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McConnell blasts House impeachment

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The top Senate Republican on Thursday denounced the “most unfair” House impeachment of President Donald Trump and reassured Trump and his supporters that “moments like this are why the United States Senate exists.”

Signaling in the strongest terms yet that the GOP-controlled Senate will acquit Trump, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, declared that the House impeachment “risks deeply damaging the institutions of American government.”

As for what the Senate should do, the Kentucky Republican said, “It could not be clearer which outcome would serve the stabilizing, institution-preserv-

ing, fever-breaking role for which the United States Senate was created and which outcome would betray it.”

McConnell described Trump’s impeachment as “the most rushed, least thorough and most unfair impeachment inquiry in modern history.”

Fighting back and using McConnell’s own words, Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, of New York, then said on the Senate floor that the Republican leader was plotting the “most rushed, least thorough and most unfair” impeachment trial in history by declining to agree to call witnesses including former Trump national security adviser John Bolton, who declined to testify before the House.

“McConnell claimed the im-

peachment was motivated by partisan rage,” said Schumer. “This from the man who said proudly, ‘I am not impartial.’”

“What hypocrisy.”

McConnell accused House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of being afraid to send “their shoddy work product to the Senate” after she threw uncertainty into the impeachment process late Wednesday by refusing to say when she would send two impeachment articles to the Senate for a trial.

He said the Democratic-controlled House “has let its partisan rage at this particular president create a toxic new precedent that will echo well into the future.”

Pelosi was upbeat the day after the House impeached Trump on two charges — abus-

ing his presidential power and obstructing Congress — stemming from his pressure on Ukraine to announce investigations of his political rival as Trump withheld U.S. aid.

Pressed about next steps, Pelosi wouldn’t say. Democrats are insisting on more witnesses, testimony and documents than McConnell appears willing to provide before they name the House “managers” who would prosecute Trump in the Senate.

Speaking earlier, McConnell said the two articles failed to meet the constitutional standard of high crimes and misdemeanors and that the House simply impeached a political foe for an abuse of power offense that isn’t considered a crime.

Trump impeached on 2 almost fully party-line votes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump was impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming only the third American chief executive to be formally charged under the Constitution’s ultimate remedy for high crimes and misdemeanors.

The historic vote split along party lines Wednesday night, much the way it has divided the nation, over a charge that the 45th president abused the power of his office by enlisting a foreign government to investigate a political rival ahead of the 2020 election. The House then approved a second charge, that he obstructed Congress in its investigation.

The articles of impeachment, the political equivalent of an indictment, now go to the Senate

for trial. If Trump is acquitted by the Republican-led chamber, as expected, he still would have to run for reelection carrying the enduring stain of impeachment on his purposely disruptive presidency.

The votes for impeachment were 230-197-1 on the first charge, 229-198-1 on the second.

Democrats led Wednesday night’s voting, framed in what many said was their duty to protect the Constitution and uphold the nation’s system of checks and balances. Republicans stood by their party’s leader, who has frequently tested the bounds of civic norms. Trump called the whole affair a “witch hunt,” a “hoax” and a “sham,” and sometimes all three.

The trial is expected to begin in January in the Senate, where

a vote of two-thirds is necessary for conviction. While Democrats had the majority in the House to impeach Trump, Republicans control the Senate and few if any are expected to diverge from plans to acquit the president ahead of early state election-year primary voting.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, once reluctant to lead Democrats into a partisan impeachment, gaveled both votes closed, risking her majority and speakership to follow the effort to its House conclusion.

No Republicans voted for impeachment, and Democrats had only slight defections on their side. Voting was conducted manually with ballots, to mark the moment.

On the first article, abuse of power, two Democrats, Jeff Van Drew, of New Jersey, who is considering becoming a Re-

publican, and Collin Peterson, of Minnesota, voted against impeaching Trump. On the second article, obstruction, those two and freshman Rep. Jared Golden of Maine voted against. Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, of Hawaii, who is running for president, voted “present” on both.

What Pelosi called a sad and solemn moment for the country, coming in the first year after Democrats swept control of the House, unfolded in a caustic daylong session that showcased the nation’s divisions. The House resolution laid out in stark terms the articles of impeachment against Trump stemming from his July phone call when he asked the Ukrainian president for a “favor.”

Judge: \$2M is too high for damages in housing suit

BY ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

A judge has ruled that \$2 million in damages for a Marine Corps family sickened by mold in military housing is excessive, according to court documents.

San Diego Superior Court Judge Randa Trapp sided with Lincoln Military Housing and its subsidiary San Diego Family Housing, the company that manages residences at Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, according to court documents filed Monday.

Trapp ordered a new trial during a hearing Dec. 6. Trapp said the new trial should determine a new figure for damages for the family of Staff Sgt. Matthew Charvat family for pain, suffering and emotional distress, because the \$500,000 awarded to each of the four

family members was too much.

"The evidence presented does not support such a high amount for what appears to be temporary nasal symptoms, insomnia and irritability, breathing difficulties, tiredness and Mrs. Charvat feeling like she lost a year," the judge wrote in her ruling.

