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Iraq declares victory over Islamic State

The Washington Post

BAGHDAD — Iraq's prime minister declared an end Saturday to the war against Islamic State, more than three years after militants overran and captured one-third of the country and imposed a violent-and-austere rule over millions of Iraqis.

Haider al-Abadi announced that the rugged, sparsely populated desert region bordering Syria has been "cleansed" of ISIS fighters and that the porous border that had underpinned the self-declared caliphate that straddled both countries has been fully secured.

"This victory was achieved. ... when Iraqis united to face a heinous enemy that didn't want us to see this day," Abadi said. "They wanted to return us back to the Dark Ages."

Saturday's declaration caps a war that has killed thousands of Iraqi troops in fierce battles for such cities as Tikrit, Ramadi and Beiji since 2015. But after losing the grueling, nine-month battle for Mosul in July, ISIS began to collapse quickly — ceding its grip on smaller cities and towns in days rather than months.

The explosive rise of the militants in 2014 drew the U.S. back into Iraq, with more than 5,000 U.S. troops assisting Iraq's mili-

tary as it wrested land back. ISIS's growth also saw the U.S. enter Syria's battlefields, already crowded with Russian and Iranian proxy forces that buttressed the unsteady rule of President Bashar Assad.

"The Coalition congratulate the people of Iraq on their significant victory against #Daesh. We stand by them as they set the conditions for a secure and prosperous #futureiraq," the U.S.-led coalition wrote in a tweet, using the Arabic name for ISIS.

Last month, Iran and Russia declared victory over ISIS militants in Syria, though fighting continues in small pockets near the border with Iraq. The Syrian Democratic Forces, a group of mostly Kurdish fighters backed by the U.S., won back ISIS's de facto Syrian capital of Raqqa in October.

Al-Abadi's comments came almost in passing as he attended a conference with the journalists union Saturday. The casual declaration of victory over ISIS came as the nation's attention has turned to a political standoff with Kurdish separatists and a reckoning with repairing the immense physical and social damage that the militants and the military fight to dislodge them has wrought.

Although a large military parade to mark the victory is planned for the coming

weeks, al-Abadi's announcement provoked little public jubilation.

The Pentagon has acknowledged that at least 801 civilians have been killed mistakenly in U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS targets in Iraq and Syria. Airwars, an independent monitoring group, says the figure is likely much higher, totaling 5,961 since 2014.

An Iraqi official charged with managing a fund to reconstruct cities such as Mosul has said it would cost about \$150 billion to rebuild these places — the vast majority of which are in Iraq's Sunni heartland. About 3 million people remain displaced to this day.

In addition, 20,000 people accused of joining ISIS remain in detention, coursing through an overburdened criminal justice system that Human Rights Watch said is unable or unwilling to provide fair trials and distinguish between those who eagerly killed for the group or were coerced into menial roles like cooks.

Iraqi forces are bracing for ISIS's continued presence as an underground insurgency that has returned to its traditional tactics of terrorist attacks. Hours before al-Abadi spoke, a car bomb in Tikrit killed at least one person.

Israel strikes at Hamas as demonstrations continue

Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — Israeli airstrikes killed two Hamas members early Saturday following a rocket attack on Israel, in the latest fallout from President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital — a development that has roiled the region and the larger Muslim world.

The Israeli military said it targeted four Hamas facilities in response to rockets fired the previous night, including one that landed in the town of Sderot without causing casualties or major damage. The military said it struck warehouses and weapons manufacturing sites, after which Hamas said it had recovered the bodies of two of its men.

Israel considers Hamas responsible for all rocket fire emanating from Gaza, which

is home to other armed groups. Some residents of Sderot and other border towns spent the night in shelters, fearful of a resumption of rocket attacks from Gaza that have led to three Israel-Hamas wars during the past decade.

Protests and demonstrations continued across the West Bank and Gaza on Saturday on the third and final so-called Palestinian "day of rage" following Trump's announcement. The military said there were clashes in some 20 locations. In Bethlehem, Palestinians hurled stones at Israeli troops, who responded with tear gas, rubber bullets and stun grenades. The Israeli military said some 600 Palestinians were throwing firebombs and rolling burning tires toward Israeli forces. It said it dispersed the crowds and arrested one rioter.

Along the border with the Gaza Strip,

some 450 Palestinians clashed with Israeli troops at eight main locations. About 20 were lightly wounded. Some 4,000 demonstrators gathered in Gaza City and demonstrations resumed in Pakistan, Turkey and elsewhere across the Muslim world as well.

In Jerusalem, police forces — some on horseback — scuffled with protesters near the Old City and arrested six people who were involved in what they called an illegal protest. Two policemen were injured.

"President Trump cannot take what he doesn't have," said Zuheir Dana, one of the protesters from east Jerusalem.

Israel has mobilized troops in case further violence breaks out. The clashes in the West Bank and east Jerusalem have yet to claim lives or to spiral into the kind of violence some had feared following Trump's move.

Winds power blazes in Southern California

Associated Press

FALLBROOK, Calif. — Firefighters in Southern California were on high alert for dangerous fire potential even before the first blazes broke out.

