

Congress agrees on \$740B defense bill

BY STEVE BEYNON
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House and Senate lawmakers reached a deal last week on the 2021 National Defense Authorization act, teeing up a \$740.5 billion defense spending and policy bill for votes in both chambers while simultaneously setting up a potential collision course with the White House as President Donald Trump has made multiple veto threats.

“Just as Congress has done for the last 59 years in a row, we have reached a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021,” Sens. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Jack Reed of Rhode Island, the ranking Democrat on the committee, said Thursday in a joint statement.

The compromise bill is moving forward despite veto threats from Trump, who is demanding the defense bill terminate unrelated legal protections for social media companies over content for third parties and users. Both chambers of Congress passed their original bills during the summer with veto-proof majorities.

More so, the House Armed Services Committee’s ranking Republican said the bill

shouldn’t include extraneous issues.

“The purpose of the bill has always been to support our troops and to protect American national security. Disagreements on all other issues have been put aside. This year should be no different,” said Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, who is retiring.

Here are some key issues addressed in the 2021 NDAA:

■ Confederate names to be scrubbed from bases

The bill includes a provision authored by Sen. Elizabeth Warren that directs the Pentagon to remove the names of Confederate generals from Army bases in three years. Trump previously threatened to veto the NDAA over any efforts to rename bases.

■ Halting Trump’s hopes of a drawdown from Germany

The NDAA also seeks to squash Trump’s plan to move some 12,000 troops out of Germany. The plan calls for some to move elsewhere in Europe and others to the United States. The bill halts the Pentagon from cutting troop numbers below 34,500 in Germany until 120 days after it sends an analysis to Congress on reduction impacts.

■ Staying in Afghanistan

The NDAA seeks not to fund a reduction of troops in Afghanistan until the Pentagon

assesses the impacts a drawdown would have on expanding terrorist safe havens and counterterrorism efforts. More than 2,300 Americans have been killed in Afghanistan and the war is 19 years old with no clear objectives or outlines for an end state.

■ More pay for troops

Servicemembers will see a 3% pay raise, and increases to hazard duty pay from \$250 a month to \$275. The bill also adds pay incentives to recruit and retain pilots, submariners, health care professionals, and some critical job fields.

■ Preparing for a future pandemic

The Defense Department will be required to maintain a 30-day supply of personal protective equipment sufficient for all active-duty and Reserve component service members. It also directs the Pentagon to have the ability to facilitate rapid research and develop vaccines in the case of a future pandemic, and develop a general reaction plan.

■ Guardsmen and reservist’s retirements shouldn’t be impacted by coronavirus

The Pentagon also has to assure that retirement eligibility is not cut for National Guard members and reservists because of drill weekends and annual training being canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

US Navy official says ‘uneasy deterrence’ reached with Iran

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — The top U.S. Navy official in the Mideast said Sunday that America has reached an “uneasy deterrence” with Iran after months of regional attacks and seizures at sea, even as tensions remain high between Washington and Tehran over the Islamic Republic’s nuclear program.

Vice Adm. Sam Paparo, who oversees the Navy’s 5th Fleet based in Bahrain, struck an academic tone in comments to the annual Manama Dialogue hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies. He described having a “healthy respect” for both Iran’s regular navy and the naval forces of its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

“We have achieved an uneasy deterrence. That uneasy deterrence is exacerbated by world events and by events along

the way,” the vice admiral said. “But I have found Iranian activity at sea to be cautious and circumspect and respectful, to not risk unnecessary miscalculation or escalation at sea.”

Iran’s mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

While Iran has not directly seized or targeted a tanker in recent months, a mine recently struck an oil tanker off Saudi Arabia and a cargo ship near Yemen came under assault. Suspicion immediately fell on Yemen’s Iranian-backed Houthi rebels for being behind both attacks. The Houthis have not commented on either attack.

Paparo, a former Navy fighter pilot who most recently served as director of operations at the U.S. military’s Central Command, offered a different stance than his

immediate predecessor, Vice Adm. James Malloy. In one of his last comments to journalists in August, Malloy referred to Iran as “reckless and provocative” and always trying in dramatic naval drills to “lower the denominator until they’re sure that they can look like they’ve won something.”

Malloy’s tenure saw oil tankers seized by Iran and a series of limpet mine explosions targeting tankers that the Navy blamed on Iran. Tehran denied being involved, though Revolutionary Guard members were filmed taking an unexploded mine away from one tanker.

By contrast, the months that Paparo has been in charge have not seen any crises.

“Forty-one years into the revolution, I think we can dispense with that notion,” the vice admiral said. “I sincerely doubt there’s a difference among them.”

Navy set to recommission the 1st Fleet

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Navy is resurrecting the 1st Fleet, a spokesman for the Navy secretary confirmed Thursday, days after the service's top civilian leader called for a U.S. counterweight to rapidly growing Chinese military might in the Indo-Pacific region.

The "administrative requirements" to recommission the 1st Fleet "are in the final stages of coordination," Capt. Jereal Dorsey, a spokesman for Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite, said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

Braithwaite is working with Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller, Congress, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger and other stakeholders on ensuring the Navy maintains its maritime dominance in an era of great power competition, Dorsey said.

