

## Biden signs 2022 defense bill into law

BY ROSE L. THAYER

*Stars and Stripes*

President Joe Biden signed into law Monday the \$768 billion defense policy bill that includes a pay raise for troops, reforms of the military justice system and billions to spend on research and development deemed critical for the U.S. military to remain competitive with Russia and China.

The 2022 National Defense Authorization Act, which sets policy and priorities for the Defense Department and includes some funding for the Department of Energy, passed through Congress earlier this month with bipartisan support from 363 members of the U.S. House of Representatives and 88 senators.

“It addresses a broad range of pressing issues, from strategic competition with China and Russia, to disruptive technologies like hypersonics, AI and quantum computing,” said Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee. “It provides our forces with the resources and support they need to defend our nation, makes historic reforms to help improve the lives of our service members and takes important steps to care for their families.”

After signing the bill, known as the NDAA, Biden released a statement thanking the committee’s leadership, as well as the House Armed Services Committee leadership, for

their work on the annual legislation.

Next, Congress will need to pass an appropriations bill, which will pave the way for the spending authorized in the NDAA. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, has warned that operating under a continuing resolution, which keeps spending at the previous year’s levels, would compromise \$35 billion from the NDAA.

“We can all stand up here on the Senate floor and back at home, declaring our unwavering support for our troops and their families, and claiming to support a strong national defense, but until we put our money where our mouth is and provide the funding we say we support, those words ring hollow,” Leahy said in a statement.

The NDAA includes \$740 billion for the Pentagon budget — about \$24 billion more than Biden’s administration requested. Of that, an unprecedented \$117.8 billion goes toward Pentagon research, development, testing and evaluation in new technologies, which officials have deemed critical in a high-end fight against power competitors such as China and Russia.

Among many reforms and new policies, the NDAA gives troops and civilian employees a 2.7% pay raise that begins in January, as well as a “basic needs allowance” for service mem-

bers with an income that’s not enough to support their family. Service members also gain parental leave for up to 12 weeks for the birth, adoption or foster care placement of a child and two-week bereavement leave, a benefit that is also available to civilian employees.

The NDAA reforms the military justice system, particularly the way it handles sexual assault and harassment cases. It creates a standalone crime for sexual harassment and overhauls how the military investigates and prosecutes 11 crimes, including sexual assault, murder, manslaughter and kidnapping. It also moves the decision to prosecute those crimes from the chain of command to an independent prosecutor. Commanders do retain oversight of courts-martial under the new law.

“Empowering independent military prosecutors is key to tackling the military’s sexual assault crisis and it’s also key to boosting military readiness and retention,” retired Col. Don Christensen, the former chief prosecutor of the Air Force and president of Protect Our Defenders, a military justice advocacy group, said in a statement. “If you care about the health and well-being of those who serve our nation and the military as a whole, then today’s reforms — which also include significant sentencing reform, enhanced victim’s rights and the criminalization of sexual harassment — are a big win.”

## Officials recommend shorter virus isolation, quarantine

*Associated Press*

NEW YORK — U.S. health officials on Monday cut isolation restrictions for asymptomatic Americans who catch the coronavirus from 10 to five days, and similarly shortened the time that close contacts need to quarantine.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention officials said the guidance is in keeping with growing evidence that people with the coronavirus are most infectious in the two days before and three days after symptoms develop.

The decision also was driven by a recent surge in COVID-19 cases, propelled by the omicron variant.

Early research suggests omicron may

cause milder illnesses than earlier versions of the coronavirus. But the sheer number of people becoming infected — and therefore having to isolate or quarantine — threatens to crush the ability of hospitals, airlines and other businesses to stay open, experts have said.

Last week, the CDC loosened rules that previously called on health care workers to stay out of work for 10 days if they test positive. The new recommendations said workers could go back to work after seven days if they test negative and don’t have symptoms. And the agency said isolation time could be cut to five days, or even fewer, if there are severe staffing shortages.

Now, the CDC is changing the isolation

and quarantine guidance for the general public to be even less stringent.

The change is aimed at people who are not experiencing symptoms. People with symptoms during isolation, or who develop symptoms during quarantine, are encouraged to stay home.

The CDC’s isolation and quarantine guidance has confused the public, and the new recommendations are “happening at a time when more people are testing positive for the first time and looking for guidance,” said Lindsay Wiley, an American University public health law expert.

Nevertheless, the guidance continues to be complex.

# Analysts: Black Sea part of Russia equation

By ALISON BATH  
*Stars and Stripes*

Any new Russian invasion of Ukraine that might be in the works would likely include a land grab in the south designed to give the Kremlin a greater stranglehold on the Black Sea, some analysts are warning.

As the world eyes the buildup of troops and military equipment along Ukraine's eastern border, Russian President Vladimir Putin could take advantage of the distraction to position forces needed to seize additional Ukrainian coastline along the Sea of Azov, said Jim Townsend, a fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington.

But that slice of littoral territory, which includes the port city of Mariupol, might not be enough for Putin, Townsend and others have said. The southern port of Odessa, Ukraine's biggest and one of the largest on the Black Sea, also could be on the list.

