

House overrides defense bill veto

BY STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The House on Monday voted to override President Donald Trump's veto of the \$740.5 billion defense bill that boosts pay and benefits for troops and adds care for thousands of Vietnam-era veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange.

In a 322-87 vote, the Democrat-controlled House successfully rebuked Trump's rejection of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets annual spending and policy priorities for the Pentagon. The bill originally passed both chambers of Congress by veto-proof majorities.

"It's the exact same bill, not a comma has changed," Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, said on the House floor ahead of the vote. "The president has authorized his constitutional prerogative. Now ... it's up to us."

The House vote tees Congress up for the first veto override of Trump's presidency in his last days in office.

The Republican-controlled Senate is expected to vote Wednesday on overriding the veto, which will require a two-thirds vote. The bill was passed in the Senate in an

84-13 vote earlier this month. The initial House vote was 335-78.

"My intention was and is to ensure the Senate continues fulfilling our obligation to the men and women of our armed forces," Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said on the Senate floor last week urging the president not to veto the NDAA.

Trump primarily vetoed the legislation because it does not include a last-minute demand to repeal Section 230, a law that protects social media companies from liability for what is posted on their sites by third parties. The idea is backed by Republicans on Capitol Hill, but as a separate bill because it doesn't fall into the jurisdiction of military policy.

"Both parties have put together an incredible piece of legislation," Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said ahead of the vote. "That's why it passed so overwhelmingly just a couple of weeks ago. The president vetoed this because of something that was never going to be in the bill, something totally unrelated to national security and something that we were not going to do in any event. There is literally no reason to veto this bill for the reasons the president did."

Trump also had objections to a measure

that would rename military bases that honor Confederate leaders and provisions that restrict a quick withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Germany.

"Unfortunately, the act fails to include critical national security measures, includes provisions that fail to respect our veterans and our military's history, and contradicts efforts by my administration to put America first in our national security and foreign policy actions. It is a 'gift' to China and Russia," Trump wrote in his veto message to Congress.

Among the critical measures included in the NDAA, the bill would authorize a 3% pay raise for troops, an increase of more than 5,000 military troops and provide funding for a new initiative aimed at checking China's military power in southeast Asia.

The NDAA also includes a measure that approves benefits for Vietnam War veterans suffering from bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinson's-like symptoms — conditions thought to be caused by exposure to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange.

The provision would add the diseases to the VA presumptive list, which lowers the amount of proof veterans must provide in order to receive VA benefits.

Biden warns of transition 'roadblocks'

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — President-elect Joe Biden is warning of massive damage done to the national security apparatus by the Trump administration and "roadblocks" in communication between agency officials and his transition team that could undermine Americans' security.

During remarks Monday in Wilmington, Del., Biden said his team has faced "obstruction" from the "political leadership" at the Defense Department and the Office of Management and Budget as they've sought to gather necessary information to continue the transition of power.

"Right now we just aren't getting all the

information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security areas. It's nothing short, in my view, of irresponsibility," Biden said.

He warned that his team needs "full visibility" into the budget process at the Defense Department "in order to avoid any window of confusion or catch-up that our adversaries may try to exploit." He also said they need "a clear picture of our force posture around the world and of our operations to deter our enemies."

Biden's remarks came after he was briefed by members of his national security and defense teams and advisers, including his nominees for Secretary of State, Defense and Homeland Security,

as well as his incoming national security adviser. The president-elect said his team found that agencies "critical to our security have incurred enormous damage" during President Donald Trump's time in office.

Trump has still refused to concede an election he lost by more than 7 million votes, and his administration did not authorize official cooperation with the Biden transition team until Nov. 23, weeks after the election. Biden and his aides warned at the time that the delay was hampering their ability to craft their own vaccine rollout plan, but have since said cooperation on that and other issues related to COVID-19 has improved.

PTSD cited in Green Beret shooting hearing

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Army Special Forces Sgt. 1st Class Duke Webb suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, his attorney said Monday during a court hearing in the bowling alley shooting in Rockford, Ill., that left three people dead.

Webb, 37, was charged in the Saturday evening shooting at Don Carter Lanes with three counts of murder and three counts of first-degree attempted murder. The soldier attended the courtroom hearing in Winnebago County via a Zoom call, NBC-affiliate 13 WREX reported.

Webb's attorney Elizabeth Bucko said in court that the soldier suffers from PTSD and he has been scheduled to be evaluated for the anxiety disorder and a traumatic brain injury,

WREX reported. Bucko said Webb is prescribed medication, but did not say for what condition.

Webb's attorney also said the soldier has memory loss issues, the Rockford Register Star reported. Webb was denied bond Monday by Judge Debra Schafer and his next court hearing is scheduled for Feb. 16.

