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3 military men's pull with Trump on rise

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a White House laden with competing power centers, a trio of military men have emerged as a force to be reckoned with.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly and Joint Chiefs Chairman Joseph Dunford quickly have formed a stabilizing alliance in an administration whose earliest days have been marked by turmoil. At working dinners and meetings

ANALYSIS with President Donald Trump, the men — all retired or current generals — have sought to guide the new leader and foreign policy novice.

And they increasingly have represented Trump around the world, seeking to allay concerns about the new president and his nascent foreign policy.

Their fingerprints increasingly can be seen on the president's early national security moves, from the reworking of his controversial refugee-and-immigration order to the walking back of his talk of a "military operation" for deportations to his search for a national security adviser after the first was ousted.

All three are notable for their independence from Trump. None had a prior relationship with him, but all have long histories with each other.

When Kelly's son was killed in Afghani-

stan in 2010, it was Dunford who arrived at his house in uniform to inform him. Mattis and Kelly recommended each other for defense secretary. All three served in Iraq about the same time.

In Washington and in foreign capitals, their long resumes have been a welcome addition to an administration led by a president and several advisers with no experience in government.

"It should be reassuring that they are visible with Trump and cementing their influence," said Christine Wormuth, a former undersecretary of defense for policy and a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington-based think tank.

The rising power of Mattis, Kelly and Dunford also could assuage some fears among Republicans that national security decision-making is becoming too concentrated in the White House West Wing. Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, has been deeply involved in discussions with foreign officials. And chief strategist Steve Bannon, a media executive with no foreign policy experience, now has a seat on Trump's Principals Committee, which weighs pressing national security issues.

Of the three military men, Mattis has emerged as a dominant figure in Trump's orbit.

A retired Marine, Mattis, 66, is credited by some National Security Council staff with blocking an executive order that would

have reopened CIA "black sites." Trump has said the Pentagon chief convinced him it wasn't necessary to bring back banned torture techniques like waterboarding.

On his way to Baghdad this week, Mattis bluntly rebuffed Trump's assertion that America may have a second chance to take Iraqi oil as compensation for U.S. efforts in the war-torn country.

"We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil," Mattis told reporters.

Kelly, too, has tried to moderate some of the president's hard-line positions. Hours after Trump said deportations of people in the U.S. illegally were being carried out as a "military operation," Kelly said Thursday in Mexico that the U.S. would not enlist the military to enforce immigration laws.

While Trump tapped Mattis and Kelly for his Cabinet, he inherited Dunford, whose term as Joint Chiefs chairman runs through the end of the year. But the president, who has stocked his national security team with military leaders, is said to see Dunford as a "general's general," according to another person with knowledge of Trump's team.

Earlier this week, Trump tapped another military man, Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, as his national security adviser after firing Michael Flynn for misleading the White House about his dealings with Russia. Mattis, Kelly and Dunford all praised the pick, the administration official said.

US changes engagement rules for Mosul fight in Iraq

Associated Press

SOUTH OF MOSUL, Iraq — U.S. Army Lt. Col. James Browning juggled phone calls on an overstuffed sofa in a small village south of Mosul. His counterparts in the Iraqi army's 9th Division were pushing toward western Mosul, just a few miles away, and were coming under mortar fire from the Islamic State group as they moved on a power station.

Iraqi army Brig. Gen. Walid Khalifa called Browning on a simple Nokia phone to relay the approximate location of the mortar fire. Browning swapped phones to make another call.

"Can you tell them that (the 9th Division)

is receiving fire?" he told his coalition colleagues at another forward base overseeing the operation. He asked them to pinpoint where the attack was coming from using coalition aerial surveillance and to take it out.

Just a few months ago, Browning's phone conversation would have been impossible. Rather than request assistance directly, his call likely would have been routed through a joint command center much farther from the battle zone.

In the fight against the Islamic State group in Mosul, the U.S. has adjusted its rules of engagement as American and other international troops are now closer to front-line fighting than before.

During the push to take Mosul Interna-

tional Airport on Thursday, American and European advisers were embedded with forward Iraqi rapid response and special forces units.

Coalition officials say the changes are helping speed Iraqi military gains, but they mark a steady escalation of U.S. involvement in Iraq that also reflects lingering shortcomings on the part of Iraq's armed forces and growing political and military pressure to finish the Mosul operation quickly.

"Usually I'm right by his side," Browning said between phone calls of his Iraqi army counterpart Khalifa. "When a threat comes in like this, we take it just as seriously as if we are under threat."