But once flames met ferocious winds, fire crews were mostly powerless to stop infernos that destroyed more than 500 buildings, killed dozens of horses and forced hundreds of thousands of people to run from six out-of-control fires that have burned more than 260 square miles since Monday.

“The crews were trying to stay out ahead of this as quickly as they could,” said Capt. Kendal Bortisser of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention. “As we know, when a tornado hits the Midwest, there’s no stopping

it. When a hurricane hits the East Coast, there’s no stopping it. When Santa Ana winds come in, there’s no stopping them.”

Firefighters gained ground Friday, and some of the earliest evacuees who fled from flames Monday were being allowed to return home.

Yet new fires were popping up, and danger persisted. Vegetation is bone dry, there’s been hardly any rainfall and winds were expected to gusts up to 40 mph Saturday and up to 50 mph Sunday in the Los Angeles and Ventura areas, the National Weather Service said.

Fires have taken people by surprise over a large swath of Southern California since the biggest fire broke out Monday evening in Ventura County, where the only death attributed to the fires so far involved

a 70-year-old woman who was found dead in a wrecked car on a designated evacuation route in the small city of Santa Paula.

Three people were burned trying to escape a fast-moving fire that started Thursday 50 miles north of San Diego and overran a mobile home retirement community and a race-horse training facility.

John Knapp did not initially believe a sheriff deputy’s order to leave when he first spotted the fire outside his home in the Rancho Monserate Country Club.

“I thought he was full of bologna, but once I saw the flames and the smoke, I thought that maybe he’s right,” Knapp said.

After leaving, he watched from a nearby highway for five hours as the community went

up in smoke.

More than a third of the community’s 213 mobile homes burned as fire zigzagged along a hillside, skipping some streets and razing others. On one street, all 24 mobile homes were gone, with only hulls of cars and twisted metal remaining.

Knapp was sure he had seen his house burn on the television news, so he was expecting the worst when he sneaked past a police barricade to witness the damage and was surprised to find it still standing.

The flames that tore through Fallbrook, the self-proclaimed “Avocado Capital of the World,” also hit hard in nearby town of Bonsall, where an estimated 30 to 40 elite thoroughbreds perished when the flames swept into barns at the San Luis Rey Training Facility.

Navy deploys firefighting helicopters near Camp Pendleton

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Across California, active-duty, reserve and National Guard commanders began mobilizing military might to support firefighters battling blazes.

At Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, commanders from Marine Light Attack Helicopter Training Squadron 303, the “Stingers” of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 267 and the “Heavy Haulers” of Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462 attended a planning session with Navy officials to coordinate firefighting efforts.

The Navy is deploying two firefighting helicopters equipped with special buckets for dumping water onto the blazes near Camp Pendleton. The North Island-based MH-60S Seahawk helicopters will come from the “Merlins” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 3 and the “Blackjacks” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 21 and will team up with California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection units.

“Navy HSC squadrons regularly train for this mission and are prepared to conduct firefighting missions at the Navy’s Southern California offshore training ranges, and they conduct semi-annual joint training with Cal Fire to ensure interoperability and an immediate response capability in support of local authorities for emergency events,” Navy spokesman Brian O’Rourke

said by email.

The Marines will chip in two UH-1Y Venoms to directly support ground crews battling the Lilac Fire, with two CH-53E Super Stallions on standby. The Venom can dump up to 320 gallons of water onto a blaze and the Super Stallion carries a 900-gallon bucket.

Marine spokeswoman Capt. Morgan Frazer told the San Diego Union-Tribune in an email that the level of aerial firefighting support will depend on weather forecasts analyzing high-wind conditions throughout the weekend.

On Thursday, multiple crews from the Camp Pendleton Fire Department began attacking the Bonsall blaze burning east of the base.

Marine commanders issued no evacuation orders to base residents but they opened the military installation to nearby community members evacuating their horses from the fires. Marine Corps Community Services’ Stepp Stables continues to take in horses in need of a safe haven.

As wildfires began to sweep Ventura County, the California Army National Guard activated the 670th Military Police Co. of National City, but the unit had yet to receive a specific request to support operations in San Diego County, according to Guard spokesman Capt. Will Martin in Sacramento.

Martin reported Friday that nearly 1,350 California Army and Air National Guard personnel are now battling six wildfires that have charred more than 137,000 acres. They’re providing fire crews with everything from logistical support to an MQ-9 Reaper for drone aerial reconnaissance, he said.

Wildfires now threaten about 20,000 homes and more than 195,000 residents are under evacuation orders, according to the Pentagon’s National Guard Bureau.

At the 146th Airlift Wing in Port Huene in Ventura County, California Air National Guard loaded the Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System into a pair of C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, converting the lumbering plane into an overhead fire truck.

The five pressurized tanks can spit out 2,700 gallons of fire retardant in five seconds, carving a fire line that’s 60 feet wide and a quarter-mile long through a blaze, according to the system’s manufacturer.

To aid displaced troops, military retirees and their families in evacuated areas, the Virginia-based Defense Health Agency also moved to enact emergency prescription refill procedures. The temporary rules will allow more than 300,000 beneficiaries in San Diego and Santa Barbara counties to obtain prescribed medications without referrals.