Webb is a Special Forces assistance operations and intelligence sergeant assigned to 3rd Battalion, 7th Special Forces Group (Airborne), located at Camp Bull Simons, Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., according to the Army. He was on leave at the time of the shooting.

Webb has deployed to Afghanistan four times since 2009, including from January to July of this year, according to details of his service record released by

the Army on Monday. He has also worked as a Special Forces engineer sergeant and a parachute rigger.

When the shooting happened Saturday, about 25 people were at the bowling alley, which has an upstairs bar open for patrons in accordance with the state's pandemic restrictions, Dan O'Shea, the Rockford Police chief, said Sunday at a news conference. The police believe Webb was shooting inside and outside the building. Most of the shooting was captured on surveillance footage from inside the building, according to O'Shea.

Three men, aged 65, 69 and 73, were shot and killed. A 62-year old man also suffered multiple gunshot wounds and was in critical condition Sunday, according to O'Shea. The other two shooting victims are a 14-year old boy who

was shot in the face and is in stable condition, and a 16-year old girl who was shot in the shoulder. The girl was treated and released from a local hospital. The teenagers were there to pick up food and were not in the bar area, according to O'Shea.

"We believe this was a completely random act, and there is no prior meeting or any kind of relationship between the suspect and any of the victims in this case," O'Shea said at the news conference. He could not speak to any possible motive for the shooting.

Webb was arrested without police officers having to fire their weapons, according to O'Shea.

Before Webb was arrested, he attempted to "obscure his identification and hide his weapons," which O'Shea stated were two handguns.

Marine honored for aiding Okinawa snakebite victim

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An Okinawa-based Marine who rendered aid to a local woman after she was bitten by a venomous habu snake has received a medal for his lifesaving actions.

Sgt. John James, a motor vehicle operator from Combat Logistics Battalion 31, was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal during a ceremony at Camp Hansen on Dec. 23, according to an email Monday from 1st Lt. Stephanie Murphy, spokeswoman for the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit.

The expeditionary unit commander, Col. Michael Nakonieczny, presided as Tokiko Ahuso, the woman James helped, pinned the medal to his chest.

James, a native of DuBois, Neb., was barbecuing with

friends at the Saloon bar in Kin town on Nov. 6 when he heard Ahuso's screams, the Marines said previously. He rushed to her aid to find she had been bitten by a venomous snake. He fastened a tourniquet above the wound.

"We were grilling burgers and hot dogs and suddenly we heard an elderly woman screaming in a language we didn't understand," James said, according to the previous statement. "We didn't know what was wrong until she started screaming out 'habu, habu.'"

First responders arrived, found the snake and administered the proper antivenom. They credited James' quick actions with saving the woman's life, Marine officials said previously. Ahuso recovered quickly and was able to go back to work within a few days of the incident.

Colonel accused of beating wife, threatening suicide

The News Tribune
(Tacoma, Wash.)

The chief of staff assigned to I Corps at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., is accused of beating his wife in front of their children and repeatedly threatening to kill himself during a stand-off with police at the family's DuPont home.

On Monday, Pierce County prosecutors charged Col. Owen Ray, 47, with first-degree kidnapping, two counts of second-degree assault, two counts of felony harassment and reckless endangerment. He is scheduled to be arraigned Monday afternoon.

An I Corps spokesman said on Monday that Ray has been suspended.

Charging papers give this account of the domestic violence incident:

On Sunday, Ray argued with his wife and she hid from him in

the bedroom of their youngest children. She heard him say "Let's do this" before going into the garage where he stored guns and coming back into the home, records say.

Ray eventually found his wife in the children's bedroom and was furious when she called police. He pointed a gun at her and "proceeded to kick (his wife) over and over with his boots in the face and chest," prosecutors wrote in charging papers.

Police arrived at the family's home about 12:15 a.m. About 15 minutes later, Ray let his wife and two youngest children go outside. His teenage daughter followed them out moments later.

At one point during the two-hour stand-off, police say they spotted Ray holding a pistol to his head while standing on the balcony. He was also seen holding a rifle inside the home. Police arrested Ray after he came outside.

Nashville bomber's motive remains elusive

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — In the days before he detonated a bomb in downtown Nashville on Christmas, Anthony Quinn Warner changed his life in ways that suggest he never intended to survive the blast that killed him and wounded three other people.

Warner, 63, gave away his car, telling the recipient that he had cancer. A month before the bombing, he signed a document that transferred his longtime home in a Nashville suburb to a California woman for nothing in return. The computer consultant told an employer that he was retiring.

But he didn't leave behind a clear digital footprint or any other obvious clues to explain why he set off the explosion in his parked recreational vehicle or played a message warning people to flee before it damaged dozens of buildings and knocked out cellphone service in the area.

While investigators tried to piece together

a possible motive for the attack, a neighbor recalled a recent conversation with Warner that seemed ominous only in hindsight.