The Navy secretary signaled U.S. intentions during a speech Nov. 17 at the Naval Submarine League's annual symposium.

"We want to stand up a new numbered fleet," Braithwaite said at the time. "And we want to put that numbered fleet in the

crossroads between the Indian and the Pacific oceans, and we're really going to have an [INDOPACOM] footprint."

The mission Braithwaite described now belongs to the 7th Fleet, based at Yokosuka Naval Base, Japan, the only U.S. fleet in the Indo-Pacific. It includes the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group, which is supported at times by ships from the San Diego-based 3rd Fleet.

Seventh Fleet is the Navy's largest deployed fleet with 50-70 ships and submarines, 150 aircraft and approximately 20,000 sailors. Its almost 48 million-square-mile operations area stretches from the International Date Line in the central Pacific to the India/Pakistan border and from the Kuril Islands in the north to the Antarctic in the south.

The Navy can't rely on 7th Fleet alone to cover that area, Braithwaite said.

Its ships deploy frequently for missions such as freedom-of-navigation patrols in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, where Beijing has built military bases on artificial islands in disputed waters.

Meanwhile, China's navy has been growing rapidly. In September, it sent both of its aircraft carriers to sea as construction on a

third continued.

"We have to look to our other allies and partners like Singapore, like India, and actually put a numbered fleet where it would be extremely relevant if, God forbid, we were to ever to get in any kind of a dust-up," Braithwaite said at the symposium.

A new fleet could provide a much more formidable deterrent, he said.

"So we're going to create the 1st Fleet, and we're going to put it, if not Singapore right out of the chocks, we're going to look to make it more expeditionary-oriented and move it across the Pacific until it is where our allies and partners see that it could best assist them as well as to assist us," he said.

The 1st Fleet previously existed from just after World War II to the early 1970s.

"The obvious location for the fleet's home port is Cockburn Sound in Perth alongside the Australian naval base HMAS Stirling, Ross Babbage, a former Australian assistant defense secretary, said in an email Friday.

"It is in an excellent swing location, offers ready access to the [Southeast] Asian straits and provides vast land-based strategic depth," he said.

Report: Congress, DOD must lower aviation mishaps

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Military pilots and troops who maintain aircraft are overworked and undertrained, contributing to more than 6,000 aviation accidents since 2013 that have killed 224 service members, according to a new congressionally mandated report.

Aviation troops deploy overseas too frequently without adequate home-station training, many flying units are riddled with low morale, and irregular Pentagon funding from Congress has forced service members to misuse or scavenge for critical aircraft parts, the National Commission on Military Aviation Safety listed in a new report examining issues plaguing the aviation community in recent years.

The 143-page report dated Dec. 1 and released to the public Thursday was the culmination of 18 months of work by the seven-member commission. The group analyzed 6,079 noncombat aviation incidents between 2013 and 2018 and interviewed thousands of aviators and aircraft maintainers

in some 200 units at 80 military installations as part of the probe.

"Our findings recommendations really focused on four areas where we think Congress, the Department of Defense and the [military] services can take immediate steps to reduce aviation mishaps," said retired Army Gen. Dick Cody, a former pilot who was the chairman of the commission created in 2018 by lawmakers. "That is: Pilots need to fly. Maintainers need to maintain. Data can save lives — we need better data. And, funding [from Congress] should be consistent."

In addition to costing lives, aviation mishaps, which rose in recent years across all the military services and impacted fixed-wing airplanes, helicopters and tilt-rotor aircraft like Ospreys, cost American taxpayers some \$11.6 billion since 2013 and cost the Pentagon 186 destroyed aircraft.

In a phone call with reporters Thursday, Cody said Congress and the Pentagon have taken the issue seriously. He anticipated lawmakers and the military would heed much of the advice the commissioner's le-

vied in their report.

Cody had been scheduled Thursday to provide public testimony detailing the report to the House Armed Services Committee's subpanel on readiness, but the hearing was quietly changed to a briefing closed to the public. On its website, the committee cited unspecified "COVID-19 complications" for the last-minute change. Committee spokespersons did not immediately respond to a request for further information.

The commission's report does not single out any one issue as the underlying cause of the rise in military aviation problems. The issues are myriad and will take years to address, Cody said.

But much of the problem can be traced to budget constraints, he said. The Pentagon has continued to face issues stemming from the sequestration-mandated budget cuts after 2012. Additionally, the regular use of temporary government funding measures, known as continuing resolutions, in the absence of annual defense spending bills forces the Pentagon to cut funding to certain programs.

New treatment study shows promise for blood diseases

Associated Press

Scientists are seeing promising early results from the first studies testing gene editing for painful, inherited blood disorders that plague millions worldwide, especially Black people.

Doctors hope the one-time treatment, which involves permanently altering DNA in blood cells with a tool called CRISPR, may treat and possibly cure sickle cell disease and beta thalassemia.

Partial results were presented Saturday at an American Society of Hematology conference, and some were published by the New England Journal of Medicine.

Doctors described 10 patients who are at least several months removed from their treatment. All no longer need regular blood transfusions and are free from pain crises that plagued their lives before.

