

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Marine, Navy aircraft will help fight San Diego blaze

Associated Press

FALLBROOK, Calif. — Retirement communities built on golf courses, thoroughbreds in race horse stables and other usually serene sites were engulfed by flames as the San Diego area became the latest front in California's wildfire fight.

The fire broke out Thursday amid dry, hot, windy conditions across the region that would be extreme for any season, but are especially stunning just two weeks from winter.

It exceeded 6 square miles in a matter of hours and burned dozens of houses as it tore through the tightly packed Rancho Monserate Country Club community in the small city of Fallbrook, known for its avocado orchards and horse ranches. Three people were burned while escaping the flames, said Capt. Nick Schuler of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Winds subsided significantly early Friday morning, but forecasters said they would return later in the day.

The fire was on the eastern border of the Marine Corps' vast Camp Pendleton, where base Fire Chief Thomas Thompson told Fox5 San Diego that the lack of wind should help fight the fire. Marine Corps and Navy aircraft will join the battle, he said.

Meanwhile, firefighters in Ventura — 130 miles to the north — tried to corral the largest and most destructive fire in the state, which has destroyed 430 buildings. The so-called Thomas Fire has grown to 180 square miles since it broke out Monday. Fire crews made enough progress against large fires around Los Angeles to lift most evacuation orders.

The fire 50 miles north of San Diego, driven by winds above 35 mph, razed rows of

trailer homes in the retirement community.

It wasn't immediately known what sparked the fire next to State Highway 76, but strong winds carried it across six lanes to the other side.

Evacuations were ordered in the area near Camp Pendleton and schools and casinos were being used as shelters.

Cynthia Olvera, 20, took shelter at Fallbrook High School.

She had been at her Bonsall home with her younger sister and nephew when her father called from the family nursery to say the fire had reached the gate of their sprawling property. After starting to drive away, the family turned around to recover forgotten personal documents — but it was too late. Trees were ablaze and flames were within 10 feet of the house. Her older sister wanted to drive in to save her husband's car, but Olvera told her, "Don't do it. It's not worth it."

Her sister heeded the advice and the family made it safely to Fallbrook High. But the flames followed them, and the family had to pack up again when evacuation orders came for the school. The family went to a second shelter, not knowing if their house survived.

As the flames approached the elite San Luis Rey Downs training facility for thoroughbreds, many of the more than 450 horses were cut loose to prevent them from being trapped in their stables if barns caught fire, said Mac McBride of the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club. Herds of horses galloped past flaming palm trees in their chaotic escape of a normally idyllic place. Not all survived.

The California Horse Racing Board said about 25 horses were killed when eight barns burned and others in adjacent pastures were unaccounted for.

Protests against Trump Jerusalem shift turn violent

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Large crowds of worshippers across the Muslim world staged anti-U.S. marches Friday, some stomping onto posters of President Donald Trump or burning American flags in the largest outpouring of anger yet at Trump's recognition of bitterly contested Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

In the holy city itself, prayers at Islam's third-holiest site dispersed largely without incident, but Palestinians clashed with Israeli troops in several dozen West Bank hot spots and on the border with the Gaza Strip.

A 30-year-old Gaza man was killed by Israeli gunfire, the first death of a protester since Trump's dramatic midweek announcement. Two Palestinians were seriously wounded, health officials said.

Dozens of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were hit by live rounds or rubber-coated steel or inhaled tear gas.

Later Friday, the Israeli military said its Iron Dome missile-defense system intercepted a rocket fired from Gaza into southern Israel, but no injuries were reported.

Trump's pivot on Jerusalem triggered warnings from America's friends and foes alike that he is needlessly stirring more conflict in an already-volatile region.

The U.N. Security Council was to meet for a special ses-

sion Friday, with the U.S. expected to face opposition from the 14 other council members.

The religious and political dispute over Jerusalem forms the emotional core of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The ancient city is home to major Muslim, Jewish and Christian shrines and looms large in the competing national narratives of Israelis and Palestinians.

Trump's decision on Jerusalem is widely seen in the region as a blatant expression of pro-Israel bias, but it was unclear whether protests and confrontations would maintain momentum after Friday. More extensive violence has erupted in the Palestinian areas in the past, including deadly bloodshed triggered by disputes over Jerusalem.

On Friday, demonstrators in the West Bank torched heaps of tires, sending columns of thick, black smoke rising over the cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem. Palestinian stone-throwers traded volleys in the streets with soldiers firing tear gas and rubber bullets. Along the Gaza-Israel border fence, Israeli troops fired at stone-throwers.

Across the region — from Asia's Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan to North Africa's Algeria and Lebanon in the Levant — thousands of worshippers poured into the streets after midday prayers to voice their anger. Some protesters burned U.S. and Israeli flags or stomped Trump posters that showed the president alongside a Nazi swastika.

House ethics panel widens probe of GOP's Farenthold

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House Ethics Committee says it is expanding an investigation into sexual harassment allegations against Republican Rep. Blake Farenthold, of Texas.

The committee said it will investigate whether Farenthold sexually harassed a former member of his staff and retaliated against her for complaining. The committee also said the panel would review allegations that Farenthold made inappropriate statements to other members of his official staff.

