hargis' commanding officer giving him a Purple Heart went viral online.

Plasma is a straw-colored liquid that contains proteins that make the blood clot. Unlike current plasma supplies that have to be slowly thawed from frozen storage, the dehydrated and powdered freeze-dried version needs no refrigeration and can be used within minutes after swirling it in water.

Over the past five years, the military's special ops units in the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Marines have received about 1,000 kits of the freeze-dried plasma, including 430 this year.

Flynn's guilty plea reveals new layer of lies

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More smoke but no smoking gun.

Michael Flynn's guilty plea Friday revealed a new layer of lies unearthed by the far-reaching investigation into ties between President Donald Trump and Russia and put heightened scrutiny on the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

But Flynn's admission, and all of the criminal cases thus far, have not resolved the fundamental question special counsel Robert Mueller is seeking to answer: Did Trump's campaign collude with Russia to win the election?

Trump, himself, was eager to settle that question as he offered his first public response to Flynn's plea, saying Saturday: "What has been shown is no collusion, no collusion. There's been absolutely no collusion."

But Mueller has left no doubt that his investigators have amassed a wealth of knowledge about the contacts between Trump associates and the Russians, and they're looking to gather more facts from Flynn, a new key cooperator.

By forcing Flynn's assistance, Mueller gains someone who can put him in the room with Trump and his closest advisers during the campaign, the transition and the early days of the administration, times

when Trump associates have acknowledged communicating with people connected to Russia.

In the hours after Flynn admitted lying about his contacts with a Russian government official, two names surfaced as integral players in his actions.

Kushner was identified as a "very senior" transition official who directed Flynn to contact foreign governments, including Russia, about a U.N. Security Council resolution last December. And KT McFarland, who served as Flynn's deputy national security adviser, was a "senior" transition official involved in discussions with Flynn about what to relay to Sergey Kislyak, then Russia's ambassador to the U.S., about the response to U.S. sanctions levied by the Obama administration.

Kushner and McFarland weren't named in court papers. But McFarland's involvement was confirmed by two former transition officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the matter publicly. One of the officials confirmed Kushner's involvement.

Flynn, 58, a retired U.S. Army lieutenant general, became the fourth person known to have been charged in Mueller's probe and the second, after former campaign policy adviser George Papadopoulos, to cooperate with investigators.

For both Flynn and Papadopoulos, prosecutors employed a similar — and textbook — strategy by accepting a limited guilty plea and turning the defendants into government cooperators. Papadopoulos and Flynn both pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI about their foreign contacts but not for their underlying conduct.

Still, Flynn's plea to a single felony count of false statements made him the first official of the Trump White House to admit guilt so far in Mueller's criminal investigation as court papers made clear that senior Trump officials were aware of his outreach to Russian officials in the weeks before the inauguration.

That revelation moved the Russia investigation, which has overshadowed Trump's agenda throughout the year, deeper into the White House and raised questions about the accuracy of administration assertions that Flynn had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other officials about his calls with Kislyak.

Though prosecutors also had investigated Flynn's lobbying work on behalf of the Turkish government, the fact he pleaded guilty to just one count and faces a guideline range of zero to six months in prison suggest prosecutors see him as a valuable tool and are granting a degree of leniency in exchange for his sharing what he knows.

Apathy greets test of Hawaii nuclear-attack alert system

Associated Press

HONOLULU — Hawaii officials were checking whether sirens malfunctioned or were not loud enough to alert tourists and residents of a possible nuclear attack from North Korea Friday after the first test of the warning system since the end of the Cold War was barely heard at one of the state's most popular beaches.

The sirens largely were drowned out by crashing waves and wind along Waikiki, the famous stretch of beach in the shadow of the Diamond Head volcano. Beachgoers hardly noticed the test, which sounded like a distant siren. The warning would give people 20 minutes to take shelter ahead of an imminent attack.

"I was out in the ocean playing around, and I heard this siren," said tourist Tom Passmore from Calgary, Canada, adding that he didn't think much of it.

"I think it's a good idea," he said of the test, "but judging by everyone's reaction around here, nobody moved."

Vern Miyagi, administrator of the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, said early reports indicate the test went well, but officials could get complaints later. They will document any they receive and investigate if there were any glitches — a process they carry out after every monthly test of a siren for natural disasters.

There are 385 warning sirens throughout the islands. How well someone hears them

depends on how close they are to a device, Miyagi said.

Hawaii officials said it is the first state to bring back the Cold War-era attack warning system. The wailing siren sounded for a minute after the usual testing of the steady alert for tsunamis and other events that residents are used to hearing.

The possibility of a strike is remote but it's important to be prepared, Gov. David Ige said this week. The test will ensure the public knows what to do in case of an impending attack, he said.

