

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## House GOP offers pared-down spending bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans unveiled a new, stripped-down spending bill Thursday, aiming to prevent a government shutdown this weekend and to allow quarreling lawmakers to punt most of their unfinished business into the new year.

The bill would keep the government operating through Jan. 19 and permit lawmakers to head home for the holidays. It would delay budget, health care and immigration battles into January, denying Democrats victories that they had hoped to score this year.

Failure to pass the temporary spending measure would trigger a government shutdown at midnight Friday, which would amount to a political pratfall just after the GOP scored a major win on a landmark tax bill. With Republicans control-

ling Washington, they would not have anyone else to blame for a shutdown debacle.

President Donald Trump tried to blame Democrats while winning over the frustrated House GOP factions.

“House Democrats want a SHUTDOWN for the holidays in order to distract from the very popular, just passed, Tax Cuts. House Republicans, don’t let this happen. Pass the C.R. TODAY and keep our Government OPEN!” Trump tweeted.

The problem for GOP leaders is the party’s defense hawks, who had hoped to enact record increases for the military this year. The short-term spending bill does contain about \$5 billion to upgrade missile defense to respond to the threat from North Korea and to repair two destroyers damaged in accidents this year in the Pacific.

A vote was likely Thursday, and Senate passage was ex-

pected to quickly follow. Debate on the measure kicked off early Thursday afternoon, and a vote was expected by suppertime.

Underscoring the inability of Congress to complete its work was the failure to reauthorize the health care program for some 9 million low-income children. The program expired on Oct. 1, and the spending bill only includes a temporary spending fix until March.

The House might also vote on an \$81 billion disaster aid package that’s a priority of the Texas and Florida delegations, but its fate is uncertain as conservatives upset about its cost may oppose the measure.

Thursday’s version of the bill is the third rewrite this week as GOP leaders have struggled to come up with a plan that would unite Republicans. Democratic leaders aren’t providing votes for the measure, saying Re-

publicans are ignoring promises to protect immigrants brought to the country illegally as children. That issue, and a hoped-for budget deal to undo a spending freeze on the Pentagon and government agencies, would be put off until January.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, of California, made a rare appearance before the Rules Committee to press for a vote on legislation dubbed the Dream Act, which would provide a pathway to citizenship for the immigrants.

The bill includes a short-term, \$2.1 billion fix for an expiring program that pays for veterans to seek care outside the Department of Veterans Affairs system. It also includes a patch through March to ensure states facing shortfalls from the Children’s Health Insurance Program won’t have to purge children from the program.

## High-tech planes drop supplies, gifts to remote islands

BY LEON COOK  
*Stars and Stripes*

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — New technology on Super Hercules transport planes has helped crews airdrop Christmas gifts to Pacific islanders with pinpoint accuracy.

The C-130Js, which replaced the 374th Airlift Wing’s fleet of older C-130H models at Yokota in western Tokyo, flew out of Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, this month during Operation Christmas Drop.

The operation, which has delivered much-needed supplies to isolated islands each December since 1952, was particularly on point this year.

Lt. Gen. Jerry Martinez, U.S. Forces Japan commander, has described the C-130J as the “meanest, toughest, and most tactical machine in the world.” It flies with two fewer crewmembers than its predecessor and has improved avionics, increased

cargo capacity, improved fuel economy and a longer range.

Christmas drops this year involved U.S., Japanese and Australian airmen delivering more than 140 crates of supplies, each weighing about 400 pounds, to 56 islands in the Federated States of Micronesia, the Northern Mariana Islands and the Republic of Palau.

The bundles contained items such as fishing nets, construction materials, powdered milk, canned goods, rice, coolers, clothing, shoes, school supplies, and, of course, Christmas toys.

Andy Nepaial, 58, who grew up on the tiny, now-uninhabited island of Agrigan — also known as Agrihan — in the Northern Marianas, has fond childhood memories of the Christmas drops.

“When the airplanes were rumbling over the island, the whole island was shaking like it was going to crack in two,” he told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

Nepaial vividly remembers watching the planes drop smoke grenades to gauge wind conditions in the drop zone — calculations now performed via the sophisticated electronics suite in the C-130J.

“We saw these things coming out of the back of the airplane and I was yelling: ‘There are toys coming down,’” Nepaial said of the first Christmas drop mission to Agrigan in the 1960s.

Larry Raigetel, who lived on Lamotrek in Micronesia until he was 14, recalled in a video posted online by the Air Force, how kids raced to get to the bundles.

“Whoever gets to the box first gets to get the parachutes,” he said, explaining they made excellent mosquito nets. “Our priority mission was to try and get to the box as quickly as we can and just cut a string off the parachute, then it would be ours.”

Raigetel said kids would see toys they wanted in the boxes but knew better than to fight over them.

# N. Korean soldier defects via DMZ

BY YOO KYONG CHANG  
*Stars and Stripes*

SEOUL, South Korea — A North Korean soldier fled to South Korea on Thursday across the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone, prompting gunfire as his comrades searched for him in the thick fog, South Korean officials said.

The defector arrived at a South Korean guard post at the central and western front just after 8 a.m., a Ministry of National Defense spokesman said. Heavy fog limited visibility to about 100 meters; however, border guards were able to spot him using surveillance equipment.