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 committee already had been conducting a discretionary review of the matter and has examined more than 200,000 pages of materials and interviewed multiple witnesses. However, a news release announcing the subcommittee's formation said the resolution of the case had been significantly delayed by difficulties in obtaining testimony from key witnesses and in accessing confidential documents the parties exchanged as the lawsuit was ongoing.

The formation of the subcommittee raises the level of the review and is a necessary prerequisite to the most serious sanctions available in ethics matters.

The committee said more information has come out about the settlement between the two parties. In addition, both Farenthold and the former aide had expressed an interest in increased transparency.

GOP Rep. Franks latest to resign after allegations of impropriety

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican Rep. Trent Franks of Arizona is resigning next month after revealing that he discussed surrogacy with two female staffers. Franks was the third member of Congress in three days to announce he would resign following allegations of sexual impropriety.

The eight-term lawmaker, a staunch conservative and fierce opponent of abortion, said in a statement that he never physically intimidated, coerced or attempted to have any sexual contact with any member of his congressional staff.

Instead, he said, the dispute resulted from a discussion of surrogacy. Franks and his wife, who have struggled with infertility, have 3-year-old twins who were conceived through surrogacy.

Franks, 60, said he had become familiar with the surrogacy process in recent years and "became insensitive as to how the discussion of such an intensely personal topic might affect others."

He said he regrets that his "discussion of this option and process in the workplace" with two female staffers made them feel uncomfortable.

In a statement, Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., called the allegations "serious and requiring action" and said he told Franks he should resign.

Franks said he will step down effective Jan. 31.

In a one-page statement late Thursday, the House Ethics Committee said its members were examining whether Franks "engaged in conduct that constitutes sexual harassment and/or retaliation for opposing sexual harassment." The statement provided no further detail and noted that while it was establishing an investigative subcommittee, that did not mean any violation of law or House rules had occurred.

Ethics is unlikely to proceed in light of the resignation.

Franks has been a member of the far-right House Freedom Caucus. He's a staunch social conservative who sponsored House-passed legislation to make it a crime for any person to perform an abortion if the age of the fetus is 20 weeks or more.

Earlier on Thursday, liberal Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., announced his resignation after facing allegations of sexual harassment by at least eight women. Franken said some of those accusations were false and that he remembered others differently than his accusers did. He said he'd depart in a few weeks.

On Tuesday, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., resigned effective immediately. He also faced accusations from women of improper sexual behavior that he's contesting.

GOP could eye pickup after Franken's fall

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Minnesota Sen. Al Franken's departure from the Senate solves one problem for Democrats, demonstrating their will to push out one of their own when sexual harassment allegations pile up. Now they must worry about keeping one more vulnerable seat when they already had their hands full in next year's election.

Franken said Thursday he would resign, just a day after new allegations brought the number of women alleging he had groped or tried to kiss them to at least eight. In a sometimes-emotional speech delivered on the Senate floor, Franken said some of the accusations were false, but acknowledged he couldn't continue.

"I know in my heart that nothing I have done as a senator — nothing — has brought dishonor on this institution," Franken declared.

The former comedian who made his name on "Saturday Night Live" is the latest to fall in the national wave of sexual harassment allegations.

His rapid fall leaves Democratic Gov. Mark Dayton to appoint a replacement to serve until at least 2018, when the state would hold an election to finish Franken's six-year term ending in 2020. Dayton said Thursday he expected to do so "in the next couple of days."

Franken's exit gives Republicans an opening to expand their reach in an already favorable Senate map — two dozen Democratic senators are up for

re-election next year, including 10 in states that President Donald Trump carried in 2016. That difficult math raises the question of whether Dayton will appoint a temporary placeholder or try to give a Democrat a running start for the 2018 campaign. His lieutenant governor, Tina Smith, has been mentioned most frequently for the appointment. But Smith previously announced she wouldn't run for governor next year, suggesting she would be no more than a caretaker.

While Dayton weighed his choice, eyes turned to the 2018 race, especially among Republicans. Former Gov. Tim Pawlenty — the last Republican to win a statewide election in Minnesota, in 2006 — was seen as a potential contender.

DOD preparing for transgender recruits

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military is preparing to accept transgender recruits for the first time beginning in January, the Pentagon said Wednesday, the latest signal that President Donald Trump's desired ban may not materialize after all.

Officials are "taking steps to be prepared" to bring in the first transgender recruits on Jan. 1, as required by a federal court order issued recently, said Army Maj. David Eastburn, a Pentagon spokesman. He declined to comment further, citing open litigation, but said that the Defense Department and

the Justice Department are consulting on the issue.

The Pentagon's acknowledgment comes a week after U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly in Washington clarified an October injunction in which she blocked Trump's proposed ban on all transgender personnel serving in the military. The administration immediately sought to delay the Jan. 1 deadline by which it must comply with the order, but Kollar-Kotelly denied that motion on Nov. 28.

In the days since, the administration appealed its case to the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington. On late Wednesday,

government lawyers asked the judge to temporarily put on hold the section of Kollar-Kotelly's ruling that requires the military to start accepting transgender recruits on Jan. 1 until its appeal is resolved.