Rick Laude told The Associated Press on Monday that he saw Warner standing at his mailbox less than a week before Christmas and pulled over in his car to talk. After asking how Warner's elderly mother was doing, Laude said he casually asked him, "Is Santa going to bring you anything good for Christmas?"

Warner smiled and said, "Oh, yeah, Nashville and the world is never going to forget me," Laude recalled.

Laude said he didn't think much of the remark and thought Warner only meant that "something good" was going to happen for him financially. He was speechless when he learned that authorities had identified Warner as the bomber.

"Nothing about this guy raised any red

flags," Laude said.

As investigators continued to search for a motive, body camera video released late Monday by Nashville police offered more insight into the moments leading up to the explosion and its aftermath.

The recording from Officer Michael Sipos' camera captures officers walking past the RV parked across the street as the recorded warning blares and then helping people evacuate after the thunderous blast off camera. Car alarms and sirens wail as a police dispatch voice calls for all available personnel and people stumble through downtown streets littered with glass.

David Rausch, the director of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, said authorities hope to establish a motive but sometimes simply cannot. "The best way to find motive is to talk to the individual. We will not be able to do that in this case," Rausch said Monday in an interview on NBC.

Judge blocks challenges to more than 4K Ga. voters

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ga. — A federal judge ordered local election officials in Georgia to allow voting by more than 4,000 people whose eligibility was being challenged ahead of next week's runoff elections for the U.S. Senate.

U.S. District Judge Leslie Abrams Gardner blocked election boards in Ben Hill County and Muscogee County, which includes Columbus, from forcing large numbers of voters to prove their residency before casting ballots in the runoffs. The judge ruled that denying so many voters access to the ballot so close to an election would likely violate the National Voter Reg-

istration Act.

Republican Sens. David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler face runoff elections Tuesday. If both lose to Democratic challengers Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, Democrats will take control of the Senate.

Challenges against roughly 4,000 voters in Muscogee County and more than 150 voters in Ben Hill County were part of an effort by the Texas-based conservative group True The Vote to coordinate challenges statewide under a Georgia law that allows any registered voter to challenge the eligibility of any other voter within the same county.

The group said on Dec. 18 that it was

bringing challenges in each of Georgia's 159 counties against more than 364,000 voters whose residency was being questioned based on change of address data obtained from the U.S. Postal Service.

It's up to local election boards to determine whether the challenges have merit. Several, including in Fulton and Cobb counties in metro Atlanta, have rejected them.

Because election officials in Muscogee and Ben Hill counties had determined the challenges had probable cause, anyone on the challenged list attempting to vote would have been required to prove their eligibility — as would anyone challenged who mailed an absentee ballot.

Mormon church sued for alleged role in Scouts abuse

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was hit with several lawsuits Monday for allegedly covering up decades of sexual abuse among Boy Scout troops in Arizona, marking the latest litigation before the state's end-of-year deadline for adult victims to sue.

The church "must be held accountable in order to bring healing and closure to Mormon victims of childhood sexual abuse," Hurley McKenna & Mertz, a law firm that

focuses on church sex abuse, said in a statement.

In the seven lawsuits each representing seven different male victims, attorneys say church officials never notified authorities about abuse allegations. Public records show members of church-sponsored Boy Scout troops who were abused would tell church bishops about what they had experienced. The lawsuits allege bishops would then tell the victims to keep quiet so the church could conduct its own investigation.

In the meantime, troop leaders and volunteers accused of sex abuse would be allowed to continue in their roles or be assigned to another troop, the suits said. Church spokesman Sam Penrod said in a statement that the faith has zero tolerance for abuse of any kind and that the serious allegations require thorough investigation. He called it inaccurate to say the faith had access to files that had names of banned Scout leaders and said the church hasn't seen the records that allegedly back the accusations.

New virus surge challenges Calif. hospitals

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — As coronavirus hospitalizations stabilize in parts of California, patients continue to overwhelm hospitals in a large swath of the state, and Gov. Gavin Newsom warned Californians on Monday to brace for the effect of a surge upon surge upon surge from recent holiday travel.

Intensive care units in Southern California and the San Joaquin Valley have no capacity remaining, according to state figures, and Newsom said it was “self-evident” his latest stay home order would be extended Tuesday in places where hospital ICUs have less than 15% capacity.

Newsom said that even with admissions to hospitals plateauing in some places, the state was destined to move into a “new phase” that it’s been preparing for as it sets up hospital beds in arenas, schools and tents, though it is struggling to staff them.

State officials also notified hospitals Monday that the situation is now so dire that hospitals should prepare for the possibility that they will have to resort to “crisis care” guidelines established earlier in the pandemic, which allow for rationing treatment.

New York

ALBANY — New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced a crackdown on potential vaccine fraud as state officials hope to provide an initial vaccine dose to 400,000 people by the end of the week.