The state delayed the test for a month to let people know it would be happening, Miyagi said. Hawaii turned to public service announcements on TV and radio, town hall meetings, information on agency websites

and media stories.

Honolulu resident Mark Valdez was taking a walk in Ala Moana Beach Park, about a mile away from Waikiki, during the test. He said he's heard some information about it but that he "wouldn't know what to do" in an emergency.

Also in the park, Thomas Hanes and his wife sat in hammocks as the sirens sounded.

"We heard it quite clearly, and it was effective," he said. "I just didn't know what it was for."

The Los Angeles residents, who stopped in Hawaii on their way to Australia, had not heard anything about the test.

"I assumed it was a test," Hanes said. "I thought if it is a nuclear missile attack, there's nothing I can do about it, so I'm just going to relax."

Senate approves \$1.5T tax bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans pushed a nearly \$1.5 trillion tax bill through the Senate early Saturday after a burst of eleventh-hour horse trading, as a party starved all year for a major legislative triumph took a giant step toward giving President Donald Trump one of his top priorities by Christmas.

“Big bills are rarely popular. You remember how unpopular ‘Obamacare’ was when it passed?” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said in an interview, shrugging off polls showing scant public enthusiasm for the measure. He said the legislation would prove to be “just what the country needs to get growing again.”

Senate approval came on a 51-49 roll call, with Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., the only lawmaker to cross party lines. The measure focuses its tax reductions on businesses and higher-earning individuals, gives more modest breaks to others and offers the boldest rewrite of the nation’s tax system since 1986.

Republicans touted the package as one that would benefit people of all incomes and ignite the economy. Even an official projection of a \$1 trillion, 10-year flood of deeper budget deficits couldn’t dissuade GOP

senators from rallying behind the bill.

“Obviously, I’m kind of a dinosaur on the fiscal issues,” said Corker, who battled to keep the bill from worsening the government’s accumulated \$20 trillion in IOUs.

The Republican-led House approved a similar bill last month in what has been a stunningly swift trip through Congress for complex legislation that impacts the breadth of American society. The two chambers will now try crafting a final compromise to send to Trump.

After spending the year’s first nine months futilely trying to repeal President Barack Obama’s health care law, GOP leaders were determined to move the measure rapidly before opposition Democrats and lobbying groups could blow it up. The party views passage as crucial to retaining its House and Senate majorities in next year’s elections.

Democrats derided the bill as a GOP gift to its wealthy and business backers at the expense of lower-earning people.

They contrasted the bill’s permanent reduction in corporate income tax rates from 35 percent to 20 percent to smaller individual tax breaks that

would end in 2026.

Congress’ nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation has said the bill’s reductions for many families would be modest and said by 2027, families earning under \$75,000 would on average face higher, not lower, taxes.

The bill is “removed from the reality of what the American people need,” said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y. He criticized Republicans for releasing a revised, 479-page bill that no one can absorb shortly before the final vote, saying, “The Senate is descending to a new low of chicanery.”

“You really don’t read this kind of legislation,” Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wis., told home-state reporters, asked why the Senate was approving a bill some senators hadn’t read. He said lawmakers needed to study it and get feedback from affected groups.

Democrats took to the Senate floor and social media to mock one page that included changes scrawled in barely legible handwriting. Later, they won enough GOP support to kill a provision by Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., that would have bestowed a tax break on conservative Hillsdale College in Michigan.

House GOP unveils plan to avert a shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House GOP leaders unveiled a plan Saturday to avert a government shutdown next weekend and to keep the government open through Dec. 22.

The measure would buy time for bipartisan talks on a bigger budget agreement that would give the Pentagon and government agencies significant relief from a pending budget freeze.

A temporary spending bill enacted in September expires at midnight on Friday.

The move comes despite opposition from some GOP conservatives who think they’re being set up for a pre-Christmas deal they won’t like.

House Democrats say they won’t vote for the legislation without protections for immigrants brought to the country illegally as children. GOP leaders oppose the idea.

Talks on a budget agreement are likely to restart this week after a setback on Tuesday when top Democrats pulled out of a meeting with President Donald Trump after he attacked them on Twitter.

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-N.J., said the new stopgap funding measure “will allow for additional time for a deal to be reached on top-line spending levels for this fiscal year. Once this agreement is made, my committee will rapidly go to work with the Senate to complete the final legislation.”

“I am eager to know what Republican leadership believes they can accomplish in the next two weeks that they haven’t been able to accomplish in the last two months,” countered top House Appropriation Democrat Nita Lowey, of New York. over spending could produce the framework for a longer-term “omnibus” appropriations bill. That legislation would award the Pentagon and domestic agencies with spending increases that could total more than \$100 billion in 2018 alone.