Victoria Gray, the first patient in the sickle cell study, had long suffered severe pain bouts that often sent her to the hospital.

"I had aching pains, sharp pains, burning pains, you name it. That's all I've known my entire life," said Gray, 35, who lives in Forest, Miss. "I was hurting everywhere my blood flowed."

But since her treatment a year ago, Gray has weaned herself from pain medications she depended on to help her symptoms.

"It's something I prayed for my whole life," she said. "I pray everyone has the same results I did."

The treatment studied attacks the problem at its genetic roots.

In the womb, fetuses make a special type of hemoglobin. After birth, when babies breathe on their own, a gene is activated that instructs cells to switch and make an adult form of hemoglobin instead. The adult hemoglobin is what's defective in people with one of these diseases. The CRISPR editing aims to cut out the switching gene.

"What we are doing is turning that switch back off and making the cells think they are back in utero, basically," so they make fetal hemoglobin again, said one study leader, Dr. Haydar Frangoul of the Sarah Cannon Research Institute in Nashville.

The treatment involves removing stem cells from the patient's blood, then using CRISPR in a lab to knock out the switching gene. Patients are given strong medicines to kill off their other, flawed blood-producing cells. Then they are given back their own lab-altered stem cells.

Saturday's results were on the first 10 patients, seven with beta thalassemia and three with sickle cell. The two studies in Europe and the United States are ongoing and will enroll 45 patients each.

Tests so far suggest the gene editing is working as desired with no unintended effects, Frangoul said.

"The preliminary results are extremely encouraging," he said.

Japan officials eager to study asteroid pieces

Associated Press

TOKYO — Japanese space officials said they are excited about the return of a capsule that landed safely in the Australian Outback on Sunday while carrying soil samples from a distant asteroid, and that they are eager to begin analyzing the "treasure" inside.

The capsule's delivery by Japan's Hayabusa2 spacecraft completes its six-year sample-return mission and opens the door for research into finding clues to the origin of the solar system and life on Earth.

"We were able to land the treasure box" onto the sparsely populated Australian desert of Woomera as planned, said Yui-chi Tsuda, Hayabusa2 project manager at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, adding that the capsule was in perfect shape. "I really look forward to opening it and looking inside."

The capsule will be packed in a container after preliminary treatment at an Australian lab and returned to Japan this week, Satoru Nakazawa, a project sub-manager, said during an online news conference from Woomera.

Hayabusa2 left the asteroid Ryugu, about 180 million miles from Earth, a year ago. After it released the capsule Saturday, it set off on a new expedition.

Hayabusa2 released the capsule on Saturday from 136,700 miles away in space, sending it toward Earth.

Report: 'Directed' energy sickened diplomats in Cuba

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A new report by a National Academy of Sciences committee has found that "directed" microwave radiation is the likely cause of illnesses among American diplomats in Cuba and China.

The study commissioned by the State Department and released Saturday is the latest attempt to find a cause for the mysterious illnesses that started to emerge in late 2016 among U.S. personnel in Havana.

The study found that "directed, pulsed radio frequency energy appears to be the most plausible" explanation for symptoms that included intense head pressure, dizziness and cognitive difficulties. It found this explanation was more likely than other previously considered causes such as tropical disease or psychological issues. The study did not name a source for the energy and did not say it came as the result of an attack, though it did note that previous re-

search on this type of injury was done in the former Soviet Union.

In its report, the 19-member committee noted that it faced significant challenges in trying to get to the bottom of the medical mystery. Among them was the fact that not everyone reported the same symptoms, and the National Academy of Sciences research did not have access to all the previous studies on the illnesses, some of which are classified.

"The committee found these

cases quite concerning, in part because of the plausible role of directed, pulsed radiofrequency energy as a mechanism, but also because of the significant suffering and debility that has occurred in some of these individuals," said committee chairman David Relman, a professor of medicine at Stanford University. "We as a nation need to address these specific cases as well as the possibility of future cases with a concerted, coordinated and comprehensive approach."

US sees cases climb over holiday season

Associated Press

Coronavirus infections across the United States continue to rise as the country moves deeper into a holiday season when eagerly anticipated gatherings of family and friends could push the numbers even higher and overwhelm hospitals.

A new daily high of nearly 228,000 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases was reported nationwide Friday, eclipsing the previous high mark of 217,000 cases set the day before, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

The seven-day rolling average of deaths attributable to COVID-19 in the U.S. passed 2,000 for the first time since spring, rising to 2,011. Two weeks ago, the seven-day average was 1,448. There were 2,607 deaths reported in the U.S. on Friday.

Johns Hopkins had previously reported Wednesday daily COVID-19 deaths at 3,157. That was later updated to 2,804 due to a change in numbers from Nevada, a spokeswoman said Saturday.

Much of the nation saw surging numbers in the week after Thanksgiving, when millions of Americans disregarded warnings to stay home and celebrate only with members of their household.

Arizona's top public health official took on a blunt tone as she reported the state's latest case numbers, a near-record of nearly 6,800 new infections, telling people to wear masks around anyone outside their household, "even those you know and trust."