United Nations Command announced it is working with South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff to determine the circum-

stances surrounding the low-ranking soldier's defection.

"Armistice Agreement rules are in effect throughout the Demilitarized Zone, including the area where the defection occurred," it said in a statement. "This is signaled by the fact that the guard post near where the defector was first encountered flies a United Nations Command flag in addition to the [South Korean] flag, as do all guard posts in the DMZ."

The Joint Chiefs of Staff initially reported there were no shots fired during the defection nor was there any unusual movement of North Korean troops detected.

However, it later said that South Korean soldiers fired 20 warning rounds about 9.30 a.m. as North Korean soldiers approached the Military Demar-

cation Line to search for their former comrade.

"Our side broadcasted warning messages a few times and then fired ... after the warning shots, they did not approach any more," a defense ministry spokesman said.

North Korean propaganda leaflets were later found at Seoul's Yongsan Garrison, 8th Army spokeswoman Christina Wright told Stars and Stripes. It is unknown whether they are related to the defection.

The defector is the fourth to cross into South Korea this year. The incident comes just weeks after surveillance cameras captured the dramatic defection of another North Korean on Nov. 13 through the Joint Security Area. He survived despite being shot five times by his comrades as he fled.

# Task Force 76 group surgeon dies on leave

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE  
*Stars and Stripes*

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The group surgeon for the Navy's forward-deployed amphibious force on Okinawa died while visiting family and friends in the U.S., Navy officials said Thursday.

Capt. Kedric Webster, 45, died of natural causes on Dec. 13 in Pensacola, Fla., according to a Task Force 76 statement. No further details were available.

The Tuskegee, Ala., native was remembered by colleagues for his engaged leadership, "joyful spirit, professionalism, and ever present smile," the statement said.

"We are shocked and saddened by the death of our shipmate and friend," said Task Force 76 commander Capt. Marvin Thompson. "He was an incredible professional, a great asset to the Navy, and a friend to many on our team. We will always remember him for his intellect, enthusiasm, and sense of humor."

Webster — who served in the Navy for 27 years and earned his medical degree from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences in Bethesda, Md. — joined the Task Force 76 in June 2016 as the officer in charge of Fleet Surgical Team 7, the statement said. He supported crisis response operations and major exercises in the region.

Webster is survived by his mother, Fronzena Webster, and daughters, Elise and Reese Webster.

Services will be held Saturday at The Tuskegee University Chapel, in Tuskegee, followed by burial in the city's Greenwood Cemetery, according to The Peoples Funeral Home.

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# DOD releases policy for recruiting trans troops

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department has issued detailed new policy guidance to military recruiters for how to enlist transgender men and women into the armed forces, intensifying an emotionally charged legal fight over whether the Pentagon is ready to implement such a sensitive cultural change.

The military distributed its guidance throughout the force Dec. 8. Lawyers challenging President Donald Trump's proposed ban on transgender military service, which he announced on Twitter in July, have since included the document in their lawsuits. The memorandum states the Pentagon will comply with federal court orders, now under appeal, that direct the military to begin accepting transgender recruits Jan. 1.

The court order also raises the possibility that a handful of individuals who graduated from U.S. service academies in the spring now could join the mili-

tary. They were denied commissions upon graduating due to their transgender status, but now "may be commissioned if they meet established accessions standards," said Army Maj. David Eastburn, a Pentagon spokesman.

The policy paper was issued by the U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command in Chicago, "and shall remain in effect until expressly revoked," the memorandum said. It states that allowing transgender military service is "mandatory," and repeats a previous directive from Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who has said all people will be "treated with dignity and respect."

Military recruiting personnel are responsible for inputting recruits' personal information into databases. They should do so while using a copy of a recruit's birth certificate, court order or U.S. passport "reflecting preferred gender," according to the Pentagon's new guidance.

"For the purposes of military

entrance processing, the applicant's preferred gender will be used on all forms asking for the 'sex' of an applicant," the guidance said.

Individuals who have undergone gender-reassignment surgery will be allowed to join the military as long as doctors consider them to have been stable in their new gender for 18 months, with no complications or additional surgery needed.

During their entry screenings, transgender women who have not undergone gender-reassignment surgery or hormone replacement "will wear undergarments consistent with their physical anatomy," the memo adds. Transgender women, unlike other female applicants, will not be administered a pregnancy test. Everyone will receive a medical exam specific to their "anatomical characteristics."

The guidance stresses the need for privacy, noting that some physical screening procedures for the military are not carried out in total seclusion.

## Donations to help Marines deliver toys to Puerto Rico

*The Dallas Morning News*

Sometimes Santa's sleigh looks a little more like a luxury plane.

Marine Toys for Tots will deliver 30,000 toys and games to families in hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico this week on a cargo plane owned by North Texas' Hillwood Airways. Transformers, My Little Pony toys and plenty of Play-Doh will be in the hands of children to celebrate Christmas on Monday and Three Kings Day on Jan. 6.

Hurricane Maria made landfall Sept. 20 and left 3.4 million people on the U.S. territory without electricity. Parts of the island are still without power.

The first plane of toys left Hillwood's hangar at Fort Worth Alliance Airport on Wednesday morning for Luis Munoz International Airport. The plane was scheduled to pick up toys in Miami on Thursday and deliver them to the island.