Charvat, his wife, Leigh, and their two children moved into base housing in San Diego in April 2015. The house had a "horrible, musty odor throughout," as well as mold in the air vents, crumbling drywall and a damaged roof, according to court documents. The Charvat family started feeling ill the following January and discovered mold in the home a month later, according to court documents. They moved in April 2016 and their symptoms dissipated shortly thereafter.

GIs in Afghanistan get early premiere of Star Wars movie

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Troops howled their best Chewbacca impressions as they waited for the latest Star Wars movie, which premiered in a special showing for troops in Afghanistan on Thursday.

About 10,000 service members deployed throughout the Middle East had a chance to see "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" a day before fans back home in America, thanks to a partnership between the Army and Air Force Exchange Service and Walt Disney Studios.

"It's actually, really, really exciting, to be honest with you," said Army Sgt. Danny Ramirez from Bagram Airfield in a phone interview.

"It was one of the things I thought I was going to miss out on," added Ramirez, a lifelong Star Wars fan who watched the previous eight movies of the

saga in preparation.

Troops at Bagram, the largest U.S. base in Afghanistan, lined up outside one of the Morale, Welfare and Recreation buildings an hour early to secure seats for one of four showings of the movie on its first day.

Inside, decorative Death Stars, TIE fighters and Millennium Falcons hung over their heads.

The building's kitchen area was transformed into something like a Star Wars cantina. There was even a red carpet rolled out in the building for selfies.

Not many troops at the first screening wore the fanciful costumes of the heroic Jedi knights or insidious Sith lords, but those at the late-night screenings often do, said Don Baumgartner, Morale, Welfare and Recreation director at Bagram. Bagram has hosted other Star Wars movies in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Graham walks back claims on drawdown

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The United States could conduct its missions in Afghanistan of fighting terrorist groups and supporting the Afghan military with about 8,600 troops, Sen. Lindsey Graham said Wednesday.

But he also told reporters on Capitol Hill that an official announcement of a U.S. military drawdown there might not be imminent.

Graham, R-S.C., said Army Gen. Scott Miller, the top commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, had convinced him during his visit to Kabul this week that the 12,000 to 13,000 troops serving there now were more than are needed in the country. But the senator, a key ally and confidant to President Donald Trump, said he had not discussed the issue in depth with the president, seeming to clarify reporting this week that an announcement of a drawdown would come before the end of the year.

"We have some people there probably in redundant roles, and the capability of an 8,600 force is sufficient to maintain our counterterrorism mission and provide basic support to the Afghan military," he said.

Graham has long been adamant that the United States maintain forces in Afghanistan and in the Middle East. He backed plans, eventually adopted by Trump, to increase the U.S. force in Afghanistan from about 8,400 troops when former President Barack Obama left office to more than 14,000 in 2017.

Trump has long called for an end to American operations in Afghanistan, and in a surprise Thanksgiving Day visit to Bagram Airfield said he planned for a significant force reduction. Yet, the Pentagon has not received orders to draw down. Pentagon officials referred questions Wednesday to the

White House, which did not reply to a request for comment.

Graham said he has highlighted the potential value of Afghanistan's rare minerals, in an attempt to convince the president to maintain an American interest in that country. He compared the effort to another recent strategy to convince Trump to leave troops in a country that he desired to leave — using U.S. troops to secure oil fields in eastern Syria.

"The minerals in Afghanistan could be well over \$1 trillion. Lithium and other really valuable minerals," Graham said. "One thing President Trump really wants to do is look at those resources differently."

The senator, a retired Air Force lawyer and former member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, warned the United States must maintain a presence in Afghanistan or risk "a second 9/11." He said he was told during his recent visit to Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan that Islamic State's affiliate in that country sought to attack the U.S. homeland.

"There was actual intelligence coming out of ISIS-[Khorasan] regarding plots against our homeland," Graham said. "Elements in Afghanistan are reaching back to America trying to radicalize people here and attack us here at home."

The senator declined to provide additional details about the plots. The revelations came as U.S., Afghan and Taliban forces have all hammered ISIS-K in its stronghold in eastern Afghanistan's Nangarhar province in recent months. Graham said some 400 ISIS fighters had been taken captive after locals stopped supporting the terrorist fighters and essentially "starved them out."

Those fighters, held now by the Afghans, are almost exclusively foreign fighters, many of them from Pakistan, Graham said.

USMC eyes 2 models of copters

Bloomberg

The Pentagon is assessing whether the Marine Corps should scale back its \$31 billion program to buy new King Stallion helicopters from Lockheed Martin and opt for a combination with a modified version of the latest-model Chinooks built by rival Boeing.

Officials from the Pentagon's acquisition, sustainment, research and operational test offices are evaluating and expanding on a preliminary review completed in May by the Pentagon's independent cost assessment office at the urging of lawmakers.

They are "reviewing the operational suitability and cost effectiveness of a potential mix" of the helicopters "to perform the heavy lift mission," John Whitley, acting director of the cost assessment office, wrote the congressional defense committees this month.

The results "will be available with the submission of the administration's fiscal 2021 bud-

get," Whitley wrote in a letter obtained by Bloomberg News. Charts accompanying the letter said "analysis suggests a mix" of the two aircraft "could be more cost-effective and will be investigated."