Navy set to comb seabed for crashed plane

TOKYO — The U.S. Navy says it will deploy deep-water salvage experts to search for a transport aircraft that crashed in the western Pacific last month, killing three sailors.

The C-2A “Greyhound” aircraft was traveling to the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan when it crashed the day before Thanksgiving in the Philippine Sea. Eight people were rescued.

The plane’s last position on the surface is known but the depth of the water exceeds 16,000 feet.

A salvage team will depart Japan in the coming days to deploy a pinger locator to try to pick up the aircraft’s emergency location signal. If successful, the Navy says additional assets will be deployed to recover the aircraft and the fallen sailors.

Equipment failure halts destroyer’s sea trials

USS Michael Monsoor returns under own power

Associated Press

BATH, Maine — The second stealthy destroyer being built for the U.S. Navy cut short its first sea trials because an equipment failure prevented testing of propulsion and electrical systems under full power, officials said Friday.

The problem during builder trials was discovered Tuesday, a day after the future USS Michael Monsoor left Bath Iron Works, the Navy said.

The Monsoor returned to the shipyard under its own power Thursday and will re-

turn to sea after the problem is fixed, the Navy said. The repairs are not expected to impact the ship’s delivery in March.

The first-in-class Zumwalt experienced propulsion problems — with seawater leaking into the system — that have been repaired.

The Monsoor’s problem was electrical in nature, with the loss of an induction coil causing the failure of another system. The shipbuilder decided it would be more efficient to make the fix at the yard.

The third and final ship in the class is the Lyndon B. Johnson. It’s also under construction at Bath Iron Works.

Military funding study of falcons to build drone killer

Bloomberg

Throughout history, humans have employed falcons as lethal hunters of other animals. Now those raptors are being sent after drones.

It turns out that many of the skills feathered predators use to find a tasty lunch can be applied to the developing field of drone defense. A U.S. Air Force-funded study by zoology researchers at Oxford University suggests that the means by which a peregrine falcon tracks its quarry could be effective in defending against drones that threaten troops, police or airports.

The researchers fitted the falcons with miniature video cameras and GPS receivers to track their angles and methods of attack on other birds, or on bait being towed through the air by a drone. In a paper published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S., the falcons’ approach to intercepting their targets aligned closely with the rules of proportional navigation, a guidance system used by visually directed missiles.

The principle is such that a missile — or a falcon on the hunt — will reach a target as long as its line of sight remains unobstructed while it closes in. The earliest AIM-9 Sidewinder heat-seeking missiles, dating to the 1950s, used this technique with a rotating mirror to “see” the target.

A key difference, however, is that falcons adjust their angle of attack to compensate for their slower speeds — which is where drones come in. The work, the researchers suggested, could be applied to the development of small, visually guided drones that can disable other drones.

“We think that the finer details of how peregrines operate could certainly find application in small drones designed to remove other drones from protected airspace,” Professor Graham Taylor, the principal investigator, wrote in an email. The research involved data from 55 attack flights in Wales with falconers and a certified drone operator.

For soldiers on the battlefield and even law enforcement at home, the threat of drone attack

has grown as every day passes — as has a desire for a working defense. In July, the Pentagon authorized 133 U.S. military installations to shoot down private or commercial drones that threaten their airspace. That move followed a decision earlier this year to ban aerial drones near these facilities.

Cheap, small drones have become a handy weapon for militants, with the Defense Department working to field new technology and techniques to protect troops and equipment. To date, the Pentagon has explored a variety of methods to deter hostile drones. These range from the most basic — machine gun fire — to more sophisticated approaches including lasers, frequency jamming to render them inoperable and more advanced techniques to actually gain control of the drones.

The application to drone defense “emerged naturally through the course of the study” given research by several police forces to eliminate drones using trained raptors, the authors said. Police in the Netherlands, for example, have

studied whether eagles can be an effective means to capture and disable small drones.

“The problem with this approach is that raptors are only motivated to chase targets if they are hungry or defending a territory, and spinning rotor blades pose as much of a threat to a birds’ talons as they do to our own fingers,” Taylor wrote in an email. “Keeping a defense team of hungry raptors on call isn’t practical, and flying them at large multi-rotors isn’t ethical.” (The Air Force didn’t immediately return a request for comment)

Taylor called the study’s findings “an elegant convergence” of raptor behavior and missile guidance law, “which reflects how natural selection and engineering design are constrained similarly by maths and physics. It’s also quite beautiful how well the model fits the data, and thrilling for me as a mathematically minded biologist to see how the flight trajectories of real birds engaged in real attacks emerge from the equations that ultimately govern them.”

Ex-aide says lawmaker offered her \$5 million to carry his child

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A former aide to Republican Rep. Trent Franks has told The Associated Press the congressman repeatedly pressed her to carry his child, at one point offering her \$5 million to act as a surrogate mother.

The eight-term lawmaker abruptly resigned Friday, bowing to an ultimatum from House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis. Ryan told Franks that he would refer the allegations to the Ethics Committee and urged him to step aside.

The former staffer said the Arizona congressman asked at least four times if she'd be willing to act as a surrogate in exchange for money. Franks, in his statement announcing his resignation, said he and his

wife, who have struggled with infertility, have twins who were carried through surrogacy.

