

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, December 16, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

8K firefighters take on California blaze

Associated Press

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The massive wildfire that California has been battling since early December has now ballooned into the third-largest in the state's history, burning a record amount of acreage, officials said Saturday.

Steve Concialdi of the Orange County Fire Authority said the Thomas Fire, which started Dec. 4 in Santa Paula, has now burned 259,000 acres. That exceeds the devastating Rim Fire in 2013 by 2,000 acres.

"As of this morning, we're at 259,000 acres and still grow-

ing," Concialdi said.

The region has had "red flag" — or hot, dry and windy — conditions for an unprecedented 13 consecutive days.

The National Weather Service said those conditions would last at least through Saturday evening, with winds gusting to 40 mph in the Santa Barbara County mountains where the fire is burning.

Everything about the fire was massive, from a footprint larger than that of many cities to the sheer scale of destruction that cremated entire neighborhoods or the legions attacking it: about 8,300 firefighters from

nearly a dozen states, aided by 78 bulldozers and 29 helicopters that were dropping thousands of gallons of water onto fires and hot spots.

Firefighting costs were approaching \$89 million.

The Thomas Fire surging through Ventura and Santa Barbara counties already has burned more than 1,000 buildings, including well over 750 homes. Another 18,000 buildings are still in jeopardy, including mansions in the wealthy enclave of Montecito. Some 315 fire engines are stationed in and around homes in Montecito and Santa Barbara, along

with "hand crews" armed with equipment like chain saws and drop torches. Another 200 fire engines are on standby.

Concialdi said authorities are hoping to have the blaze contained by Jan. 7.

Santa Barbara has had only a tiny amount of rain since Oct. 1, the start of the new water year, and is more than 3 inches below normal to date.

Another focus of firefighting was on the eastern flank in canyons where a state firefighter was killed Thursday near Fillmore.

Mattis: N. Korea short of posing imminent threat to US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — North Korea's latest missile test, which U.S. experts say indicated an increasing technological sophistication, did not demonstrate an imminent threat of nuclear attack on the U.S., Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Friday.

"No, not yet," Mattis said when a reporter asked whether the Nov. 29 test indicated a full capability to strike the U.S.

"It has not yet shown to be a capable threat against us right now," Mattis added. His remark suggested he believes the Trump administration has additional time to pursue diplomacy before resorting to military options for eliminating the North's nuclear arsenal.

"We're still doing the forensic analysis," he added, apparently referring to intelligence agencies' study of imagery of the flight of the missile and its payload, which presumably included a mock warhead. The

Leader Kim unmoved by global opposition

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — North Korea's friends and enemies joined forces Friday in opposing its determination to be recognized as a nuclear weapons state and calling on leader Kim Jong Un to negotiate the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula — but the North gave no sign of budging on its nuclear ambitions.

In a very rare appearance by a North Korean at the U.N. Security Council, Ambassador Ja Song Nam told a ministerial meeting that the country's possession of nuclear weapons was "an inevitable self-defensive measure" to defend the country against "the U.S. nuclear threat and blackmail."

Ja never mentioned the possibility of talks.

Instead, he called the council meeting "a desperate measure plotted by the U.S. being terrified by the incredible might of our republic that has successfully achieved the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force."

He pointed to the Nov. 29 launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile that experts say could reach the U.S. mainland.

South Korea's Vice Foreign Minister Cho Hyun told the council that North Korea is "in the final stages of nuclear weaponization" and warned that if it can put a nuclear warhead onto an intercontinental ballistic missile, "it will fundamentally alter the security landscape in the region and beyond."

Trump administration has not publicly disclosed what it knows about what happened to the missile's re-entry vehicle, which detaches from the missile body during flight and is designed to protect warheads

from heat created by re-entry into the Earth's atmosphere.

Shortly after the November test, Mattis said the missile flew higher than any previous North Korean test, and that it represented a continued effort

to build a missile capable of threatening the U.S. Since then, Mattis has said little about it publicly, and the administration has sent mixed messages about its willingness to begin talks with North Korea.

Mattis warns of unsafe flights by Russian military

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is warning against dangerous flights by Russian fighter jets over what is considered a safe zone in Syria, questioning if recent close calls were mistakes or deliberate.

Mattis told Pentagon reporters Friday that the U.S. and Russia are still using a phone line to coordinate flight movements over crowded Syrian skies as the U.S.-led coalition goes after remaining Islamic State militants.

Two Russian Su-25 fighters flew through an unofficial line separating Russian and American air forces in eastern Syria on Wednesday coming dangerously close to U.S. aircraft.

U.S. Air Force F-22 fighter jets launched warning flares in response.

Man gets 18 months for Fort Hood threats

WACO, Texas — An ex-soldier from Texas has been sentenced to 18 months in federal prison for threatening to go on a shooting rampage at Fort Hood.

Prosecutors said a judge in Waco sentenced Thomas Anthony Chestnut Jr., 29, on Dec. 8. In September, a jury found him guilty of threatening a uniformed servicemember and using interstate communications to threaten injury.