Analysts including Townsend aren't convinced that Moscow's recent actions and demands are just about bringing the United States to the negotiating table to exact certain promises, among them a guarantee that Ukraine will never join NATO.

Putin knows that won't happen, Townsend said.

"He's not going to have any other choice but to go in (to Ukraine), and if he goes in, he's going to make sure he gets what he wants," said Townsend, a former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy. "And I think (the Sea of Azov and Odessa) are some of the things he wants."

But recent developments seem to be making an invasion less of a certainty.

The U.S. and Russia have agreed to security talks in Geneva on Jan. 10, and a top Russian government official said Monday that the country has never had any intention of invading Ukraine, the Russian news agency Tass reported.

Over the weekend, Moscow announced the withdrawal of more than 10,000 troops involved in monthlong military exercises near Ukraine.

Another strategist, James R. Holmes, said nothing can be ruled out when it comes to determining Putin's intentions, but he thinks it's unlikely that taking additional Ukrainian land is a serious objective.

Russia's need to ensure a power position in the Black Sea was accomplished with its annexation of Crimea in 2014, he said.

"Moscow probably just covets deference if not subservience from Kyiv, much as it wants the

dominant say-so in the 'near abroad,' or former Soviet Union," said Holmes, a professor at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. "Influence need not demand ownership."

While it wouldn't be front and center, the Black Sea would play an important role in any Russian military campaign, Holmes and others said.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet and ground forces from Crimea would offer critical protection of the campaign's rear and flank and prevent the Ukrainian navy or NATO countries' ships from interfering in the land campaign. Blockading the Sea of Azov also is a possibility, analysts say.

"Holding off hostile navies would isolate the battlefield while simplifying the problem for Russian ground commanders," Holmes said. "After all, the more they can fend off outsiders, the easier time they will have defeating an outmatched Ukrainian army."

It's also likely that the Russians would have multiple invasion routes, said Townsend, adding that Russia's air defense web in the Black Sea would come into play as well.

Staking a claim to additional Ukrainian coastline along the Sea of Azov would give Russia a highly desired land bridge connecting it to Crimea, said James

G. Foggo III, dean of the Arlington, Va.-based Center for Maritime Strategy.

Foggo, who led U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command in Naples, Italy, believes a more robust U.S. and NATO presence in the Black Sea is needed. Responsibility for coordinating and achieving a nearly constant presence there shouldn't fall solely on the U.S., he said. Other countries with strong navies, such as France and the Netherlands, should send warships to the region, he said.

"The strategy would be that ... we maintain a steady drumbeat and a steady presence there to show solidarity, not just with the NATO allies but the partners in the region, and that includes Georgia and Ukraine."

But Holmes said that if Russia invades, the use of NATO ships would be limited given the aggressiveness of the Black Sea Fleet and the shore-based anti-ship weaponry that overshadows the theater.

The most likely primary weapon, should NATO intervene, would be the U.S. Air Force, Holmes said.

"If air power could make the theater relatively safe for surface warships, then you might see NATO navies play a bigger part," he said.

## NATO jets scrambled 290 times to meet Russians in 2021

*Associated Press*

BRUSSELS — NATO fighter jets were scrambled hundreds of times this year to intercept aircraft, most of them Russian warplanes in northwest Europe that were flying too close to the airspace of its member countries, the military organization said Tuesday.

NATO said that 290 of around 370 total missions were flown in 2021 in response to the activities of Russian aircraft. Most of those took place in the Baltic region around Estonia, Lat-

via and Lithuania, where the organization has an air-policing operation.

"Generally, intercepts occurred without incident as NATO planes take off to identify the approaching aircraft and escort it out of the area. Very few intercepted flights entered allied airspace," a statement from the 30-country U.S.-led alliance said.

NATO intercept flights are a routine occurrence. But despite high tensions between NATO and Moscow over the activities of Russian

armed forces near Ukraine's borders in recent months, the number of Russia-linked intercepts decreased this year.

In 2020, NATO jets scrambled around 350 times in response to Russian planes.

More than 60 NATO jets are on round-the-clock alert across Europe to respond to things like unannounced military flights or civilian planes losing communication with air-traffic controllers for any reason, which could range from technical problems to hijacking.

# Officials: 25% of Navy ship crew has virus

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — About two dozen sailors on a U.S. Navy warship — or roughly 25% of the crew — have now tested positive for COVID-19, keeping the ship sidelined in port at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on Monday, according to U.S. defense officials.

The USS Milwaukee has a crew of a bit more than 100, and it was forced to pause its deployment late last week because of the coronavirus outbreak. The defense officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the outbreak, said the number of infected sailors is staying relatively constant at this point.

The USS Milwaukee, a small-

er, stealthier combat ship, is the first Navy ship this year to have to interrupt its deployment at sea.

It began its deployment from Naval Station Mayport in Jacksonville, Fla., on Dec. 14, and had stopped for a scheduled port visit. The ship was heading into the U.S. Southern Command region.