The former aide said the conversations took place in private, sometimes in the congressman's car, and that she repeatedly told him she wasn't interested. She said she never filed a formal complaint because until recently she didn't know where to go, but that his behavior had made her feel uncomfortable.

The Associated Press verified the identity of the staffer and confirmed that she worked in Franks' office. She asked that her name be withheld out of concern for her privacy.

"During my time there, I was asked a few times to look over a 'contract' to carry his child, and if I would conceive his child, I

would be given \$5 million," she said, adding that she refused to look over the contract and has never seen a copy.

The woman said the requests shocked her, and made her feel afraid that if she didn't agree, she would face professional consequences. She said she spoke to another aide in the office, who also had been approached about surrogacy.

The aide cited the surrogacy requests as "a main reason" for leaving the office, adding that she felt retaliated against after turning down the congressman, ignored by Franks and not given many assignments.

A spokesman for Franks would not comment on whether the congressman offered aides money in exchange to act as surrogates.

President pushes for Moore win in Alabama

Associated Press

PENSACOLA, Fla. — President Donald Trump is trying to push embattled GOP Senate candidate Roy Moore across the finish line in Tuesday's election in Alabama by contending the Democratic nominee would oppose "what we must do" for the nation.

Trump, in a tweet early Saturday, hours after boosting Moore's campaign during a Florida rally, framed the race as a referendum on his efforts to reshape the country and said Democrat Doug Jones would work in lockstep with his party's leaders on Capitol Hill to oppose the Trump agenda.

With Moore denying allegations of sexual misconduct that have arisen late in the campaign, Trump basked in what he called "a big contingent of very enthusiastic Roy Moore fans" at the Friday night event in Pensacola, the Florida Panhandle city near the state line with Alabama.

In a rally cry to Alabama voters, the president tweeted that "we can't have" a liberal in the mold of Sen. Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., and Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., holding the seat in a Senate where the GOPs hold a slim 52-48 edge.

"Need your vote to Make America Great Again! Jones will always vote against what we must do for our Country," Trump wrote.

At the campaign-style event in Pensacola, Trump claimed Jones was the Democratic leaders' "total puppet and everybody knows it."

Trump's wide-ranging speech also touched on the immigration system and the nation's economic performance since he took office. As Trump spoke about Moore, the Republican candidate tweeted Trump's comments to his own followers.

Snow tapers off in normally sunny Deep South

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Snowfall shrouding much of the Deep South began tapering off early Saturday, but freezing temperatures kept roads slick throughout the region and airplanes grounded at the world's busiest airport.

Forecasters warned that moisture on the roadways could freeze and cause black ice to form. The National Weather Service said that while snow flurries would end by midday in areas including metro Atlanta, temperatures at or below freezing could cause transparent layers of thin ice to form on bridges and other elevated roadways.

The frigid temperatures behind a cold front combined with moisture off the Gulf of Mexico to bring unusual wintry weather to parts of the South. Officials at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, which holds the world record for annual number of passengers, said delays and cancellations were expected.

"Passengers should monitor their airline's media channels for flight info," the airport said via Twitter. Airport spokesman Reese McCranie said more than 400 flights were canceled Saturday morning.

Not everyone was anxious to flee, though. Members of a central Florida family found their way to Atlanta specifically to witness the white drifts.

"It's beautiful," said Tim Moss, while his two sons and wife threw snowballs at each other near a McDonald's parking lot early Saturday. He said the family — including his mother — made a spontaneous decision late Friday to leave 80-degree weather in Florida and drive seven hours to see snow for the first time.

"A lot of people who live here are staying in," said Moss, 46. "They don't want to get out in it. But we want to get out and run around in it."

The snowstorms knocked out electricity to thousands across the South. More than 382,000 homes and businesses were still

without electricity Saturday in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Southern Pine Electric Cooperative, which had nearly 19,000 customers without power Friday in south Mississippi, said restoration could take several days.

Snowfall and icy roads in North Carolina on Friday closed government offices and schools, sent cars sliding off the road and altered the governor's travel plans.

Forecasters said heavy snow was falling in the mountainous western part of the state, with up to 6 inches likely in areas including Asheville. A winter storm warning was in effect through Saturday morning for western counties.

Accumulations of 6 inches were reported in Mississippi and northern Georgia, while at least 5 inches fell in Alabama.

Rare snow flurries were spotted in New Orleans.

The weather band also brought a rare snowfall to parts of South Texas.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Audit: Workers took paid leave, didn't vote

KY FRANKFORT — An audit has found more than 1,100 public employees claimed leave to vote in Kentucky elections but did not cast a ballot.

State Auditor Mike Harmon said in a statement that his office reviewed the use of election leave during the 2015 general election and the 2016 primary election. The audit found that 1,329 employees claimed four hours of paid election leave but were not entitled to it because they weren't registered to vote, did not cast a ballot or were on another form of leave.

Harmon called the findings "troubling" and said the report will be sent to the Executive Branch Ethics Commission and the Personnel Cabinet for further investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Ice cream shop's logo gets icy reception

NJ MONTCLAIR — A New Jersey ice cream shop is changing its logo of a cartoon cow with a pronounced derriere after the play on words drew complaints that it was sexist.