Trial evidence showed Chestnut called Fort Hood in February saying he was a former soldier wrongly accused of a crime. He said he'd shoot soldiers at the Army post if he didn't receive back pay.

Sunken World War II sub found off of Oahu

HONOLULU — A wreck-hunting organization located a sunken World War II submarine off the coast of Oahu.

STEP Ventures found the USS S-28, which sank in 1944 with 49 crewmembers aboard during training, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported Thursday.

The sub was found in 8,700 feet of water.

From The Associated Press

Navy reinstates officer fired over anti-war statements

The (Norfolk, Va.) Virginian-Pilot

A naval officer who was investigated for hate group activity and was separated from the service in 2009 over anti-war statements has been reinstated to active duty after an administrative board ruled that the Navy erred in handling his case, according to federal court records.

Cmdr. John Sharpe, a former lieutenant commander and public affairs officer assigned to the aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson, was reinstated in February 2016 by the Board for Correction of Naval Records, according to personnel records.

The records — including the board's review of the case — were made public as part of a 2015 lawsuit seeking back pay and other relief filed in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims. Sharpe returned to active duty in February 2017 and worked at the Navy Public Affairs Support Element in Norfolk, Va., until April 6. Since May 30, he has reported to the Office of the Chief of Naval Information at the Pentagon and is a liaison at the Fort Meade, Md.-based Defense Media Activity, planning, coordinating and evaluating Navy productions, including photos, videos, print and graphics, CHINFO director of media operations Cmdr. Bill Speaks said Friday.

Sharpe's reinstatement hinged largely on an assertion that he was improperly denied his right to trial by court-martial by Vinson commanding officer Capt. Walter "Ted" Carter Jr. after Sharpe was presented with charges that statements he made in a 2006 internet interview and in a book that he co-edited were contemptuous toward then-President George W. Bush. Sharpe instead was ordered to nonjudicial punishment, or captain's mast, after

Carter invoked the "vessel exception" — a military law that allows leadership to deny servicemembers' right to demand a court-martial, provided they are attached to or embarked on a vessel.

Sharpe, a 1993 U.S. Naval Academy graduate and former submarine officer, was assigned to the Vinson in June 2006 while it was undergoing its refueling and complex overhaul in Newport News. He was removed in March 2007 and was reassigned a month later to Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic. Following a captain's mast in May 2007, Sharpe was made to show cause for retention before a board of inquiry. That three-panel board recommended Sharpe be discharged. He was separated Sept. 30, 2009.

Sharpe told *The Virginian-Pilot* in 2007 that he founded IHS Press, a Norfolk-based publisher of Catholic titles, and the now-defunct internet forum Legion of St. Louis. Both gained the notice of the Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, which called the organizations "two of the most nakedly anti-Semitic organizations in the entire radical traditionalist Catholic pantheon." At the time, Sharpe told *The Pilot* that neither group was anti-Semitic nor affiliated with supremacist groups.

A Naval Criminal Investigative Service investigation initiated in March 2007 after a journalist asked about the assertion found that Sharpe had "no substantive links" to "unlawful extremist groups," according to court documents. But, Sharpe's actions previously had caught the attention of the Navy. In 2004 and 2005, while stationed at the Pentagon, Sharpe co-edited, under the name J. Forrest Sharpe, a two-volume "Neo-Conned" anthology that criticized the Iraq

war. After a Navy investigator declined to take or recommend any action, Sharpe received a letter of caution as a corrective measure from his supervisor, Navy Chief of Information Rear Adm. T. L. McCreary, who reminded him "to exercise greater care" performing his duties. He also was told he could continue to promote and sell the books, provided he complied with regulations and did not associate his official duties with his private activities.

A preview to one of the articles in those books, in which Sharpe accused the Bush administration of hypocrisy in its dealings with the United Nations over the Iraq war, later formed the basis for one of the two charges for which he later was discharged, court documents show.

In its decision to reinstate Sharpe — which includes restoring and clearing his record — the board relied on a 1997 ruling by the United States Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces that says the operational status of a ship and the servicemember's relationship to it are relevant in whether the vessel exception may be applied. The Vinson was not operational while it was in the yards and Sharpe spent most of his time working from a Newport News office building while assigned to the ship, the board said. It also noted that 10 weeks passed between when Sharpe was removed from his assignment to the carrier and his captain's mast, which was also held ashore.

As a result of his reinstatement, Sharpe was promoted to commander, which had been halted as a result of his case. He also received more than \$666,000 in back pay and Norfolk-based housing allowances, according to a ruling in his federal claim case.

Republicans reveling in tax-reform deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans working to execute their first major legislative achievement of Donald Trump's presidency appear to have secured the votes to pass a massive tax overhaul that Trump hoped to present to the American people for Christmas.

"This is happening. Tax reform under Republican control of Washington is happening," House Speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin told rank-and-file members in a conference call Friday. "Most critics out there didn't think it could happen. ... And now we're on the doorstep of something truly historic."

It's the widest-ranging reshaping of the tax code in three decades and is expected to add to the nation's \$20 trillion debt. The tax cuts are projected to add \$1.46 trillion over a decade. The GOP plans to muscle it through Congress next week before its year-end break.