Another warship, meanwhile, had to postpone its movement out to sea earlier this month due to a separate outbreak. Navy Cmdr. Sean Robertson, spokesman for 3rd Fleet, said the USS Halsey, a destroyer, delayed its homeport move from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to San Diego because a significant number of the crew became infected with COVID-19. The ship was finally able to leave Hawaii on Sunday. The move is

not a deployment, but a transfer to a new home station for the crew.

A Navy official said roughly one-third of the Halsey crew tested positive for the virus, and most had only mild symptoms or none at all. A destroyer has about 300 crew members. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details on the crew impact.

Robertson said the crew was nearly 100% vaccinated and no one was taken to the hospital. Vaccine booster shots were made available for the crew. Robertson also said some of the samples have been tested and all were of the omicron variant.

The Navy said in a statement Friday that the USS Milwaukee's

crew was "100% immunized" and that all of those who tested positive for COVID-19 were being isolated on the ship away from other crew members.

The U.S. officials said Monday that the Navy believes the total vaccination of the crew is the key factor in controlling the outbreak.

According to the Navy's statement, "a portion" of those infected are having mild symptoms, and the specific variant is not yet known. COVID-19 cases have surged across the country as a result of the highly contagious omicron variant.

According to the latest data released by the Navy, more than 98% of all active-duty sailors have been fully vaccinated.

## Marine saves man trapped in overturned car in Calif.

**By J.P. LAWRENCE**  
*Stars and Stripes*

A barefoot Marine rescued a crash victim by kicking out the windshield of the man's car, which was overturned in the middle of a highway in Orange County, Calif.

Staff Sgt. Joseph Maldonado, a recruiter, was on his way to work in Fullerton on Dec. 6 when he came across a three-car pileup, according to a Marine Corps statement issued Monday.

Maldonado had his windows rolled down and heard a man calling for help from an overturned red Mercedes, it said. According to the statement, the man was having a diabetic seizure.

"Us Marines always run to the call of help," Maldonado said in a Facebook message Tuesday.

Maldonado borrowed a knife from a bystander and crawled into the car to cut the trapped man out of his seat belt. The Marine had been wearing flip-flops while driving, and he used his

bare feet to break the front windshield in an attempt to free the man, the statement said.

But Maldonado realized it would be too hazardous to pull the crash victim out through the windshield, so he asked bystanders to help pull him through the driver's side door.

"I told him, 'Hey, I'm going to use my body and get you out of here,'" Maldonado said, according to the Marines' statement.

After the rescue, Maldonado retrieved the man's personal belongings, which included insulin and diabetes medication. He told police officers at the scene that the man may be in the middle of a diabetic seizure.

Based on that information, police gave the man medication to keep him stable, the statement said.

At least one other person involved in the collision was injured, Maldonado said Tuesday.

"I saw where I could help and simply did something about it," he was quoted as saying in the Marines' statement.

## Marcinko, SEAL Team 6 founder, dies at age 81

**By COREY DICKSTEIN**  
*Stars and Stripes*

Richard Marcinko, who founded the Navy's SEAL Team 6 after earning accolades as a SEAL leader during two tours in Vietnam, died Christmas Day at age 81, the National Navy SEAL Museum has announced.

With the Navy needing an elite unit dedicated to counterterrorism after the Pentagon's failure to rescue American hostages in Iran in 1980, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Thomas B. Hayward hand-picked Marcinko to stand up the new SEAL team, according to the Fort Pierce, Fla., museum. Marcinko, known as "Demo Dick," commanded SEAL Team 6 for about three years, retired from the Navy in 1989 as a commander and went on to write a series of nonfiction and fiction books based on the Navy SEALs.

His family confirmed his death at his home in Fauquier County, Va., in a message on Twitter.

Marcinko, the son of Pennsylvania coal miner, enlisted in the Navy in 1958 after dropping out of

high school, according to his 1992 best-selling autobiography "Rogue Warrior." He completed underwater demolition training as an enlisted sailor before commission via Officer Candidate School in 1965. He deployed less than two years later to Vietnam with SEAL Team 2.

Marcinko was serving at the Pentagon during the April 1980 rescue attempt by U.S. special operators to free 52 American diplomats and citizens taken hostage five months earlier by Iranian college students supporting the Iranian Revolution. Operation Eagle Claw's failure — including the deaths of eight American service members — prompted the Pentagon to rethink how it responded to crises around the globe.

Hayward, the CNO, charged Marcinko with designing the unit, selecting its members, training them and serving as its initial commander. After leaving the Navy, Marcinko went to work in business, did motivational speaking and authored some 20 books.

# Flu making comeback in US after year off

Associated Press

The U.S. flu season has arrived on schedule after taking a year off, with flu hospitalizations rising and two child deaths reported.

Last year's flu season was the lowest on record, likely because COVID-19 measures — school closures, distancing, masks and canceled travel — prevented the spread of influenza, or because the coronavirus somehow pushed aside other viruses.

"This is setting itself up to be more of a normal flu season," said Lynnette Brammer, who tracks flu-like illnesses for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The childhood deaths, Brammer said, are "unfortunately what we would expect when flu activity picks up. It's a sad reminder of how severe flu can be."