The court battle stems from Trump's July 26 announcement on Twitter that the U.S. government "will not accept or allow Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military." He cited the military's need to focus on "decisive and overwhelming victory" without being "burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption" that he said having transgender people

in the military would cause.

Gen. Joseph Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, issued a memo the following day to say that transgender servicemembers who already are serving would be treated with dignity and respect as the Pentagon sorted out its new policy, effectively putting any change on hold.

Several people sued the federal government afterward, including in Maryland and the nation's capital. In Washington, Kollar-Kotelly said in a preliminary injunction that the policy "does not appear to be supported by any facts."

Advocates worry over VA fidelity on homeless vets

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — One night in January, volunteers across the country counted 40,056 veterans living on the streets or in transitional housing and shelters — 585 more than in 2016 and the first increase of homeless veterans since 2010.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development reported this week the results of its annual point-in-time count of the country's homeless.

The findings were released Wednesday at the same time concerns were growing among advocates that the federal government was stripping resources from one program that has been housing veterans successfully.

The report, which found 553,742 people homeless in the U.S., showed that veterans accounted for 9 percent of them. Of the homeless veterans counted, 38 percent were in places deemed unsuitable for habitation. The number of homeless female veterans increased by 7 percent.

Largely driving the increase this year: 1,860 more homeless veterans in California, where

almost 29 percent of homeless veterans live, HUD reported. Veteran homelessness decreased in 36 states and the District of Columbia.

"We were hoping to see the numbers trend down, given the intensive efforts a lot of communities were putting into that work at the very end of the Obama administration," said Kathryn Monet, chief executive officer of the nonprofit National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. "But it's not a huge surprise, given some of the affordable-housing issues that we've seen out on the West Coast."

There's a severe affordable-housing shortage in Los Angeles County. Excluding that county, overall veteran homelessness would have decreased by 3.2 percent.

The last year-to-year increase was in 2010, followed by six years of gradual decline. Since 2009, there has been a 45 percent decrease in the number of homeless veterans.

Then-Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Eric Shinseki established a goal in 2010 of ending veteran homelessness by 2015.

Agency eyes alternative therapies to treat PTSD

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Pressurized oxygen chambers, light-emitting helmets and neck injections are all treatments the Department of Veterans Affairs is using to help veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries.

Following an announcement last week that the VA would offer hyperbaric oxygen therapy to some veterans with PTSD, the agency said Thursday that the move is part of an effort to explore alternatives to the traditional therapies for PTSD and TBI, VA Secretary David Shulkin said in a statement.

Shulkin repeatedly has cited suicide prevention as his No. 1 clinical priority and promised lawmakers "big, bold steps" toward that end.

The VA said light-emitting diode (LED) therapy is now being offered to veterans with mild or moderate TBI to use in their homes, or at the VA Boston Healthcare System in Jamaica Plain. It involves a light-emitting frame being placed onto a patient's head and a clip in their nose. The VA studied the

treatment in 2015 and found it increases blood flow in the brain and affects damaged cells to possibly improve brain function.

At the Long Beach VA Medical Center in California, doctors have started using a method called stellate ganglion block for veterans with PTSD. The treatment consists of a shot of medication into a patient's neck.

VA researchers published a report on the treatment in February stating they found improvements in PTSD symptoms after the first test, but progress dropped in subsequent trials. The study was inconclusive, and researchers called for more testing.

The VA said Thursday the treatment might ease anxiety.

A third alternative treatment, hyperbaric oxygen therapy, uses pressurized chambers to send higher oxygen levels to patients. For now, the VA is making the therapy available to a small number of veterans in the eastern Oklahoma and northern California VA health care systems.

Gunman slays 2 teenagers at NM high school

Associated Press

AZTEC, N.M. — Heaven Angelica Hughes and her classmates heard loud noises coming from the hallway just before bullets began flying through the window, striking a wall just over one student's head.

"Get down!" her teacher yelled. The 15-year-old freshman fell to the floor and hid under her desk. Heaven then sent a text message: There's a shooting here at school, mom.

Across the hallway, David Stone, 16, heard the same booms while in math class. His teacher herded the class into a closet and locked the door.

"This is not a drill," an announcer over the school intercom told students.

When the frightened students emerged Thursday from their hiding places at Aztec High School, they learned two of their classmates had been killed. The shooter also was dead and the close-knit community of 6,500 people was thrust into mourning as they became the latest to feel the sting of what seems to be a routine tragedy in the U.S..

Why the shooter chose Casey Marquez and Francisco Fernandez remained a mystery as detectives combed through evidence. They have released few details.

"I just thought it was a dream," said Sebastian McNeal, 18, who was waiting to board a bus for a basketball tournament. "I thought I was going to wake up and it's going to be all fine."

Then he saw an ambulance. "I knew it was real," he said.

Police arrived at the school less than a minute after getting the initial calls, which came shortly after the start of first period. With the school in lockdown, they got inside through a window and a door.

It was not clear if the shooter died by suicide or was killed by police. No other injuries were reported.

Hours after the gunshots, students and the community gathered in churches, community centers and then a park, braving frigid temperatures for a candlelight vigil at St Joseph's Catholic Church.