Satellite images show China missile sites near disputed islands

The Washington Post

New satellite images show the Chinese military shoring up its defenses on a disputed island chain in the South China Sea, adding what appears to be reinforced launch sites for surface-to-air missiles on at least three atolls.

The existence of the new launch sites was first reported by Reuters on Wednesday, and on Thursday, photos of the nearly completed structures were obtained by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The images show at least eight structures on three of China's man-made atolls in the Spratly Islands: Fiery Cross, Mischief Reef and Subi Reef.

A U.S. defense official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said Wednesday that the buildings have retractable roofs, making them suitable launching points for medium-to long-range surface-to-air missile systems.

According to a photo analysis by CSIS, the buildings are about 66 feet long and 33 feet wide, making them large enough to store China's HQ-9 missile system. The HQ-9 closely resembles Russia's S-300, a surface-to-air missile system with a range of approximately 93 miles and an ability to hit targets flying at 88,000 feet. It is unclear, however, whether the actual HQ-9 launchers have been deployed to the Spratlys, as one of the benefits of the new launch structures is the ability to conceal them from reconnaissance flights and satellites.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang didn't deny the existence of the launch sites at a Wednesday briefing with reporters.

"China has indisputable sovereignty of the South China Sea islands and their adjacent water," he said.

Car bomb hits Syrian town retaken from Islamic State

The Washington Post

BEIRUT — A suspected Islamic State car bomb killed at least 60 people outside the northern Syrian town of al-Bab, a day after rebels backed by Turkey pushed out militants to gain a potentially strategic foothold.

But the blast showed the possible challenges in holding the gains by rebels seeking to cut off critical Islamic State supply routes to areas including the militant's self-proclaimed capital of Raqqa.

On another front, Iraqi warplanes carried out their first airstrikes in Syria targeting suspected Islamic State sites, Iraq's prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, said in a statement.

It said the attacks targeted the towns of Boukamal and Husseibah, near the Iraqi border, in response to recent bombings in Baghdad claimed by the Islamic State group. It marked the first publicly acknowledged airstrikes in Syria by Iraq's military, which has also been leading battles seeking to drive the Islamic State from its last strongholds in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul.

Outside al-Bab, witnesses said a pickup truck exploded outside a building in the village of Sousyan, where rebels were distributing permits for displaced residents to return. Turkey's

state news agency Anadolu put the death toll at 60, while a local doctor said that figure was expected to rise.

Images from the area showed blood and body parts littering the ground.

"It drove right into the heart of the crowd. There were bodies everywhere, some of them were on fire. When I got closer to them, I realized I knew their faces. They were trying to go home," said Khalil Abdulrahman, a Syrian journalist from al-Bab.

The attack came a day after Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army rebels recaptured the town, pushing the Islamic State group from its final foothold along Syria's northern border with Turkey.

Beginning in early December, the offensive was long and bloody despite the backing of Turkish warplanes, tanks and special forces.

There are fears, however, the Islamic State group will not retreat without a fight.

Last month, the extremist group killed 48 people with a blast in a busy marketplace in the northern town of Azaz, three years after rebel forces recaptured the area.

"The situation in al-Bab is not stable," said Issa Khider, a local activist, on Friday.

Iraqi jets strike Islamic State in Syria for first time

The Washington Post

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraqi warplanes have conducted airstrikes on Islamic State targets inside neighboring Syria for the first time, Iraq's prime minister said Friday, vowing to chase down the militants "everywhere" as Iraqi forces opened new fronts in the city of Mosul.

The strikes in Bukamal inside Syria — and Hussaiba on the Iraqi side of the border — were carried out by U.S.-supplied F-16 fighter jets in response to bombing attacks in the capital, Baghdad, said Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

The strikes come as Iraqi

forces reach the final stages of their operation seeking to oust the militants from the northern city of Mosul, the largest remaining stronghold of the group in Iraq. Police forces finished clearing the city's airport southwest of Mosul on Friday before storming a neighborhood on the western side of the city.

The eastern side of Mosul already has been recaptured in the grueling, large-scale offensive for the city, which was launched in October. But while it loses ground, Islamic State has continued to carry out bombing attacks on civilian targets elsewhere in Iraq.

Iraqi officials said they had information that recent attacks in Baghdad had been organized from inside Syria.

"We are determined to follow the terrorism that is trying to kill our sons and our citizens everywhere," Abadi said.

Iraq decided to carry out the strikes on its own, rather than relying on the U.S.-led coalition, because it was acting off Iraqi intelligence and "it's up to us to take revenge," said Lt. Gen. Anwar Hana, commander of Iraq's air force. The strikes were successful, he said.