During last year's unusually light flu sea-

son, one child died. In contrast, 199 children died from flu two years ago, and 144 the year before that.

In the newest data, the most intense flu activity was in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., and the number of states with high flu activity rose from three to seven. In CDC figures released Monday, states with high flu activity are New Mexico, Kansas, Indiana, New Jersey, Tennessee, Georgia and North Dakota.

The type of virus circulating this year tends to cause the largest amount of severe disease, especially in the elderly and the very young, Brammer said.

Last year's break from the flu made it more challenging to plan for this year's flu vaccine. So far, it looks like what's circulating is in a slightly different subgroup from

what the vaccine targets, but it's "really too early to know" whether that will blunt the vaccine's effectiveness, Brammer said.

"We'll have to see what the impact of these little changes" will be, Brammer said. "Flu vaccine is your best way to protect yourself against flu."

There are early signs that fewer people are getting flu shots compared with last year. With hospitals already stretched by COVID-19, it's more important than ever to get a flu shot and take other precautions, Brammer said.

"Cover your cough. Wash your hands. Stay home if you're sick," Brammer said. "If you do get flu, there are antivirals you can talk to your doctor about that can prevent severe illness and help you stay out of the hospital."

## Northwest cold is forcing some people into shelters

Associated Press

SEATTLE — With temperatures in normally mild Seattle dropping well below freezing, Kaety West walked a short distance in the snow from the tent where she usually stays to find refuge at a small warming center at an American Legion hall.

"I'm not even willing to stay in it right now. It's just so difficult," she said of her tent on Monday.

Severe weather sweeping parts of the United States brought frigid temperatures to the Pacific Northwest and heavy snow to mountains in Northern California and Nevada.

Across western Washington and Oregon officials and private groups opened emergency spaces for people to find refuge as forecasters said the extreme cold from an arctic blast could last until the weekend.

Snow showers blew into the Pacific Northwest on Sunday from the Gulf of Alaska,

dumping up to 6 inches across the Seattle area and snarling traffic throughout the greater Seattle and Portland areas.

The National Weather Service said Seattle's low Sunday was 20 degrees F, breaking a mark set in 1948. Bellingham, Wash., was 9 degrees F, 3 degrees colder than the previous record set in 1971.

State officials in Oregon have declared an emergency. In Multnomah County — home to Portland — about a half dozen weather shelters were open. Seattle city leaders also opened at least six severe weather shelters and the mayor declared an emergency.

Utilities reported about 5,000 customers without power Monday in western Washington and Oregon.

Farther south, blowing snow in the mountains of Northern California and Nevada closed key highways, with forecasters warning that travel in the Sierra Nevada could be

difficult for several days.

At Donner Pass in the Sierra, officials with the University of California, Berkeley's Central Sierra Snow Laboratory on Monday said recent snowfall has smashed the snowiest December record of 179 inches, set in 1970. The record is now 193.7 inches as more snow is expected.

The Northstar California Resort in Truckee closed its mountain operations on Monday amid blizzard conditions. The ski resort has received more than 6 feet of snow over the last 48 hours, according to the resort's Facebook post.

The snowpack in the Sierra was at dangerously low levels after recent weeks of dry weather, but the state Department of Water Resources reported on Monday that the snowpack was between 145% and 161% of normal across the range with more snow expected.

## Kentucky's death toll from tornadoes increases to 77

Associated Press

FRANKFORT, Ky — Kentucky's death toll from devastating tornadoes earlier this month rose by one as Gov. Andy Beshear announced Monday that an infant died last week. The state's revised death toll from the storms is now 77.

The infant was from Graves County in the western part of the state, the governor said. Mayfield, the county seat, was hit especially

hard by the storms, with hundreds of buildings destroyed.

"This is one that rips at the very fabric of who we are," Beshear said during a news briefing. He was joined by Kentucky first lady Brittainy Beshear.

"Brittainy and I ask everyone to join us in lifting up this family and their friends and the community in prayer," he added.

Debris removal in affected areas is "start-

ing to ramp up," Beshear added. While around 26% of Graves County is still without power, outages in other counties are down to less than 1%. Meanwhile, some 11,600 insurance claims have been filed.

"Rebuilding these homes and structures and lives is going to take years and we've got to make sure when support is needed down the road that we have it ... and we can deploy it there to help these families," Beshear said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Police discover human remains in stolen truck

**NV** LAS VEGAS — Las Vegas police announced the start of a homicide investigation after human remains were discovered inside a stolen truck.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department said in a statement that they found the remains after recovering two previously stolen trucks in the aftermath of a police chase.

Agency officers arrested Eric Holland, 57, in connection with the chase, pending arrest warrants and subsequent investigation into an apparent homicide. They said in a news release that Holland fled when officers attempted to conduct a traffic stop, switching from one stolen vehicle to another before being arrested at an apartment complex in central Las Vegas.

### Brothers regift same hard candy for decades

**NH** MANCHESTER — Two New Hampshire brothers have gotten their holiday regifting skills down to an art — they've been passing the same hard candy back and forth for over 30 years.