Under the bill, today's 35 percent rate on corporations would fall to 21 percent, the crown jewel of the measure for many Republicans. Trump and GOP leaders had set 20 percent as their goal but added a point to free money for other tax cuts that won over wavering lawmakers in final talks.

The legislation would lower taxes on the richest Americans. Benefits for most other taxpay-

Tax bill guts ACA's insurance mandate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans didn't get their wish to repeal former President Barack Obama's health care law, but the tax bill barreling toward a final vote in Congress guts its most unpopular provision, the requirement that virtually all Americans carry health insurance.

Politically, the move is a winner for Republicans, who otherwise would have little to show for all their rhetoric about "Obamacare."

But if estimates by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office are right, it will lead to more people being uninsured and higher premiums for those buying individual health insurance policies.

And Congress then could find itself considering other ways to nudge people to get health insurance.

The CBO estimates that repealing the requirement would lead to more people taking a gamble on going without coverage, raising the number of uninsured Americans by 4 million in 2019 and by 13 million a decade from now.

The federal government would save about \$338 billion over a decade because fewer people would seek subsidized coverage under the Affordable Care Act. But premiums for individual plans would go up about 10 percent because the people left behind would tend to be sicker.

ers would be smaller.

The bill would repeal an important part of President Barack Obama's Affordable Care Act — the requirement that all Americans have health insurance or face a penalty — as the GOP looks to unravel a law it

failed to repeal and replace this past summer.

Only on Friday did Republicans cement the needed support for the overhaul, securing endorsements from wavering senators.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., re-

lented in his high-profile opposition after negotiators expanded the tax credit that parents can claim for their children. He said he would vote for the measure next week.

Rubio had been holding out for a bigger child credit for low-income families. After he got it, he tweeted that the change was "a solid step toward broader reforms which are both Pro-Growth and Pro-Worker."

Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, the only Republican to vote against the Senate version earlier this month, made the surprise announcement that he would back the legislation. Corker, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, repeatedly has warned that the nation's growing debt is the most serious threat to national security.

"I realize this is a bet on our country's enterprising spirit, and that is a bet I am willing to make," Corker said.

The White House said Trump "looks forward to fulfilling the promise he made to the American people to give them a tax cut by the end of the year."

The bill embodies a long-standing Republican philosophy that a substantial tax break for businesses will trigger economic growth and job creation for Americans in a trickle-down economy.

Skeptical Democrats are likely to oppose the legislation unanimously.

Air Force Academy sex assault office to be rebuilt

The (Colorado Springs, Colo.)
Gazette

The Air Force Academy is rebuilding its scandal-rocked Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office with a special emphasis on preventing future attacks, the school's top general told The Gazette.

The office, which was all but disbanded last summer ahead of an investigation that found its director "derelict" in caring for victims, will have more workers who will be required to have better qualifications, Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria said. Two

of the extra workers will be assigned to a new wing aimed at violence prevention.

"The more we can do to get to the left of the assaults, the better," Silveria said, using a military term for stopping something before it happens.

The problems in the office were detailed last month in a 560-page report released to The Gazette under the Freedom of Information Act.

Office infighting and a lurid rumor mill swirled in an office amid what investigators called a toxic environment fostered

by manager Theresa Beasley. Investigators also found that the office under Beasley failed to provide adequate care for sexual assault victims.

Silveria, who arrived at the academy in August, inherited the rebuilding job.

"We have standards; she didn't meet those standards," he said of Beasley.

Beasley was a key source in a series of CBS News reports over the past week detailing the academy's alleged failures with sexual assault victims. Silveria didn't agree with every

detail of the report but flew to New York to address the issue on camera.

The general said with the rise of the #metoo movement on social media and sexual assault scandals striking entertainers, media personalities and politicians, it's something he must address.

"I'm happy to get out and continue the conversation on this topic," he said.

Sexual assault is a big issue for the Air Force, where cadets reported 45 incidents last year.

Number of US-Mexico border arrests up

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The U.S. government on Friday announced a seventh straight monthly increase in people being arrested or denied entry along the Mexican border, erasing much of the early gains of President Donald Trump's push to tighten the border.

Denials of entry for people at official crossings and border arrests reached 39,006 in November, up 12 percent from 34,855 in October and more than double the 15,766 who were stopped or arrested in April. But November's figure was still down 38 percent from 63,361 for November of 2016, shortly before Trump took office.

Border arrests don't capture how many people got away from agents but are widely used to understand trends in how many attempt to enter the country illegally.

Trump touted the dramatic decline in arrests during the early months of his presidency as evidence that his administration was making the border more secure. Rea-

sons for the drop and recent rise are unclear but Trump's pledge to build a wall with Mexico initially could have discouraged people from trying and now could be having less impact.

Administration officials had said they were concerned about an increase in families and unaccompanied children showing up at the U.S. border with Mexico. Customs and Border Protection asked for changes to a 2008 law that gave new protections to children entering the country who are not from Canada or Mexico and prevents them from quickly being sent home.

Tyler Houlton, a Homeland Security Department spokesman, said illegal immigration has declined during the past year.