Iraq's Joint Operations Command released video of the mis-

siles hitting buildings. It did not specify whether the airstrikes were carried out in coordination with the Syrian government, but Iraq has said that it is engaged in security and intelligence sharing operations with Syria, Russia and Iran.

Iraqi forces retook Ghazlani military camp on the outskirts of the western side of the city on Friday, before storming Mamon neighborhood, Joint Operations Command said. They faced resistance from Islamic State car bombs and weaponized drones that dropped grenades onto the advancing forces.

Feds deny duping Calif. police into immigration raid

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Federal immigration officials pushed back hard against the assertion that they had duped the Santa Cruz, Calif., police department into helping them make immigration arrests during a raid on an El Salvador-based gang.

They also denied that the aggressive immigration approach of President Donald Trump's administration had anything to do with their plans or actions.

"We worked closely with the Santa Cruz Police Department over the last five years on this case," Immigrations and Customs Enforcement spokesman James Schwab said in response to statements Thursday by the city's police leadership and mayor. "Allegations that the agency secretly planned an immigration enforcement action in hopes there would be new political leadership that would allow for an alleged 'secret' operation to take place are completely false, reckless, and disturbing," Schwab, the spokesman for ICE's San Francisco field office, said in a statement.

Santa Cruz, a coastal college town of about 60,000 people, is a so-called sanctuary city, which prohibits its police from cooperating with federal authorities investigating immigration violations.

Police Chief Kevin Vogel and Assistant Chief Dan Flippo said at a news conference that the federal officials lied when they assured them a Feb. 13 joint operation in the region would not include immigration-related arrests during the raid on the gang known by the names MS-13 and Mara Salvatrucha.

Flippo said he didn't learn of the immigration arrests until the next night, when dozens of protesters disrupted a City Council meeting to voice their displeasure.

Vogel said the department no longer trusts the Department of Homeland Security, which includes ICE, and will no longer work with the agency.

"We can't cooperate with a law enforcement agency we cannot trust," Vogel said.

Staff's acts belie Trump's blast of press on sources

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Donald Trump used his first presidential appearance before the nation's largest gathering of conservative activists on Friday to sharply escalate his criticism of the news media and to take direct aim at the use of anonymous sources. Reporters "shouldn't be allowed to use sources unless they use somebody's name," he declared, just hours after members of his own staff held a news briefing and refused to allow their names to be used.

"A source says that Donald Trump is a horrible, horrible human being, let them say it to my face," Trump told the Conservative Political Action Committee. "Let there be no more sources."

Members of Trump's White House team regularly demand anonymity when talking to reporters.

Trump said he wasn't against all the press, just "the fake news media or press."

"I'm against the people that make up stories and make up sources," he said. "They shouldn't be allowed to use sources unless they use somebody's name."

The president has chafed at a number of anonymously sourced stories, including numerous reports describing contacts between his campaign officials and the Russians, which the White House has sharply disputed.

"The fake news doesn't tell the truth," Trump insisted. "It doesn't represent the people. It will never rep-

resent the people and we're going to do something about it."

It was a triumphant return to CPAC for Trump, who was warmly welcomed by a crowd that loves pushback against the mainstream media.

After his broadside on the press, Trump turned to a recitation of his agenda, promising bold action on health care, trade, energy policy and more.

"One by one, we're checking off the promises we made to the American people," he said, telling the group, "I will not disappoint you."

Trump told the conservatives that the health care law he inherited from President Barack Obama threatens to bring about "total catastrophe," reiterating his promise to repeal and replace it. He highlighted his efforts to get tough on illegal immigration, saying that "as we speak today, immigration officers are finding gang members, drug dealers and criminal aliens and throwing them the hell out."

He promised changes to the welfare system, saying, "It's time for all Americans to get off welfare and get back to work," adding that: "You're going to love it."

While conservatives aren't always in sync with Trump's views, they're happy to have a scrapper in the White House who's often on their side.

"How good it feels to have somebody lead our country who knows how to fight," American Conservative Union Chairman Matt Schlapp told the crowd in introducing Trump.

Trump aide asked FBI to dispute reports on Russia

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — White House chief of staff Reince Priebus asked a top FBI official to dispute media reports that President Donald Trump's campaign advisers were frequently in touch with Russian intelligence agents during the election, a White House official says.