Montclair studio and gallery owner Amy Tingle accused Dairy Air Ice Cream of sexualizing women to sell ice cream. The logo shows a female cow with her rear exposed eating ice cream.

The Record reported the Creativity Caravan owner wrote in an open letter to the community that she was "repulsed and offended."

The store's manager, Natalie DeRosa, wrote on Facebook that Dairy Air Ice Cream takes the complaints seriously and is working "to change the cow to be more fun and less sexy."

Santa makes 'naughty' comment to shopper

ME BANGOR — The police in Bangor said they've gotten a complaint about a department store "bad Santa" who apparently wasn't working there.

Police posted on Facebook on Thursday that a woman walking around the store with her daughter recently was approached by a man dressed as Santa, who handed out a candy cane.

A short time later, they ran into him again and he said, "Good girls get candy, naughty girls get jewelry."

The woman complained to a store manager but was told they didn't have a Santa on the payroll or in the store. They looked around and couldn't find him.

Judge: State can't issue birth certificates

AR LITTLE ROCK — An Arkansas judge has halted the state from issuing new birth certificates until officials are able to comply with a U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the state's birth certificate law illegally favors heterosexual parents.

Pulaski County Circuit Judge Tim Fox on Friday set aside his orders requiring the state and three same-sex couples go into mediation on how to fix the state law to comply with the U.S. high court's order. Attorney General Leslie Rutledge last week asked the state Supreme Court to stay or lift Fox's mediation order.

Rutledge told the court that both sides had agreed on an order that Fox rejected.

Fox said in his order he was hopeful that the governor could fix the law by executive action.

Messy falcons move to state capitol building

NV CARSON CITY — A pair of Peregrine falcons has moved into the east side of the Nevada Capitol building causing headaches for staff.

The Nevada Appeal reported that while the falcons have scared off problematic pigeons in the month since they arrived, their messy eating has created a new problem.

According to staff, the falcons have littered the grounds with body parts and feathers of their prey.

Legislative Counsel Bureau Director Rick Combs and staff are hoping the falcons will move out on their own once they've culled their food source.

Man who scammed stores pleads guilty

CT BRIDGEPORT — A couple who told police that they scammed a dozen Home Depot stores in Connecticut to pay for their wedding and move out of his parents' house will have to postpone their nuptials.

The Connecticut Post reported that Kenneth Matthews, 33, of Bridgeport, pleaded guilty Thursday to first-degree larceny and retail theft. He faces three years in prison and restitution of \$30,000 at sentencing on Jan. 26. His fiancée is expected to plead guilty to misdemeanor charges.

Prosecutors said the couple would take a valuable item from the sales floor and bring it to the return counter along with an old receipt for the same product to get store credit. They then used the store credit to purchase the same item and pawn it for cash, then use the receipt to repeat the scam.

Sheriff: 'Grinch' returns in new round of thefts

MS ST. ANDREWS — Authorities said a man convicted of stealing packages delivered to homes before Christmas two years ago has done it again.

News outlets reported Jackson County Sheriff Mike Ezell said in a release that Jason Robert Phillips, 34, was arrested Thursday and is accused by authorities of being "a Grinch."

Ezell said Phillips is suspected of stealing packages delivered to homes in St. Andrews and was allegedly filmed by a surveillance camera.

Phillips was convicted in 2016 for stealing packages in December 2015.

He's charged with four counts of petit larceny and possession of a controlled substance and drug paraphernalia.

2 injured when rear wheels fly off bus

FL BOYNTON BEACH — Two wheels flew off a public transportation bus as it was traveling on Interstate 95, causing a five-vehicle crash that injured two people.

The Florida Highway Patrol said the Palm Tran bus was traveling north Thursday when two rear tires flew off the bus. Video shows the driver trying to maintain control of the bus before hitting a vehicle and crashing into the guardrail and light post.

Another video captured the wheel flying off the bus and bouncing over the median. It hit the hood of a pickup truck.

Palm Tran Executive Director Clinton Forbes told the Sun Sentinel there are indications a third-party contractor failed to torque two rear tires on the bus.

From wire reports

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Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Brawls, dirty hits marring NFL games

Associated Press

Maybe the public address announcer at NFL stadiums is a job for Michael Buffer these days.

You know: "Let's get ready to rumble!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Unfortunately, what goes on inside the boxing ring might be safer than what we saw the last few weeks on the football field.

Brawls. Dirty hits. Malicious moves. Targeting. Launching.

Nauseating.

"The unnecessary stuff is over the top," says Broncos linebacker Shaq Barrett, who was not involved in any of the incidents and, presumably, is a neutral observer. "We should try to get that out of the game."

Leagues at all levels have spent more than a decade seeking enhanced player safety. Most of the time, those initiatives involved rules changes.

In the NFL, mostly they have worked. Not so much lately.

Troy Vincent, a terrific defensive back in his playing days and now the overseer of football operations for the league, promises that the NFL will look

at any adjustments that will diminish the awfulness seen in recent weeks.

"We have had clear directives from the competition committee," Vincent says. "They asked us and the players to remove some of the helmet-to-helmet hits that we have seen, as well as some of the blindside blocks and other types of disparaging techniques and behaviors on the field. We have clear directive that this is not something that should be progressive, but that we strongly consider removing a player that is using these techniques that we want out of our game immediately."