The uptick since April "underscores that Congress must act immediately to close immigration loopholes, fund the border wall, terminate outdated visa programs and provide the necessary tools for DHS officials to carry out their mission," he said.

November's count was far below the

number of people who were stopped trying to enter the U.S. during the Obama administration's final months and the summer of 2014, when large numbers of families and children from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras crossed through southern Texas. Still, it was higher than five months in 2014 and in 2015 and four months in 2013.

Border Patrol arrests of people traveling as families totaled 7,018 in November, up 45 percent from 4,839 in October. Arrests of unaccompanied children reached 4,000, up 26 percent from 3,168 a month earlier.

Trump made his pledge for a "big, beautiful wall" with Mexico a centerpiece of his presidential campaign. The government announced this month that Border Patrol arrests plunged to a 45-year low in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30.

Congressional Democrats have balked at Trump's request for \$1.6 billion to build or replace 74 miles of wall in San Diego and Texas' Rio Grande Valley by October.

1 in 3 agency workers reported harassment

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — More than one-third of employees at the Interior Department say they have been harassed or discriminated against in the past year, the department said Thursday.

Results from the department's survey of its 70,000 employees, who answered anonymously, show 8 percent reported being victims of sexual harassment, and 16 percent reported harassment based on gender. More than 9 percent describe harassment based on race or ethnicity.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs and National Park Service reported the most incidents, with 40 percent of BIA workers and 39 percent of NPS workers reporting some form of harassment.

The department released the National Park Service figures two months ago to highlight widespread complaints of harassment and workplace discrimination within the agency.

Federal investigators have uncovered problems at many

of the nation's premier parks, including Yosemite, Yellowstone, and Florida's Canaveral National Seashore. A sexual harassment scandal at the Grand Canyon forced the park superintendent to retire in May 2016.

The former Yosemite superintendent retired last year after allegations he created a toxic work environment surfaced at a congressional hearing. Don Neubacher headed the California park for nearly seven years and spent 37 years with the park service. Yosemite is one of the nation's oldest and most popular national parks, drawing more than 4 million visitors per year.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke said Thursday he has "zero tolerance for any type of workplace harassment"

Harassment based on a person's gender was the most common — nearly 29 percent — followed by complaints based on age (22 percent). Nearly 10 percent of complaints were based on race or ethnicity, 7 percent on disability status and 6 percent on religious beliefs.

Hollywood players set up panel to fight misconduct

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The biggest figures and institutions in entertainment have established a commission to be chaired by Anita Hill that intends to combat sexual misconduct and inequality in the industry in the wake of the wave of revelations spurred by allegations against Harvey Weinstein.

A statement Friday announced the founding of the Commission on Sexual Harassment and Advancing Equality in the Workplace, a group that grew out of a meeting called by "Star Wars" producer Kathleen Kennedy and several other prominent women in the industry.

The chief executives of nearly every major Hollywood studio, TV network and record label attended the meeting and agreed to found and fund the group, the statement said. The long list includes Disney CEO Bob Iger, Paramount CEO Karen Stuart, Universal Music Group CEO Sir Lucian Grange and CBS Chief Executive Leslie Moonves.

The movie and music acad-

emies and many major agencies and unions that represent entertainers also signed on.

The group chose as its chair law professor Hill, who brought the concept of sexual harassment to the national consciousness in 1991 when she testified during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas.

"It is time to end the culture of silence," Hill said in a statement. "I've been at this work for 26 years. This moment presents us with an unprecedented opportunity to make real change."

The commission said in its statement that it would reconvene immediately after the first of the year to hone its mission, scope and priorities.

Hill has been making appearances in Southern California in the days before Friday's announcement, speaking to a gathering of entertainers and executives in Beverly Hills on Dec. 8.

She said there that she knew that despite Thomas' confirmation to the Supreme Court, the issue would one day return.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Plane that led invasion of Normandy restored

WI OSHKOSH — A plane that led the invasion of Normandy during World War II has been saved from a junkyard and carefully restored in Oshkosh.

The C-47, called “That’s All, Brother,” carried the first paratroopers who stormed the beaches of Normandy. The aircraft led the more than 800 other C-47s also carrying paratroopers.

WLUK-TV said the plane was lost for 70 years and was accidentally discovered by an Air Force historian at the Basler Turbo Conversions junkyard in Oshkosh in 2015. The group, Commemorative Air Force, started a campaign to restore the relic. Employees at Basler have spent more than 22,000 hours restoring it.

Their hope is to fly the aircraft over Normandy in 2019 for the 75th anniversary of D-Day.

Police find 8 pounds of meth in spare tire

MT BILLINGS — Law enforcement officers said they found 8 pounds of meth in a spare tire during a traffic stop in Stillwater County.

The Billings Gazette reported Thursday that according to the officers, the man driving the vehicle claimed he had been visiting Yogi Bear in Yellowstone National Park before being pulled over.

The driver, Manuel Paz Sanchez Jr., 31, was charged with possessing meth with intent to distribute.

Sanchez was originally pulled over for tailing a vehicle too closely.

Police: Catholic church collection box robbed

VT ST. JOHNSBURY — Vermont police are looking for the person who broke into a collection box for the needy at a Catholic church.