The official said that Priebus' request came after the FBI told the White House it believed a

New York Times report last week describing those contacts was not accurate. As of Thursday, the FBI had not stated that position publicly and there was no indication it planned to.

The New York Times reported that U.S. agencies had intercepted phone calls last year between Russian intelligence officials and members of Trump's 2016 campaign team.

Priebus' discussion with FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe sparked outrage among

some Democrats, who said that the chief of staff was violating policies intended to limit communications between the law enforcement agency and the White House on pending investigations.

"The White House is simply not permitted to pressure the FBI to make public statements about a pending investigation of the president and his advisers," said Michigan Rep. John Conyers, the top Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee.

A 2009 memo from then-Attorney General Eric Holder said the Justice Department is to advise the White House on pending criminal or civil investigations "only when it is important for the performance of the president's duties and appropriate from a law enforcement perspective." When communication has to occur, the memo said, it should involve only the highest-level officials from the White House and the Justice Department.

ND pipeline could be operating in weeks

Associated Press

CANNON BALL, N.D. — Oil could be flowing through the \$3.8 billion Dakota Access pipeline in less than two weeks, according to court documents filed by the developer just before police and soldiers started clearing a protest camp in North Dakota where pipeline opponents had gathered for the better part of a year.

Energy Transfer Partners has finished drilling under Lake Oahe and soon will be laying pipe under the Missouri River reservoir, the Dallas-based company said.

“Dakota Access estimates and targets that the pipeline will be complete and ready to flow oil anywhere between the week of March 6, 2017, and April 1, 2017,” company attorney William Scherman said in the documents filed in Washington on Tuesday.

The work under the Missouri River reservoir is the last stretch of the 1,200-mile pipeline that will move oil from North Dakota through South Dakota and Iowa to a shipping point in Illinois. ETP got permission for the lake work last month from the Trump administration, though American Indian tribes continue fighting the project in court.

The Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes say the pipeline threatens their drinking water, cultural sites and ability to practice their religion, which depends on pure water. ETP says the pipeline is safe.

The tribes have been fighting the construction since last summer.

They have also asked U.S. District Judge James Boasberg to overturn permission for the river crossing. The Standing Rock Sioux filed a motion earlier this month, and the Standing Rock tribe filed a similar request on Wednesday.

FBI helping probe Kan. shooting

Associated Press

OLATHE, Kan. — A man has been charged with murder in what some witnesses described as a racially motivated shooting at a crowded suburban Kansas City bar that left one Indian man dead and two other men hospitalized.

Local police are working with the FBI to investigate the shooting Wednesday night in Olathe, Kan., but have declined to describe the attack as a hate crime.

A bartender at Austins Bar and Grill said Adam Purinton used “racial slurs” before he opened fire as patrons watched the University of Kansas-TCU basketball game on television. Srinivas Kuchibhotla, 32, died at a hospital, while Alok Madasani, 32 and Ian Grillot, 24 are hospitalized in stable condition, police said.

Purinton, 51, was taken into custody about five hours after the shooting after he told a bartender at an Applebee’s some 70 miles away in Clinton, Mo., that he had been involved in a shooting. He has been charged with murder and attempted murder.

A spokesman for India’s External Affairs Ministry, Vikas Swarup, said Kuchibhotla was from the southern state of Telangana. Sushma Swaraj, India’s external affairs minister, said Kuchibhotla’s body would be taken to Hyderabad, where his family lives.

The LinkedIn accounts for Kuchibhotla and Madasani describe them as engineers for GPS device-maker Garmin, which has a customer service center in Olathe.

Asked if the involvement of federal authori-

ties indicated the shooting might be considered a hate crime, FBI special agent Eric Jackson said it was too early to determine.

“This was a violent crime and we want the best prosecution that relates to this because there are victims of this crime and we want the community to know that. ... We’re looking to make sure that the individual involved in this is held accountable for his actions.”

Bartender Garret Bohnen told the Kansas City Star Kuchibhotla and Madasani stopped at Austins for a drink once or twice per week.

“From what I understand, when he was throwing racial slurs at the two gentlemen (Kuchibhotla and Madasani), Ian (Grillot) stood up for them,” Bohnen said. “We’re all proud of him.”

Witnesses also told the Star that Purinton yelled “get out of my country” before he opened fire.

Grillot said from his hospital bed that when the gunfire started, he hid until nine shots had been fired, and he thought the suspect’s ammunition magazine was empty.

“I got up and proceeded to chase him down, try to subdue him,” Grillot said in a video from the University of Kansas Health System. “I got behind him, and he turned around and fired a round at me.”