Trump denies Tillerson out as secretary of state

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Friday denied he wants to oust Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, calling reports to that effect “fake news,” as his top diplomat brushed off speculation that he has lost the confidence of the White House.

As Tillerson went about his normal schedule of diplomatic activities, including two meetings with Trump, the president said his secretary of state is “not leaving.”

“The media has been speculating that I fired Rex Tillerson or that he would be leaving

soon — FAKE NEWS!” Trump tweeted. “He’s not leaving and while we disagree on certain subjects (I call the final shots), we work well together and America is highly respected again!”

The tweet was Trump’s strongest endorsement of his top diplomat since senior White House officials on Thursday began telling reporters that a plan had been devised to push Tillerson out and replace him with CIA chief Mike Pompeo. Immediately after reports of the plan emerged, Trump offered only tepid support for Tillerson, noting only that he was at the White House for a previ-

ously scheduled meeting.

The halfhearted backing amid the swirl of speculation over Tillerson’s imminent demise had threatened to impair his effectiveness, particularly as he prepares for an official trip to Europe this week.

On Friday, Tillerson attended two meetings at the White House with Trump — one with Libya’s visiting prime minister and then a lunch with the president and Defense Secretary James Mattis. Before those meetings, Tillerson told reporters at the State Department that speculation he was on his way out was “laughable.”

Ethics panels seek records on settled claims

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ethics committees from the House and Senate requested records on Friday detailing taxpayer-financed payments made over the years to settle claims of sexual harassment, discrimination and other prohibited behavior by lawmakers.

A separate review shows that the Office of Compliance, which administers the payments, spent nearly \$360,000 over the past five years to settle a half-dozen discrimination or harassment claims. The office promised the House Administration Committee that it would gather data for previous years as quickly as possible.

Congressional leaders are under pressure to respond to a national outcry against sexual harassment, with Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., and Sen. Al Franken,

D-Minn., the latest lawmakers facing allegations of inappropriate sexual behavior.

Rep. Susan Brooks, the Republican chairman of the House Ethics Committee, and Rep. Ted Deutch, the top Democrat on the committee, wrote to the Office of Compliance's executive director requesting that she "promptly" provide the committee with all records relating to alleged employment practices prohibited by statute and House rules.

The committee generally investigates after a referral is made about a particular lawmaker. The move Friday is unusual because of its proactive nature. It comes after the House passed legislation earlier this week requiring annual anti-harassment training for lawmakers and aides.

Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said an upcoming target for examination would be

the secretive practice lawmakers have used to settle harassment and discrimination complaints. No information is publicly released, and recipients must promise silence.

In seeking information about the payments, leaders of the Ethics Committee did not place any restrictions on how much time had lapsed since the settlement had occurred. About the only limitation in the record request is that the information pertains to current members of the House and their employees.

Later in the day, Sens. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., and Christopher Coons, D-Del., sent a similar letter seeking payment information from the Office of Compliance. The request was for records involving current senators or employees of the Ethics Committee.

Source: GOP lawmaker used public funds to settle claim

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Blake Farenthold, of Texas, used taxpayer money to settle a sexual harassment claim brought by his former spokeswoman, according to an aide with knowledge of the settlement.

Lauren Greene is a former communications director in the congressman's office. She alleged in a 2014 federal lawsuit that she was sexually harassed and fired soon after complaining of a hostile work environment. Farenthold said when the case was settled in 2015 that he didn't engage in any wrongdoing.

The Office of Compliance on Friday released a report saying that since 2013, roughly \$360,000 has been paid out to resolve complaints against House offices. Only one settlement stemmed from a sexual harassment claim, amounting to \$84,000. An aide with knowledge of the settlement confirmed on Friday that Farenthold is the lawmaker whose office paid out the settlement. The aide spoke on condition of anonymity because the individual was not authorized to pub-

licly discuss the agreement.

Farenthold's office released a statement saying he can't confirm or deny using a little-known congressional account to settle a sexual harassment claim. He says the Congressional Accountability Act prohibits him from answering the question.

According to Greene's lawsuit, filed in 2014, a congressional staffer told Greene that Farenthold had discussed his sexual fantasies about her. The lawsuit also said that the lawmaker said at a staff meeting that a lobbyist had propositioned him for a threesome and that he repeatedly complimented Greene about her appearance, then joked that he hoped the comments wouldn't be construed as sexual harassment.

The independent Office of Congressional Ethics investigated Greene's harassment claim and had recommended that the House Ethics Committee dismiss the allegations, "as there is not substantial reason to believe that Representative Farenthold sexually harassed or discriminated against complainant."

Pelosi calls for Nev. Democrat to resign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top House Democrat on Saturday called for Nevada Rep. Ruben Kihuen to resign after a former aide accused the first-term lawmaker of repeatedly making sexual advances toward her during the 2016 campaign.