Police said they believe the theft took place sometime between Wednesday and Thursday at the St. Johnsbury church. The Caledonian-Record reported the wooden box was broken in order to gain access to the cash.

Father Curtis Miller said the money that is collected in the box is used to fund the church’s voucher program. Vouchers are given for various forms of assistance to people in need.

Miller said the exact amount of money stolen from the box is not known, but the church estimates it was likely around \$20.

Swimmer seriously injured by sea lion

CA SAN FRANCISCO — Officials said a person swimming in San Francisco’s bay was seriously injured after being bitten by a sea lion.

Oakland television station KTVU reported that officers applied a tourniquet to the swimmer’s arm before he was transported to San Francisco General Hospital. Officials said he’s expected to recover.

Matthew Reiter, with San Francisco Police Department’s Marine Unit, said the sea lion got near the swimmer, and the man splashed water on it, but the animal did not go away. The man then yelled at it, and that’s when the sea lion came up to him and bit him.

A man on a nearby sailboat pulled him onto his boat and called police.

The 56-year-old swimmer has not been identified.

Police to bring rescue puppy home for woman

ME BANGOR — A police department is playing the role of puppy delivery for a Maine woman looking for help with her Christmas gift.

The Bangor Police Department said a woman requested their assistance after seeing two officers were in Washington as part of the convoy for Wreaths Across America.

The Waldoboro woman told the department she adopted a 14-week-old rescue border collie puppy in Virginia, but she couldn’t bring the dog back to Maine before the holiday.

The officers responded, saying they don’t mind picking up an extra passenger on their way back from Arlington National Cemetery. The wreaths arrived Saturday.

Dying man gets wish to see new ‘Star Wars’

NH BEDFORD — A dying man’s wish to see the new “Star Wars” movie is coming true, thanks to a cast of many.

Ron Villemaire, 69, has stage four colon cancer and is in hospice care in Bedford, N.H. He’s a huge “Star Wars” fan, but can’t get to a theater and sit in a seat.

After a public plea from his daughter, the Bedford and New Boston fire departments were expected to make it happen Saturday. They were to take him by ambulance to a theater and transfer him to a hospital bed, allowing him to see the film comfortably. Medics were expected to be on hand.

Villemaire, a U.S. Air Force veteran, also was slated to be greeted by representatives thanking him for his service.

Recycled rocket soars with recycled capsule

FL CAPE CANAVERAL — SpaceX has racked up another first, launching a recycled rocket with a recycled capsule on a NASA grocery run.

The unmanned Falcon rocket blasted off from Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Friday with a just-in-time-for-Christmas delivery for the International Space Station.

The first-stage booster took flight again after a six-month turnaround. On board was a Dragon supply ship, also a second-time flier.

It’s NASA’s first use of a re-used Falcon and only the second of a previously flown capsule.

This time, the Dragon is hauling nearly 5,000 pounds of space station goods, including 40 mice for scientists and 20 barley seeds for Budweiser. It should reach the orbiting outpost Sunday.

Man gets 45 years for bubble wrap suffocation

SC BEAUFORT — A South Carolina man who, according to prosecutors, suffocated his girlfriend in bubble wrap, then stole her Jeep and spent weeks in Florida was sentenced to 45 years in prison.

Nick Evangelista, 55, was found guilty Thursday of murder by a Beaufort County jury after a three-day trial.

In a videotaped confession, Evangelista said he passed out after placing the green bubble wrap over the mouth of Rebecca Melton, 55, in the bedroom of a Hilton Head Island apartment they shared in August 2014.

Evangelista, 55, told investigators he didn’t remember any struggle.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Nick Saban unhappy about early signings

Associated Press

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Nick Saban isn't happy about one major new distraction, and it has nothing to do with Alabama defensive coordinator Jeremy Pruitt's hiring at Tennessee.

The fourth-ranked Crimson Tide (11-1) opened practice Friday in preparation for another playoff matchup with No. 1 Clemson (12-1) on Jan. 1 in the Sugar Bowl. But the looming December signing period has kept Saban and other coaches on the recruiting trail and left him trying to snatch time on plane rides to watch film of the Tigers.

A coach who's nothing if not committed to routine hasn't changed his opinion of players being able to sign with teams for three days starting next Wednesday.

"I didn't like it when we did it. I don't like it now," Saban said after practice. "I don't think it's in the players' best interest. I don't see how it benefits anybody. I think it's really stressful for everyone. We're all trying to get ready for bowl

games and playoff games and we have a signing day right in the middle of when we're going to be practicing for a playoff game.

"It was very stressful for a lot of coaches to get out and see as many guys as they could in December and accelerate everything."

Not making the Southeastern Conference championship game did have a couple of potential benefits, allowing injured players more time to heal and coaches more time to work on recruiting. Never one to mince words, Saban was particularly outspoken on the December signing dates.

He said he has plenty of company in the coaching ranks.

"Maybe I shouldn't be speaking like this. I have not talked to a coach that's happy with it," Saban said. "Now, maybe they wouldn't say what I just said. Maybe they wouldn't say that, and they'd probably disagree with it just because I said it. We're dealing with it. It is what it is and we're managing it the best we can, and we're working

with every player and trying to let them decide when they want to make their decision and not really pressing them to make a decision..."