Without Hillwood Airways' contribution to haul the toys, shipment costs could have prevented the deliveries, Toys for Tots said. Hillwood is private charter airline for domestic and international travel with rates that typically run \$20,000 to \$25,000 per flight hour.

# Mattis becomes 1st DOD chief to visit Gitmo since '02

*Associated Press*

GUANTANAMO BAY, Cuba — U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis visited the American Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to offer holiday greetings to troops Thursday. It was the first trip there by a Pentagon chief in almost 16 years.

Mattis was meeting with troops, not touring the detention facilities or discussing detainee policy options. His stay comes amid uncertainty over the Trump administration's policy on continued use of the military prison.

President Donald Trump hasn't released any Guantanamo prisoners nor added any to the list of men who have been officially cleared to go home or to third countries for resettlement.

Mattis is the first defense secretary to visit Guantanamo Bay since Donald Rumsfeld in January 2002, just weeks after the first prisoners arrived from Afghanistan in the early stages of the fight against terrorism. The detention center was set up to hold suspected terrorists shortly after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Mattis arrived at Guantanamo on Wednesday night and was accompanied by an Associated Press reporter.

Forty-one prisoners remain in detention. Ten have been charged by a military commission. Five have been cleared to leave, but their status is in doubt under the current administration.

That leaves 26 in indefinite confinement, though some eventually could be cleared for release, too, or prosecuted. Lawyers are considering filing new legal challenges, arguing that a policy of no releases means the detainees' confinement no longer can be legally justified as a temporary wartime measure.

President Barack Obama tried to close the detention center, but was thwarted by Congress. Lawmakers objected to transferring detainees to confinement facilities in the U.S.

Mattis has said little publicly about Guantanamo Bay since taking office in January. The subject wasn't raised in his Senate confirmation hearing.

In response to written questions submitted to him before that hearing, he said, "I believe that we should develop a repeatable detainee policy that is appropriate for enemy combatants taken prisoner under such circumstances."

## Army trainees head home on leave for holidays

BY DAN STOUTAMIRE  
*Stars and Stripes*

Thousands of U.S. Army basic trainees will experience the shock this holiday season of shifting from their regimented lives in the crucible of training to the comfort and familiarity of home and family.

It's time for the annual holiday block leave, when more than 41,000 trainees from across U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command installations will be spending the next two weeks with a welcome respite from a stressful training environment.

It's something that trainees have been looking forward to for months.

"I'm going to be giving my whole family hugs, my mom, my dad, my brothers ... hugs all around," said Spc. Danielle Burton, who recently graduated from basic training at Fort Jackson, S.C., and will be heading in January to advanced individual training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. "I want to plan a girl day with my mom and spend some time with my dog, for sure."

The block leave is the culmination of a

massive, commandwide effort to ensure that soldiers are able to spend the holidays with their loved ones. Planning at Fort Jackson began in August and had trickled down to the company level by early October.

"My commander and I, we spent countless hours — through the rehearsals, the planning process and the actual walkthroughs," said First Sgt. Paul Volino of Company D, 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment. "In total, we had 29 cadre (members) assigned to this mission, so you're talking about a lot of hours going into this."

The roughly 7,000 troops at the South Carolina post all headed home Monday with staggered timelines, Volino said.

There are risks involved. With the Army ceding control of these soldiers — many of them young and away from their hometowns for the first time — accidents, including deaths, do happen, though there were no fatalities among its trainees on block leave last year, according to TRADOC.

There is also the risk that some soldiers could fail to report back, something the command seeks to mitigate by inform-

ing trainees of the consequences of going AWOL or committing violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

"We give them safety briefings before they leave our company and at the airport," said Staff Sgt. Amanda Moncada, a drill sergeant with the 1st Battalion, 61st Infantry Regiment. "We encourage them not to drink when they're on leave, not to drive, because they haven't been behind the wheel for a long time. We encourage them — whatever environment they've left to come to basic training — don't go back to that environment if that will get you in trouble."

There's also the chance that the relatively long time away from mandatory physical training and the temptations of holiday food and drink could set back their efforts to get fit.

"It's going to be a bit of a shock coming back, especially for the trainees who just entered basic training," Moncada said. "I give them a couple of days, about 48 hours, and then it sinks back in for them, 'I'm here, this is what we have to do.'"

## Sexual misconduct claims voted top news story in poll

Associated Press

NEW YORK — The wave of sexual misconduct allegations that toppled Hollywood power brokers, politicians, media icons and many others was the top news story of 2017, according to The Associated Press' annual poll of U.S. editors and news directors.

The No. 2 story was Donald Trump's tumultuous first year as president. A year ago, Trump's unexpected victory over Hillary Clinton in the presidential election was a near-unanimous pick for the top news story of 2016.

Here are 2017's top 10 stories, in order:

**1. Sexual misconduct:** Scandals involving sexual misdeeds by prominent men are nothing new in America, but there's never been anything remotely like the deluge of allegations unleashed this year by women who were emboldened to speak out by the accusers who preceded them. Luminaries toppled from their perches included movie magnate Harvey Weinstein, media stars Bill O'Reilly, Matt Lauer and Charlie Rose, and several celebrity chefs and members of Congress.