Grillot said the bullet went through his hand and into his chest, just missing a major artery.

“It’s not about where he (the victim) was from or his ethnicity,” Grillot said. “We’re all humans, so I just did what was right to do.”

Police: VX nerve agent used to kill Kim

Associated Press

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — The poison used to kill the estranged half brother of North Korea’s leader at a crowded air terminal in Malaysia was the banned chemical weapon VX nerve agent, police said Friday.

The revelation that VX nerve agent, deadly even in minute amounts, was used in the Feb. 13 attack boosted speculation Pyongyang dispatched a hit squad to kill Kim Jong Nam, the outcast older sibling of North Korea’s ruler.

The case also raised questions about public safety although there was no sign that any bystanders had fallen ill. Police said one of the alleged attackers had been vomiting in the hours after the attack, but there were no reports that anyone else had been sickened.

VX nerve agent was detected on Kim’s eyes and face, Khalid said earlier in a written statement, citing a preliminary report from the country’s Center for Chemical Weapons Analysis.

According to Malaysian investigators, two female suspects coated their hands with the liquid toxin and wiped it on Kim’s face as he waited for a flight to Macau.

Kim sought help from airport staff, but he fell

into convulsions and died on the way to the hospital within two hours of the attack, police said.

Malaysian police say the women — one Vietnamese, one Indonesian — washed their hands immediately after the attack as they’d been trained to do, and had practiced the attack in Kuala Lumpur shopping malls.

Malaysian police had initially said no one besides Kim Jong Nam had been sickened. But Khalid told reporters that one of the two women accused of wiping the toxin on Kim’s face became sick later and suffered from vomiting.

Khalid said police were still investigating how the lethal nerve agent entered Malaysia.

VX nerve agent has the consistency of motor oil and can take days or even weeks to evaporate. It could have contaminated anywhere Kim was afterward, including medical facilities and the ambulance he was transported in, experts say.

The toxin was almost certainly produced in a sophisticated state weapons laboratory, and is banned under an international treaty. But North Korea never signed that treaty, and has spent decades developing a complex chemical weapons program that has long worried the international community.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Whiteboards banned out of fear of insults

MI EAST LANSING — Michigan State University has decided to no longer allow whiteboards as an acceptable item on dorm room doors as of the coming fall semester because of bullying through the boards.

WLNS-TV reports while the whiteboards were commonly used for friendly messages and inspirational quotes, they've recently been a tool for anonymous bullying. A Facebook post by the Lansing NAACP says a student recently had a racial slur written on her whiteboard, and that's just the latest incident reported at the East Lansing school.

University Residential Services Communications Director Kat Cooper says the boards have become "more of a distraction than a helpful tool."

Cop comes to girl's aid — helps with homework

OH MARION — The mother of a 10-year-old Ohio girl who messaged police on Facebook for help with math homework says the responding officer's engaging approach is what counts, though his math was a little off.

Molly Draper's daughter, Lena, recently messaged Marion police about equations involving addition of numbers in parenthesis as well as multiplication.

Lt. B.J. Gruber replied. He walked the fifth-grader through correctly solving one problem but slipped up on another, suggesting addition and multiplication steps in the wrong order.

Even so, his effort drew wide praise when Draper shared the exchange on Facebook. She tells WCMH-TV it demonstrates her daughter's trust in police officers and good com-

munity relationship-building on their part.

City lowers estimate for Trump security costs

NY NEW YORK — New York City has lowered its cost estimate for guarding President Donald Trump, his family and their Manhattan residence.

Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill has written to New York's congressional delegation to seek reimbursement. He says it cost about \$24 million to guard the Trumps and Trump Tower during the 2½ months between Election Day and Inauguration Day. The original estimate was \$35 million.

When the president is not in New York City, the department estimates that it costs \$127,000 to \$146,000 a day to protect the first lady and their son. If Trump is in New York City, the Police Department puts the estimate at \$308,000 a day.

Sassy woman issues warning from the grave

OH COLUMBUS — Relatives of a 91-year-old Ohio woman who died this week are giving her the last word with a sassy, occasionally profane obituary that starts with the basics — "I was born. I lived. I died." — and instructs people to "wait the appropriate amount of time" before trying to claim her stuff.

They wrote it in Jean Oddi's perspective, recapping the people important to her, adventures she had and her favorite activities, including playing cards and teaching her granddaughter "dirty songs." Her daughter, Casey Oddi Clark, tells The Columbus Dispatch the obituary celebrates a blunt woman who lived unapologetically.