It started in 1987, when Ryan Wasson gave a 10-roll Frankford "Santa's Candy Book" with assorted fruit flavors to his brother, Eric Wasson, as a joke for Christmas, knowing that Eric wouldn't like it.

"I didn't eat them," Eric Wasson told WMUR-TV. "And so the next year I thought, 'Hey, I think I'm going to give it back to him. He'll never remember.'"

But Ryan immediately recognized it. They've been taking

turns ever since, keeping a log of their exchanges. They've gotten creative about it.

The tradition has also involved family members, co-workers and even a sheriff's department. Last year, it was presented to Ryan on a silver platter at a restaurant.

### Bacon in warehouse spoils, food firm sues

**NE** LINCOLN — A Nebraska food company and its insurer want a warehouse company to pay them more than \$400,000 because a shipment of bacon was destroyed inside one of its warehouses in Lincoln.

Omaha food manufacturer Westin Inc. and Nationwide Agribusiness Insurance Co. filed a lawsuit against warehousing company Universal Pure over the August 2020 incident. They said Universal Pure should have maintained its warehouse better to avoid the problem.

The Lincoln Journal Star reported that the bacon was destroyed when water accumulated and froze in a wall cavity of the warehouse, which led the wall to bow, pushing on pallet racking and causing a collapse.

### Man arrested, accused of trying to dig up grave

**MS** MERIDIAN — A man has been arrested for allegedly digging up a grave at a cemetery in Mississippi.

Meridian Police Sgt. Heather Luebbers said officers responded Christmas Eve to a call about two men walking around a cemetery with metal detectors,

WLBT-TV reported. When officers arrived, they found one person, Shamus Burcham, digging up a gravesite.

Luebbers said Burcham did not get far in his effort before he was caught. He was arrested on a misdemeanor charge of desecration of cemeteries or corpses.

### Town pushing year's last paycheck to 2022

**IN** PORTAGE — Local government employees in an Indiana city will have to wait until next year to get their last paycheck for 2021.

Portage officials said they can't cover payroll on Dec. 31. The money won't be available until Jan. 3, the (Northwest Indiana) Times reported.

Portage typically has 26 paydays a year but has 27 in 2021.

Former Mayor John Cannon is offering interest-free loans to city workers until Jan. 4, especially if they need money for automatic deductions from their bank.

### Guests, workers at facility get \$100 bills

**SD** SIOUX FALLS — Staff members and guests at a homeless and transitional facility in South Dakota each received \$100 bills for Christmas, thanks to an anonymous donor.

The St. Francis House in Sioux Falls has 90 residents, one of whom is recovering from cancer and suffering from Parkinson's disease. Darrin Stringfellow said he was "overwhelmed" by the donation.

"I have saved a year's worth of rent in four and a half months,

working the two jobs, and they've given so much more, a sense of worth, though, not just the monetary things and a warm bed," Stringfellow said. "I feel like a complete human again."

Nichole Barry, one of 30 employees at the house, said she "teared up a little bit" when she received the present.

St. Francis House Executive Director Julie Becker said it was humbling to be selected by the donor and delivered a message when handing out the bills, KELO-TV reported.

### Dog pound sued over lost dog adopted out

**IL** CHICAGO — A Chicago woman said her dog ran away and was adopted by a new owner, despite having his name and her phone number on his collar.

Zeus, a golden retriever, ended up at a dog pound and was transferred to Fetching Tails Foundation before he was placed in a new home, Karly Moran-West said, a day after filing a lawsuit against Chicago Animal Care and Control. Moran-West, 20, also made a plea to the new owner: Please return Zeus.

Animal Care and Control declined to comment, the Chicago Sun-Times reported.

Moran-West was visiting her sister in Los Angeles in January 2020 when Zeus escaped from her father's yard.

Animal Care and Control told Moran-West there was no phone number on Zeus' collar, according to the lawsuit, but a public records request showed the dog was wearing his collar with the number when he was processed.

— From wire reports

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# Dolphins stretch winning streak to seven

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A Dolphins defense that intercepted Saints rookie Ian Book twice and sacked him eight times was probably enough to push Miami's winning streak to seven games.

The team also got a big lift from rookie sensation Jaylen Waddle to outclass New Orleans on both sides of the ball.

Waddle caught 10 passes for 92 yards and a touchdown in his return from the COVID-19 list, and the Dolphins beat the short-handed Saints 20-3 on Monday night, becoming the first NFL team to win seven straight after losing seven in a row.

"This team stuck together, really the entire year," said third-year Miami coach Brian Flores, who improved to 19-7 in games played after October. "Obviously we dealt with a lot of adversity early in the year. It revealed a

lot — revealed the character of the guys in our locker room.

"Our guys kept fighting, they kept sticking together, they worked hard," Flores added.

Nik Needham intercepted Book and returned the ball 28 yards for a touchdown to help Miami become one of four 8-7 teams — along with Baltimore, the Los Angeles Chargers and Las Vegas — in contention for one of the final playoff spots in the AFC.

Book started for New Orleans (7-8) because of a COVID-19 outbreak that took 16 players off the active roster, including starting QB Taysom Hill and veteran backup Trevor Siemian.