"We must act as though anyone we are around may be infected," Dr. Cara Christ, director of the Arizona Department of Health Services, wrote on Twitter.

Arizona's intensive-care units are experiencing caseloads not seen since the summer, when the state had one of the worst outbreaks in the world.

Just 8% of ICU beds and 10% of all inpatient beds were unoccupied Friday, according to state data.

Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — The hours and some services at Arkansas state parks are being limited because of the coronavirus.

The state health department Saturday reported 2,245 newly confirmed or probable cases and 34 additional deaths for totals of 169,382 cases and 2,620 deaths since the pandemic began.

The parks department's visitor information centers and museums will be open five days a week on what are typically their busiest days while restaurants will reduce seat-

ing and end buffets, the department said in a statement Friday.

"Flexibility is necessary during these unprecedented times," said Arkansas Department of Parks, Heritage and Tourism Secretary Stacy Hurst.

"Due to the impact of COVID-19 on our parks system, we must make adjustments in order to ensure that our most-used amenities and facilities continue to be available to the public during the days and hours they use them the most."

California

SAN FRANCISCO — The vast region of Southern California, much of the San Francisco Bay area and a large swath of the Central Valley were to be placed under a sweeping new lockdown in an urgent attempt to slow the rapid rise of coronavirus cases.

The California Department of Public Health said Saturday that the intensive care unit capacity in Southern California and Central Valley hospitals had fallen below a 15% threshold that triggers the new measures, which include strict closures for businesses and a ban on gathering with anyone outside of your own household.

The new measures will take effect Sunday evening and remain in place for at least three weeks, meaning the lockdown will cover the Christmas holiday.

Gov. Gavin Newsom announced the new plan Thursday. It is the most restrictive order since he imposed the country's first statewide stay-at-home rule in March.

New Mexico

SANTA FE — New Mexico on Saturday reported 1,925 additional known COVID-19 cases and 32 more deaths, increasing the statewide totals since the pandemic's start to 106,856 known cases and 1,738 deaths.

The number of current COVID-19-related hospitalizations dropped to 925 from 934, according to the state's coronavirus dashboard.

Most of the additional deaths were people in the 70s and 80s, but a few were men and women in their 30s and 40s.

Health officials had been warning that cases could go up in weeks following family gatherings over the Thanksgiving holiday and related travel.

Nevada

CARSON CITY — Nevada on Saturday reported a record nearly 3,200 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases and a record number of related hospitalizations.

The state reported 3,194 additional known cases and 29 additional deaths, increasing the state's totals to 165,628 cases and 2,301 deaths.

Saturday was only the second time that Nevada reported more than 3,000 additional cases on a single day. The state reported 3,159 on Nov. 25.

Gov. Steve Sisolak noted the record high number of additional cases and the state's high COVID-19 positivity rate, and urged Nevadans to stay home as much as possible, wear masks and avoid crowds.

North Carolina

RALEIGH — North Carolina reported a record increase in cases of the coronavirus and hospitalizations on Saturday.

The state reported that there have been 6,018 cases since Friday. North Carolina says there are 2,171 people with COVID-19 in the state's hospitals. That's up 14 from a day earlier.

"In less than a week, we went from exceeding 5,000 new cases reported in one day to exceeding 6,000," said Dr. Mandy Cohen, the state's health secretary. "This is very worrisome."

Oregon

DALLAS — The Oregon Medical Board has suspended the license of a doctor who said he refuses to wear a mask in his clinic west of Salem and encouraged others to not wear masks.

Dr. Steven LaTulippe told a pro-Trump rally in November that he and his staff do not wear masks while working in his Dallas clinic, KGW-TV reported.

A state order requires health care workers to wear face coverings in health care settings to help stem the spread of COVID-19.

The medical board voted Thursday to suspend LaTulippe's license immediately.

Virginia

RICHMOND — Virginia has reported the biggest increase in COVID-19 cases in one day during the pandemic.

The state reported 3,793 cases of the coronavirus on Saturday. The state's health department says some of the cases were due to a backlog of data entering the system.

The previous record for new cases in Virginia was set on Nov. 23, when there were 3,242 cases.

Virginia has reported a total 251,173 cases, with 220,510 of those cases confirmed and 30,663 determined to be probable. Virginia's seven-day positivity rate is 10%.

Police: Patient gouges out woman's eye

WY RIVERTON — Authorities in Wyoming said a man who was hospitalized attacked a fellow patient and gouged out one of her eyes before he could be restrained, a newspaper reported.

Patrick Lee Rose, 53, of Dubois was charged with aggravated assault in the Nov. 26 attack at a hospital in Lander, according to The Ranger newspaper.

Rose severely damaged the woman's other eye, likely blinding her, and her injuries are being treated out-of-state, according to court records.

It's unclear why the attack occurred but a judge said Rose may have suddenly stopped a medication, the newspaper reported.

Researchers team up to study white sharks

MA BOSTON — Researchers in New England and Canada are teaming up to learn more about the great white sharks appearing in Northeast waters in greater numbers each summer.

More than a dozen organizations and state agencies from Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine are part of the New England White Shark Research Consortium announced recently.