**2. Trump's First Year:** The controversies started on Inauguration Day, with the new president challenged over his claims on the size of the crowd, and persisted throughout the year. Trump's approval ratings hovered around record-low territory, his base remained fiercely loyal, and his relentless tweeting provoked a striking mix of outrage, mockery and grateful enthusiasm.

**3. Las Vegas mass shooting:** A 64-year-old high-stakes video poker player, after amassing an arsenal of weapons, unleashed a barrage of gunfire from a high-rise casino-hotel that killed 58 people and injured hundreds among a crowd attending an open-air concert along the Las Vegas Strip.

**4. Hurricane onslaught:** In a four-week span, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria ravaged Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands.

**5. North Korea:** At times the taunts had a schoolyard flavor to them — a “dotard” versus “Little Rocket Man.” But they came from two world leaders with nuclear arms at their disposal — Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Fueling the tensions were North Korea's latest tests of a hydrogen bomb and of ballistic missiles that potentially could reach the U.S. mainland.

**6. Trump-Russia probe:** Trump fired FBI Director James Comey, but a former FBI chief, Robert Mueller, soon was appointed to investigate potential coordination between Russia and Trump's election campaign. By mid-December, Mueller's team had brought federal charges against four people, including former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and former national security adviser Michael Flynn. Flynn pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI.

**7. Obamacare:** Despite repeated efforts, majority Republicans in Congress failed to repeal Barack Obama's health care law and to replace it with new plan.

**8. Tax overhaul:** Without a single Democratic vote, Republicans in Congress pushed through a sweeping, \$1.5 trillion tax overhaul that would cut corporate taxes while producing mixed results for individuals.

**9. Worldwide terror attacks:** The first big terror attack of 2017 came on New Year's Day — a gunman killing 39 at a nightclub in Istanbul. Subsequent targets of global terror included an Ariana Grande concert in England, a bike path in New York City and the historic La Rambla promenade in Barcelona. In October, a truck bombing in Somalia killed more than 500 people; in November, an attack on a crowded mosque in Egypt killed more than 300.

**10. Islamic State:** After lengthy assaults, an array of forces drove ISIS from its two main strongholds — the city of Mosul in Iraq, and its self-styled capital, Raqqa, in Syria.

## Firefighters in Calif. douse hot spots

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Firefighters doused hot spots Thursday as winds increased that could whip up embers and cause flare-ups at the gigantic wildfire still smoldering northwest of Los Angeles.

Crews were in place to once again provide structure protection above Montecito and other hillside communities in Santa Barbara County, where the last round of heavy gusts revived the flames and forced new evacuations last weekend.

In neighboring Ventura County firefighters attacked a stubborn section of the blaze from the air because terrain near the agricultural city of Fillmore was too rugged to get ground crews in.

Some 18,000 homes and other buildings remained threatened.

The Thomas Fire, which began Dec. 4, is responsible for two deaths, has destroyed at least 750 homes, and has burned about 425 square miles.

The blaze was 60 percent contained and now the second largest in California history. Officials said the new winds could cause it to grow into the state's biggest fire ever.

Firefighters used three days of calm conditions to bulldoze containment lines and set controlled fires to clear dry brush.

Some residents watched from hotels and evacuation centers, while others are waiting in their homes and hoping for the best.

## 19 injured as SUV plows into people in Australia

The Washington Post

SYDNEY — A white sport utility vehicle drove into a busy downtown intersection packed with pedestrians in the Australian city of Melbourne, injuring at least 19 people, some critically, and raising fears of a terrorist attack.

Police named a 32-year-old man of Afghan descent with history of mental health issues as the driver and said it was a “deliberate act,” but declined to say if there were terrorist motivations.

“We don't have any intelligence or evidence to indicate this is connected to terrorism,” said acting police chief Shane Patton, adding that there did not appear to be a need to raise the threat level.

A second man seen filming the incident was arrested after a search revealed several knives on his person, but Patton added that there now appeared to be nothing linking the two men.

Witnesses said the white Suzuki didn't appear to brake as it plowed through one of the main intersections in Australia's second-largest city, full of Christmas shoppers and commuters heading home. It finally crashed into a tram stop and came to a halt.

“All you could hear was bang, bang, bang, bang,” Jim Stoupas, the owner of a nearby doughnut shop, told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. “The only thing that slowed him down was hitting pedestrians. All you could hear were the sounds of the car hitting people and the screams.”

The driver was apprehended by an off-duty police officer who held him until police arrived, sustaining injuries in the struggle.

Police said the man had a history of drug use and mental health issues and was known to them for traffic offenses and a minor assault in 2010.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Layaway balances paid for military families

**NC** FORT BRAGG — A national nonprofit organization has paid off about \$2,000 in layaway balances for 12 military families at a Fort Bragg retailer in North Carolina.

The Fayetteville Observer reported that the 12 families were called to the South Post Exchange under the guise of a customer appreciation exchange Tuesday to learn the balances for their layaway items had been fully paid.

The funds were donated by Pay Away the Layaway, which plans to pay off \$10,000 in layaway balances for military families nationwide.

### Probe looks into theft of historic documents

**AZ** TOMBSTONE — Authorities are investigating the whereabouts of original handwritten documents under which the Village of Tombstone became the City of Tombstone in 1881.

The Sierra Vista Herald reported the Cochise County Sheriff's Office and the Tombstone Marshal's Office have conducted interviews attempting to locate the charter and other city documents, some of which date back to the 1880s.