The combination assumes the Chinook, built for the Army, can be converted for the rugged, corrosive environment of aircraft carriers and amphibious warfare ships.

A Pentagon decision to move toward a combination of the copters as soon as the fiscal 2021 budget would be a blow to Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed.

The Navy's plans to buy 200 King Stallions were a prime motivation for Lockheed's \$9 billion acquisition of Sikorsky Aircraft from United Technologies in 2015. Twenty have been put on contract to date. The current budget plan calls for requesting 77 King Stallions, designated CH-53K, through 2024, including 14 in fiscal 2021, which would be five more than this year.

A mix would be a boon to Chicago-based Boeing, its Philadelphia plant and the 4,580 workers there. That's especially true given that the Army has proposed halting procurement of 28 CH-47 Chinooks and shifting an estimated \$962 million into a separate program.

The preliminary analysis "concluded that a pure fleet of marinized" Chinooks could save as much as 40% compared with a fleet composed entirely of King Stallions, Christopher Sherwood, a spokesman for the cost assessment office, said in a statement. But he said a fleet solely of Chinooks "cannot meet the mission set" for heavy lift needs.

The Marine Corps is signaling resistance to the mixed-fleet idea.

Lt. Gen. Steven Rudder, the top Marine aviator, said in a statement that a mixed fleet "degrades capabilities by 40%, while only realizing a potential 10% cost savings over the aircraft life cycle."

Marine is sentenced, then freed for assaults

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — After spending months in a Japanese jail, a Marine lance corporal convicted of drunkenly assaulting three people in Tokyo is free on a suspended sentence.

Kahsai Tyree Hill, 21, assigned to 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment at Camp Lejeune, N.C., was found guilty Wednesday in Tokyo District Court of three counts of bodily injury. The judge gave him a suspended sentence of three years in prison with hard labor.

Hill won't have to serve his prison time unless he commits another crime in Japan within the next five years.

Hill had been in jail for 110 days awaiting trial and sentencing, the judge said. Speaking through an interpreter Wednesday evening, Hill's defense attorney told Stars and Stripes that Hill would be immediately released.

After a night of drinking with fellow Marines in the city's Shinjuku ward on May 25, Hill struck two men and choked a woman, according to testimony at a November hearing. The Marines were in town from nearby Camp Fuji.

Through an interpreter, the judge on Wednesday called the attacks "violent and dangerous," especially because of Hill's "built-up physique through training" with the Marine Corps.

The judge said he suspended Hill's sentence because Hill paid about \$16,800 in compensation to his victims and he "can't rule out" that an underlying mental illness played a role in Hill's actions.

The judge said he also took into account Hill's admission of guilt and promises to seek counseling, stop drinking alcohol and not reoffend.

Memorial honors Iwakuni crash victims

BY JAMES BOLINGER

Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — Iwakuni Marines dedicated a memorial to five aviators who died one year ago after the tail of their KC-130J Hercules, call sign Sumo 41, was struck by an F/A-18 Hornet during a nighttime training mission.

The Marines were assigned to Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 152. The granite monument honoring them was unveiled outside the squadron's building on the first anniversary of the accident.

Lost on Dec. 6, 2018, from the refueler squadron were Cpl. Daniel Baker, Maj. James Brophy, Staff Sgt. Maximo Alexander Flores, Lt. Col. Kevin Herrmann and Cpl. William Ross.

The Hornet pilot — Capt. Jahmar Resilard of Iwakuni's

Marine All-Weather Fighter Attack Squadron 242 — was also killed. The jet's weapons officer survived after ejecting.

Four officers from the fighter squadron were fired after investigators determined the pilot's inexperience conducting nighttime, in-air refueling and a toxic command climate contributed to the collision.

It's tough to plan a memorial, said refueler squadron commander Lt. Col. Mitch Maury in an interview Monday. He was in command the day of the incident.

"You never feel like you can do enough for the families or to properly put things into perspective to honor those who we lost," he said. "If I try to put myself in the family's shoes, I think my biggest fear would be people not remembering what great men they were, what selfless individuals, what they contributed. We needed something

that would remind those coming into the squadron about who they were, what they gave."

A committee within the squadron decided on a granite memorial beneath a torii gate. A section of a propeller recovered from the wreckage forms the gate's top beam. Maury said the memorial was designed by Capt. Anthony Walter and his wife, Emily.

A torii is often found near the entrance to a Shinto shrine and symbolically marks a transition to a sacred place.

"Being able to use a piece of the wreckage that was recovered allows us to be reminded about our brothers, and all events that took place that day," Gunnery Sgt. Andrew Torrecillas, also of the refueler squadron, said in an email Thursday. "Sumo 41 will always be tied to those 5 great Americans, but also to the aircraft lost. We will never forget."

Trump rallies supporters amid impeachment

Associated Press

BATTLE CREEK, Mich. — Defiant in the face of a historic rebuke, President Donald Trump labeled his impeachment by the House of Representatives on Wednesday “a suicide march” for the Democratic Party as he delivered a rambling two-hour rally speech that overlapped the vote.

“Crazy Nancy Pelosi’s House Democrats have branded themselves with an eternal mark of shame,” Trump told the crowd in battleground Michigan, where he took the stage just minutes before becoming only the third president in U.S. history to be impeached. “It’s a disgrace.”