Cuomo, a Democrat, has touted New York’s vaccination efforts even as the nation as a whole is short of reaching the federal government’s goal of injecting 20 million Americans with the first dose by the end of December. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said nearly 2 million people have received an initial vaccine

done as of Dec. 26.

The nation reported about 1.3 million new COVID-19 cases over the past seven days, including roughly 75,000 in New York. The number of new cases has flattened over the past week in New York, which is reporting more cases per capita than 30 other states.

Hospitals in New York have reported 2,800 deaths of people who tested positive for COVID-19 so far in December — roughly the same amount as reported in total from June through November.

South Dakota

SIoux FALLS — South Dakota on Monday reported the lowest number of daily new coronavirus cases in two months, tallying 267 people who had tested positive, though testing also slowed after the Christmas holiday.

The Department of Health reported the results of 1,162 tests, a large drop from the average of 4,309 daily tests over the previous seven days. Health officials indicated that 14.3% of the RT-PCR tests performed came back positive, which is an indicator that more people may have infections than tests are indicating.

South Dakota has seen a significant drop in coronavirus cases after infections peaked in November. Over the past two weeks, the rolling average number of daily new cases has decreased by 47%, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. The Department of Health’s count of people with active infections dipped below 7,000 for the first time since October.

No new deaths from the virus were reported, but after the November spike, the state’s rate of deaths per capita has risen to the fifth-highest in the nation, according to Johns Hopkins researchers. Over the course of the pandemic, 1,446 people have died after contracting CO-

VID-19, representing about one out of every 610 people.

Nebraska

OMAHA — The number of people hospitalized with the coronavirus in Nebraska is roughly half of the record of 987 set on Nov. 20.

Nebraska said 503 people were hospitalized with COVID-19 Saturday, which was down slightly from 505 the day before. That number is down significantly since last month’s peak, but it remains more than twice as high as it was at the start of October.

Nebraska reported just 175 new virus cases Saturday to give the state a total of 161,337 cases, but the Test Nebraska testing sites were closed on Christmas Day. The state also said 1,559 deaths have been linked to the virus since the pandemic began.

Over the past two weeks, the seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in Nebraska decreased from 1,507.43 new cases per day on Dec. 12 to 916.71 new cases per day on Saturday.

Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA CITY — An Oklahoma agricultural research organization announced Monday that it will donate 11 ultra-cold freezers to the state that health officials said will help expedite the distribution of coronavirus vaccines.

The freezers, donated by the Noble Research Institute based in Ardmore, will allow more Oklahomans to receive the vaccine at their local health care providers, limiting travel for people during the pandemic, Oklahoma Deputy Health Commissioner Keith Reed said. The Pfizer vaccine must be shipped and stored at ultra-cold temperatures.

Through Saturday, the most recent data available from the Oklahoma State Department of Health, nearly 30,000 vaccine doses of the 122,750 the state has received so far have been distributed, or less than 25%. But

Reed said a lag in data entry can lead to some underreporting of vaccine administration information.

Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah residents 75 years and older are scheduled to receive the coronavirus vaccine in mid-February under a plan approved Monday for the second phase of distribution.

Other groups who could be line to get the COVID-19 vaccine include people with underlying health conditions and those who live in group settings, but a person’s job is no longer under consideration, the Utah Department of Health said in a news release.

It makes most sense to get the vaccine next to older people who are most at risk of hospitalization and death, said Rich Saunders, interim executive director of the Utah Department of Health.

Of the state’s 1,219 confirmed deaths from the coronavirus, 77% have been people 65 years and older, state health statistics show.

West Virginia

CHARLESTON — West Virginia has reported a daily record for the percentage of positive coronavirus tests among all tests given.

The daily positive rate of 16.4% on Sunday broke the mark of 12.6% set last Tuesday. Tuesday’s rate had been the highest since April.

There were 302 confirmed virus cases Sunday, but the overall number of tests reported administered was much lower than the average from recent weeks.

The number of positive virus cases reported statewide last week, 5,634, was the lowest in a month and was down nearly 18% from the record 6,848 confirmed cases reported for the week ending Dec. 20.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Victim pulls gun, foiling carjacking; 4 arrested

MO WENTZVILLE — An attempted carjacking was foiled when the victim drew a gun of her own, and then police arrested three teens and an 11-year-old.

Wentzville Police said the confrontation happened in a parking lot in the 1900 block of Wentzville Parkway.

Police said the victim reported that she noticed four people nearby while she was seated in her vehicle before a teenage boy approached and demanded her vehicle at gunpoint. Police said the woman pulled her own firearm and refused to leave her vehicle, and that prompted the teen with the gun and the other three suspects to flee.

Former Ringling Bros. circus train cars up for auction

NC RALEIGH — The state of North Carolina is selling nine railroad cars that once belonged to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus which they bought in hopes of refurbishing them for passenger service.