Tombstone Mayor Dusty Escapule reported the documents missing in February 2015 after an inventory failed to account for the items.

The criminal inquiry of the disappearance of the documents was re-ignited last month when Tombstone Marshal Bob Randall obtained a search warrant to look for "any evidence which tends to show" the offense of theft and possession of stolen property had been committed.

### Man injured by sandbag thrown from overpass

**OH** TOLEDO — Toledo police say four teens were charged after a Michigan man was critically injured by items thrown from an Interstate 75 overpass.

The Blade of Toledo reported Marquise Byrd of Warren, Mich., was a front seat passenger in a southbound vehicle struck by a sandbag near the Indiana Street overpass Tuesday. Authorities said the sandbag crashed through the vehicle's windshield and entered the vehicle, striking Byrd. The driver, whose name was not released immediately, did not appear to have been injured.

The four juveniles arrested were a 13-year-old and three 14-year-olds.

### Grocery shoppers get operatic treat

**MA** WATERTOWN — A Massachusetts grocery store employee surprised shoppers with his operatic renditions of popular Christmas music.

Tony Russo, owner of Russo's Market in Watertown, told The Boston Globe he had no idea Guilherme Assuncao could sing when the 23-year-old volunteered to sound check equipment Friday night for an upcoming weekend performance. His voice shocked his co-workers, and Assuncao was invited back to the stage to perform for shoppers.

### Light display closes citing party buses

**MN** MINNETRISTA — A popular Twin Cities residential holiday light display that attracts 500 vehicles on a busy night has been shut down due to rowdy and in-

toxicated visitors.

State-of-the-art technology and months of preparation have made Trista Lights one of the most popular holiday light displays in the Twin Cities.

Homeowner Ryan Kasper-Cook said he and his neighbors have had a problem this year with a new trend of party buses taking tours of residential light displays. Kasper-Cook told KARE-TV that loud, intoxicated guests usually get out of the bus, sometimes walk through their yards and are generally disruptive. So, the display has been shut down.

### Agent accused of taking photos in restroom

**WI** MADISON — University of Wisconsin police said they've arrested a federal agent for taking photos in a women's restroom at a residence hall.

Authorities say the 27-year-old man went into the bathroom at Witte Hall and put his cellphone under an occupied stall and took pictures. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives has confirmed the man is an employee.

UW spokesman Marc Lovicott said the agent told police that he mistakenly entered the wrong restroom. He's being held on possible charges of trying to take photos depicting nudity and disorderly conduct.

### Town residents become Scottish landowners

**CT** SCOTLAND — Residents of the rural town of Scotland, Conn., became lords and ladies in the United Kingdom country of the same name.

The Scottish land preservation company Highland Titles said Tuesday it's gifting all 1,694 residents 1 square foot of land on its nature reserve in

Glencoe Wood, Scotland. The residents will get courtesy titles of Lord or Lady of Glencoe and instructions on how to visit their plots.

The company sells forest land ranging from 1 square foot to 1,000 square feet so they can't be developed.

### 'Whatever' tops annoying word list, literally

**NY** POUGHKEEPSIE — The shoulder-shrugging reply "whatever" continues to annoy Americans more than other words or phrases, but "fake news" is coming on strong.

The annual Marist College poll of most annoying words and phrases found "whatever" topping the list for the ninth straight year. It was the pick of one third of poll respondents, who were given five choices.

The recent addition "fake news" was slightly ahead of "no offense, but" for second place, 23 percent to 20 percent. About one in 10 found "literally" to be most grating, as did a similar number for "you know what I mean."

### Vandals scatter tomb's remains at cemetery

**HI** HONOLULU — Vandals broke into an Oahu cemetery tomb and scattered someone's remains, prompting a police investigation.

Hawaii News Now reported Monday that volunteers cutting grass at Sunset Memorial Park found the desecrated remains.

The volunteers said an empty cement box was found inside one of the tombs and a pile of bones and bone fragments were dumped in another tomb nearby.

The incident is the latest of a string of vandalism and homelessness issues at the cemetery.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

# Mills, Perry have Knicks looking good

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Magic Johnson noticed. Carmelo Anthony, too.

The once misguided New York Knicks seem to have a plan. The franchise that's been good at producing chaos but not much else has the look of a professional NBA organization under president Steve Mills and general manager Scott Perry — and that's not just on the court.

Like everyone else in the league, the two men want to win. But even before that, they want the Knicks to develop the traits of a model franchise, not the model of dysfunction that they had come to be their identity.

"I knew there were a lot of things that needed to change here and we're in the process of doing that," Mills said.

So far, so good. The Knicks were 16-14 heading into their game against Boston on Thursday night — not bad for a team that parted ways with its team president on the eve of free agency and then traded its leading scorer on the eve of training camp.

"Hats off to my good friend Steve Mills. He is doing an excellent job," Johnson wrote in a tweet after the Knicks beat the Hall of Famer's Lakers on Dec. 12. "The future is promising for his young Knicks."

And, it appears, much different from the past.

Mills and Perry want the Knicks to be known as a team that competes hard, works

hard, defends hard. They insist on players who will be accountable to the team and a team that will be accountable to its fans.

The only identity the Knicks had in recent years was of a laughingstock.