"With growing sightings of white sharks from Rhode Island to Canada, this is the perfect time to create a unique consortium to increase understanding of white shark life history," the consortium said in a statement.

The participating organizations include the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Maine Department of Marine Resources; New Hampshire Department of Natural and Cultural Resources; the University of Massachusetts; the New England Aquarium; Arizona State University; Fisheries and Oceans Canada; the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Atlantic Shark Institute, Atlantic White Shark Conservancy and the Center for Coastal Studies.

Sheriff: Boy accidentally brought gun to school

VA FREDERICKSBURG — Police in Virginia said a 5-year-old boy showed up at school with a loaded firearm after he grabbed an adult's backpack by accident.

The Stafford County Sheriff's Office said the day had just started at Anne E. Moncure Elementary School in North Stafford when a teacher told students to get items from

their backpacks, The Free-Lance Star of Fredericksburg reported.

It was then that the firearm was discovered in the child's backpack, the sheriff's office said.

The weapon was confiscated and the sheriff's office was notified.

County worker scammed into sending \$600K

OH TOLEDO — An employee of Lucas County, which includes the Ohio city of Toledo, mistakenly sent more than \$600,000 to a scammer posing as a construction company with which the county has contracts.

The county's auditor's office discovered the payments and reported the theft to law enforcement and financial institutions, the Toledo Blade reported.

Auditor Anita Lopez called the theft of public funds "sickening," and told the newspaper that no staff are currently on leave or being investigated.

Deputy found inside stranger's van arrested

FL ORLANDO — Officials arrested a Florida deputy sheriff who was found inside the minivan of a woman he didn't know, smelling of alcohol and with a baby pacifier and a face mask in his pocket.

The Orlando Sentinel reported the Orange County Deputy Cameron Turk, 32, was charged with burglary and petit theft. The woman called 911 reporting a man she didn't recognize trying to get into her van, which was unlocked and parked in her driveway.

Deputies found the items, which belonged to the woman, in Turk's pocket according to the arrest affidavit. On the way to the jail, the man told deputies he was depressed and suicidal, prompting a mental health evaluation.

Student injured in chemical explosion at lab

MN MINNEAPOLIS — Authorities said a University of Minnesota student was injured in a chemical explosion inside a laboratory on the Minneapolis campus.

The Star Tribune reported the student was working in Smith Hall, which is home to the school's Chemistry Department, when the explosion occurred.

University spokeswoman Lacey Nygard said the student suffered noncritical injuries and was being treated at a hospital.

Firefighters pull horse from frozen pond using crane

CO LOVELAND — Firefighters rescued a horse that was trapped in a frozen pond and said the animal, named Buddy, was likely to survive his frigid ordeal.

Rescuers used a crane to pull Buddy out of the pond in Loveland after his owner called for help and said the horse wasn't moving, The Denver Post reported.

Buddy's owner found him standing in the pond in water up to his hips but no one knows how long he'd been in the water. The pond had an inch-thick layer of ice on top and Buddy was so cold he didn't have the energy to walk out by himself, firefighters said.

The horse appeared to be recovering slowly after his rescue and the 15 firefighters who responded put a blanket on him and blew hot air under the blanket from a duct to warm him.

Town has reverse parade with stationary floats

SC BLUFFTON — A South Carolina town is changing up its Christmas parade because of COVID-19.

In Bluffton, the parade floats stood still and the spectators drove by in vehicles in what the town called a reverse Christmas parade.

It's the safest way the town could think of to hold a Christmas parade with COVID-19 still spreading, officials said.

The floats were 10 feet away from each other and none of them could throw candy or other items. The town limited the number of floats to 50.

Ex-attorney sentenced for stealing millions

NJ CAMDEN — A former attorney who stole millions of dollars from his clients was sentenced to 18 years in prison and must pay \$11.7 million in restitution.

Michael Kwasnik, 51, specialized in estate and financial planning. Federal prosecutors said he would open irrevocable family trusts to hold clients' money and would offer them a chance to earn interest on their funds.

Between 2008 and 2011, Kwasnik embezzled more than \$13.2 million from clients through a scheme where he would have them transfer funds into the trusts. Kwasnik would then move money from the trust accounts into bank accounts he controlled, using the money for personal expenses and paying for other companies he controlled.

From The Associated Press

Unbeaten Steelers benefit from stability

associated Press

It's comforting to see the Pittsburgh Steelers back atop the NFL.

In a topsy-turvy world that's gone completely off the rails in 2020, the franchise that hardly ever changes coaches — the great Mike Tomlin is their third in 52 seasons — and clings to the "Steeler Way" no matter the era is just what we needed.

Pittsburgh has become only the 12th team in the Super Bowl age to start a season 11-0, providing a welcome dose of stability amid the chaos of positive tests and rescheduled games and eerily quiet stadiums.

Frankly, the Steelers haven't been all that impressive in building their perfect record, but that's OK.

Those familiar black-and-gold uniforms, with the iconic logo on just one side of the helmet, are like a warm, reassuring blanket, helping us cope with the grimmest of winters.

If there's one thing we've always been able to count on, it's the Steelers.