"Right now we need to keep each other in our hearts and thoughts and take care of each other," Aztec Mayor Sally Burbridge posted on her Facebook page.

"This is a tight community," Marsha Dodd, 51, said while holding a flag in front of Safeway grocery store. "I don't want this in my community, just peace and love."

She stood next to Dennis Martinez, 24, who held a sign demanding that teachers be allowed to carry guns.

Officials say schools across town that shut down Thursday will stay closed Friday.

Trump signs bill granting 14-day shutdown reprieve

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has signed a spending bill to avoid a government shutdown and keep the federal government running through Dec. 22.

The president signed the two-week spending bill Friday at the White House after the House and Senate acted to prevent a government shutdown this weekend.

The White House and congressional leaders are negotiating a longer-term agreement.

The measure funds government agencies from the Defense Department to the IRS. It also makes money available to several states running out of funds for the Children's Health Insurance Program. The popular program provides medical care to more than 8 million children.

The White House and lawmakers say the bill will give them more time to negotiate several end-of-year agenda items, including the budget, a children's health program and hurricane aid.

The measure passed the House 235-193, mostly along party lines, on Thursday and breezed through the Senate on a sweeping 81-14 tally barely an hour later.

Topics at a Thursday afternoon meeting between top congressional leaders and Trump had included relief from a budget freeze on the Pentagon and domestic agencies, extending the children's health program and aid to hurricane-slammed Puerto Rico, Texas and Florida. The trickiest topic, and a top priority for Democrats, involves protections for immigrants brought to the country illegally as children.

These "Dreamer" immigrants are viewed sympathetically by the public and most lawmakers but face deportation in a few months because Trump reversed administrative protections provided to them by former President Barack Obama.

In back-to-back statements, both Democratic and GOP leaders declared the meeting "productive." The White House called it "constructive." But negotiations are sure to be challenging. House Minority Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., insisted Thursday that any year-end deal solve the immigration issue. Pelosi told reporters before the meeting that "we will not leave here" without helping the "Dreamers." Her stance was noteworthy because GOP leaders are likely to require Democratic votes for the pre-Christmas spending bill.

With Trump invited, some black lawmakers to skip Miss. event

Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Many in Mississippi's African-American community had waited decades for a civil rights museum. But with President Donald Trump coming to the museum's opening Saturday, some will skip the eagerly anticipated opening.

They say Trump's policies are incompatible with honoring the African-American freedom struggle.

That slide into racial and partisan strife from what was supposed to be a moment of unity and atonement was punctuated Thursday with Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., saying he would abandon his plans to speak, saying Trump's presence was an "insult." Rep. Bennie Thompson, Mississippi's only Democrat in Congress, announced his exit in a joint statement with Lewis. The NAACP, led by a Mississippian, has said Trump should cancel his appearance because of his divisive record on civil rights issues.

"To come and somehow give the impression that things are all right, that we're getting along, was absolutely the wrong message," Thompson said, saying he views Trump's agenda as too destructive to paper over differences, even for just an hour or two.

The White House later issued a statement calling it "unfortunate" that Lewis and Thompson won't join the president in honoring the "incredible sacrifice civil rights leaders made to right the injustices in our history."

The White House said Trump hopes others will join him in recognizing "that the movement was about removing barriers and unifying Americans of all backgrounds."

Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant, a big supporter of Trump who invited the president, told reporters Wednesday that Trump's presence will bring worldwide attention and give the museums a big boost.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Retired justice kept off jury for murder trial

MA BOSTON — She was impartial enough to serve as a justice on the highest court in Massachusetts, but apparently that wasn't enough for Geraldine Hines to be named a juror in a murder trial.

Hines, 70, who retired from the Supreme Judicial Court in August, said she was "so disappointed" when the prosecutor rejected her as a juror Wednesday.

Hines tells *The Boston Globe* "I've been waiting my whole life to be a juror in a criminal case."

After questioning from defense attorneys and Suffolk Assistant District Attorney Mark Lee, Lee used one of his challenges to keep Hines off the jury. He apologized outside of court.

Overtaken truck spills vodka onto roadway

PA CORNWELLS HEIGHTS — A tractor-trailer carrying vodka overturned, spilling cargo onto a busy ramp leading to Interstate 95 near Philadelphia.

The accident closed the Woodhaven Road east ramp to I-95 south in Bucks County about 4:45 a.m. Thursday.

It took road crews hours to unload boxes of Tito's vodka so the truck could be righted.

Officials said the truck driver sustained minor injuries.

The accident is under investigation.

Woman says surgeon used phone in surgery

NY WHITE PLAINS — A suburban New York City woman has sued a doctor, claiming he used his cellphone to take a language test while

operating on her.

The *Journal News* reported Mary Edwards, 70, filed a lawsuit Monday in state Supreme Court against Dr. Eric Fishman and his employer, Westmed Medical Group. The lawsuit seeks unspecified monetary damages.

Fishman performed surgery on Edwards to fix varicose veins twice in 2017. According to the lawsuit, Edwards claimed Fishman had a conversation in Spanish on his cellphone during the second outpatient procedure.