"People say, 'Can you win first and then have a culture?' Well, what is the foundation you're building to fall back on when you talk about being sustainable?" Perry said. "So what we want to be is a sustainable team that's good year in and year out."

Mills returned to the team president role he briefly held after Phil Jackson was ousted in late June and then hired Perry as his general manager shortly after. They went to work on fixing the Knicks' roster and reputation, trading Anthony but earning praise by showing him respect Jackson didn't during a tumultuous final season together.

They surprised Anthony with a video tribute before his first game back at Madison Square Garden last Saturday, then the Knicks showed their former star how much things have changed by routing Oklahoma City.

"I like the potential that they have," Anthony said. "For me, just to see those guys having fun again, knowing that it wasn't fun. The fun was lost over the past couple of seasons."

Mills had a firsthand view of it while serving as Jackson's general manager. Another 50-loss season ended with the Knicks getting a clear signal of how fed up

people were when Kristaps Porzingis, the young star who was being groomed to replace Anthony as the face of the franchise, skipped his exit meeting after the season.

"Everyone was frustrated. One of our players was obviously frustrated. Our fans were frustrated, we were frustrated, and so it led us to think we have to do something different and I felt strongly about it," Mills said. "I addressed it with Phil and our coaching staff and our entire staff, that in my view we weren't a team that really stood for anything in particular and that needed to change.

"If it meant changing the triangle, if it meant changing our day-to-day stuff, we had to become more definable by something. When someone sees the Knicks, when someone's going to play against the Knicks, what are you going to experience when you play that team?"

For Perry, the hope is a team like the Pistons of the early 2000s, who won an NBA title and went to the Eastern Conference finals every season he was their director of player of personnel. One thing he's insistent the Knicks won't become are losers on purpose, as he and Mills rule out tanking for a high draft pick even though both have said they want to build with youth.

"Ultimately our goal is to become a championship-type organization and I have just yet to see in my time in the NBA teams that embrace tanking that ultimately will be champions," Perry said.

## Roundup

# Lakers end Rockets' 14-game win streak

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Rookie forward Kyle Kuzma set career highs with 38 points and seven three-pointers, and the Los Angeles Lakers overcame 51 points from James Harden to end the Houston Rockets' 14-game winning streak with a 122-116 victory Wednesday night.

It was Houston's first loss since Nov. 14.

Harden powered Houston on a night when Chris Paul had just eight points before leaving early in the fourth quarter with a sore left leg.

**Heat 90, Celtics 89:** Kelly Olynyk scored a career-high

32 points in his rousing return to Boston, and undermanned Miami hung on for a victory.

**Warriors 97, Grizzlies 84:** Klay Thompson scored 27 of his 29 points in the first half and made his first nine field goal attempts, leading undermanned Golden State past visiting Memphis for its 10th straight win.

**Bulls 112, Magic 94:** Denzel Valentine had 16 points and 10 rebounds, Nikola Mirotic had 15 points and 10 rebounds, and host Chicago beat Orlando for its seventh straight win.

**Spurs 93, Trail Blazers 91:** LaMarcus Aldridge scored 22 points, and Pau Gasol had 20

points and a season-high 17 rebounds in visiting San Antonio's victory over Portland.

**Timberwolves 112, Nuggets 104:** Karl-Anthony Towns had 25 points and 10 rebounds, Jimmy Butler also scored 25 and Minnesota beat host Denver.

**Thunder 107, Jazz 79:** Russell Westbrook had 24 points and 10 rebounds to help Oklahoma City roll past visiting Utah.

**Raptors 129, Hornets 111:** DeMar DeRozan scored 18 of his 28 points after halftime and Toronto overcame a slow start to beat host Charlotte for its fourth straight win.

**Pacers 105, Hawks 95:** Victor Oladipo scored 23 points,

Myles Turner had 20 and visiting Indiana beat Atlanta.

**Kings 104, Nets 99:** George Hill scored 22 points, Zach Randolph added 21 and Sacramento completed its first back-to-back sweep of the season by beating host Brooklyn.

**Mavericks 110, Pistons 93:** Harrison Barnes scored 25 points, rookie Dennis Smith Jr. had 15 points and five assists in his return from a hip injury and Dallas beat visiting Detroit.

**Clippers 108, Suns 94:** Austin Rivers scored 21 points, DeAndre Jordan grabbed 20 rebounds and host Los Angeles beat Phoenix to end a three-game skid.

# Wofford knocks off fifth-ranked UNC

Associated Press

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — Wofford coach Mike Young walked into his postgame news conference wearing a soaked dress shirt and sheepishly drying himself with a towel.

"Pardon my appearance," Young said, "a little over-exuberance from my team."

It's OK, coach. Beating fifth-ranked and reigning national champion North Carolina — on the road, no less — deserves a hearty celebration.

Fletcher Magee scored 27 points to help the Terriers stun the Tar Heels 79-75 on Wednesday night, snapping UNC's 23-game home winning streak.

The Terriers (8-4) led the entire second half and by as many as 14 points before holding off UNC's late-game run for their first win over a ranked team in 23 games.

The Terriers closed it out with four straight free throws in the final 15.2 seconds to seal it, then mobbed each other at midcourt as the horn sounded and the Tar Heels (10-2) headed to the tunnel.