In a statement, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi said she found the young woman's documented account, reported by BuzzFeed News, to be convincing. The woman, identified as Samantha, said Kihuen, 37, propositioned her for dates and sex despite her repeated rejections.

On two occasions, she said, he touched her thighs without consent.

"In light of these upsetting allegations, Congressman Kihuen should resign," Pelosi said.

The request comes hours after Rep. Ben Ray Lujan, chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, also had pressed for Kihuen's resignation, saying House members and candidates should be held to the highest standard, and anyone guilty of sexual harassment or assault should not hold elected office.

Kihuen said in a statement he

did not remember the incidents with the aide, who worked as his campaign finance director.

"I sincerely apologize for anything that I may have said or done that made her feel uncomfortable. I take this matter seriously as it is not indicative of who I am," Kihuen said. "But I want to make it clear that I don't recall any of the circumstances she described."

Kihuen gave no indication in the statement that he would follow Lujan's admonition.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., called for a "full, fair and expedient investigation against Congressman Kihuen and any other member of Congress who have women or men come forward with allegations of inappropriate behavior."

"This process must be open, transparent and have an appropriate investigatory timeline that delivers justice," she said.

Congressional leaders are under pressure to respond to a national outcry against sexual harassment. Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., was accused of sexually harassing members of his staff and Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., was accused of inappropriate touching.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Toilet seat tips man off to intruder

MI TRAVERSE CITY — A man suspected of breaking into a northern Michigan home left a big clue: The toilet seat was down.

Police said a Traverse City man who lives alone figured something wasn't right on Nov. 25. Why? He told investigators that he typically keeps the seat up.

Police Chief Jeff O'Brien said a 26-year-old man was found passed out in the man's garage. O'Brien told the Traverse City Record-Eagle that the intruder appeared to be intoxicated and had taken prescription drugs from the home.

Pup caught on video scaling shelter cage

VA WINDSOR — A video of a beagle at a Virginia animal shelter scaling her cage in an escape attempt generated calls of interest from across the country.

Emily Glickman, a caretaker at the shelter, said by phone Thursday that the dog's new owner was planning to take her home the next day.

The adopter claimed the dog, named Buttermilk, long before the video went viral.

The Isle of Wight County Animal Shelter posted a Facebook video of the escape attempt Tuesday, generating more than 70,000 views. It shows Buttermilk gingerly climbing a 4-foot cage's wall before perching atop it.

Builders race to save team from jinx

PA PHILADELPHIA — Superstitious construction workers placed a small statue of Philadelphia's founder atop the city's newest

skyscraper in an effort to save the NFL-leading Philadelphia Eagles from a jinx.

Philly.com reported the William Penn figurine was affixed to the Comcast tower's highest beam Monday after builders decided waiting for a topping-off ceremony was too risky.

Believers in the Curse of Billy Penn said it doomed the city's sports teams after the first skyscraper rose higher than the William Penn statue on City Hall.

In 2007, the situation was rectified with a statuette placed atop a taller skyscraper. The next year, the Phillies won the World Series.

Startled doe scrambles through school

MS ENTERPRISE — A deer darted through two hallways of a Mississippi school, startling students as they were arriving for the day.

Enterprise Middle School is in a rural, wooded area about 100 miles east of Jackson. Principal Marlon Brannan said it's unusual to see deer on campus, but this doe was grazing on a playground Wednesday morning.

He said the doe bloodied its nose by jumping and hitting a window three times; it then ran through an open door.

Brannan said "that deer was moving full-throttle" as it scrambled down two tile hallways, going about 200 feet before sliding out another open door. It ran between two vehicles in the carpool line and escaped to the woods.

Police: Sub encouraged students to smoke pot

NH SOMERSWORTH — New Hampshire police charged a former substitute teacher who, they say, encouraged students to smoke pot and gave a student a vaping

device.

Elisha Mahar, 20, of Rochester, was arrested Thursday and charged with four misdemeanor counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

Authorities said a school resource officer at Somersworth Middle School spoke with Somersworth police on Oct. 13 after he learned Mahar had invited students to smoke and given a student a vaping device while she was a substitute teacher.

2 critically endangered tiger cubs born at zoo

FL JACKSONVILLE — Two healthy cubs belonging to a critically endangered tiger subspecies have been born at a Florida zoo.

The Florida Times-Union reported that the male Sumatran tiger cubs were born Nov. 20 at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. The cubs are the second litter for mother Dorcas, 6, and father Berani, 16, part of a worldwide Sumatran tiger species management program dedicated to maintaining a healthy population.

The cubs will not be on exhibit for several months, but a live video feed of their nest box is available in the tiger viewing building.