Edwards' attorney said his client was terrified for the rest of the operation. Edwards claims Fishman later explained he was taking a Spanish proficiency test during the surgery.

Dead vultures hung up to scare off live ones

SC MOUNT PLEASANT — Amid the Christmas lights and garlands, one South Carolina neighborhood features more unusual decorations in its trees — vulture carcasses.

The *Post and Courier* of Charleston reported the neighborhood homeowners group for Brickyard Plantation in Mount Pleasant is in the midst of its second round of dangling three carcasses by their legs, part of an Agriculture Department ploy to scare off live vultures.

In Brickyard Plantation, vultures have been tearing up exposed rubber caulking. The director of the USDA office in Columbia, Noel Myers, said vulture complaints are among the most frequent issues handled by the wildlife management department.

The approach has met with resistance from people who rehabilitate the federally protected species. Center for Birds of Prey Director Jim Elliott also says the method only works briefly.

Town plans to close streets to nonresidents

NJ LEONIA — A New Jersey town plans to close its streets to nonresidents during rush hour to curtail traffic.

WABC-TV reported that Leonia officials said the town sees increased traffic when there's a delay on the nearby George Washington Bridge. Emergency construction on the bridge on Wednesday caused motorists to use their GPS systems to find shortcuts, and that crowded Leonia's streets.

Officials said the congestion makes it difficult for emergency personnel to travel through the town. So, beginning Jan. 15, Leonia will close access to local streets during the morning and afternoon rush hours. Residents will receive special stickers for their vehicles and violators will be fined.

Business's Bigfoot sculpture gets attention

NY WHITEHALL — A nearly 12-foot-tall sculpture of Bigfoot has been erected in an upstate New York town where some locals say the legendary creature stalks the woods.

Paul Thompson told *The Post-Star* of Glens Falls that he got the idea for the statue after meeting people looking for Bigfoot around Whitehall, N.Y., located on the Vermont border between the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains. Thompson paid a local artist for a nearly 12-foot-high, half-ton steel sculpture that depicts Bigfoot in full stride. He has placed the sculpture in front of his business, the Vermont Marble, Granite, Slate & Soapstone Co.

Bigfoot's head is covered with a large Santa Claus hat for the holidays. Thompson said people driving by have been pulling over to get a better look.

Squirrel steals pricey goods for delivery folks

NJ MAPLEWOOD — An obese squirrel has been caught on video stealing gourmet chocolate and lip balm that a New Jersey family leaves out yearly as a holiday treat for delivery people.

Michele Boudreaux said on her blog she provides candy, tissues, lip balm and other goodies on her doorstep. This year, her basket was raided within hours. The thief was targeting the priciest stuff, including Ghirardelli chocolate squares.

The Maplewood family set up a surveillance camera and spotted the varmint Tuesday. It cleared out all the chocolate, snack bars and throat lozenges.

She stumbled upon the thieving rodent in the act Wednesday, and recorded it taking more chocolate and a Carmex lip balm. She said they now have the chocolate in a jar that requires opposable thumbs.

Police: Bouncing roll of tape spurs 911 call

ME BANGOR — Police in Bangor, Maine, said a reported intruder turned out to be a roll of duct tape.

Officers responded to a call from a woman who heard noises from her basement and reported that her dog was barking aggressively at the noise.

Police said it turns out a "thump-thump-thump" sound the woman heard was a roll of duct tape that fell off a shelf and bounced down the stairs.

Sgt. Tim Cotton wrote on Facebook that the woman had already investigated before the first officer arrived. The officer felt that the woman could've held her own until police arrived because she was "from Maine, had a dog, and a roll of duct tape."

From wire reports

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Jones' interception seals Falcons' win

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Deion Jones can't wait to face the New Orleans Saints again in two weeks.

The Falcons' standout middle linebacker keeps putting up impressive numbers against his hometown team, and he made the play of the game in a 20-17 win Thursday night over the Saints.

Jones was playing man coverage in the closing minutes on tight end Josh Hill when he leapt high in the end zone, intercepted Drew Brees' pass with both hands and closed his eyes as he began falling backward for a big thud against the turf.

"Once I realized I had it, I knew it was going to be a long way down," Jones said with a smile. "I felt my feet in the air and I just wanted to hold onto it. I wanted to get up with the ball. I didn't want to see myself fall. I really didn't."

For Jones, it was just another great game against the Saints.

Jones, who grew up in New Orleans and starred at LSU, has been on the other side of the fence since the Falcons drafted him in the second round last year. In three career games against the Saints — all victories — he has 20 solo tackles, 28 stops overall, five pass breakups and two picks.

In his first game against New Orleans last year, he returned an interception 90 yards at the Superdome.

His pick Thursday sealed a big win for the Falcons (8-5) and kept the Saints (9-4) from holding a tighter grip on the NFC South lead.

"We just have to keep stacking 'em, coming out and playing with that fire," Jones said. "No telling what might happen."

No choke tonight: Saints coach Sean Payton appeared to taunt Devonta Freeman with a choking gesture, holding his hand at his neck and yelling, "Choke!" after the Falcons running back was stopped for no gain at the New Orleans sideline early in the fourth quarter.