"Rookie quarterback — we mixed up some looks on him," Needham said. "Had him a little confused out there and I think that played a big part."

With the Saints' offensive line

missing three starters, including both tackles, Book completed 12 of 20 passes for 135 yards.

"Just keeping him upright tonight was a challenge," New Orleans coach Sean Payton said. "The first interception was a throw he'll want back, but that's a tough position for him to be in."

The Saints' defense helped keep the game within reach until Waddle scored on a 1-yard shovel pass from Tua Tagovailoa to make it 17-3 with 5:10 left in the third quarter.

Tagovailoa, who entered the game with an NFL-best 69.9% completion rate, connected on 19 of 26 passes (73.1%) for 198 yards and the short TD. He also was intercepted by Marshon Lattimore.

## The Waddle effect

Waddle missed the Dolphins' previous game because of a pos-

itive COVID-19 test. He has 96 catches this season, eclipsing New Orleans' Michael Thomas for the second-most receptions by a rookie, and leaving him five short of Anquan Boldin's rookie record of 101 catches in 2003.

Waddle said "it'll obviously be pretty cool" if he breaks the record.

"The NFL is a special league, so anything in this league, to have a record is always big," he said.

## Superlatives

The Dolphins' eight sacks tied a team record for a game. They became the first team in the Super Bowl era to have that many sacks, score a defensive TD and hold an opponent under 200 total yards while allowing no TDs or third-down conversions. The Saints went 0-for-12 on third down.

# List of players on NFL's COVID-19 list still growing

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — To Indianapolis Colts coach Frank Reich, it was just a matter of time before his team would be adding a few players to the NFL's COVID-19 list.

The Colts placed safety Jahleel Addae, cornerback T.J. Carrie, linebacker Malik Jefferson, running back Marlon Mack and tackle Braden Smith on the list Monday. Smith has been a key member of the offensive line that has helped Jonathan Taylor lead the league in rushing. Cornerback Chris Wilcox went on the practice squad COVID-19 list.

"It's interesting that since we had more unvaxxed players than the average around the league that we were one of the last teams to (test) positive," Reich said. "You kind of feel like it's going to catch up with you at some point just because the virus is so rampant. But this

is what you prepare for, hitting adversity you don't expect, although this is something we probably could have expected to hit us at some point."

Also:

■ The Carolina Panthers sent all of their players home from Bank of America Stadium after six more players tested positive for COVID-19 on Monday.

That brings the total number of Carolina players on the COVID-19 list to 13.

Defensive end Brian Burns, linebacker Shaq Thompson, defensive end Marquis Haynes, defensive tackle Phil Hoskins, center Matt Paradis and defensive tackle Daviyon Nixon all tested positive on Monday. Paradis and Nixon were already on injured reserve.

■ The Jacksonville Jaguars placed 10 players on the COVID-19 list Monday, including five defensive linemen and two

starting offensive linemen.

Because left guard Andrew Norwell is unvaccinated, he will be out at least 10 days under NFL protocols and will miss Sunday's game at New England. The other nine players are vaccinated and have a chance to play against the Patriots.

The Jaguars already ruled out pass rusher Josh Allen, who also is unvaccinated and won't be cleared in time to play. He tested positive for COVID-19 on Friday along with receiver Laviska Shenault and right guard Ben Bartch.

■ The Tennessee Titans got left guard Rodger Saffold and rookie defensive back Elijah Molden back from the COVID-19 list. They still have two other offensive linemen still on the list, and they also put four players — including three starters — on the list, including outside linebacker Bud Dupree, wide receiver Julio Jones, de-

fensive back Buster Skrine and receiver Nick Westbrook-Ikhine. They also put cornerback Caleb Farley, who's on injured reserve, on the list.

■ The Cleveland Browns, who have been hit as hard as any team by COVID-19 the past few weeks, activated eight players, including defensive end Jadeveon Clowney and running back Kareem Hunt.

Clowney has missed the past two games — both losses — and his return will help a pass rush that hasn't been the same without him. Starting left tackle Jedrick Wills Jr. is also back. He's been replaced the last two games by left guard Joel Bitoni, who can slide back to his usual spot.

■ The Tampa Bay Buccaneers, hard hit by injuries on offense, put star wideout Mike Evans on the COVID-19 list, but activated wide receiver Breshad Perriman from it.

# Morant's layup lifts Grizzlies past Suns

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Ja Morant scored 33 points, including a layup with 0.5 seconds to play that gave the Memphis Grizzlies a 114-113 victory over the Phoenix Suns on Monday.

Morant's basket came after Devin Booker's three-pointer with 5 seconds to play gave the Suns their first lead since early in the game. After a timeout, Morant drove the left side of the lane and banked it in. Phoenix's final shot from the corner was off the mark.

Desmond Bane scored 32 points, 19 in the first half when the Grizzlies built a 60-48 lead. Steven Adams had 13 points and 16 rebounds as Memphis dominated the boards, 50-35.

Booker led the Suns with 30 points. Deandre Ayton and Jae Crowder, as well as coach Monty Williams, were placed in the COVID-19 protocols. Phoenix lost its second straight at home following the Christmas defeat to Golden State.