The N.C. Department of Transportation said it is also selling seven other old rail cars it said it no longer needs, The News & Observer of Raleigh reported.

NCDOT paid \$383,000 for the circus cars shortly after Ringling Bros. held its last performance in 2017.

The auction site lists a minimum bid of \$45,000 for each of the circus train cars, except for a storage car that's filled with various hand and shop tools.

Bald eagle survives shot; investigation underway

AK JUNEAU — A bald eagle that had been shot has survived with a broken leg and is being treated at a bird hospital in Alaska.

The eagle was rescued after Kathy Benner, the manager of the Juneau Raptor Center, received a report about an injured bird in a person's yard in Juneau.

It is illegal to harm bald eagles under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 unless a permit from the Secretary of the Interior is provided.

A federal investigation has been launched as a result of the incident, Benner said.

The bird had been given pain medication before it was transported to the Alaska Raptor Center in Sitka, a bird hospital, the Juneau Empire reported.

State Police warn of man impersonating trooper

MI DETROIT — Michigan State Police have warned of a man who was allegedly impersonating police and making traffic stops.

Authorities said they received reports of a man in an unmarked car identifying himself as a state trooper who made stops near Interstate 96 and Davison Avenue in Detroit.

The man was reportedly wearing a black uniform and driving a black Dodge Charger with red and blue lights.

Police said troopers don't use unmarked cars for traffic stops.

State police advised anyone uncertain of being stopped by an unmarked car to slow down, use hazard lights, drive to a public place and call 911.

Teen pilots airlift pets from crowding shelters

NM ALBUQUERQUE — Teenage pilots are airlifting animals from shelters in New Mexico to places out of state where they have a better chance of being adopted.

The program is a collaboration between the Barkhouse animal shelter in Las Cruces and the SAMS Academy Aviation in Albuquerque, local TV station KRQE reported.

The high school student pilots need light hours, while the shelters need to move animals to areas where they are more likely to be adopted.

"In our region, we have a major pet overpopulation issue," said Koko Dean, manag-

ing director of Barkhouse, adding that overcrowding at shelters can lead to euthanizing.

On a recent flight, 17-year-old pilot Cody Anderson helped move two female dogs and 22 puppies from Las Cruces to Albuquerque.

Church added to National Register of Historic Places

NE OMAHA — A 107-year-old Omaha church is now part of the National Register of Historic Places.

The Omaha World-Herald reported that Hope Lutheran was added to the register, along with three other Omaha institutions.

The church played an active role in Omaha's civil rights movement. David Calease, the National Register of Historic Places coordinator with History Nebraska, said that given the events involving the racial justice movement in 2020, stories like those from Hope Lutheran "are more relevant than ever."

The church that stands today was built by the Pella Danish Lutheran Church in 1913 after the Easter Sunday tornado, which destroyed a church nearby that stood a few blocks away.

Salvation Army strikes gold with Maple Leaf coin kettle donation

NV LAS VEGAS — Salvation Army officials in Las Vegas said they were surprised to find a valuable gold coin among the dollar bills, nickels, dimes and quarters in one of the organization's iconic red charity fundraising kettles.

Capt. Anthony Barnes, Salvation Army of Southern Nevada coordinator, said the solid gold Canadian Gold Maple Leaf coin found wasn't immediately appraised, but officials believe it could be worth up to \$2,000.

Barnes called it an incredible anonymous donation.

The coin is produced by the Royal Canadian Mint at a face value of \$50 Canadian, or about \$39.

— From The Associated Press

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Lawrence, Fields lead on the field and off

Associated Press

There has never been any doubt about the football abilities of Clemson's Trevor Lawrence and Justin Fields of Ohio State. Their youth quarterback coach could see the power arms, nimble feet and accurate decision-making when they were budding Georgia prep stars.

Ron Veal also saw the character and resolve in Lawrence and Fields.

"Both were mostly quiet, taking everything in" as rising Georgia prep quarterbacks, Veal said in a phone interview. "Until it was time to speak up."

The quarterbacks felt it was time during the offseason, and now they'll square off in the College Football Playoff semifinals when Clemson takes on Ohio State in the Sugar Bowl on Friday night.

It was their off-field actions that helped set up the the showdown.

Lawrence and Fields spoke out on social justice issues and were outspoken to ensure players' views were heard in discussions about having a season amid the coronavirus pandemic. College athletes were angered by the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others. They also were disheartened and confused by questions if they would or should play as the virus raged throughout the country.

Both steadied their teammates and gave fans something to rally around through their words and actions, Veal said.

"They were leaders when their teams needed them," he said.

The actions Lawrence and Fields took of-

ten landed them in the spotlight:

■ In June, Lawrence was among Clemson players who organized a march for social justice near campus.