It also promises an "after-party" following the funeral

but warns: "If you are sick, don't bother to come. I might be dead, but I still don't want your germs."

Veteran who intervened for turtle is rewarded

FL DAYTONA BEACH — A disabled Navy veteran has a new ride a week after authorities said he was beaten by three men he confronted as they were torturing a turtle in Daytona Beach.

Daytona Beach Kia-Mitsubishi gave Garry Blough, 45, keys to a 2012 Kia Forte after the incident was brought to their attention by former Marine Paula Mongeon.

"I just knew they would help this guy, I just knew it," Mongeon told The Daytona Beach News-Journal.

Blough called the vehicle a "godsend," explaining that his family, which includes his wife Jennifer and 1-year-old daughter, didn't have a vehicle. That meant routine appointments at the doctor or going shopping for groceries could take hours.

Blough, who was injured in 1991 during the Persian Gulf War, is unable to work and suffers from daily seizures.

Last week, Blough confronted three men torturing a freshwater turtle in a pond.

An arrest report states that the men punched Blough, and when he crumpled to the ground, they kicked his torso, face, head and legs. He was taken to a hospital and was discharged early the next morning. Because he had no way home, he walked — using a walker — 1.7 miles to his apartment.

Suspected abduction blamed on shaming

TX EL PASO, Texas — An El Paso woman will remain in jail after a federal magistrate denied bond follow-

ing testimony that she abducted another woman because her "lifestyle brought shame to the Muslim community."

The judge determined Wednesday that Norma Juarez Taha, 35, was a flight risk and a danger to the community.

Court records show Taha was charged with one count of kidnapping after allegedly abducting the 20-year-old woman from her home, drugging her and taking her to Juarez, Mexico. People in the home where she was taken took her to the border crossing and turned her over to U.S. officials.

A court-appointed attorney for Taha says the victim's allegations are a fabrication and that Taha has always been law-abiding. Taha is a naturalized U.S. citizen who's described in court documents as Mexican-Muslim.

No sanctuary city for immigrant mayor

NJ MONTVALE — A Syrian immigrant mayor says his New Jersey town will not be a sanctuary city for immigrants illegally living in the United States.

Montvale Mayor Michael Ghassali posted on Facebook that a mayor should not advocate defying federal laws and he will not sign any executive orders asking the town's employees to do so. The Republican tells The Record he hopes his position is not misconstrued as being against diversity.

The Trump administration announced Tuesday that any immigrant in the country illegally who is charged with or convicted of any offense, or even suspected of a crime, will now be an immigration enforcement priority.

Ghassali became a citizen in 1987 and is married to an Iraqi immigrant.

From wire reports

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Hamlin makes late move for win

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Denny Hamlin didn't need a Toyota teammate to grab another win at Daytona International Speedway.

Hamlin charged past Dale Earnhardt Jr. with one lap remaining Thursday night to deny Earnhardt a victory in a 150-mile qualifying race that Earnhardt dominated. Earnhardt led 53 of the 60 laps in the second qualifying Duel, but couldn't hold off Hamlin at the end.

Hamlin got a push from Chevrolet driver Austin Dillon to gather the momentum needed to get past Earnhardt. Typically, the Toyota drivers have teamed together to navigate through traffic in restrictor plate races.

In the qualifying race, Hamlin didn't need his fellow Toyota drivers and even overcame a pit road penalty to get the win.

"I don't know what I could have done differently to defend that," Earnhardt said. "Denny is so smart, he knows what he's doing out there. Any which way I went, I knew he was going to go the other way and probably get by me. If it's the Daytona 500, it's the same thing, ain't nothing you can do

about that."

It was Earnhardt's first race in his return from a concussion that caused him to miss the second half of last season. He faded to sixth.

Hamlin is the defending Daytona 500 winner and has won a Duel qualifying race three times in his career. The twin 150-mile races are used to set the field for Sunday's season-opener, and Hamlin got this win on the same day he announced a contract extension with Joe Gibbs Racing and sponsor FedEx.

Chase Elliott won the first qualifier, but he had already earned the top starting spot for Sunday's race based on speed. He and Hendrick Motorsports teammate Earnhardt will start on the front row in "The Great American Race."

There were two open slots for the Daytona 500 and they were claimed by Corey LaJoie and Canadian driver D.J. Kennington.

LaJoie had the harder road to race into the Daytona 500.

He ran into the back of Reed Sorenson, one of the drivers he was racing for the slot in the 500. It caused Sorenson to wreck.