Sheriff fires daughter over alleged drug use

TN JOHNSON CITY — A Tennessee sheriff fired his daughter and son-in-law after discovering their alleged use of illegal drugs.

The Johnson City Press reported Washington County Sheriff Ed Graybeal fired Shelly Graybeal and Scott Johnson on Nov. 20. The sheriff's chief operations officer, Leighta Laitinen, said communications between the couple revealed they had been using meth and other narcotics.

Johnson had worked as a detention officer since 2001, and Shelly Graybeal was hired as a timekeeper in 2004. She calculated the amount of time county inmates had served.

Rainbow crosswalks called hazards to stay

KY LEXINGTON — A Kentucky city will keep its rainbow-colored crosswalks while it investigates why federal government officials say the gesture honoring the LGBTQ community is a safety hazard.

The Lexington Herald-Leader reported Environmental Quality and Public Works Commissioner Dowell Hoskins-Squier told the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council on Tuesday that the crosswalks at a prominent downtown intersection will remain as the city conducts more research.

A Federal Highway Administration official sent a Nov. 13 letter to Mayor Jim Gray asking the city to remove the crosswalks, calling them distracting.

Police say boy, 10, shot BB gun at buses

MA METHUEN — A 10-year-old boy has been arrested after, according to police, he shot a BB gun at two school buses full of children.

Police said both buses had about 63 students aboard in grades K-8 when they were shot at Wednesday.

The impact of the pellets shattered multiple bus windows. No injuries were reported.

Investigators traced the pellets to a boy who police said fired them from his home. The boy is facing several charges, including malicious damage and one count of assault with a dangerous weapon for every student on the bus.

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USC holds off Stanford to win Pac-12

Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — With the Pac-12 championship hanging in the balance, Southern California delivered a goal-line stand followed by a 99-yard drive that gave the Trojans their first conference title in nine years.

Sam Darnold's 54-yard pass to Michael Pittman Jr. keyed the long drive after Uchenna Nwosu preserved the lead with the defensive stop that led No. 11 USC to a 31-28 victory over No. 14 Stanford on Friday night.

"It was time to dig deep and win a championship," coach Clay Helton said. "When you're trying to win one, those are the plays that are going to define you and define your football team."

The Trojans (11-2, No. 10 CFP) led 24-21 when the Cardinal (9-4, No. 12) drove down the field in position to tie the game or take the lead.

But facing a third down from the 2, Stanford kept star back Bryce Love on the sideline with his gimpy ankle to rely on

short-yardage back Cameron Scarlett instead. Scarlett ran on successive plays, gaining 1 yard on third down and then being stopped just short of the end zone on fourth.

"The bottom line is we had opportunities and we didn't make enough plays," coach David Shaw said. "We made enough plays to keep it close but not enough plays to win. The sequence of fourth-and-1 to take the lead in the Pac-12 championship game, there's no hesitation at all. That's what we're going to do."

Shaw figured at worst, Stanford would come out of that situation with a defensive stop and good field position on the ensuing drive but those hopes ended when Darnold delivered the offensive play of the game.

After Ronald Jones gained 1 yard on first down, Darnold dropped back to pass and quickly was under pressure. He stepped up and appeared ready to run before launching a pass to Pittman to get USC out of trouble.

"That's kind of what you ex-

pect from Sam, to make those crazy plays," Pittman said. "That's why he's one of the best players in the country."

Jones finished that drive with an 8-yard run that made it 31-21 to cap a productive night where he ran for 140 yards and two touchdowns to give USC its first Pac-12 title since 2008.

Darnold was 17-for-24 for 325 yards with TD passes to Pittman and Tyler Vaughns to lead the way for USC.

The win gives USC a season sweep against Stanford and will likely send the Trojans to the Fiesta Bowl. USC still holds out hope for a spot in the four-team playoff if there are several upsets in other conference title games on Saturday but the chances appear to be remote.

"However we get ranked is not up to us, but we're just going to continue to compete, and that's all we can do," Darnold said.

The takeaway

Stanford: Love ran for 125 yards and had his FBS-record 12th run of at least 50 yards

that set up K.J. Costello's 11-yard TD pass to Kaden Smith that cut USC's lead to 24-21 late in the third quarter. Costello added a 28-yard TD pass to Smith with 2:09 remaining but wasn't nearly consistent enough to keep pace with Darnold. Costello finished 10-for-22 for 192 yards.

USC: The Trojans had a balanced offensive performance with Pittman catching seven passes for 146 yards and Jones doing solid work on the ground. The defense came up with the big stop at the goal line. But it probably won't be enough to overcome the earlier losses at Washington State and Notre Dame to lift the Trojans into the playoff.