A single family, the Rooneys, has owned the franchise since its founding in 1933. With the hiring of Chuck Noll in 1969, the Steelers embarked on an era of unprecedented equilibrium even as the league — and the world — changed greatly all around them.

Noll coached the Steelers for 23 years, winning four Super Bowl titles before his retirement. Bill Cowher took over in 1992 and added another championship to the ledger during his 15-year reign.

Then the torch was passed to Tomlin, who was just 34 years old with a single season as a coordinator on his resume when he landed the job. He's been to a pair of Super Bowls, becoming the youngest coach and second Black coach to win the title during the 2008 season.

Compare that with any other franchise in the NFL — or any other major league sport, for that matter.

The rival Cleveland Browns have employed more head coaches in the past three seasons than the Steelers have had in the last 52. In all, the Browns have gone through 21 coaches since 1969 (and they were dormant for three seasons after the original team moved to Baltimore and became the Ravens).

For those NFL teams that were around at the end of the '60s, the Dallas Cowboys have employed the next-fewest number of coaches since then with nine — largely because of Tom Landry's reign.

As with his two predecessors, Tomlin's hiring was an inspired one. While he is often overlooked when the league's top coaches

are ranked, there is little doubt that he's as good as anyone not named Belichick. Any discussion of the Steelers' sustained success must begin with Tomlin — a gritty, no-nonsense leader who is perfect for this team and its blue-collar city.

"He's one of the greatest coaches I ever worked for," said Raheem Morris, interim head coach of the Atlanta Falcons, who spent a couple of seasons with Tomlin when both were assistants at Tampa Bay many years ago. "If you don't see the benefits of him being the coach of that football team, shame on you. He comes every day with the same mentality, the same approach, which is greatness."

Tomlin is the epitome of the "Steeler Way," which essentially comes down to sticking with those you hire for the long haul, drafting wisely, developing your picks, and rarely splurging in free agency. If you're stirring up trouble in the locker room, you won't be around for long — no matter how talented you might be. Antonio Brown learned that lesson the hard way.

In general, there's not a lot of turnover from year to year, which was especially useful during this most unusual of seasons. With offseason workouts scrapped because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Steelers were able to cope better than most teams.

No. 22 Tulsa downs Navy, earns AAC title game spot

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — No comeback required. No flurry of touchdowns needed.

All it took for No. 22 Tulsa to earn a spot in the American Athletic Conference title game was a rousing defensive performance and one heck of a big play.

The Golden Hurricane squelched Navy's triple option Saturday and used a tie-breaking 66-yard touchdown pass from Zach Smith to Josh Johnson to earn a 19-6 victory that extended their winning streak to six.

Tulsa (6-1, 6-0, No. 24 CFP) needed to win one of their final two games to play for the AAC championship for the first time. The Golden Hurricane will face Cincinnati at home next weekend before taking on the Bearcats for the league title on Dec. 19.

"Man, it feels great. It's our first one, so it's real exciting," said defensive tackle Jaxon Player, who had 12 tackles and two sacks. "We went crazy in the locker room, and we're still going to go crazy after we get home."

Four of Tulsa's wins this season have come after the team trailed by double digits, and the Golden Hurricane hadn't been held under 28 points since losing to Oklahoma State in the opener.

They flipped the script this time. Tulsa never trailed, got a great performance from its defense and made the most of its only touchdown.

The score was tied at 6 late in the third quarter before Smith lofted a long pass between four Midshipmen defenders into the waiting arms of Johnson, who outdistanced his pursuers in a 40-yard sprint to the end zone.

"Obviously, it was great to see JJ pop that big one at a crucial time," Golden Hurricane coach Philip Montgomery said. "These guys continue to stay resilient as obstacles are put before them."

Plenty of hurdles were cleared with this victory: A berth in the title game, Tulsa became bowl-eligible, and it beat Navy for the first time in six tries.

"We knew there was a lot on the line tonight and we felt it," Montgomery said. "To go in there and get a big win on the road, with everybody contributing, I'm blown away by our guys."

The defense took care of business despite losing starting linebacker Zaven Collins to an injury that Montgomery deemed not to be serious.

Smith went 10-for-25 for 168 yards but came up big when it counted. Facing a third-and-8 from his own 40 with less than four minutes to go, Smith connected with Keylon Stokes down the right sideline for a 37-yard gain that set up Zack Long's fourth field goal.

The Midshipmen (3-6, 3-4) will bring a four-game losing streak into next week's clash with archrival Army at Michie Stadium. Navy produced only 153 yards in offense and lost its home finale for the first time since 2002.

The Midshipmen managed only 71 yards in the first half.

AP Top 25 takeaway

More games needed like BYU-Coastal Carolina

Associated Press

College football needs more games like BYU-Coastal Carolina. The eighth-ranked Cougars and No. 14 Chanticleers put on an intense and chippy show Saturday with a thrilling end reminiscent of the Titans-Rams Super Bowl in 2000.

The result was a wild celebration in Myrtle Beach, S.C., after the 22-17 victory, an end to the BYU hype and maybe an outside chance for Coastal Carolina to sneak into a New Year's Six game.