Yet the prohibited keeps happening and, it seems, to a higher degree.

"You're always talking about keeping the poise and understanding the big picture is winning the game," Saints coach Sean Payton says. "Part of that is mental toughness. You don't have to respond and be macho. So many times I hear, 'I'm not going to be punked,' and I get that. And yet, listen, there's a discipline element that you're preaching as coaches. You're

trying to make them understand the big picture, which is winning, and all these side things that can take you down a path contrary to the goal."

While fans of specific teams will take umbrage at one of their guys getting suspended — that's a basic principle of fandom, that your team can't be wrong — more objective observers recognize the danger zone these incidents occur in.

Two of the most insightful voices in this area, former NFL executive Pat Kirwan and former pro quarterback Jim Miller, discussed the ugliness of what we just saw during their SiriusXM NFL Radio program this week. They brought up a point worth pondering: Why aren't players being tossed when they go so far across the line of fair play?

Miller: "When are the officials going to be willing to eject players?"

Kirwan: "They should have by now. They think throwing flags is going to stop it. I quote Ray Lewis, we are talking about a receiver coming over the middle and he did a number

on the guy. I asked Ray: 'What was going through your mind?'

"Look, I've got the middle in our zone drop. Anyone who is coming in there, here comes the receiver, at no time in my life did I ever think of the rule book and let him in there with the ball."

Miller: "I go back to that (2015 Steelers-Bengals) playoff game, that's what lit the fuse, that's what got the party started. And it was payback (Monday night). The Bengals felt they were wronged by the officials. (They think) if they are not going to police it, boys, we are going to police it. They got one of ours, we're going to get one of theirs."

"At what point will the officials eject?"

Kirwan: "As soon as the head of officials tells them if you don't eject, we are going to suspend (an official). You've got to get this under control. Or the league office stops the game like they should, and say 'He's out now.' Why can't they eject from New York?"

"You've got to control it."

Saints' Payton still fuming over officiating in loss

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Saints coach Sean Payton had a full night and morning to reflect on and review how much of an effect officiating really had on New Orleans' narrow loss to Atlanta.

By Friday afternoon, it sounded like the coach had decided that his initial concerns were warranted, and that it's a problem the league should address.

"The officiating was extremely poor," Payton said in a conference call. "Inconsistent would be a great way to put it. I thought that had a lot to do with the way this game ended."

The way the game ended was costly for the Saints.

New Orleans (9-4) missed an opportunity to strengthen its

hold on first place in the NFC South, which now has three teams within a game of one another; Carolina (8-4) sits in second place and Atlanta (8-5) in third. The Saints also lost several players to injury during Thursday night's 20-17 loss, but Payton seemed most concerned by the penalty flags that were thrown against his team — or weren't thrown against the Falcons.

Payton said he "went through every one of 'em — and the ones that weren't called. Too many inconsistencies."

The Saints were penalized 11 times for 87 yards, and the Falcons gained nine first downs by penalty.

Payton would not address all of the calls he disagreed with, but he did single out a rough-

ing-the-passer call on defensive lineman Sheldon Rankins against Matt Ryan. The penalty came at the end of a third-down incompleting, keeping alive a drive that ended with Atlanta's first touchdown.

The officiating "has been a problem all year and it's something that's going to have to be addressed from a leadership standpoint at the top in our league office."

"It's frustrating when you have a game, instead of it being decided on the field like it's supposed to, you have a crew make so many mistakes in one event."

After Matt Bryant's 52-yard goal gave Atlanta a 20-17 lead with 3:49 left, Drew Brees drove New Orleans into position for a tying field goal or winning touchdown.

But linebacker Deion Jones made a leaping interception of a Brees pass in the end zone with 1:25 left.

The Saints lost their last chance to get the ball back when an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on Payton — who had angrily rushed onto the field to communicate with an official — gave the Falcons a first down that enabled them to run out the clock.

Payton said after the game that he was trying to call a timeout when one of the officials "asked me again."

"I said, 'I've already called the timeout,'" Payton said. "I probably said it with a little more oomph or vigor than I was supposed to, but I had enough. I've got to be smarter than that."

College basketball roundup

No. 16 Arizona State holds off St. John's

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Romello White scored 22 points and No. 16 Arizona State held off St. John's 82-70 on Friday night in the opener of the Basketball Hall of Fame Classic tripleheader at Staples Center.

Shannon Evans II added 18 points for the Sun Devils (8-0), off to their best start since 1980-81.

St. John's rallied from a 13-point deficit early in the second half to trail 71-70 on a layup by Shamorie Ponds after he stole the ball from White.

After Remy Martin missed a layup for the Sun Devils, Bryan Trimble Jr. threw the ball away near the Red Storm's bench and they never got any closer.

Ponds scored 19 points for the Red Storm (8-2), who had their three-game winning streak ended.

No. 20 TCU 84, No. 22 Nevada 80: At Los Angeles, Jaylen Fisher scored 20 points and the Horned Frogs extended the nation's-best winning streak to 15 games.

TCU (10-0) never trailed

playing the last game of a tripleheader in front of a sparse late-night crowd at Staples Center. Kenrich Williams added 16 points and 11 rebounds, his 11th double-double during the streak.