"I know it looked like I meant to do it but I didn't," LaJoie said on his radio. "I was running the middle and he came down on me."

Elliott, meanwhile, was thrilled with his first Cup victory.

"I know this was just a Duel win, and doesn't mean a lot for the playoffs, but it still means something to me," said Elliott.

Indeed, this was technically just an exhibition race. But new rules for this season earned Elliott 10 points with the win. NASCAR's new format this year includes a provision that awards points on a 10-to-1 declining scale to the top-10 finishers in Thursday night's races.

Points were not the goal for Elliott, though. His Hendrick Motorsports team instead wanted to test his Chevrolet to see how strong it will be in Sunday's big event.

"We didn't say one word about points before the race," Elliott said. "We just kind of set out and wanted to race, not ride around. I think sometimes you ride around and you don't know what your car is like and if it's going to be the way you want it for Sunday.

"We took chances and it worked out, so excited for Sunday."

Johnson chasing unprecedented eighth title

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Jimmie Johnson might have had an easier time had his 6-year-old daughter asked for help with a school art project. Genevieve Johnson instead left dad briefly bewildered with a messier question:

What does famous mean?

"At school, the kids are asking her, saying, 'Your dad's famous,'" Johnson said. "How do you answer that question?"

Let's try.

Does your dad dress in a Lowe's fire suit, slide into the No. 48 Chevrolet and race on national television every weekend? Does your dad have more than 2.3 million Twitter followers, is he besieged by autograph seekers and asked to voice cartoons on the Disney Channel?

Yes, Genevieve, your father is famous.

But the more contemplative question is this: Is Johnson the greatest to ever drive a stock car? That answer is up

for debate, though arguments for other contenders thin as Johnson continues to add to his championship collection.

Seven of 'em, if you've lost count.

An eighth would push Johnson past Dale Earnhardt and Richard Petty for most ever, leaving him alone as NASCAR's greatest.

Outside his motorhome, Johnson scratched his beard, tinged with a touch of grey, as he considered what an eighth title would mean. Johnson's shot at history hit him in 2010 when he won his fifth straight Cup title and talk about chasing eight intensified. He won his sixth in 2013, and his surprising seventh last year now makes an eighth championship seem more inevitable than a longshot.

With 80 career wins and a pair of Daytona 500 victories, the 41-year-old Johnson won't let the record define him.

"No," he said, "but I'm going to try (and win it), though."

Long before he fires up the Chevy, Johnson's championship pursuit begins near dawn with a run. Johnson long ago traded his race helmet for a bicycle helmet during off hours at the track and put a twist on his Sunday finish line by running the occasional marathon before a race.

At Daytona, he biked 42 miles on Sunday morning hours before he pulled double duty and raced in the Clash at Daytona and qualified for the 500. He's inspired and coached members of the NASCAR family — crew chiefs, fellow drivers — and helped whip them into shape before he whipped them on the track. Johnson's days of scarfing hushpuppies and sipping sweet tea out by a roadside barbecue stand are long behind him. He's still an adrenaline junkie in the offseason, though his fastest turns in the winter now come navigating the snow-capped slopes in Colorado.

With a wife, two daughters and enough race trophies to

stuff a storage unit, the fitness freak has never been happier. Johnson has even won over fans who had grown tired of the 48 dynasty built with team owner Rick Hendrick and crew chief Chad Knaus. Before the championship race at Homestead, Johnson was greeted by fans holding up seven fingers, not the one-finger salute he'd grown accustomed to receiving.

"I get the respect from being around a long time, now," he said. "I think the age kind of does something."

NASCAR fans are coming around to what the drivers have known for years — Johnson is an easy guy to root for.

"I don't know anyone who doesn't like Jimmie," 2010 Daytona 500 champion Jamie McMurray said. "I feel like he's the guy that you would like not to like because he does win all the time. He's got a beautiful wife. He's got great-looking kids. He just kind of like has everything. But he's just always so nice."

Williams, Rockets soar past Pelicans

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Reserve Lou Williams hit seven three-pointers and scored 27 points in his Rockets debut after a trade from the Lakers, helping Houston crush New Orleans 129-99 on Thursday night in DeMarcus Cousins' first game with Anthony Davis.

Davis had 29 points, and Cousins finished with 27 points and 14 rebounds after he was acquired from Sacramento during the break. But New Orleans turned the ball over 20 times couldn't keep pace with the firepower of the Rockets, who hit 20 three-pointers.

Eric Gordon scored 19 points and Ryan Anderson added 17 in both players' first game in New Orleans since leaving the Pelicans. James Harden had 13 points and 14 assists.