Payton said after the game that he didn't remember doing it. Freeman, who scored the game's first touchdown earlier in the game, had no trouble recalling it.

"I saw it," Freeman said. "He don't know nothing about choking."

The Falcons know a little something about it. They blew a 28-3 lead to lose the Super Bowl last season.

Payton's apparent taunt didn't slow them Thursday, though. They kept the drive going three more plays before quarterback Matt Ryan hooked up with Mohamed Sanu for an 8-yard touchdown.

Rough night: Ryan looked nothing like last year's MVP, throwing three interceptions in a span of nine plays and making some uncharacteristically bad decisions with the football.

At least Ryan got the offense back to scoring touchdowns. They went without a TD in last week's loss to Minnesota, marking the first time that didn't happen since they lost 38-0 at Carolina in 2015. But the pass he underthrew to Julio Jones in the end zone early in the third quarter was one he'd like to forget.

The only thing good about it was New Orleans had to punt five plays later.

"On the third one in the end zone, you want to give Julio opportunities, and I didn't throw the ball nearly high enough," Ryan said.

Ryan wasn't alone. Brees was disappointed in himself for the game-ending pick.

"Yeah, I shouldn't have thrown it," Brees said. "They made a nice play. It wasn't worth the risk right there, especially when you know that you have points. It's not like you have to have a touchdown to tie. We could have kicked the field goal since we had points. I'm just disappointed in the result there. I should not have taken that chance."

Vikings can clinch with win over Panthers

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Case Keenum's improbable season has the Minnesota Vikings thinking playoffs.

Keenum entered the league as an undrafted rookie in 2012, one year after Cam Newton made a splash as the No. 1 overall pick by the Carolina Panthers.

While the two quarterbacks have taken dramatically different paths, it is Keenum who has the Vikings positioned to win the NFC North — and perhaps even earn home-field advantage throughout the playoffs.

The Vikings (10-2) can clinch their second division title — and first with Keenum at the helm — in three years by beating Newton's Panthers (8-4) on the road Sunday. Minnesota can also clinch if Green Bay and Detroit lose or tie.

Keenum's success doesn't

surprise Panthers wide receiver Russell Shepard, who regularly works out with the fifth-year quarterback in the offseason.

"The Vikings called him last-minute," Shepard said of Keenum's signing with the Vikings last offseason. "They wanted him, kind of in his mind from what he was telling me, as a camp body, an extra guy, knowing the injuries at quarterback with Teddy (Bridgewater) still being hurt. Just to see him take off, man, it's one of those crazy stories."

Keenum is 8-2 as the Vikings starter since taking over for the injured Sam Bradford, after struggling in his previous 26 starts with the Rams and Texans.

Shepard said it makes for a great story.

"We're like the misfits, like the rug rats," said Shepard of

undrafted players, of which he is one.

"In this league, in life in general, everybody wants to see the underdog succeed. Everybody wants to see the guy that nobody expected to be that guy."

Across from Kalil: Vikings defensive end Everson Griffen has sacked Carolina's Cam Newton five times in two games, including three of Minnesota's eight sacks in the 22-10 victory in Charlotte on Sept. 25, 2016. This time, he'll be lined up across from former teammate Matt Kalil, who spent the past five seasons with the Vikings.

Griffen and Kalil were also college teammates at Southern Cal, so their friendship dates back almost a decade.

"I'm going to watch my tape. I'm going to study him. I'm going to know him better than I know my phone number," said Griffen, whose 42½ sacks since

becoming a full-time starter in 2014 are the third-most in the NFL in that span.

Kalil has struggled at times in his transition to Carolina. He had two penalties last week against the Saints for 25 yards, but was playing after receiving an IV before the game because of the flu.

Getting stops: The Vikings are the NFL's best at getting off the field on third down. They limited the Falcons to one of 10 conversions on third down last week after Atlanta had gone 27-for-41 over its previous three games.

Minnesota is allowing opposing offenses to convert just 27 percent (40-for-148) of third-down chances.

That success has been matched on the other side of the ball, too. The Vikings offense is first in the league in third-down conversions, at 46 percent (74-for-161).

NBA roundup

Lakers edge Philly

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Brandon Ingram made the winning three-pointer with 0.8 seconds left and finished with 21 points in the Los Angeles Lakers' 107-104 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Thursday night.

Julius Randle and Jordan Clarkson each added 16 points to help the Lakers snap a five-game skid.

Joel Embiid scored 33 points, and Ben Simmons had a triple-double with 12 points, 13 rebounds and 15 assists for Philadelphia.

The 76ers overcame a 16-point second-half deficit to tie it on Embiid's two free throws with 39.8 seconds remaining. Lonzo Ball missed a three on Los Angeles' ensuing possession, and Embiid then missed a chance to give Philadelphia the lead.

On the winning play, Ball drove to the basket before dish-ing back to Ingram on the right wing. After a timeout, Richaun Holmes' tying attempt at the buzzer was way off.

The winning basket sent Ball's

dad, LaVar, into a wild celebration in a suite. Lonzo Ball, loudly booed every time he touched the ball, had 10 points, eight rebounds and eight assists.