It was a dramatic and discordant split-screen moment, with Trump emerging from a mock fireplace like Santa Claus at the Christmas-themed rally as the impeachment debate in Washington played

out. It was also Trump’s longest rally ever, according to the tracking site Factbase, clocking in at two hours and one minute.

As Trump spoke — seemingly unaware for a stretch that the votes had been tallied — the House moved to impeach him on two counts. The first charges him with abuse of power for allegedly pressuring the president of Ukraine to investigate his Democratic rivals while crucial U.S. security aid was being withheld. The second charges him with obstruction of Congress for stonewalling investigative efforts.

Yet there is little chance Trump will be convicted by the Republican-controlled Senate and removed from office — a fact that Trump and his allies have pointed to as they have tried to minimize the votes’ significance. Still, Trump clearly was stung by the stain that an “ugly” impeachment will attach to his legacy.

Throughout the rally, Trump unleashed his anger at the Democrats, slammed their effort as “illegal” and accused the party of demonstrating “deep hatred and disdain” for voters.

“After three years of sinister witch hunts, hoaxes, scams, tonight the House Democrats are trying to nullify the ballots of tens of millions of patriotic Americans,” Trump said, claiming that it was the Democrats who were “interfering in America’s elections” and “subverting American democracy.”

Trump spent much of his marathon speech zigzagging between impeachment and unrelated topics, punctuating his remarks with more profanity than usual.

And after a day of harsh tweets, Trump at times projected a less-concerned attitude toward what he called “impeachment lite.”

Court rules ‘Obamacare’ mandate invalid

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A federal appeals court on Wednesday struck down “Obamacare’s” now-toothless requirement that Americans carry health insurance but sidestepped a ruling on the law’s overall constitutionality. The decision means the law remains in effect for now.

The 2-1 ruling handed down by a panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans means the ultimate fate of the rest of the Affordable Care Act including such popular provisions as protections for those with pre-existing conditions, Medicaid expansion and the ability for children under the age of 26 to remain on their parents’ insurance remains unclear.

The panel agreed with Texas-based U.S. District Judge Reed O’Connor’s 2018 finding that the law’s insurance requirement, the so-called “individual mandate,” was rendered unconstitutional when Congress, in 2017, reduced a tax on people without insurance to zero.

The court reached no decision on the big issue — how much of the Affordable Care Act must fall along with the insurance mandate.

“It may still be that none of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate, even after this inquiry is concluded. It may be that all of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate. It may also be that some of the ACA is severable from the individual mandate, and some is not,” Judge

Jennifer Elrod wrote.

The decision sends the case back to a judge who already ruled once to throw out the entire ACA but with some guidance. O’Connor has to be more specific about which parts of the law can’t be separated from the mandate, and also must take into account Congress’ decision to leave the rest of the law essentially unchanged when it reduced the penalty for not having insurance to zero, Elrod wrote.

In dissent, Judge Carolyn Dineen King said her colleagues were prolonging “uncertainty over the future of the healthcare sector.” King would have found the mandate constitutional, although unenforceable, and would have left the rest of the law alone.

Space Force may call Colorado base its new home

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

The Space Force, a new armed service branch that will be responsible for America’s military efforts in space, needs a home and it may be Colorado.

The National Defense Authorization Act, passed by Congress and expected to soon be signed into law by President Donald Trump, doesn’t explicitly designate where the new military branch’s main hub will be. But the spending plan authorizes \$148 million to begin construction on a Combined Space Operations Facility at Schriever Air

Force Base in Colorado Springs, an area already home to the newly established U.S. Space Command.

Colorado officials appear optimistic that the region will be the eventual headquarters.

“With U.S. Space Command established in Colorado Springs earlier this year, and the bulk of the Space Force personnel currently serving on Peterson and Schriever Air Force Bases, this NDAA solidifies our community’s position as the premier defense space community of the United States,” Rep. Doug Lamborn, R-Colo., said

in a statement.

The establishment of the Space Force, a top priority for Trump, marks the first time in more than 70 years that a new military service has been formed. U.S. Air Force Gen. John Raymond, who heads Space Command, told Stars and Stripes in October that growing security demands in space and the need to defend satellites from potential attack require a military branch devoted to it.

The idea is for the Space Force to be a partner to the Air Force as the Marine Corps is to the Navy.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man stuffs shrimp down pants in grocery thefts

CA RIVERSIDE — A thief stuffed a total of 30 bags of frozen shrimp down his pants in back-to-back burglaries of a Southern California grocery store, police said.

The man took the shrimp from a Vons market in Riverside by entering the store three times in a span of 15 minutes on Dec. 14.

Each time he went to the frozen food section and concealed the shrimp in his pants, Riverside police said in a statement.

The stolen food had a retail value of more than \$500.

Woman surprised by delivery of AR-15 parts

FL DEBARY — A Florida woman was surprised by the delivery of a package she didn't order. The bigger surprise came when she opened the package and found parts for an AR-15 rifle inside.

Volusia County Sheriff's officials said the 69-year-old woman had been notified by her bank about fraudulent payments that recently appeared on her credit card. She canceled the card and was told the charges were also canceled, but one was processed.