He was happier delivering the injury report, saying linebackers Christian Miller and Terrell Lewis are "full go" after missing most of the season. Middle linebacker Mack Brown (foot) isn't 100 percent but was able to practice "a significant amount." Offensive linemen Ross Pierschbacher and J.C. Hassenauer are back from injuries.

For the third straight year, Alabama enters the playoffs with a coordinator on his way out. Pruitt is set to remain with the Tide through the playoffs after accepting the head coaching job at Tennessee. Pruitt wasn't at practice Friday while working toward the early signing day with the Volunteers but will return Sunday and miss only two practices, Saban said.

Last season, it was Lane Kiffin (Florida Atlantic) and the year before that Kirby Smart (Georgia) who were leaving for

head coaching positions.

Defensive analyst Wes Neighbors is helping fill Pruitt's role with the inside linebackers.

"We're all kind of filling in where we can," Saban said.

Saban said he has added UT-San Antonio defensive coordinator Pete Golding as a defensive assistant starting next season.

Tide notes: Alabama linebacker Rashaan Evans and punter JK Scott are making their fourth appearance in the playoffs. Evans has 18 tackles in five CFP games with 2.5 sacks. Scott has averaged 47 yards on 38 punts in the playoffs, including a career-long 73-yarder. ... The Tide will have 25 graduates on the roster for the Sugar Bowl, with 16 current and three former Alabama players set to graduate Saturday. That group of former players includes former All-American and Butkus Award winner Rolando McClain. Evans is among Saturday's graduates while kicker Andy Pappanastos is earning his master's degree.

Workplace misconduct? Panthers owner being investigated

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Carolina Panthers founder and owner Jerry Richardson is under investigation for workplace misconduct.

The team said Friday former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles is overseeing the investigation by a Los Angeles-based law firm.

Team spokesman Steven Drummond said in a release that the Panthers and the 81-year-old Richardson take these allegations very seriously and are fully committed to a full investigation and taking appropriate steps to address and remediate any misconduct.

"The entire organization is fully committed to ensuring a safe, comfortable and diverse work environment where all individuals, regardless of sex,

race, color, religion, gender, or sexual identity or orientation, are treated fairly and equally," Drummond said in the release. "We have work to do to achieve this goal, but we are going to meet it."

Richardson was unavailable for comment.

Drummond told The Associated Press because the matter is under legal review, the Panthers cannot comment publicly on the specifics of the allegations.

The Panthers made the NFL aware on Friday that it has initiated an investigation into Richardson's alleged workplace misconduct.

NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy said the league has no comment at this time.

The investigation against the team's only owner in franchise history is being led by interna-

tional law firm Quinn Emanuel Urquhart and Sullivan, LLP, and will be overseen by Bowles, who is a minority owner.

Panthers coach Ron Rivera said in a release Friday night that he has had a strong relationship with Richardson since he joined the franchise as coach in 2012.

"I have enormous respect for the man, but will wait for the results of the investigation before making any judgment," Rivera said.

Richardson brought NFL football to the Carolinas in 1993 when he became the first former NFL player since George Halas to own a team.

The Panthers began play two years later in 1995.

The Panthers have made a series of peculiar moves in the last year.

Team president Danny Mor-

ison, who was well liked in the Carolinas among had worked on the business side, abruptly resigned in February.

Then, as the Panthers were preparing for training camp, Richardson unexpectedly fired general manager Dave Gettleman, who has led the team to the Super Bowl just two years ago and replaced him with former general manager Marty Hurney. The move was odd considering Carolina has made the playoffs three times in four seasons under Gettleman.

Richardson was hospitalized 2008, one month after receiving a pacemaker. Richardson underwent quadruple bypass surgery in 2002 and was placed on a donor waiting list for a new heart. He received the new heart on Feb. 1, 2009, and has not had any known setbacks since.

Giants trade lefty Moore to Rangers

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Texas acquired Matt Moore in a trade with the San Francisco Giants on Friday, raising the possibility of four left-handers in the Rangers' rotation.

"As far as the four lefties, generally it's a good thing," Rangers general manager Jon Daniels said. "I realize there's some very heavy right-handed clubs in our division. With the exception of Martin (Perez), the other three guys have been very effective against righties in their career."

Texas sent minor league right-handers Israel Cruz and Sam Wolff to the Giants. The Rangers also received \$750,000 in international signing bonus pool allotment from the Giants.

Perez, a 13-game winner, and Cole Hamels, another lefty who won 11 games, were the only holdover Texas starters when the offseason started. Counting Moore, the Rangers have added three options to their rotation.

Right-hander Doug Fister agreed to a \$4 million, one-

year deal that could be worth up to \$11.5 million over two seasons, and lefty Mark Minor received a \$28 million, three-year contract.

Minor was a reliever for Kansas City last season but previously was a starter for Atlanta before missing the 2015 and 2016 seasons with shoulder issues. Daniels said the club still intends to prepare Minor as a starter in spring training.