Clincher

USC still needed one more play from Darnold to put the game away after Stanford's on-side kick went out of bounds. On fourth-and-2 from the Cardinal 32, Helton called for a pass and Darnold hit Josh Falo for a 15-yard gain that allowed the Trojans to run out the clock.

Fisher leaves FSU after 8 seasons to take A&M job

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Jimbo Fisher is leaving Florida State for Texas A&M, four years after leading the Seminoles to their third national title.

Fisher told university President John Thrasher on Friday that he was resigning to accept Texas A&M's offer.

"I believe Texas A&M is getting one of the best coaches in college football. We appreciate all he has done for our program and wish him and his family great success moving forward," Thrasher said in a statement that closed days of speculation about Fisher's future.

Fisher leaves Florida State after going 83-23 in eight seasons. Besides the national championship, he also led the Seminoles to three Atlantic Coast Conference titles and four

ACC Atlantic Division crowns. He will replace Kevin Sumlin, who was fired last weekend after going 51-26 in six seasons at Texas A&M. The Houston Chronicle reported that Fisher is expected to earn between \$7 million and \$7.5 million over at least five years.

Fisher's buyout from Florida State is the sum remaining on the contracts of his assistants who are not retained, which would be in the range of \$7 million.

Fisher goes to a program that has lofty hopes amid a drought: Texas A&M last won a conference championship in 1998, when it was in the Big 12. The school's only national title came in 1939. Texas A&M Chancellor John Sharp said after Thursday's Board of Regents meeting that expectations were "nothing serious. We

just want him to win a national championship."

Fisher is just the fourth head coach to leave a school where he has won an AP national championship and go directly to another college job. The last to do it was Johnny Majors, who went from Pittsburgh to Tennessee in 1977.

Florida State (5-6) faces Louisiana-Monroe on Saturday and needs a win to be bowl eligible for a 36th consecutive season. Defensive line coach Odell Haggins will be the interim coach.

"President Thrasher and I have worked together through this challenging period while coach Fisher was making a decision, and I appreciate the cooperation, support and leadership he has provided," athletic director Stan Wilcox said. "We are extremely pleased by

the quality of individuals who have already expressed interest in being the head coach at Florida State University. I am confident we will fill the position very soon."

The Seminoles were ranked third in the preseason Top 25 but lost quarterback Deondre Francois in the opening loss against Alabama and were 3-6 at one point before winning their last two. Florida State is trying to avoid its first losing season since 1976.

Fisher, who had dodged questions about his interest in Texas A&M for the last two weeks, said as recently as Thursday that he intended to coach on Saturday.

However, growing frustration with the program from fans, alumni and parents of players made that unlikely.

World Cup could have dreariest of starts

Associated Press

MOSCOW — A World Cup shrouded in corruption controversies and struggling to attract sponsors could have the dreariest of starts.

Host Russia and Saudi Arabia play June 14 at Moscow in an opener lacking global appeal, but things pick up the next day when 2010 champion Spain and defending European champion Portugal meet in Sochi.

The Iberian neighbors were drawn into Group B at a Kremlin ceremony Friday. Morocco coach Herve Renard hoped to avoid the “two ogres” but will face them along with Iran.

“It’s a complicated group,” Spain coach Julen Lopetegui said. “It will be tough. Portugal is a great team. It is the defending European champion and has a squad filled with top players.”

None more so than Cristiano Ronaldo, who recently joined Argentina’s Lionel Messi as the only five-time winners of FIFA’s player of the year award.

Messi’s quest for his first World Cup title begins the following day when Argentina takes on Iceland — at 334,000 the least-populous country to qualify for the World Cup.

Iceland coach Heimir Hallgrímsson already knows what he must tell his team: “Watch out for No. 10.”

The United States is missing from soccer’s top event for the first time since 1986 and four-time champion Italy will be watching from afar for the first time since 1958.

Germany remains the favorite. Its depth was clear when an experimental squad won the Confederations Cup in Russia in July. Germany opens against Mexico in its quest to become the first country to win back-to-back World Cup titles since Brazil in 1962. The Germans then face Sweden and South Korea in Group F.

“We got opponents that are not unknown to us,” Germany captain Manuel Neuer said. “That’s what I like best, when we know what to expect.”

Germany is hoping to be based in Sochi along with Brazil. The only five-time world champion does not intend to move its training camp despite a schedule that has none of its games in the Black Sea resort. The Seleção, beaten 7-1 at home by Germany in the 2014 semifinals, were drawn in Group E with Switzerland, Costa Rica and Serbia.

“Despite the distances, there are quick ways to get there,” Brazil coach Tite said.

England, eliminated in the group stage three years ago, was drawn into Group G along with newcomer Panama, Tunisia and Belgium. Gareth Southgate’s first World Cup game as a coach will be a repeat of his first as a player — Southgate made his World Cup debut in England’s 2-0 win over Tunisia in 1998.