It was in the locker room, Young said, that his team dumped a cooler on him as part of a celebration that left him a bit embarrassed as he pointed out it was only one regular-season win.

And yet, he also understood: what a win it was for a team picked to finish sixth in the Southern Conference.

"I grew up in Virginia," Young said. "This was my team, Coach Smith, and you see all those banners up there, and I can think back to (John) Kuester and (Walter) Davis and (Phil) Ford, all those guys.

"And to bring a team in here and not only compete and fight and do some really good things — but win — holy cow, that's a mouthful."

The Tar Heels got within a point twice and missed four three-pointers for the tie in the final 6 minutes. But they never

could overtake the Terriers, who played confidently and kept counter-punching every time UNC made a run.

"We've got to by God be ready to play and not act like we're prima donnas, (that) we've got North Carolina (on their jersey) and we can walk out there and the other team is going to fold," UNC coach Roy Williams said. "That team out-worked us."

Joel Berry II scored 23 points to lead UNC, which suffered its first home loss to an unranked team while ranked in the top five since falling to Boston College in January 2009.

"They just had the momentum," Berry said, "and it's hard to get it back on your side when they're just coming out here and playing with more effort than you."

**Magee's roll:** Magee, a 6-foot-4 junior, entered the day as the nation's No. 2 scorer (24.1 points) while leading the country in made threes per game (4.73). He made 10 of 23 shots and 4 of 12 threes against UNC, several on tough looks.

"That's what kids in mid-major schools like us, that's our opportunity, one of our best opportunities we get the whole year," Magee said. "This game was marked and big for us."

**Johnson's debut:** Pittsburgh graduate transfer Cameron Johnson finally made his regular-season debut for UNC. He missed the opener with a neck injury then the next 10 games after knee surgery five weeks ago.

Johnson had 10 points, mostly from a 7-for-8 showing at the line, in 17 minutes.

**UNC's home success:** The Tar Heels had won 22 games in the Smith Center and a relocated game in Greensboro against Notre Dame last season during its home winning streak. It was UNC's first home loss since February 2016 against rival Duke.

## Top 25 roundup

# No. 21 Volunteers squeak by Paladins

Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee delivered the last-minute plays it failed to make three days earlier.

The 21st-ranked Volunteers needed that kind of late production to avoid a second straight loss

Grant Williams scored a tie-breaking basket with 54 seconds left Wednesday night as Tennessee outlasted Furman 66-61 to snap the Paladins' five-game winning streak. Tennessee barely survived a game that featured 13 ties and 14 lead changes.

"We found a way at the end," Tennessee coach Rick Barnes said. "You've got to do that sometimes when you're not playing your best."

Tennessee was coming off a 78-73 loss to No. 5 North Carolina on Sunday in which it failed to execute late. The Vols had led North Carolina most of the way before allowing nine straight points in the final minute.

"It really left a bitter taste in my mouth, so I wanted to make an impact tonight," said Tennessee's Admiral Schofield, who had 12 points and 13 rebounds.

Jordan Bowden scored 21 points for Tennessee while Williams had 14. Williams made the go-ahead basket in the final minute when he made a move in the paint and scored to break a 61-all tie.

**No. 4 Duke 104, Evansville 40:** Freshman Wendell Carter Jr. scored a season-best 27 points for the host Blue Devils.

Marvin Bagley III added 18 points and Grayson Allen finished with 16 to help Duke (12-1) bounce back from its lone loss with one of its best defensive performances of the season.

Duke blocked nine shots, forced a season-best 21 turnovers and turned them into 39 points against a slow-paced Evansville team.

Dainius Chatkevicius had 12 points to lead the Purple Aces (10-3), who had their five-game winning streak snapped

**No. 10 West Virginia 77, Coppin State 38:** Teddy Allen scored a career-high 24 points and grabbed nine rebounds for the host Mountaineers.

West Virginia (10-1) struggled in the first 10 minutes of the game, shooting 5-for-23 over the first 13 minutes. Allen then led West Virginia to a 15-1 run to close the first half to take a 42-18 lead over the Eagles (0-12).

Tre' Thomas led Coppin State with nine points

**No. 18 Baylor 80, Southern 60:** Manu Lecomte scored 22 points and the host Bears won their fifth straight.

Baylor (10-2) went on a 13-0 run in the first half to pull away, then had an 11-2 spurt after Southern cut its lead to 46-40 midway through the second half.

The Bears shot 63 percent from the field (31-for-49), including 11-for-22 from three-point range. Lecomte was 6-for-9 on threes.

Jared Sam led the Jaguars (3-9) with 21 points

**No. 23 Seton Hall 89, Wagner 68:** Khadeen Carrington scored 26 points and Angel Delgado added 15 points and 10 rebounds for the host Pirates.

The win enabled Seton Hall (10-2) to get back on track after falling to state rival Rutgers last Saturday.

Jo Jo Cooper paced Wagner (7-3) with 15 points and Nigel Jackson added 12.

**No. 25 Creighton 116, USC Upstate 62:** Marcus Foster scored 16 points and the host Bluejays (10-2) shot nearly 70 percent during a 58-point first half.

Foster made 6 of 7 shots two nights after scoring a season-high 32 points against UT Arlington.

# College football recruits sign early

Associated Press

The relevance of the traditional National Signing Day in early February may have just taken a major hit.