Nets 100, Thunder 95: At Mexico City, Caris Levert scored 19 points, Rondae Hollis-Jefferson added 17 and short-handed Brooklyn overcame another strong performance by Russell Westbrook to beat Oklahoma City.

Westbrook had 31 points, eight rebounds and six assists.

Wizards 109, Suns 99: Bradley Beal scored 34 points to help visiting Washington beat Phoenix.

Former Sun Markieff Morris added 21 points for the Wizards.

Rockets 112, Jazz 101: James Harden scored 29 points and Ryan Anderson added 23 to lead visiting Houston past Utah.

Chris Paul added 18 points, 13 assists and nine rebounds for the Rockets, who won their eighth straight game and 14th of their last 15. The Rockets improved to 8-0 with Paul in the lineup.

76ers trade Okafor

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Buried on the bench in Philly, Jahlil Okafor has a chance to prove in Brooklyn he's not a bust.

Okafor got his wish when the Philadelphia 76ers finally traded the No. 3 overall pick of the 2015 draft to the Brooklyn Nets. The deal ends the stalemate that had kept Okafor on the bench for all but two games this season.

Once a prized piece of The Process, Okafor rapidly fell out of favor with the rise of star center Joel Embiid.

"Love you. New beginnings," Embiid said he texted Okafor. "Good luck. And I made sure to let him know I was going to

kick his (rear)."

Okafor led the Sixers in scoring as a rookie with Embiid out with injuries. Okafor played 55 games last season and never really meshed with the franchise center. Okafor started piling up DNP-CDs and those stretched into this season, where the Sixers will chase a playoff berth without him.

"He can go play basketball again," coach Brett Brown said.

The Sixers also sent seldom-used guard Nik Stauskas, the No. 8 overall pick in the 2014 draft, and a 2019 second-round pick to the Nets for forward Trevor Booker. Booker, the 23rd overall pick of the 2010 draft by Washington, averaged 10.1 points with the Nets.

NHL roundup

Lightning roll to win over Colorado

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Steven Stamkos had a goal and two assists, and the Tampa Bay Lightning became the first NHL team with 20 wins by defeating the Colorado Avalanche 5-2 on Thursday night.

Stamkos, who entered with one goal and two assists over his previous eight games, got his 12th goal early in the first. He also assisted on Vladislav Namestnikov's tiebreaking goal at 8:09 of the second and Alex Killorn's third of the season 4:57 into the third.

Chris Kunitz and Brayden Point also scored for the Lightning, and backup Peter Budaj made 28 saves in his fifth game this season.

Colorado left wing Gabriel Landeskog, back in the lineup after serving a four-game suspension for cross-checking Calgary's Matthew Tkachuk in the head on Nov. 25, eluded Nikita Kucherov and scored on his first shift 1:21 into the game.

Erik Johnson also scored for the Avalanche, who were coming off a 1-4 homestand. Semyon Varlamov stopped 27 shots.

Kings 4, Senators 3 (OT): Drew Doughty scored 32 seconds into overtime, lifting host Los Angeles to its seventh consecutive victory.

Dustin Brown, Alex Iafallo and Tanner Pearson also scored for Los Angeles, and Darcy Kuemper stopped 35 shots.

The Kings appeared to be on their way to a regulation win, but Ottawa's Ryan Dzingel tied the game with his ninth of the season in the final seconds of the third.

Jean-Gabriel Dumont and Matt Duchene also scored for the Senators, who have lost 10 of 11. Mike Condon had 36 stops.

Flyers 4, Canucks 1: Shayne Gostisbehere and Claude Giroux each had a goal and an as-

sist, helping Philadelphia to the road win over Vancouver.

Michael Raffl and Wayne Simmonds also scored for the Flyers, who have won three in a row after a 10-game losing streak. Jakub Voracek had three assists.

Bruins 6, Coyotes 1: David Backes scored his first two goals of the season, powering host Boston to the runaway win over Arizona.

It was Backes' fourth game back after he missed 12 straight following surgery to remove part of his colon. The veteran forward scored his first goal with Boston on a tip-in 13:54 into the second period and then added another goal with 54 seconds left in the period.

Blues 3, Stars 0: Jake Allen made 29 saves and Brayden Schenn continued his strong play, helping host St. Louis blank Dallas.

Penguins 4, Islanders 3: Matt Hunwick scored 1:29 into overtime, lifting host Pittsburgh over New York.

Sharks 5, Hurricanes 4 (OT): Brent Burns scored 22 seconds into overtime, giving host San Jose the victory over Carolina.

Panthers 6, Jets 4: Micheal Haley scored a tiebreaking goal midway through the third period, and host Florida snapped a three-game skid by beating Winnipeg.

Flames 3, Canadiens 2 (OT): Sean Monahan scored his second goal of the game 1:14 into overtime, lifting Calgary to a road win over Montreal.

Monahan finished a 2-on-1 break by taking a feed from Johnny Gaudreau and beating Carey Price from the slot.

Garnet Hathaway also scored for Calgary (15-12-2), which was coming off a shootout loss in Toronto on Wednesday night. David Rittich made 35 saves in his second career start.

Mayfield named AP Player of the Year

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baker Mayfield is The Associated Press college football Player of the Year, becoming the fourth Oklahoma quarterback to win the award since it was established in 1998.