**Bulls 130, Hawks 118:** DeMar DeRozan scored 35 points, Zach LaVine added 30 and visiting Chicago won its fourth straight game, beating short-handed Atlanta.

Cam Reddish finished with 33 points and Trae Young, cleared from health and safety protocols about 90 minutes before tipoff, returned to the starting lineup and scored 29

for the Hawks in the first game of a home-and-home set with the Bulls.

DeRozan was 14 for 20 from the field. LaVine, in his second game back after missing 15 days in protocols, went 11 for 21, including 5 of 8 from three-point range. Nikola Vucevic got his 14th double-double with 24 points and 17 rebounds.

Chicago improved to 21-10, second-best in the Eastern Conference. It began the day 10 games over .500 for the first time since January 2016.

**Jazz 110, Spurs 104:** Jordan Clarkson scored 23 points, Rudy Gobert had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and Utah won at San Antonio for its fourth straight victory.

Bojan Bogdanovic had 19 points and Joe Ingles added 17 for Utah, which has won 12 of 14.

Derrick White scored 21 points and Doug McDermott added 17 for San Antonio, which had its season-high, three-game winning streak snapped.

**Timberwolves 108, Celtics 103:** Jaylen Nowell scored 29 points and Nathan Knight added 20 points and 11 rebounds, leading short-handed Minnesota over visiting Boston.

Jaden McDaniels scored 17 points and Malik Beasley added 15 points and eight rebounds for the Wolves, who were playing

without all five of their regular starters due to COVID-19 protocols.

Veteran center Greg Monroe, who signed to a 10-day contract earlier in the day, had 11 points and nine rebounds in 25 minutes for Minnesota, which snapped a two-game losing streak.

**Hornets 123, Rockets 99:** Terry Rozier scored 27 points and made seven three-pointers, and host Charlotte routed Houston for its second straight win.

Kelly Oubre chipped in with 18 points, while LaMelo Ball and Jalen McDaniels had 16. Mason Plumlee finished with a season-high 15 points and nine rebounds for the Hornets.

**Nets 124, Clippers 108:** James Harden tied his season high with 39 points and had a season-best 15 assists, and Brooklyn won at Los Angeles in a matchup of short-handed teams.

The Nets improved their NBA-best road mark to 13-3 with a sweep in Los Angeles.

**Mavericks 132, Trail Blazers 117:** Kristaps Porzingis had a season-high 34 points and nine rebounds, leading Dallas to a win at Portland.

Both teams were short-handed. The Mavericks were missing six players, including star Luka Doncic, in the NBA's health and safety protocols.

## CFP games arrive amid a raging pandemic, again

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — They are trying to have as many fun events as they can at the Orange Bowl for Georgia and Michigan, as always taking advantage of the tropical lifestyle that the Miami area has to offer. Dinner cruises. Beach days. Water toys.

It's just like normal.

Or, more accurately, the new normal.

College Football Playoff week is here with a pair of semifinal games on Friday: Alabama vs. Cincinnati at the Cotton Bowl followed by Georgia vs. Michigan at the Orange Bowl. For the second consecutive season, college football is going to try to get across the finish line amid a raging pandemic, with coronavirus numbers soaring all over the country and some other bowl games getting

canceled after teams determined they simply aren't healthy enough to play.

"The key is just to make sure that we put every protocol in place that focuses on their health and safety," said Jack Seiler, the president and chairman of the Orange Bowl Committee. "We've been able to do that. We're just focusing on the health and safety of the players and making sure we have an incredible game on Friday night."

The people facilitating the games in both areas — the Orange Bowl in South Florida, the Cotton Bowl in North Texas — are doing all they can to ensure the four teams are healthy and able to play. Staffs are constantly reminded about all the best practices that have become part of everyday life since March 2020,

such as mask wearing, hand washing and social distancing.

The calendars for all four teams have been pared down. Media sessions are virtual, and events where in pre-pandemic times there might have been fan interaction are basically nonexistent.

"We've got to constantly remind ourselves we're here for a reason," Michigan offensive coordinator Josh Gattis said. "This is purely a business trip. We're afforded the luxury of being in Miami in such a great hotel and have all the hospitality around us, but it doesn't matter if we're playing this game in Ann Arbor, Athens or Miami, we're here for a reason, and the College Football Playoffs is that reason."

Gattis played in the Orange Bowl for Wake Forest 15 years

ago. It was a big game, but not one that was sending the winner into the national championship game, so he thinks players understand why they might have to curb the fun and frolic a bit this week.

"It's getting really crazy out here," Georgia safety Chris Smith said, when asked about virus numbers rising just about everywhere. "They're just reiterating the fact that you need to be safe, wear a mask, wash your hands, stuff like that, to make sure we don't have a breakout or anything like that."

Bowl games tend to have some sort of element of community involvement, and the Cotton Bowl is no exception. Alabama and Cincinnati were both assigned a hospital to visit in an effort to boost spirits for patients, virtually.