The News-Journal of Daytona Beach, Fla., reported the woman plans to return the parts.

Boy, 15, heads to Stanford on scholarship

NC CARY — A 15-year-old math whiz in North Carolina has earned a scholarship to Stanford University.

WRAL reported that Kenan Hasanaliyev is a standout student at Triangle Math and Science Academy in the Raleigh

suburb of Cary.

He earned math credits in sixth grade that put him three grades ahead. Since then, he's mastered AP Calculus and Calculus 2 at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He's also taken graduate-level math classes.

Incident involving hyena, zookeeper investigated

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Albuquerque Biological Park officials are investigating an "emergency incident" involving a zookeeper and a hyena.

KOB-TV reported the zoo confirmed it is looking into a Nov. 7 episode before the park opened.

According to emergency dispatch calls, first responders reported a 40-year-old woman with "some type of hand injury" who was bleeding profusely. The calls also indicated the need for medical transport at the time and that "this is a city employee."

Park officials are not answering questions about the case.

Police: Marijuana gifts sniffed out at airport

TN NASHVILLE — A man who may have been dreaming of a "green" Christmas found himself inside the gray walls of a Tennessee jail.

According to court documents, state police caught Somphone Temmeraj, 57, with more than 80 pounds of marijuana disguised as Christmas gifts at Nashville International Airport, news outlets reported.

Officers and a K-9 smelled a strong odor of marijuana coming from three bags, according to the documents. The officers said they saw Temmeraj pick up the bags and load them onto

a cart. He allowed officers to search the bags.

Temmeraj had flown to Nashville from Seattle, the documents state.

Feds seize cocaine headed to Canada

VT MONTPELIER — Federal agents seized almost 370 pounds of cocaine that was hidden in a truck preparing to enter Canada at Vermont's Derby Line border crossing, a court document said.

The cocaine, packed in 142 brick-shaped packages, was found by agents of U.S. Customs and Border Protection with the help of a drug-sniffing dog in a hidden compartment, said an affidavit filed in the case.

The driver of the Quebec-registered truck and trailer, Jason Nelson, was charged in federal court in Plattsburgh, N.Y., with possession with intent to distribute cocaine.

Girl who pointed finger gun placed on diversion

KS OVERLAND PARK — A 13-year-old Kansas girl who was arrested for making her fingers into the shape of a gun and pointing at classmates has been placed on a juvenile diversion program.

The Overland Park girl, who was originally charged with felony threatening, was set to go before a judge on Tuesday, but the Johnson County Juvenile Court hearing was canceled.

Under diversion, a charge can be dismissed if a juvenile successfully meets certain conditions set by authorities.

The girl's mother told The Kansas City Star previously that on Sept. 18, a boy asked her daughter who she would kill if she could kill five classmates. The girl reportedly made the

shape of a gun with her fingers and pointed at four students, then herself. The Associated Press is not identifying the mother to protect the girl's identity.

Service dogs help couple wed

FL WILLISTON — A Florida couple said their service dogs are so important to them that they decided to make it a canine themed wedding. They're even changing their last name to Brown-Paws.

Ten German shepherds attended the backyard ceremony in Williston. Groom Robert Brown's service dog, Sirius, and the bride's service dog, Hero, stood close as the couple read their vows.

Bride Sarah Pawleski, who is an Army veteran, was matched with her dog in 2013. Brown, a Desert Storm veteran, was matched with Sirius three years later.

Pranksters cover home, 2 cars in cheese

PA GIRARD — A man and two teenage boys who allegedly covered two cars and a home with cheese slices are facing disorderly conduct charges.

Pennsylvania state police said the prank occurred in Girard, but it's not clear what motivated it.

The names of the three suspects — a 17-year-old Girard boy and two Lake City residents, ages 17 and 18, — have not been released. Authorities said they admitted their involvement in the prank.

It's not clear if anyone was in the home at the time of the incident.

From wire reports

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Jags fire top exec Coughlin after criticism from NFLPA

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — The Jacksonville Jaguars fired top executive Tom Coughlin on Wednesday, parting ways with the two-time Super Bowl-winning coach a little more than a day after the NFL Players Association took a sledgehammer to his reputation.

Coughlin served as executive vice president of football operations since 2017. It was his second stint with Jacksonville, the expansion franchise he helped build from the ground up in the mid-1990s.

The unbending taskmaster had been in trouble for weeks because of the team's sagging record and several questionable roster moves. The NFLPA seemingly forced owner Shad Khan's hand after an arbitrator's decision to undo millions in fines imposed by Coughlin himself.

The NFLPA said Monday that more than 25% of player grievances filed in the last two years have been against the Jaguars. The union's take: "You as players may want to consider this when you have a chance to select your next club."

"I determined earlier this fall that making this move at the conclusion of the 2019 season would be in everyone's best interests," Khan said in a statement. "But, in recent days, I reconsidered and decided to make this change immediately."

"I thank Tom for his efforts, not only over the past three years but for all he did from our very first season, 25 years ago, to put the Jacksonville Jaguars on the map."

Khan said general manager Dave Caldwell and head coach Doug Marrone will each report directly to him on an interim basis.

"My expectations, and those of our fans, for our final two games and the 2020 season are high," Khan added.