Mayfield easily outpointed Stanford running back Bryce Love, who came in second. Louisville quarterback Lamar Jackson, the other finalist and last year's Heisman Trophy winner, was third in the award announced Thursday.

Mayfield received 51 first-place votes from the 56 AP college football poll voters who submitted player of the year ballots, and a total of 157 points. Love (83 points) and Jackson (39 points) each received two first-place votes and Penn State running Saquon Barkley received a first-place vote and came in fourth.

Mayfield, Love and Jackson are also the finalists for the Heisman, which will be handed out Saturday night in New York.

Mayfield is a former walk-on who has led the No. 2 Sooners to the College Football Playoff, where they will play No. 3 Georgia in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1. Mayfield leads the nation in passer efficiency rating and has thrown for 4,340 yards and 41 touchdowns.

He joins Josh Heupel (2000), Jason White (2003) and Sam Bradford (2008) as previous winners from Oklahoma. No other school has had more than two players win AP Player of the Year.

Mayfield won the Walter Camp Player of the Year and the Davey O'Brien awards as the nation's top quarterback Thursday at ESPN's college football awards show in Atlanta.

Mayfield is the fourth OU player to win the Walter Camp, joining Heupel (2000) and running backs Billy Sims (1978) and Steve Owens (1969).

College basketball roundup

No. 21 Purdue holds off Valpo

Associated Press

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. — The Purdue Boilermakers don't spend too much time worrying about the college basketball landscape. That doesn't mean they're oblivious to games played outside of Mackey Arena.

Ball State's upset of No. 9 Notre Dame earlier this week earned Purdue's undivided attention. So, when an undefeated Valparaiso arrived on Thursday night, the 21st-ranked Boilermakers (9-2) avoided becoming the latest victim to suffer an upset loss by smothering the Crusaders with aggressive defense and fast-paced offense on the way to an 80-50 win.

"We had a lot of respect for (Valparaiso) — they were undefeated. With all the upsets going around college basketball, we didn't want to be a part of that," Purdue forward Vincent Edwards said. "We're just trying to build a résumé and Valpo is a really good team. We just followed our scouting report. Our coaches did a great job of scouting these guys."

Vincent Edwards scored 15 points and Carson Edwards finished with 10.

Joe Burton led the Crusaders with 19 points.

The Crusaders (8-1) were giving the Boiler-

makers fits through the first 10 minutes, even leading the game early on. But Purdue had other plans.

Iowa State 84, Iowa 78: Freshman Lindell Wigginton scored 24 points and the Cyclones (6-2) held off the rival Hawkeyes (4-6) for their eighth straight home win in the series.

Nick Weiler-Babb had 15 points and 10 assists for Iowa State, which has won six in a row after an 0-2 start.

Maryland 87, Ohio 62: Michal Cekovsky made every shot he took, scoring 15 points to go with eight rebounds, and the host Terrapins (8-3) breezed past the Bobcats (4-4).

Cekovsky went 6-for-6 from floor and sank all three of his free throws. The 7-foot-1 sophomore from Slovakia was pulled with 7:22 left and finished one point short of his career high.

Georgetown 81, Howard 67: Jessie Govan scored 24 points and tied his career-best with 16 rebounds as the host Hoyas (7-0) jumped out to an early lead and then held off the Bison (1-9) to remain undefeated.

Govan was 9-for-15 from the floor with three blocks and collected his fifth double-double of the season.

Sports briefs

Source: Oregon promoting Cristobal

Associated Press

A person with direct knowledge of the situation says Oregon will hire Mario Cristobal as its head football coach.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because a deal and announcement were still being finalized. Cristobal was offensive coordinator at Oregon this past season and was named interim coach on Tuesday when Willie Taggart left to become coach at Florida State.

NBC Sports Northwest was first to report Oregon had decided to promote Cristobal.

Before coming to Eugene, Ore., with Taggart, Cristobal had spent four seasons as offensive line coach at Alabama. He has six seasons of head coaching experience at Florida International, where he went 27-47, including 20-26 in conference,

with two bowl appearances from 2007-12.

He was also an assistant at Miami, his alma mater.

NHL considers Seattle

MANALAPAN, Fla. — NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman says the league's board of governors agreed to consider an expansion application from Seattle.

Bettman said the expansion fee has been set at \$650 million for Seattle, which would become the league's 32nd team, if approved. He made the announcement Thursday after the first day of the board of governors meeting.

"We've agreed as a league to take and consider an expansion application, and to let them run in the next few months, a season-ticket drive," Bettman said. "This is a process that we

go through."

Bill Foley paid a \$500 million expansion fee for the Vegas Golden Knights. They began play this season.

Seattle plans to have a new arena ready by 2020 with the intent of luring NHL and NBA teams as anchor tenants.

Solo a candidate

Hope Solo is running for president of the U.S. Soccer Federation.

The former U.S. Olympic and World Cup goalkeeper announced her candidacy Thursday night on Facebook. It comes less than a week after current U.S. Soccer Federation President Sunil Gulati said he will not seek a fourth term. His decision came in the wake of the recent failure of the U.S. men's team to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.