# NHL back at it after six-day pause

Associated Press

Tampa Bay Lightning officials pulled a player out of a meeting because he tested positive for the coronavirus and no one in the room flinched.

As Anthony Cirelli went into the now-familiar COVID-19 protocol, the two-time defending champions practiced with their goaltending coach and an emergency backup in net and prepared to play Montreal on Tuesday night in a Stanley Cup Final rematch without either of their NHL goalies or their coach on hand.

“It’s just the norm,” assistant Derek Lalonde said Monday. “Not trying to downplay it, but I just think it’s a reality of today’s world and today’s NHL.”

Hockey returned Tuesday after the league took an extended holiday break in the hope that virus cases will not continue to disrupt the season. While three more games this week were postponed — bringing the total to 70 this season — the NHL like other leagues,

will try to power through the latest twist in the pandemic with a possible boost on the way in the form of shorter absences for players and coaches who test positive.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Monday cut the recommended isolation period from 10 days to five, and other North American professional sports leagues have already moved in that direction. NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said, “Obviously it will spur a review of the protocol” currently in place, which includes 10 days away for those who contract the virus and experience symptoms.

While many of the cases across hockey have been asymptomatic or mild, the spread of the highly contagious omicron variant has led to a rash of positive COVID-19 test results across the league’s 32 teams. Dozens more players entered virus protocol Monday, with minor leaguers taking their place and taxi squads added to keep the NHL season

going amid concerns about the quality of the on-ice product.

“Unfortunate what’s going on around the league with a lot of teams having to deal with COVID issues right now, including ourselves, but I don’t think a lot is going to change moving forward here for the next couple weeks,” Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said. “We do have to get some games in if we can do it safely, and we can do it where teams have adequate players in the lineup.”

Stamkos and his teammates were preparing to play without reigning playoff MVP goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy, five other players and coach Jon Cooper. Montreal will also be without several players for the start of a three-game U.S. trip; back home, Quebec has banned fans and all eyes are on virus restrictions in Canada that could further upend the season for a league with seven teams based north of the border.

The virus continues to play a role on either side of it. Pitts-

burgh and Washington each added six players to the COVID-19 protocol list, and the Vegas Golden Knights found out they won’t have coach Peter DeBoer behind the bench for their game Tuesday night at Los Angeles.

Washington is set to play again Wednesday against the Nashville Predators, who are dealing with their own virus absences, but the game is scheduled to go on as planned.

“It’s not about who’s out,” said coach John Hynes, whose Predators put captain Roman Josi and two other players on the COVID-19 protocol list. “It’s about the players that are in and making sure we’re physically ready to play and mentally ready to play.”

Not every game will be played on time. Chicago’s game at Winnipeg scheduled for Wednesday and a home-and-home series Wednesday and Friday between Dallas and Colorado are the latest to be postponed because of coronavirus concerns.

## US turns to Quinn to coach men’s Olympic hockey team

Associated Press

David Quinn was supposed to be an assistant on Mike Sullivan’s coaching staff for the U.S. men’s hockey team at the upcoming Winter Olympics.

After the NHL decided not to send players to Beijing, Quinn is now in charge as U.S. coach and John Vanbiesbrouck is the latest general manager in USA Hockey’s first shift to plan B for another Olympics without the best hockey players in the world.

“To be named the head coach under these circumstances, it’s bittersweet in some ways,” Quinn said on a video call Monday. “We all were hoping that the NHL guys were going to go, but to be named the head coach for the 2022 Olympic team is an incred-

ible honor.”

Quinn, 55, was the only member of the initial coaching staff not currently working in the NHL. He coached the New York Rangers the past three seasons after five years at Boston University.

Internationally, Quinn most recently coached for the U.S. as an assistant at the 2016 world championships and was also on staff for that tournament in 2007 and 2012.

“All those opportunities for me have prepared me for this,” Quinn said.

Instead of a U.S. roster featuring the likes of Auston Matthews, Patrick Kane and Seth Jones, Vanbiesbrouck will be tasked with drawing from the college

ranks and European professional leagues, similar to 2018.

“He certainly has the greatest handle on the overall player pool of American players,” USA Hockey executive director Pat Kelleher said of Vanbiesbrouck. “He’s been involved with the NHL and our NHL people involved for the 2022 Olympic team, so no one better to serve as the GM of our team than John Vanbiesbrouck, who can take what we’ve been doing so far to move forward.”

Vanbiesbrouck is the third person to take over Olympic roster preparations after Minnesota Wild GM Bill Guerin replaced Stan Bowman, who resigned after an investigation found he had a prominent role in the Chicago

Blackhawks mishandling sexual assault allegations in 2010. Guerin stepped aside when the NHL pulled out.

“This turn of events, we have to get to work and we have to get to work quickly selecting our team,” Vanbiesbrouck said.

Former Montreal Canadiens coach Claude Julien is expected to be behind the bench for Canada, replacing back-to-back Stanley Cup winner Jon Cooper of the Tampa Bay Lightning. Former Arizona Coyotes captain Shane Doan is considered the leading candidate to be GM after Hockey Canada used an international tune-up tournament in Moscow to put together an Olympic backup plan without an NHL presence.