“We’ve been good at writing off teams and then getting beaten by them,” Southgate said.

Roberto Martinez also will be making his World Cup debut. But the Belgium coach knows

England well after spending two decades there as a coach and player.

“It is going to be one of those games with no secrets,” said Martinez, a former Everton manager. “We have 25 players in the British game. That brings that understanding. That brings that competitive level.”

Peru, the last of the 32 teams to qualify for Russia, is in Group C with 1998 champion France, Australia and Denmark.

“It could have been worse,” France coach Didier Deschamps said.

The only group without a former World Cup champion is H — Poland, Senegal, Colombia and Japan.

The Russians have been placed with the winners of the first World Cup — Uruguay — in Group A along with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. At No. 65, Russia is the lowest-ranked team at the tournament, with Saudi Arabia only two places higher.

College basketball roundup

Black Knights advance to title game of Bulldog Bash

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Tommy Funk had 16 points and six assists, Jordan Fox added 13 points and Army defeated UMBC 81-70 at the Bulldog Bash on Friday night.

The Black Knights (4-2) will play Marist for the championship on Saturday while the Retrievers (4-4) meet host The Citadel in the consolation game.

UMBC led 43-41 in a wild first half that saw the Retrievers make 8 of 14 three-pointers and Army go 7-for-15 from distance, with both teams shooting about 50 percent overall. But in the second half, Army continued to shoot well from close range and the Retrievers cooled off significantly.

Army broke away from a tie

at 50 with a 9-0 run, highlighted by a Luke Morrison three-pointer. The lead was at seven before a 10-3 run that made it 78-64 with 3:16 to play. Ishmail Jabbie made four straight free throws for UMBC but John Emezie hit a three-pointer with 42 seconds left to secure the win.

The Black Knights only made 2 of 9 from distance after the break but were 14-for-27 overall, finishing at 53 percent (29-for-53). UMBC only made 6 of 22 baskets, 3 of 11 behind the arc, to finish at 40 percent (21-for-53).

Navy 82, Delaware 76: Bryce Dulin scored a career-high 30 points with 8-for-12 shooting to lead the Midshipmen to a win over the Blue Hens on Friday in Annapolis.

No. 13 North Carolina 85, Davidson 75: At Charlotte, N.C., Joel Berry II had 27 points, Luke Maye had 24 points and a career-high 17 rebounds and the Tar Heels defeated the Wildcats.

Kenny Williams added 12 points for the Tar Heels (7-1), who shot 47 percent from the field and outrebounded Davidson 54-23.

No. 15 Gonzaga 91, No. 25 Creighton 74: Killian Tillie scored 22 points and Zach Norvell Jr. added 21 points, all in the second half, for the host Bulldogs.

Northwestern 72, Illinois 68: Scottie Lindsey scored five of his game-high 22 points in overtime and the visiting Wildcats trailed for much of the evening before pulling out a

victory over the Illini in the Big Ten opener for both teams.

Grambling 64, Georgia Tech 63: At Atlanta, Diontae Jones had 18 points and nine rebounds, when a Yellow Jackets player inadvertently tipped a shot into the wrong basket with 6.5 seconds left to send the Tigers to an upset win.

Boise State 73, Oregon 70: Lexus Williams hit a three-pointer from half-court at the buzzer to lift the Broncos to a win over the Duck and snap the nation’s longest home winning streak.

Purdue 80, Maryland 75: Isaac Haas scored 21 points, Dakota Mathias added 20 and the Boilermakers opened defense of their Big Ten regular-season title by holding off the Terrapins.

NHL roundup

Anderson's late goal lifts Blue Jackets

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Josh Anderson scored late in the third period to lift the Columbus Blue Jackets over the Anaheim Ducks 4-2 on Friday night.

Anderson got his team-high 10th goal with just under five minutes left to make it 3-2. He fired the puck in off the left shoulder of goalie John Gibson. Anderson also had two assists.

Joonas Korpihalo had 25 saves, Artemi Panarin had a goal and two assists, and Brandon Dubinsky had a goal and an assist for the Metropolitan Division-leading Blue Jackets, who have won eight of nine. Nick Foligno added an empty net-goal with 29 seconds left.

Cam Fowler and Kevin Roy scored, and Gibson had 27 saves for the Ducks, who have dropped five of six.

Kings 4, Blues 1: Tyler Tof-

foli scored twice, backup goaltender Darcy Kuemper made 39 saves and visiting Los Angeles beat St. Louis.

Los Angeles won its fourth straight, including three in a row on the road. The Kings tied the Blues for the second-best record in the Western Conference with 35 points.