■ Fields and teammates put out a powerful video for social change with social media hashtags, "#BlackLivesMatter," and "#FightForChange." Fields was part of a campus demonstration where Ohio State players, students and staff knelt for nine minutes in the wake of Floyd's death.

■ In August, Lawrence and Fields were among those who started the "#WeWantToPlay" movement that even caught the ear of First Fan, President Donald Trump, who spoke with Lawrence by phone.

■ When the Big Ten Conference initially called off its fall season, Fields created an online petition to play that gained 300,000 signers in less than a week. "We wanted to come together and have a voice so people who are making decisions can hear," Fields said.

The kind of player activism Lawrence and Fields demonstrated is one of the most positive things to come out of the pandemic, said researcher Richard Lapchick, who heads the The Institute of Diversity and Ethics in Sports at UCF.

Lapchick said player voices can cause change and determine who schools hire to lead football and basketball teams.

"It has an affect on society in general and it's also going to have an effect on the college level," Lapchick said.

The quarterbacks' efforts had an impact: The Atlantic Coast Conference opened play in September while the Big Ten reversed

course and started in mid-October. Now, the two signal callers are a victory away from the national title game.

Lawrence won his third ACC championship as a starter, throwing for two touchdowns and running for a third as the second-ranked Tigers (10-1; No. 2 CFP) routed Notre Dame 34-10 two weeks ago.

Lawrence is pleased with his play but isn't satisfied.

"I have goals for myself and for my team," he said. "I want to put us in the best position to win."

Ohio State (6-0; No. 3 CFP) topped Northwestern for its fourth consecutive Big Ten crown.

Lawrence played at Cartersville High in Georgia while Fields was about 20 miles South at Harrison High in Kennesaw, becoming the nation's top college quarterback prospects.

Lawrence signed with Clemson, where he's won a national title, three ACC crowns and gone 34-1 as a starter.

Fields, after a bumpy first year at Georgia, transferred to Ohio State where the Buckeyes have gone 19-1 with him as the starter. The lone loss: A drama-filled 29-23 Clemson win at the Fiesta Bowl in CFP semifinals.

Lawrence entered his junior year as the likely overall No. 1 NFL draft pick while Fields is projected to go a few spots later, possibly as high as No. 2. Both could've easily opted out without impacting their NFL futures even though the Tigers and Buckeyes were both expected to challenge again for the national title.

Sacrifice and stress: Players handled an odd season

Associated Press

The Saturday night after winning an afternoon home game is one of the best times to be a college football player.

Family and loved ones usually await with congratulatory hugs. Then there is a nice dinner, and maybe more celebrating with teammates and friends. Few things get a college town hopping like a football victory.

But not this season.

"I'd pretty much go home, lay on my couch, watch (video) cut ups of the game like two or three times. Probably go pick up some food," Notre Dame offensive tackle Liam Eichenberg said.

To play through a pandemic, players had

to sacrifice much of their lives away from the game along with some of the best aspects of being part of a team.

To reach the playoff, No. 1 Alabama, No. 2 Clemson, No. 3 Ohio State and No. 4 Notre Dame had to go a combined 37-2 on the field and keep the virus at bay.

"It's been incredibly challenging," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said. "I just tell them, don't give up what they want most for what they may want at the moment. It's just really that simple. And the teams that do this the best and manage this the best, that's who's going to finish the best."

Doing so required lots of COVID-19 testing, and the anxiety that comes with knowing the next test could be the one that puts a

season on hold, and little time spent with anyone outside the team.

"Eating together as a team, we do it with a glass divider between us," Notre Dame receiver Ben Skowronek said Monday during media zoom sessions for the CFP. "I miss those meals and just getting to know people in the locker room. All that stuff."

Another oddity brought on by the pandemic: Four days before the New Year's Day semifinals, the playoff participants were still on their respective campuses. Alabama faces Notre Dame in the relocated Rose Bowl at the home of the Dallas Cowboys in Arlington, Texas. Clemson and Ohio State meet at the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans in a rematch of last year's semifinal.

Bills earn 1st sweep of Pats since '99

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — The Buffalo Bills put a cherry atop the changing of the guard in the AFC East.

A week after unseating the Patriots as division champions, Buffalo became the first AFC East team in two decades to sweep New England in a season series with a 38-9 victory Monday night.

Josh Allen passed for four touchdowns to help the Bills stay in the mix for the No. 2 seed in the AFC playoffs.

Buffalo (12-3) last swept the Patriots in 1999. The last division opponents to sweep New England were the Jets and Dolphins in 2000. The Patriots' 19 straight seasons without losing both games to a divisional opponent was an NFL record. New England (6-9) will finish with its first losing record since coach Bill Belichick's first season in 2000.

Allen was 27-for-36 for 320 yards. He now

has 34 touchdown passes, surpassing Jim Kelly to set a franchise single-season record. With his eighth 300-yard game, he also surpassed Drew Bledsoe's single-season team record of seven.