"We talked about when he signed, both he and us are aware that that could change based either on the club, kind of how it's shaping out, or if he has any issues getting stretched out," said Daniels, who is interested in acquiring even more starting pitchers.

Right-hander Andrew Cashner, another 11-game winner for Texas, became a free agent after completing a \$10 million, one-year deal.

San Francisco last month exercised Moore's \$7 million option for 2018. He went 6-15 with a 5.52 ERA in 174¹/₃ innings last season, setting a career high for losses, as the Giants

finished last in the NL West. He allowed a career-worst 107 earned runs.

In other baseball deals:

■ Carlos Santana is bringing his big bat and postseason experience to the Philadelphia Phillies.

The 31-year-old first baseman became the first of the offseason's big-name free agents to find a new home, agreeing Friday to a \$60 million, three-year contract with the Philadelphia Phillies, according to two people familiar with the deal.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the agreement is contingent on Santana passing a physical.

■ After spending his entire career at shortstop in Cincinnati, Zack Cozart was willing to switch positions for the chance to join the Los Angeles Angels' promising lineup.

Cozart was even willing to switch twice.

The All-Star infielder agreed to a \$38 million, three-year contract with the Angels on Friday, also agreeing to play third base

in an infield suddenly packed with veteran talent.

■ The New York Mets added catcher Jose Lobaton, who will try to earn a roster spot in spring training, and finalized their \$14 million, two-year contract with reliever Anthony Swarzak on Friday.

Lobaton will report to big league spring training and compete with Kevin Plawecki for a backup job behind Travis d'Arnaud. Lobaton would get a \$1.25 million, one-year contract if added to the 40-man roster.

■ Reliever Hector Rondon has agreed to an \$8.5 million, two-year contract with the World Series champion Houston Astros.

The 29-year-old right-hander gets \$4 million next year and \$4.5 million in 2019.

He spent the last five years with the Chicago Cubs, where he went 18-13 with a 3.22 ERA and 77 saves. He went 4-1 with a 4.24 ERA and a career-best 10.83 strikeouts per nine innings last season.

Women's hockey teams still trying to catch US, Canada

Associated Press

WESLEY CHAPEL, Fla. — Finland goalie Noora Raty believes her country is closing the gap on the United States and Canada in women's hockey.

She has some proof, too.

The Finns beat Canada 4-3 on April 1 in the preliminary round of the world championships. Raty made 35 saves as Finland earned its first victory over the Canadians in 21 games.

"It's tough when the other team has 10 times the resources we have, but we're doing our best using the resources we have, and I think we're getting there," Raty said. "We know we might lose nine out of 10 games, but we hope that one game is going to be in February. That's all we need."

Ideally, that one win will

come again with a medal on the line at the 2018 Winter Games in South Korea.

"To beat them on a regular basis is against all odds," Finland coach Pasi Mustonen said. "But we really believe we can take them a certain night, and that's what we are working for."

The United States and Canada have dominated women's hockey in the 20 years since the sport was added to the Olympics.

Only three other countries have medals. The Americans won the first gold in 1998, and the Canadians took the last three. Sweden broke up the North American hold with silver in 2006 and won bronze in 2002 at Salt Lake City. Switzerland earned its first medal with bronze in 2014, while Finland took bronze in 1998 and 2010.

Finland and Sweden both count on strong goalies. China, with Beijing hosting the 2022 Winter Games, is busy investing in the sport and might be the best bet to eventually provide a consistent medal threat.

When not playing for Finland, Raty is helping grow women's hockey in China playing with Kunlun Red Star. The far-flung team in the Canadian Women's Hockey League has a roster featuring a handful of Americans and a Canadian. Raty said she believes China has the resources both in terms of money and population to challenge the United States and Canada.

"Once China decides they want to be good at something, they're going to be good at something," Raty said. "I don't know if five years is going to be enough. But if you look at '26, '30 Olympics, if they keep doing

what they're doing, they can be a powerhouse someday. It's just a matter of fact, of getting players involved. I heard our online streams, they had over 100,000 people watching our streams. That's nothing out of a billion people, but interest is starting to be there."

Demand is only a piece of the puzzle. Financial resources and a talent pool are also key. Add both to a dedicated commitment to women's hockey, and that's why Canada and the United States do so well.

The Canadians bring together players for months before an Olympics for training, and the Americans started a residency program in Florida in September. The countries also are playing a six-game pre-Olympic exhibition schedule, not counting two games in the Four Nations Cup in November.

NBA roundup

Westbrook leads OKC over Philadelphia

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Russell Westbrook said goodbye to a three-overtime thriller and trolled Joel Embiid with a smile and a wave.

“I was telling him, ‘Go home,’” Westbrook said.

Embiid irked Westbrook earlier in the game when the 76ers’ social media star waved goodbye toward the crowd once Oklahoma City center Steven Adams fouled out. Westbrook got the last laugh, and capped his triple-double, 52-minute effort with the final assist of the game, and the Thunder pulled out a 119-117 victory on Friday night.

The early contender for NBA game of the year was led by perhaps the game of Embiid’s career. Embiid scored 34

points in 49 minutes with an achy back, saved the game in the first overtime with a block on Westbrook and trash talked Carmelo Anthony.