The NFLPA grievances are a product of Coughlin's peccadillos, many of which come from a good place — that of an old-school coach who always believed that football was more than just a business.

But the rules that once seemed trifling — no sunglasses, all meetings start 5 minutes early — took a more sinister tone since Coughlin's return. He was still basking in the glow

of two Super Bowl titles during his in-between stay as coach of the New York Giants that painted him as a man who had truly changed his ways.

He fined defensive end Dante Fowler more than \$700,000 in 2018 for missing "mandatory" appointments at the facility during the offseason. Problem was, the appointments weren't really mandatory — a reality cooked into the rule book after some hard-fought wins by the union in collective bargaining about how much time players were obliged to spend at team headquarters in the offseason.

Coughlin and the Jaguars have been on the wrong end of other high-profile battles against players — involving running back Leonard Fournette, cornerback Jalen Ramsey and now-retired defensive end Jared Odrick.

The pushback against Coughlin was as much a sign of the attitudes of players in the late 2010s as it is of their willingness to blindly follow a leader who hadn't proven himself to them — regardless of whatever message those Super Bowl rings might have delivered.

Russia plans to appeal 4-year Olympic ban

MOSCOW— Russia has signaled it will file an appeal against its four-year Olympic ban due to World Anti-Doping Agency sanctions that President Vladimir Putin on Thursday branded "unfair."

The Russian anti-doping agency's supervisory board voted Thursday to file an arbitration case with the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland. WADA last week ruled Russia had manipulated doping laboratory data to cover up past offenses.

LSU's top RB nursing hamstring injury

BATON ROUGE, La. — LSU coach Ed Orgeron said running back Clyde Edwards-Helaire's status for the college football playoffs is uncertain following a hamstring injury in practice this week.

Tests are ongoing, Orgeron said, adding that he does not know the extent of Edwards-Helaire's injury and that he's "not sure that Clyde can play or can't play yet" when No. 1 LSU meets Oklahoma in the national semifinals at the Peach Bowl on Dec. 28.

MLBPA files grievance on behalf of Ellsbury

NEW YORK — The Major League Baseball Players Association has filed a grievance against the New York Yankees in an attempt to regain the remaining \$26 million due released outfielder Jacoby Ellsbury.

The grievance was disclosed to The Associated Press by a person familiar with the process who spoke on condition of anonymity.

New York converted Ellsbury's \$153 million, seven-year contract to non-guaranteed, contending he violated the deal by getting unauthorized medical treatment, then released the 36-year-old outfielder on Nov. 20. The Yankees said he was treated by Dr. Viktor Bouquette of Progressive Medical Center in Atlanta without the team's permission.

— Associated Press

Jenkins sorry for tweet, happy with result

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — Former Giants cornerback Janoris Jenkins asserted he was in fact sorry about his use of an offensive term in an exchange with a fan on social media.

Jenkins also made it clear he was not upset about his exile from New York, particularly after it landed him with play-off-bound New Orleans.

Giants coach Pat Shurmer said last week that Jenkins' "refusal to acknowledge the inappropriate and offensive language" when he used the word "retard" in a social media

exchange influenced the club's decision to waive the cornerback. But Jenkins said Wednesday that the Giants "twisted" his position on the matter.

"I'm sorry to whoever I offended. You know, the way I was raised, we got different cultures and different terms that you use," Jenkins said. "I apologize if I offended anybody or anybody with those disabilities. I didn't mean it that way."

Gone from a 3-11 Giants team, Jenkins is now aiming to fit in with an 11-3 Saints squad that has already won the NFC

South for a third straight season and is in the running for one of the top two seeds in the NFC playoffs.

"You can already tell it's a organization that you'd like to play for. Winning, everybody got the same mindset, winning a championship. And I'm just looking forward to it," Jenkins said after his first practice.

Jenkins is one of two new defensive backs to join the Saints this week. New Orleans also added depth at safety with the signing Wednesday of free agent safety D.J. Swearingen.

College basketball roundup

No. 2 Gonzaga pounds North Carolina

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Corey Kispert turned, put his hands out and gave a little shrug as he jogged back down the floor after his fifth three-pointer of the night.

Gonzaga's do-everything junior forward picked a memorable night in the history of Zags basketball to have maybe the best game of his career.

"It was just one of those times when you were in the zone. ... I knew it was in when I let it go," Kispert said. "It's hard not to play with emotion in this place. The fans get you hyped up and pumped up and I kind of just let it show."

Kispert scored 26 points, Filip Petrushev added 20 and No. 2 Gonzaga rolled past North Carolina 94-81 on Wednesday, handing the Tar Heels their fourth straight loss.

Utah 69, No. 6 Kentucky 66: At Las Vegas, Timmy Allen hit a tiebreaking floater with 1:14 left and the Utes dodged a comeback try by the Wildcats.

The Wildcats (8-2) used a 27-10 run to tie it at 66 on Ashton Hagans' dunk with 1:43 remaining, but Allen put the Utes (9-2) back ahead with his basket.

No. 3 Louisville 70, Miami (Ohio) 46: Jordan Nwora scored 20 points and the host Cardinals pulled away with a 17-0 run to beat the Redhawks.