"We've got one game left. And all that, it's cool, the records, this and that," Allen said. "But the plan is to get to 13-3 and give ourselves a chance in the playoffs. It doesn't mean much if we can't get it done."

Stefon Diggs had nine catches for 145 yards and three touchdowns, setting a Bills single-season record for receiving yards.

"I'm new to this team so I'm basking in (the) ambience of everybody," Diggs said. "I've got a young quarterback who's balling."

The Patriots struggled to move the ball for most of the night with running back Damien Harris out for the second straight game with an ankle injury. Cam Newton had a touchdown run but was just 5-for-10

for 34 yards passing before being pulled in the third quarter for backup Jarrett Stidham.

Newton's 34 yards passing are the fewest by a New England starting quarterback since 1993.

He said the season has been frustrating because the work he has put in hasn't translated into wins.

Belichick said he hasn't made any decisions about who will start the Patriots' finale Sunday against the New York Jets.

"It was the opportunity to give him a chance to play," Belichick said of inserting Stidham. "Cam did a good job for us. I mean, that wasn't the problem. We were just not very competitive in the beginning."

Buffalo had no trouble moving the ball against a depleted new England defense that was missing linebacker Ja'Whaun Bentley and defensive tackle Lawrence Guy due to shoulder injuries.

NFL BRIEFS

Goff to miss Rams' season finale after thumb surgery

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Jared Goff will miss the Los Angeles Rams' regular-season finale against the Arizona Cardinals after undergoing surgery on his right thumb.

Goff could return a week later if the Rams make the playoffs, coach Sean McVay said Monday night.

John Wolford will take his first NFL snaps as Goff's replacement when the Rams (9-6) host the Cardinals on Sunday. Los Angeles will clinch a playoff spot with a victory, or if the Chicago Bears lose to Green Bay.

"John has done a great job preparing himself all year," McVay said. "You watch him work, and the way he's prepared, I know there's confidence in him with his teammates. He's put himself in a good position where he could come in and lead the offense."

The Rams also will be without leading rusher Darrell Hender-

son, who is headed to injured reserve with a high ankle sprain. Rookie running back Cam Akers may be able to return from his own high ankle sprain after missing just one game, McVay said.

Goff hasn't missed a game due to injury in his five-year NFL career, sitting out just one game when McVay rested his starters in the 2017 regular-season finale. He injured his thumb when he hit his hand on the helmet of Seattle defensive end Benson Mayowa in the second half of the Rams' 20-9 loss to the Seahawks last Sunday.

Jets' Gore out with bruised lung

Frank Gore reached a milestone on his final carry of the game — and maybe of his career.

The 37-year-old New York Jets running back has a bruised lung that coach Adam Gase said

Monday will keep Gore out of the season finale at New England on Sunday.

Gore, who became the third player in NFL history to run for 16,000 yards, was hurt in the fourth quarter of the Jets' 23-16 victory over the Cleveland Browns on Sunday. It was originally called a chest injury by the team after Gore left, but tests revealed the lung contusion.

Gore had 14 carries for 48 yards, leaving him at exactly 16,000 yards rushing. The third-leading rusher in NFL history is behind only Emmitt Smith (18,355) and Walter Payton (16,726). Gore has played in 240 games, a record for NFL running backs, over 16 seasons.

Browns coach criticizes players' mistakes

On Monday, Browns coach Kevin Stefanski, who has refused to make excuses for him or his players during a first year

in Cleveland he won't forget, bemoaned the Browns' mistakes — penalties, turnovers, three fumbles by Baker Mayfield and dropped passes.

"Just was sloppy," he said.

So, too, was the apparent behavior of some Browns players last week as a positive coronavirus test for linebacker B.J. Goodson morphed into wide receivers Jarvis Landry, Rashard Higgins, Donovan Peoples-Jones and KhaDarel Hodge along with rookie linebacker Jacob Phillips all being ruled out of the game as high-risk close contacts.

In addition, rookie left tackle Jedrick Wills was scratched because he had COVID-19-like symptoms. That decision came after he was activated on Saturday, two days after being placed on the COVID list from being exposed to an infected person outside the team. The close contact occurred in the recovery pool area.

NBA ROUNDUP

Morant hurts ankle as Grizz top Nets in OT

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Ja Morant exited with a sprained ankle but the Memphis Grizzlies earned their first victory of the season without him, outlasting the short-handed Brooklyn Nets 116-111 in overtime Monday night.

The reigning NBA Rookie of the Year was wheeled to the back of the arena late in the first half after hurting his left ankle when he leaped to block a shot by Timothé Luwawu-Cabarrot and landed on the Nets forward's foot. Morant rejoined his teammates on the bench in the second half with his foot in a walking boot.