Westbrook had an off night from the floor (10-for-33), yet finished with 27 points, 17 rebounds and 15 assists. He even saved Andre Roberson from goat status in the third OT. Roberson failed to even look at the basket and then missed a layup in a stunning sequence to close the second OT, then earned redemption when Westbrook fed him for the winner with 10 seconds left in the game.

“Just trusting it,” Westbrook said.

Rockets 124, Spurs 109: Chris Paul had 28 points, eight assists and seven steals to lead host Houston to its 12th straight victory.

Jazz 107, Celtics 95: Ricky Rubio had 22 points, Donovan Mitchell added 17 points, nine assists and six rebounds, and visiting Utah beat Boston.

Bulls 115, Bucks 109: Bobby Portis scored a career-high 27 points and grabbed 12 rebounds as Chicago beat host Milwaukee for its fifth consecutive victory.

Raptors 120, Nets 87: Kyle Lowry had his 11th career triple-double, DeMar DeRozan scored 31 points and Toronto won its ninth straight against visiting Brooklyn.

Nuggets 117, Pelicans 111 (OT): Gary Harris had 21 points and Will Barton added 11 of his 19 in overtime, helping host Denver beat New Orleans.

Wizards 100, Clippers 91: Mike Scott tied a season high with 22 points while Bradley

Beal added 20 as Washington held off visiting Los Angeles.

Trail Blazers 95, Magic 88: Damian Lillard scored 21 points, C.J. McCollum had 20 and Portland withstood a late rally to beat host Orlando.

Pistons 104, Pacers 98: Andre Drummond finished with 23 points and 13 rebounds, and visiting Detroit withstood a late rally to beat Indiana.

Heat 104, Hornets 98: Tyler Johnson and Wayne Ellington scored 16 points each and visiting Miami held off a late Charlotte rally.

Grizzlies 96, Hawks 94: Tyreke Evans scored 22 points, including the go-ahead layup with 1:03 left to help host Memphis snap a five-game losing streak.

NHL roundup

Nash’s late goal breaks tie, leads Rangers past Kings

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Stopped on a similar chance in the first period, Rick Nash changed his approach when he got another opportunity with the score tied late in the game, and it worked.

Nash scored the tiebreaking goal with 3:27 remaining to lead the New York Rangers to a 4-2 victory over the Pacific Division-leading Los Angeles Kings on Friday night.

Nash stole the puck in the Kings’ zone on the left side near the center line, drove into the left circle and beat Los Angeles goalie Jonathan Quick on the blocker side for his ninth of the season to give the Rangers their third lead of the game.

“I tried to go high glove and he kind of moved his chest right in front of it,” Nash said of his attempt in the first period. “So I thought I had to switch it up and try to go blocker.”

J.T. Miller added an empty-netter with 54 seconds remaining, and New York won for the eighth time in 12 games (8-3-1). Chris Kreider and Kevin Hayes also scored, and Henrik Lundqvist stopped 33 shots to help the Rangers improve to 11-1-1 in their last 13 at home.

Red Wings 3, Maple Leafs 1: Trevor Daley scored a tiebreaking, short-handed goal midway through the second period and Detroit held on to beat visiting Toronto.

Danny DeKeyser and Tomas Tater also scored, and Jimmy Howard had 25 saves for the Red Wings. They had won only one of their previous 11 games.

Toronto’s Andreas Borgman opened the scoring 1:58 into the game. The Maple Leafs lost their third straight, matching a season high. Toronto was without star center Auston Matthews for a fourth straight

game because of an upper-body injury.

Devils 5, Stars 2: Brian Boyle broke a tie with his 100th career goal and added an empty-netter and an assist to help host New Jersey beat Dallas.

Steven Santini, Blake Coleman and Nick Lappin also scored for the Devils, and Corey Schneider made 28 saves. Martin Hanzal and Alexander Radulov scored for Dallas.

Boyle gave the Devils a 3-2 lead off a rebound with 3:21 left in the second period. He assisted on Lappin’s goal midway through the third period and completed the scoring with the empty-net goal.

Hurricanes 5, Sabres 4 (OT): Jacob Slavin scored 2:15 into overtime to lift visiting Carolina past Buffalo.

Jordan Staal, Derek Ryan, Elias Lindstrom, Justin Williams and Slavin each had a

goal and an assist to help the Hurricanes win their second in a row to close out a season-long six-game trip. Cam Ward made 37 saves.

Buffalo’s Jack Eichel had his first career hat trick and assisted on Jake McCabe’s goal.

Canucks 4, Sharks 3 (OT): Sam Gagner scored at 4:34 of overtime and host Vancouver snapped a four-game losing streak with a victory over San Jose.

Gagner beat Martin Jones with a nice backhand move on a breakaway for his fourth of the season after a feed from Alexander Edler. It was Gagner’s first goal in nine games.

Markus Granlund scored twice and Brock Boeser also had a goal in regulation for the Canucks (15-14-4). Henrik Sedin and brother Daniel Sedin each added three assists. Jacob Markstrom made 34 saves.