But what if the lasting legacy of this showdown of unbeaten teams thrown together on a Wednesday is a willingness in college football to try something like it again?

Maybe not to such an extreme. The BYU-Coastal Carolina game became official 56 hours before kickoff. But creating some flexibility in schedules to create big games would be a tremendous addition to college football. Especially for the non-Power Five teams that could use a late-season boost to a résumé to improve their chances to reach a major bowl — or even crack the playoff, as unlikely that is.

There is a chance that if No. 7 Cincinnati wasn't recovering from an COVID-19 outbreak, BYU would have been in Ohio this weekend, unable to take Coastal's call when No. 25 Liberty had to pull out because of its own issues with the virus.

There are plenty of reasons why holding open dates late in the season for the football equivalent of college basketball bracket busters would be difficult to do. It's hard to sell tickets in advance to games listed as TBD.

Maybe the more realistic goal would be

simply persuading programs big and small to not schedule so far out. In college basketball, teams that are confident they're going to be good frequently make matchups for more significant early season nonconference games in the preceding offseason.

College football is not quick to embrace change, but figuring out a way to recreate the BYU-Coastal Carolina experience would be good for a sport looking for ways to make regular-season games meaningful.

Buckeyes are back

Having Justin Fields makes up for a lot of problems.

"If you're going to be a head coach for one day, you want Justin Fields with you," said longtime defensive line coach Larry Johnson, who was filling as Ohio State's coach with Ryan Day in isolation with COVID-19. "That was pretty special. He's a special young man."

No. 3 Ohio State played without three offensive line starters — and a key backup — its leading tackler and a starting defensive back against Michigan State, and other than a few poor shotgun snaps it would have been hard to notice a difference.

Fields was especially good, calmly leading an offense that needed him to provide a few more answers than it usually might. And the Buckeyes' defense was dominant.

What's next for the Buckeyes and the Big Ten? Michigan is having COVID-19 issues and if it can't play the Buckeyes next week, that would put Ohio State below the minimum number of games required by the conference to play for the league title on Dec. 19.

The minimum games rule came from the athletic directors, and they would have to change it. Wisconsin AD Barry Alvarez suggested that his colleagues seriously consider making changes to help the Buckeyes (5-0), clearly the conference's best team, be better positioned to make the playoff.

Dropping the six-game minimum is a good idea. Even better would be juggling next week's schedule to ensure Ohio State — and really all the teams available to play — get a game in, meet the minimum and have a chance to face No. 16 Northwestern, which secured its spot in Indianapolis as West Division champion while not playing.

Book's case

Hard to believe the quarterback of an unbeaten Notre Dame team could play as well as Ian Book has and still be far from a lock to even be a Heisman Trophy finalist.

Book is deserving of consideration for sure and he is closing strong, but it's a tough field for him to break into.

The fifth-year senior appears to be competing against four quarterbacks: Florida's Kyle Trask, Alabama's Mac Jones, Clemson's Trevor Lawrence and Fields.

BYU's Wilson goes to the back of the line after losing to Coastal Carolina.

And maybe Alabama's real Heisman candidate should be receiver DeVonta Smith, who caught three TDs against LSU, but it's a quarterback's award now. Coming into Saturday, when Book put up 348 total yards and accounted for five touchdowns against Syracuse, those four QBs ranked among the top 10 in the nation in passer efficiency rating. Book was 33rd at 148.89.

Defense leads No. 10 Indiana past No. 18 Wisconsin

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Indiana made sure the loss of its star quarterback didn't interfere with its emergence as one of the Big Ten's top teams this season.

These Hoosiers play some pretty stout defense, too

Jack Tuttle threw two touchdown passes in his first career start and Indiana's defense made a stand in the final minute as the 10th-ranked Hoosiers outlasted No. 18 Wisconsin 14-6 on Saturday. Tuttle was starting in place of Michael Penix Jr., who tore his anterior cruciate ligament in a victory at

Maryland last week.

"I think most people wrote us off because we lost Michael Penix, who is a special player. But we are a football team," Indiana coach Tom Allen said, putting special emphasis on his final word.

The Hoosiers tied a program record Saturday by earning their sixth Big Ten win of the season, joining the 1967 and 1987 teams. They (6-1, CFP No. 12) also snapped a 10-game skid in this series and beat the Badgers for the first time since 2002.

"It really feels amazing," Tuttle said. "I'm so happy for this team. There are things we

have to fix, but right now it just feels great."

The victory wasn't secure until the final minute.

Wisconsin (2-2, No. 16 CFP) drove to Indiana's 17-yard line on its final possession, but a second-down sack from Micah McFadden pushed the Badgers back to the 21. After an incomplete, Wisconsin faced fourth-and-10.

Graham Mertz threw into the right corner of the end zone but couldn't connect with Chimere Dike, who was closely defended by Reese Taylor, ending the Badgers' last chance.

NBA: Fines, forfeits for protocol violations

Associated Press

NBA teams that do not comply with league rules designed to minimize the spread of the coronavirus this season could face major penalties such as forfeiting games or draft picks, the league told its franchises Saturday.