Ryan McMahon added 11 points for Louisville (11-1), and Dwayne Sutton tied a career-high with 15 rebounds.

Mekhi Lairy led the Redhawks (5-6) with 10 points.

No. 8 Oregon 81, Montana 48: The Ducks made a big addition to their lineup as 6-foot-11 N'Faly Dante played his first college game and contributed 11 points in a rout of the Grizzlies.

The much-anticipated debut of Oregon's top freshman recruit probably wasn't needed against Montana (4-6), but the Ducks want Dante comfortable with his role before Pac-12 play begins in two weeks. Oregon

(9-2) has two more nonconference games.

No. 10 Baylor 91, UT-Martin 63: At Houston, Davion Mitchell and Jared Butler scored 19 points each and the Bears won their eighth straight game.

MaCio Teague had 12 points and Mark Vital added 11 for Baylor (9-1), which shot 56%, including 62% in the second half.

Cincinnati 78, No. 21 Tennessee 66: Trevon Scott scored 15 points and the host Bearcats recovered from back-to-back losses by knocking off the Volunteers.

Cincinnati (7-4) got the better of a back-and-forth game by getting inside one of the country's stingiest defenses for close-up baskets. Forty-six of the Bearcats' points came in the paint.

No. 9 Virginia 56, Stony Brook 44: Kihei Clark scored 14 points and Jay Huff had eight of his 12 during a second-half run for the host Cavaliers.

Huff ended a 5-minute score-

less drought for Virginia (9-1) with a putback dunk with 12:11 remaining and added six more points as the Cavaliers turned a 35-30 lead into a 49-38 edge.

No. 15 Michigan State 77, Northwestern 72: Cassius Winston scored 21 points and Xavier Tillman had 15 points and 10 rebounds, helping the visiting Spartans beat the Wildcats.

Winston went 8-for-16 from the field for Michigan State (8-3, 2-0 Big Ten) in their 11th consecutive victory against Northwestern. Boo Buie scored a career-high 26 points for Northwestern (5-5, 0-2).

No. 20 San Diego State 92, San Diego Christian 48: Yanni Wetzell scored 17 points and the host Aztecs beat the NAIA's Hawks to remain undefeated.

SDSU (11-0) was playing for the first time in 10 days and for the first time since jumping into The Associated Press Top 25. The Aztecs moved up five spots Monday despite not playing last week.

CFP teams clean up on first day of early signing period

Associated Press

Teams competing for the national championship this season got good news well before the College Football Playoff — even if they didn't have much time to celebrate.

The early signing period opened Wednesday with three playoff teams — Clemson, LSU and Ohio State — landing eight of the nation's top 16 prospects according to composite rankings of recruiting sites compiled by 247Sports.

They worked to sign those recruits while preparing for playoff matchups, one consequence of the early signing period that arrived two years ago. Ohio State faces Clemson and LSU meets Oklahoma in the CFP semifinals on Dec. 28.

"You have 14 guys coming

in mid-year, you have award shows to go to and, by the way, once you get off the road, you have two weeks to prepare to play Clemson," Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. "That's a very stressful time. But it is what it is and we're keeping our head down and going."

Those busy schedules haven't stopped the usual suspects from reaching the playoffs and topping the recruiting rankings each year.

Many of the elite recruits that didn't choose LSU, Clemson or Ohio State are instead heading to Alabama and Georgia, two other recent playoff participants. Those five programs have commitments from about half the top 50 prospects.

Clemson tops the 247Sports Composite team recruiting

rankings and was followed in order by Alabama, Ohio State, Georgia and LSU as of early Wednesday evening. Oklahoma's class was ranked ninth.

"More teams are recruiting at an elite level," said Barton Simmons, the director of scouting for 247Sports. "Usually, it's one, two or three (teams) tops. This cycle there's legitimately four or five teams recruiting at a national championship level."

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said he needed a big recruiting haul as he attempts to replace a senior class that is trying to help the Tigers win their third national title in four years.

"When you graduate players like that, you better have quality coming in the door," Swinney said.

Clemson signed seven of the nation's top 29 prospects according to the 247Sports Composite. That included No. 1 overall recruit Bryan Bresee, a defensive tackle from Damascus, Md.

Ohio State's class features wide receiver Julian Fleming (No. 2) and offensive tackle Paris Johnson Jr. (No. 7). The Buckeyes landed the top uncommitted quarterback when C.J. Stroud (No. 87) chose Ohio State.

The top two uncommitted prospects to sign Wednesday were Upland (Calif.) linebacker Justin Flowe and Columbia (S.C.) defensive end Jordan Burch. Flowe, ranked fourth overall, picked Oregon. Burch, the nation's No. 5 prospect, chose South Carolina.

NBA roundup

Heat deal 76ers 1st home loss of season

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Kendrick Nunn scored 26 points to help the Miami Heat hand the Philadelphia 76ers their first home loss of the season, 108-104 on Wednesday night.

The 76ers had been 14-0 at home, including a 113-86 victory over the Heat last month.

Tobias Harris buried a three-pointer for the Sixers with 25.5 seconds left that made it 106-104 and they had sudden life when Nunn missed twice at the free throw line. Al Horford, though, missed an open three-point attempt from the wing and the Heat escaped in a thriller.