He watched Brandon Clarke score the go-ahead basket on a follow shot with 41 seconds left in overtime before the Grizzlies put it away with free throws.

Kyle Anderson scored a career-high 28 points and Dillon Brooks added 24 for the Grizzlies, who had dropped their first two games. Clarke had 16 points and Jonas Valanciunas finished with 14 points and 14 rebounds.

Caris LeVert had 28 points and 11 assists for the Nets, who rested Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving while losing for the second

straight night. Brooklyn is also without Spencer Dinwiddie, who will have surgery to repair a partially torn right ACL sustained Sunday.

Trail Blazers 115, Lakers 107: Damian Lillard scored 21 of his 31 points in the second half, and CJ McCollum had 20 points and 11 assists in Portland's win at Los Angeles.

Gary Trent Jr. matched his career high with seven three-pointers while scoring 28 points in the Blazers' second straight win over the Lakers at Staples Center.

LeBron James had 29 points, nine rebounds and six assists for the NBA champions, who dropped to 2-2 on their season-opening homestand. Dennis Schröder added 24 points, but Los Angeles' streak of 59 straight victories when taking a lead into the fourth quarter was snapped.

Nuggets 124, Rockets 111: Nikola Jokic had 19 points, 18 assists and 12 rebounds for the 42nd triple-double of his career, and host Denver beat short-handed Houston for its first win of the season.

Jamal Murray added 21 points before leaving with 4:05 remaining in the third quarter after a collision in traffic sent him

sprawling to the floor. He held his hand to his head for a couple of minutes but got up and walked under his own power to the locker room for further examination. He was back on the bench midway through the fourth but did not reenter the game.

James Harden had 34 points to lead the undermanned Rockets. Christian Wood added 23.

Jazz 110, Thunder 109: Donovan Mitchell hit a go-ahead layup with 7 seconds left and finished with 20 points, lifting Utah to a win at Oklahoma City.

Bogdan Bogdanovich scored 23 points and Mike Conley added 20 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists for the Jazz, who ended a 17-game losing streak in regular-season road games against the Thunder, including games in the NBA's Orlando bubble last season. Utah's last win in Oklahoma City came on Oct. 31, 2010.

Hawks 128, Pistons 120: Trae Young scored 29 points, Bogdan Bogdanovic added 17 and Atlanta beat Detroit in its home opener.

John Collins finished with 15 points for the Hawks, who are 3-0 for the first time since 2016-17.

TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Ayala, Wiggins lead Maryland past No. 6 Wisconsin

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Maryland coach Mark Turgeon wasn't exactly pleased that the Big Ten schedule had his team on the road for a Christmas Day game followed by a trip to Wisconsin three days later.

Now, he couldn't be happier about it.

Eric Ayala scored 17 points, while Aaron Wiggins added 15 points and nine rebounds as the Terrapins beat the No. 6 Badgers 70-64 on Monday night.

Coming in, Maryland was 0-2 in the conference, including a loss at Purdue on Friday, and its wins were against the likes of Mount St. Mary's and St. Peter's.

But Turgeon said he's seen a difference in his team since losing 67-51 to Clemson on Dec. 9 and the late December road trip turned into a bonding experience that may become a building block for his team going

forward.

"It was probably the best thing that happened to us," Turgeon said. "We really grew in the last five days. A lot of meetings, a lot of being together."

The Terrapins (6-3, 1-2 Big Ten) beat Wisconsin (8-2, 2-1) by refusing to let the Badgers have their bread-and-butter — the paint.

Maryland outscored Wisconsin 38-20 in the paint, limiting the Badgers' post team of Nate Reuvers and Micah Potter to just 12 points on 6-for-18 shooting. Faced with a 3-2 zone in the second half, Wisconsin began to settle for three-pointers.

"Our zone pushed them out to the perimeter. I think it slowed them down a lot there for us," Ayala said.

No. 1 Gonzaga 88, Northern Arizona 58: Joel Ayayi had 17 points and 10 rebounds, Drew Timme added 14 points and the top-

ranked Bulldogs topped the visiting Lumberjacks.

Andrew Nembhard finished with 10 points and seven assists for Gonzaga (8-0), which has the nation's longest home winning streak at 42 games.

Cameron Shelton scored 20 points and grabbed nine rebounds for Northern Arizona (1-6), which was undone by 35% shooting. Jay Green had 12 points.

Ayayi scored nine points as the Bulldogs jumped to a 28-8 lead after eight minutes. They made 12 of their first 16 shots.

No. 21 Minnesota 81, No. 17 Michigan State 56: Liam Robbins had 18 points, nine rebounds and three blocks, leading a stifling effort by the host Gophers. Marcus Carr scored 19 points and dished out five assists for Minnesota (9-1, 2-1 Big Ten), which never trailed and held the sputtering Spartans to 25.7% shooting (18-for-70).