Cody Martin had 27 points and 11 rebounds for the Wolf Pack (8-2). Jordan Caroline added 21 points and 10 rebounds. Martin's twin brother, Caleb, had 17 points.

Kendall Stephens hit a three-pointer to leave Nevada trailing 83-80 with 8 seconds left.

Fisher got fouled and made one free throw. He then stole the ball from Cody Martin as time expired.

Oklahoma 85, No. 25 Southern California 83: Trae Young had 29 points and nine assists for in the Hall of Fame Basketball Classic tripleheader in Los Angeles.

Young, a freshman who leads the nation in scoring, topped 28 points for the sixth straight game.

Christian James added 19 points, tying his career-high with five three-pointers, and

Brady Manek had 15 points for the Sooners (7-1), who won their fifth in a row.

Elijah Stewart led five players in double figures with 23 points for the Trojans (4-3), who never led in losing their third straight. Chimezie Metu had 13 points and 11 rebounds.

Oklahoma missed its last four free-throw attempts, including two by Young.

UC Riverside 67, Air Force 48: Dikymbe Martin knocked down all four of his three-pointers and scored a career-high 22 points and Menno Dijkstra added career highs of 12 points and 12 rebounds as the host Highlanders snapped a four-game skid with a victory over the Falcons.

Chance Murray finished with 15 points, six rebounds, four assists and three steals for UC Riverside (3-6), which shot 53 percent (25-for-47) from the floor.

Ryan Swan scored a career-high 16 points on 6-for-10 shooting for the Falcons (5-5), while Trevor Lyons hit three shots from beyond the arc and

scored 14.

Air Force never found the range on offense. The Falcons made just 17 of 56 (30 percent) from the floor, including 5 of 27 (18.5 percent) from long range, and nine of 17 free throws (53 percent).

Wake Forest 109, Army 80: Doral Moore scored a career-high 20 points and added 11 rebounds, and the host Demon Deacons beat the Black Knights.

Keyshawn Woods added 22 points, Brandon Childress finished with a career-best 17 and Mitchell Wilbekin's 17 points matched a career high. Wake Forest (6-4) won its fifth straight, matching its longest winning streak in four seasons under Danny Manning.

Wake Forest used a 30-6 run in which it scored 14 straight points in about 90 seconds to break the game open, after Army closed to 73-68 midway through the second half on Alex King's free throw.

Jordan Fox had 21 points, and Matthew Wilson and King added 14 each for Army (5-4).

Japanese star Ohtani picks surprise destination: Angels

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Shohei Ohtani has decided he's on the side of the Angels.

The Japanese two-way star announced Friday he will sign with the Los Angeles Angels, ending the sweepstakes surrounding his move to the majors in a surprising destination.

Ohtani turned down interest from every other big-league club to join two-time MVP Mike Trout and slugger Albert Pujols with the Angels, who are coming off their second consecutive losing season and haven't won a playoff game since 2009.

But the Angels' combination of a promising core and a beautiful West Coast location clearly appealed to the 23-year-old Ohtani, who has confounded

baseball experts at almost every step of his move to North America as one of the most coveted free agents in years.

Ohtani's agent, Nez Balelo, issued a statement Friday announcing the decision. Balelo said the 2016 Japanese MVP "felt a true bond with the Angels. He sees this as the best environment to develop and reach the next level and attain his career goals."

After his unusual courtship, Ohtani will attempt to chart an even more unique career path as the majors' first regular two-way player in several decades. Ohtani already has drawn numerous comparisons to Babe Ruth, who excelled as a hitter and a pitcher early in his Hall of Fame career.

Ohtani is expected to be both

a starting pitcher and a left-handed designated hitter for the Angels, who intend to give him ample playing time in both roles.

Many baseball observers have long assumed Ohtani would choose a higher-profile franchise such as the Yankees or Dodgers, who would have both welcomed him into their rotation and lineup. He received serious attention from Seattle and Texas, who both could have given him more money than the Angels.

Ohtani listened to final pitches from several teams in Los Angeles earlier this week before making his choice. The Angels play about 28 miles from downtown LA in laid-back Orange County, where most of the Angels live in coast-

al Newport Beach and enjoy a comfortable, warm-weather lifestyle with ample big-market media attention, but without the withering scrutiny of other top destinations.

But Angels general manager Billy Eppler is very serious about winning, and he has spent several years scouting Ohtani, ever since his previous job with the Yankees.

"We are honored Shohei Ohtani has decided to join the Angels organization," the franchise said in a brief statement. "We felt a unique connectivity with him throughout the process and are excited he will become an Angel. This is a special time for Angels fans."

Ohtani will be formally introduced at a news conference later in the month.

NBA roundup

Pacers end Cavaliers' 13-game streak

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Victor Oladipo had 33 points and eight rebounds and the Indiana Pacers beat Cleveland 106-102 on Friday night to end the Cavaliers' winning streak at 13 games.

Indiana has won three straight, nine of 12 and is the first team to beat Cleveland twice this season.

LeBron James had 29 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for Cleveland, and Kevin Love added 20 points. The Cavs lost for the first time since Nov. 9 at Houston. They had won seven straight on the road.