Bam Adebayo scored 23 points and Duncan Robinson had 15 for the Heat. Robinson made a pair of threes in the fourth that stretched the lead to 14 points, and Nunn buried a 30-footer for a 99-83 lead.

Joel Embiid, who missed Sunday's rout by the Nets with an upper respiratory illness, had 22 points and 19 rebounds. Harris scored 20 points.

Jimmy Butler scored 14 points for the Heat and was pretty much a non-factor until late in his second game back in Philadelphia.

Pelicans 107, Timberwolves 99: Brandon Ingram scored 34 points and New Orleans snapped its 13-game losing streak with a win at short-handed Minnesota.

Jrue Holiday had 18 points and Lonzo Ball added 10 points, six rebounds and six assists off the bench for the Pelicans, who were coming off a 108-101 overtime loss at home to Brooklyn a night earlier.

Playing without leading scorer and rebounder Karl-Anthony Towns, the Timberwolves lost their seventh straight game after shooting 38% from the field. Andrew Wiggins led them with 27 points.

Raptors 112, Pistons 99: Kyle Lowry had 20 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for a triple-double and Toronto had an 11-0 run in the third quarter on its way to a win at Detroit.

The Raptors were without

guard Fred VanVleet because of right knee injury. Then center Marc Gasol left in the first quarter with a left hamstring strain. Toronto still had enough firepower to handle the Pistons.

Detroit allowed 133 points in a loss to Washington on Monday night. The Pistons got frontcourt standouts Blake Griffin and Andre Drummond back from their injuries for this game, but they still allowed 70 points in the first half, including 40 in the second quarter.

Cavaliers 100, Hornets 98: Collin Sexton scored 23 points, Cedi Osman had 18 and host Cleveland held off a late Charlotte comeback.

The Cavaliers, who had lost 16 of 18, led the entire game but nearly squandered a 24-point lead in the third quarter.

Bulls 110, Wizards 109: Wendell Carter Jr. made a layup with 9.1 seconds left in overtime, completing Chicago's rally from an 18-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat host Washington.

Zach LaVine capped a 21-3 Bulls run with three free throws that tied the game at 96 with 5.5 seconds left in the fourth. Bradley Beal hit a jumper with 0.5 seconds remaining to put Washington ahead 98-96, but LaVine was fouled on the ensuing inbound play and hit two free throws to force OT.

Thunder 126, Grizzlies 122: Dennis Schroder scored 31 points, and host Oklahoma City overcame a 24-point deficit and beat Memphis.

Nuggets 113, Magic 104: Jamal Murray and Paul Millsap helped fuel a 24-0 run in the third quarter and host Denver rallied to beat Orlando for the eighth straight time.

Celtics 109, Mavericks 103: Kemba Walker scored 32 points and Jaylen Brown had 26 as Boston won at Dallas.

Trail Blazers 122, Warriors 112: Damian Lillard had 31 points and a season-high 13 assists, Hassan Whiteside grabbed 23 rebounds and host Portland beat Golden State.

NHL roundup

Hall-less Devils down Ducks for second straight win

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — The New Jersey Devils' decision to trade 2018 MVP Taylor Hall to Arizona has put pressure on other players to step up and lead the team.

In their first game since Monday's trade, Hall's former linemates Nico Hischier and Kyle Palmieri answered the call.

Hischier and Palmieri scored second-period goals and the Devils beat the Anaheim Ducks 3-1 on Wednesday night, giving them consecutive wins for only the fourth time this disappointing season.

"I think it's for the young guys coming up, it's those close

games and finding ways to win or finding ways to close them out," Palmieri said. "Tonight, finding a way to come from behind and find a lead going into the third and come out there and keep playing on our toes. They had a couple looks but we held the fort."

Sami Vatanen also scored and Mackenzie Blackwood made 26 saves as the Devils gave interim coach Alain Nasreddine his second straight win.

Adam Henrique scored against his former team for the Ducks, who squandered an early 1-0 lead in losing to New Jersey for the first time in four games. Ryan Miller had 17 saves as Anaheim lost its sec-

ond straight on a four-game East Coast trip.

"Obviously you get a good start and get a lead and go from there," Henrique said.

Avalanche 4, Blackhawks 1: Ian Cole and Mikko Rantanen each had a goal and an assist, and visiting Colorado beat Chicago.

Nathan MacKinnon and Andre Burakovsky also scored for the Avalanche, who are 9-1-1 in their last 11 games. Pavel Francouz made 31 saves for Colorado. The Avalanche, who lost 5-2 at St. Louis on Monday, are 3-0 against the Blackhawks this season and have outscored their Central Division rival 16-5.

Ryan Carpenter got his second goal of the season for fading Chicago, which has lost five of six. Corey Crawford stopped 32 shots.

Blues 2, Oilers 1: Brayden Schenn scored, Jake Allen made 35 saves and host St. Louis edged Edmonton for its fourth straight win.

Mackenzie MacEachern also scored for the Stanley Cup champion Blues.

James Neal had a late goal and Mikko Koskinen stopped 42 shots for the Oilers, who lost for the fifth time in six games.

Edmonton went 0-for-4 on the power play, snapping an eight-game scoring streak with the man advantage.