Penguins 4, Sabres 0: Tristan Jarry made 34 saves for his first career shutout, Sidney Crosby extended his point streak to five games and visiting Pittsburgh beat Buffalo for its third straight victory.

Crosby had a goal and an assist, and Tom Kuhnhackl, Jake Guentzel and Patric Hornqvist also scored in the first game of a home-and-home set.

Senators 6, Islanders 5: Ryan Dzingel's second goal of the game snapped a tie early in third period and visiting Ottawa ended a seven-game losing

streak with a wild win over New York.

Zack Smith, Bobby Ryan, Thomas Chabot and Mike Hoffman also scored for the Senators, who were 0-6-1 since sweeping Colorado in two games in Stockholm on Nov. 10-11.

Devils 2, Avalanche 1: Brian Boyle scored a go-ahead goal early in the third period, Jesper Bratt had a goal and an assist and visiting New Jersey beat Colorado.

Corey Schneider stopped 22 shots for the Devils, who won in defenseman Sami Vatanen's debut with New Jersey.

Jets 7, Golden Knights 4: Kyle Connor scored twice, and Mark Scheifele and Patrik Laine each had a goal and two assists in host Winnipeg's five-goal third period.

Tyler Myers, Matt Hendricks and Nikolaj Ehlers also

scored for Winnipeg, with won its fifth straight at home. Blake Wheeler had three assists and Connor Hellebuyck stopped 27 shots for the Western Conference-leading Jets.

Sharks 2, Panthers 1: Chris Tierney scored in the third period to lift visiting San Jose over Florida.

Joe Pavelski scored his 300th goal, and Aaron Dell made 39 saves for the Sharks in his second consecutive start. San Jose won its third straight game.

Rangers 5, Hurricanes 1: Michael Grabner scored three goals, including two late empty-netters, to lead host New York over Carolina.

David Desharnais and Paul Carey also scored to help the Rangers win for the ninth time in their last 10 at home and improve to 11-3-0 in their last 14 overall. Henrik Lundqvist made 32 saves.

NBA roundup

Thunder beat Timberwolves to snap three-game skid

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Paul George had 35 points and nine assists and the Oklahoma City Thunder beat the Minnesota Timberwolves 111-107 on Friday night to snap a three-game losing streak.

Steven Adams had a career-high 27 points on 11-for-11 shooting from the field and Russell Westbrook added 15 points, 14 assists and nine rebounds for Oklahoma City.

The Thunder shot 51.9 percent from the field and out-rebounded the Timberwolves 42-26. It was Oklahoma City's first victory of the season by fewer than nine points.

Karl-Anthony Towns and Andrew Wiggins scored 23 points each and Jimmy Butler added 22 for the Timberwolves. They shot 51.3 percent in the loss.

Warriors 133, Magic 112: Klay Thompson scored 27 points, Kevin Durant had 25 and Steph Curry 23 to help Golden State rout host Orlando.

Durant was ejected for arguing with 4:52 left. Jordan Bell added 16 points, Draymond Green 12 and Omri Casspi 11 for Golden State, which expanded a 13-point lead after Durant left.

Jazz 114, Pelicans 108: Rookie Donovan Mitchell scored a career-high 41 points and powered visiting Utah's fourth-quarter rally against New Orleans.

New Orleans star Anthony Davis went down with a left groin injury at the beginning of the fourth quarter, hitting the ground under the Jazz basket and laying there until trainers came to help.

They eventually carried the All-Star off because he couldn't put any pressure on one of his legs. He was immediately placed in a wheelchair and taken to the training room.

Raptors 120, Pacers 115: DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points, Jakob Poeltl made all eight of his field-goal attempts and had a career-high 18 points and host Toronto beat Indiana for its sixth straight home victory.

Serge Ibaka added 15 points, Jonas Valanciunas had 13 and Kyle Lowry and Fred VanVleet each had 11 for the Raptors. They are 8-1 at home.

Spurs 95, Grizzlies 78: LaMarcus Aldridge had 22 points, Rudy Gay added 18 and visiting San Antonio handed Memphis its 10th straight loss.

Wizards 109, Pistons 91:

Markieff Morris scored 23 points, Tomas Satoransky added a career-high 17 off the bench, and Washington beat Detroit for its first home victory in nearly three weeks.

Otto Porter Jr. also had 17 points for Washington. The Wizards are 2-2 without All-Star point guard John Wall since he received injections in his swollen left knee.

Andre Drummond had 14 points, 17 rebounds and seven assists for Detroit.

Kings 107, Bulls 106: Zach Randolph had 25 points and 13 rebounds, Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 19 points and Sacramento extended host Chicago's losing streak to eight games.

Heat 105, Hornets 100: Josh Richardson scored a career-high 27 points to help host Miami beat Charlotte.