The Pacers used an 11-2 run late in the third quarter to retake the lead.

Cleveland trailed 93-86 with 9:43 to play and fought fiercely to extend the streak. The Cavs got as close as 96-95 on J.R. Smith's three-pointer with 2:48 left.

But Bojan Bogdanovic answered with a three, Oladipo made one of two free throws and hit down another three to extend the lead to 103-97 with 1:01 left.

Warriors 102, Pistons 98: Kevin Durant scored 13 of his 36 points in the third quarter and Golden State beat Detroit to complete an undefeated road trip.

Detroit had a chance to tie it in the final seconds, but Reggie Jackson's wild drive to the basket did not lead to a good shot, and Klay Thompson made two free throws with 5.3 seconds left for the final margin.

Spurs 105, Celtics 102: Manu Ginobili hit a three-pointer with 5 seconds remaining and host San Antonio overcame Kyrie Irving's 36-point effort to snap Boston's four-game winning streak.

Ginobili set up the winning basket by sneaking into the paint for an offensive rebound

with 25 seconds left.

Bucks 109, Mavericks 102: Khris Middleton scored 12 of his 31 points in the final 4:38 and Giannis Antetokounmpo had 27 points and 11 rebounds in Milwaukee's win over visiting Dallas.

Eric Bledsoe added 24 points for the Bucks. They erased an 11-point deficit late in the third quarter to pick up their fifth victory in six games.

Kings 116, Pelicans 109 (OT): Zach Randolph scored a season-high 35 points, Buddy Hield led a fourth-quarter rally against his former team and Sacramento beat host New Orleans.

Randolph made two of his career-high five three-pointers in overtime and added 13 rebounds.

Bulls 119, Hornets 111 (OT): Rookie Lauri Markkanen had 24 points and 12 rebounds and visiting Chicago beat Char-

lotte to snap a 10-game losing streak.

Markkanen made half of Chicago's six three-pointers, and the Bulls (4-20) held on in a back-and-forth game that featured 17 lead changes and 20 ties.

Raptors 116, Grizzlies 107: DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points, Serge Ibaka matched his season high with 21 and Toronto pulled away in the fourth quarter to beat host Memphis.

Tyreke Evans led the Grizzlies with 27 points, and Marc Gasol had 20. Memphis lost for the 13th time in its last 14.

Nuggets 103, Magic 89: Kenneth Faried scored 20 points as visiting Denver beat Orlando.

After scoring only 14 points in the first quarter, the Nuggets (14-11) dominated the rest of the game, shooting 61 percent (28-for-46) in the second and third quarters.

NHL roundup

Panarin sets up 5 goals to help Blue Jackets top Devils

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — Artemi Panarin had five primary assists, setting up the Columbus Blue Jackets for a 5-3 victory over the New Jersey Devils on Friday night and a split of their home-and-home series.

Pierre-Luc Dubois, Lukas Sedlak, Scott Harrington, Alexander Wennberg and Zach Werenski scored for Columbus. Sergei Bobrovsky made 21 saves.

After losing to the Devils 4-1 in Columbus on Tuesday, the Blue Jackets gained a measure of revenge while also snapping a two-game skid.

The five assists for Panarin tied a Columbus record set by Espen Knutsen against Calgary on March 24, 2001.

Brian Boyle, Marcus Johans-

son and Blake Coleman had the New Jersey goals. Cory Schneider stopped 23 shots.

Golden Knights 4, Predators 3 (SO): Malcolm Subban made a career-high 41 saves — including one against his older brother — and then denied all six shootout attempts to lead visiting Vegas over star defenseman P.K. Subban and Nashville.

Reilly Smith scored the only goal of a six-round shootout for the Golden Knights. William Karlsson, James Neal and Erik Haula scored in regulation to help Vegas win its third straight game.

Nate Schmidt had two assists, and Haula forced overtime when he scored with 40 seconds left in the third period after the Golden Knights pulled Malcolm Subban from the net

for an extra attacker.

Capitals 4, Rangers 2: Matt Niskanen scored the tiebreaking goal with 3:22 remaining and host Washington beat New York to continue its climb up the Metropolitan Division standings.

Braden Holtby made 27 saves for the Capitals, who have won four in a row and seven of eight. Jay Beagle scored 14 seconds in, Nicklas Backstrom had a goal in a second consecutive game after a long drought and Tom Wilson added an insurance goal with 1:32 left.

Wilson also assisted on the winner by Niskanen.

Blackhawks 3, Sabres 2 (OT): Gustav Forsling scored on a screened shot from the blue line with 4.9 seconds left in overtime, and host Chicago rallied past Buffalo to snap a

five-game losing streak.

Forsling, who had two assists in regulation, fired a low drive between Robin Lehner's pads with Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen blocking the goalie's view.

Sabres star Jack Eichel failed to score on a penalty shot at 1:31 of overtime when Corey Crawford dropped and made a stick save. The attempt was awarded after Forsling held and hooked Eichel from behind as he broke in.

Wild 3, Ducks 2 (OT): Matt Dumba scored 3:43 into overtime to give visiting Minnesota a win over Anaheim.

Jason Zucker and Zack Mitchell also scored for the Wild. Devan Dubnyk stopped 26 shots.