Under a policy that took effect this year, high school seniors could sign letters of intent during an early signing period that began Wednesday and runs through Friday. The vast majority decided they didn't want to wait to pick their schools: Of the nation's top 25 prospects as determined by a composite ranking from 247Sports, only a handful are delaying their decisions until February.

"I think most people know where they're going to college before December, so I feel like people don't feel like they have to wait until February now," said Knoxville (Tennessee) Catholic offensive tackle Cade Mays, one of three previously uncommitted five-star recruits to sign with Georgia on Wednesday.

Perhaps that means most prospects will finalize their recruiting process well before the traditional February sign-

ing day going forward.

"I think it's probably going to be the wave of the future," said Mike Farrell, the director of recruiting for Rivals. "I think kids copy kids. I think you'll see this next year, where Signing Day in February will be devalued a bit."

247Sports director of scouting Barton Simmons wasn't so sure.

"I don't know that today's a huge indicator of what's to come because I think a lot of prospects and colleges will both learn from this," Simmons said. "I know that colleges will continue to press for kids to sign early. Whether this many kids sign early in the future, I think is going to be determined (later)."

Farrell noted the December signing period hasn't garnered as much media attention as the traditional February signing date and wondered if that could cause some future prospects to hold off on signing early.

The early signing period has drawn mixed reviews from coaches.

Proponents say it allows

prospects to finish the college selection process early. It also enables coaching staffs to spend January and February focusing on unsigned prospects rather than worrying about their entire class. But it also forces coaches to concentrate more on recruiting when many are also preparing for postseason games.

Notre Dame's Brian Kelly liked how the early signing period gave him the opportunity to complete most of his recruiting class before Christmas.

## Georgia's big move

Mays joined offensive guard Jamaree Salyer and defensive end Brenton Cox as previously uncommitted five-star prospects to choose Georgia. The Bulldogs have commitments from seven of the top 31 prospects according to composite rankings of recruiting sites compiled by 247Sports: Mays, Salyer, Cox, quarterback Justin Fields, running backs Zamir White and James Cook and outside linebacker Adam Anderson.

Simmons said the race for the team recruiting title could come down to Ohio State and Georgia, though he wouldn't rule out Alabama as the Crimson Tide attempt to finish atop the standings for an eighth straight year. Georgia was leading the 247Sports Composite team standings as of Wednesday night.

## Notable signings

The highest-ranked previously uncommitted player to sign Wednesday was defensive end Micah Parsons, who chose Penn State. Clemson has signed four of the nation's top 10 prospects, according to the 247Sports composite: quarterback Trevor Lawrence, defensive ends Xavier Thomas and K.J. Henry and offensive tackle Jackson Carman. Lawrence and Thomas had committed to Clemson long ago, while Henry and Carman chose the Tigers on Wednesday.

"Christmas was supposed to come Monday, but it came a little early today," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said.

## NHL roundup

# Couturier breaks tie, lifts Philadelphia over Detroit

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Sean Couturier scored off his own rebound to snap a tie early in the third period and the Philadelphia Flyers beat the Detroit Red Wings 4-3 on Wednesday night for their seventh victory in eight games.

Robert Hagg added his first NHL goal, Dale Weise and Wayne Simmonds also scored as Philadelphia overcame two one-goal deficits. Claude Giroux had three assists, and Brian Elliott made 25 saves. The Flyers finished a five-game home-stand 4-1.

Martin Frk and Mike Green had power-play goals, Gustav Nyquist also scored and Jimmy

Howard made 27 saves for the Red Wings. They were trying to win three straight for the first time this season.

Couturier, in his seventh season, set a career high for goals in a season with his team-best 16th when he beat Howard with a second-chance shot at 5:57.

It appeared the Red Wings were going a man up when Jakub Voracek was called for elbowing with 2:06 left. But it was evened up when Andreas Athanasiou was given an embellishment penalty on the play and Detroit lost in Philadelphia for the 13th time in 14 tries.

The Flyers tied it at 2 on the power play in a wild second period when Simmonds finished perfect tic-tac-toe passing from

Voracek and Giroux at 10:48 for his 11th goal.

Nyquist's 10th goal 41 seconds later put Detroit ahead 3-2, but Hagg answered at 13:40 on a slap shot through traffic.

Simmonds raced into the net to retrieve the puck for Hagg, who was playing in his 35th NHL game.

**Blue Jackets 4, Maple Leafs 2:** Seth Jones had a goal an assist, and Joonas Korpi made 39 shots to help host Columbus beat Toronto.

Lukas Sedlak, Pierre-Luc Dubois and Alexander Wennberg also scored for the Blue Jackets.

Korpi, starting in place of Sergei Bobrovsky on the first night of a back-to-back,

allowed a second-period goal to Jake Gardiner and another in the third to Mitchell Marner in playing one of his strongest games of the season. Toronto has lost four of five.

**Flames 2, Blues 1:** Dougie Hamilton broke a tie at 7:57 of the third period and host Calgary beat St. Louis.

After goalie Carter Hutton stopped an initial shot from the blue line, Ivan Barbashev was about to skate away with the rebound when Hamilton swung at the puck and, all in one motion, knocked it off Barbashev's stick and into the goal.

Michael Frolik also scored for Calgary.

Brayden Schenn had his 17th goal for St. Louis.