The league also said that it and the National Basketball Players Association will discuss players, coaches and other staff “being required to receive a coronavirus vaccine” when it becomes available, strongly urged teams to encourage players and personnel to get flu shots, and said that effective immediately Tier 1 and Tier 2 personnel — which basically means players, coaches and some essential staff — must avoid bars, lounges, clubs even if food is served, most live entertainment or gaming venues, public gyms, spas and pool areas.

Also off-limits: indoor gatherings of 15 or more people. Those rules apply both when teams are at home and when they are on the road, the NBA said. Preseason games start Friday and the regular season begins Dec. 22.

The protocols document, a copy of which was obtained by The Associated Press, has much more detail than the draft version that was distributed to teams last weekend. The rules and protocols in the updated document — which even includes examples of how seating charts on planes and buses could be set up — have been agreed upon by the NBA and the NBPA.

“The biggest thing is obviously, from what we’ve been told, is the testing on the daily,” Philadelphia forward Tobias Harris said earlier in the week as the protocols were being finalized.

“And guys holding each other accountable to be safe and limit exposure from outside people or whatever. For me, it’s a bit confusing because you never know. You could go into a grocery store and you may get the virus somehow, right? So, I think it’s a fine line, but I think we have to do our best to follow protocol.”

Starting Sunday, the testing program — players and coaches will be checked daily, and 48 players were found to be positive before training camps even began — will be-

gin to include immediate families, if they so desire. Teams have been told by the NBA to work with BioReference, the league’s testing provider, to make voluntary PCR testing available for all household members of Tier 1 and Tier 2 individuals twice a week. The household members of those Tier 1 and Tier 2 individuals are also being urged to get flu shots.

The league made clear in the final protocols that if teams don’t take the health and safety rules seriously, a serious price will be paid.

As written in the new rules: “Protocol violations that result in COVID-19 spread that requires adjustments to the NBA game schedule or otherwise impacts any other team may subject the violating team to additional penalties, which may include fines, suspensions, adjustment or loss of draft choices, and/or game forfeiture.”

One key addition to the final version of the NBA protocols: Teams, when they go on the road, will have some freedoms and will not be forced to stay in their hotels when not practicing or playing.

College basketball roundup

No. 7 Kansas survives scare from North Dakota State

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — The blueblood nature of Kansas means coach Bill Self rarely needs to mine the junior college ranks for talent.

He’s sure glad he found Tyon Grant-Foster.

The transfer from Indian Hills Community College drove for the go-ahead basket with just over a minute to go Saturday, then swatted away Sam Geisel’s layup with 10 seconds left, helping the sluggish seventh-ranked Jayhawks escape with a 65-61 victory over North Dakota State.

“Tyon was great, great, great down the stretch,” said Self, who wound up playing him more than 21 minutes off the bench. “I was really happy for him because he hasn’t had many opportunities yet.”

Jalen Wilson had 14 points and 15 rebounds, and Ochai Agbaji added 13 points, including a free throw in the final seconds that helped Kansas (4-1) finish off a 7-0 run to end the game inside a mostly empty Allen Fieldhouse.

“Those are the fun ones,” Agbaji said, “when the other team is in it.”

No. 10 Houston 77, South Carolina 67:

Houston coach Kelvin Sampson would rather do a lot of things other than miss a game.

Sampson missed Saturday night’s game due to COVID-19 contact tracing, but the host Cougars didn’t miss out on another win.

Quentin Grimes had 23 points and seven rebounds and Tramon Mark added 18 points for Houston.

Grimes scored 19 points in the second half, including 12 of 13 from the free throw line. Mark scored 11 points after the break, including 6-for-7 from the line.

“Our kids, they played their hearts out,” Houston’s acting coach, Quannas White, said. “The first half didn’t go the way we would have liked it to go. It wasn’t Cougar basketball, but at halftime, our guys went in, listened and played Cougar basketball.”

DeJon Jarreau finished with 11 points and eight rebounds for Houston (4-0), which shot 38% and made 4 of 19 3-point attempts. Houston was helped by 31-for-38 shooting from the free throw line.

Sampson and his son, assistant coach Kelvin Sampson, missed the game because of COVID-19 and contact tracing protocols.

The school said the Sampsons were isolating at their homes and not showing symptoms.

“It was miserable,” Kelvin Sampson said. “I would rather wrestle a porcupine than do that again. It was just miserable. I hung up on Kellen 30 times during the game. I snapped at (my wife) Karen I don’t know how many times. I just went outside. It was just miserable.”

Kelvin Sampson said Kellen tested positive, but he had to miss Saturday and will miss the Cougars’ next game on Wednesday due to contact tracing.

White said Kelvin Sampson’s confidence in him dates to when he played for Sampson at Oklahoma.

Air Force 59, Lamar 44: Chris Joyce tied his career high with 23 points as the host Falcons topped the Cardinals.

Keaton Van Soelen had 15 points and five assists for Air Force (2-1). Glen McClintock added seven rebounds.

Quinlan Bennett had 10 points for Lamar (0-4). Avery Sullivan added 10 points and nine rebounds. Ellis Jefferson had six rebounds.