Cavaliers 119, Knicks 104: LeBron James recorded his 48th career triple-double and Kyrie Irving scored 23 points, leading Cleveland over visiting New York, which hung on to superstar Carmelo Anthony and Derrick Rose at the trade deadline.

James scored 18 points and had 13 rebounds with 15 assists for his sixth triple-double of the season.

Anthony, the subject of trade rumors because of a strained relationship with Knicks President of Basketball Operations Phil Jackson, scored 20 points, going 9-for-25 from the field.

Kyle Korver scored 20 points for Cleveland, which is 8-1 in February and has beaten New York 10 straight times.

Courtney Lee had 25 points for New York, which has lost six of seven and is 12th in the East-

ern Conference playoff race.

Warriors 123, Clippers 113: Stephen Curry scored 17 of his 35 points in a three-point flurry over the final 3:37 of the third quarter, and the two-time reigning MVP also had seven rebounds, five assists and four steals as host Golden State used a big second half to beat Los Angeles.

Curry's four-point play with 30.7 seconds left in the third and buzzer-beating three to punctuate the one-sided period propelled Golden State. Curry and Kevin Durant combined for eight of their team's nine three-pointers in the third.

The Warriors scored 50 points in the quarter after trailing 61-49 at halftime. It was the NBA's first 50-point quarter since the Lakers had 51 against the Knicks on March 25, 2014.

Kevin Durant scored 15 of

his 25 points in the third and also contributed 15 rebounds and seven assists as the NBA-best Warriors (48-9) began the stretch run with a downright dominant second half.

Pistons 114, Hornets 108 (OT): Kentavious Caldwell-Pope scored 33 points, including three three-pointers late in the fourth quarter during his team's furious rally, and host Detroit outlasted Charlotte.

Trail Blazers 112, Magic 103: Damian Lillard scored 33 points, C.J. McCollum added 22 and Portland beat visiting Orlando to snap a three-game losing streak.

Kings 116, Nuggets 100: Willie Cauley-Stein had a career-high 29 points and 10 rebounds to help host Sacramento, playing for the first time since trading DeMarcus Cousins, beat Denver.

No blockbuster deals made at NBA trade deadline

Associated Press

MIAMI — Paul George stayed put. So did Jimmy Butler, Carmelo Anthony and Derrick Rose.

And as the trade deadline passed Thursday, the NBA landscape seemed remarkably unchanged. In all, seven deadline-day trades were put together by the 3 p.m. Eastern deadline — but no last-minute blockbusters. All-Star DeMarcus Cousins was traded to New Orleans by Sacramento a few days earlier, yet every trade that followed paled in comparison.

"You know where all those big dominoes are? They're still home, with the exception of one," Miami President Pat Riley said. "I'm sure there were people that probably made some pretty significant offers. ... When you have that kind of player ... it takes a lot to say, 'OK, we're going to let this guy go.' You stay with the sure thing there."

George remained with the Indiana Pacers, even though

the four-time All-Star knew other teams sought his services. Jimmy Butler stayed with the Chicago Bulls, and the New York Knicks held onto Rose and Anthony — the latter of whom would have had to waive his no-trade clause to make any deal occur anyway.

"I wasn't concerned," George said. "At the end of the day, I'm in a good situation. ... I heard the rumors, different rumors, but I can't control what was going to happen one way or another."

The biggest moves of this trade season came long before deadline day.

Toronto getting forward Serge Ibaka from Orlando last week for Terrence Ross figures to improve the Raptors' chances in the Eastern Conference, and Thursday's move to land P.J. Tucker from Phoenix gives them another outstanding on-the-ball defender. And the deal for Cousins that went down on All-Star Sunday — in New Orleans, no less — gives the Pelicans a front line like no other in the NBA with him

now alongside Anthony Davis. Plus, Cleveland snagged Kyle Korver last month.

But contenders mostly stayed quiet Thursday. An earlier agreed-upon trade of note was officially completed, the one that sent Lou Williams to Houston from the Los Angeles Lakers and adds more serious scoring to the Rockets' bench.

Boston, currently No. 2 in the East, has the right to swap picks with Brooklyn in this year's draft, and the Nets right now would be favored to win the lottery and the No. 1 pick — something the Celtics would grab. Any big addition made Thursday almost certainly would have cost the Celtics that chance.

"It is a delicate balance of short-term goals and long-term goals," Boston general manager Danny Ainge said.

Perhaps the most interesting moves Thursday were not trades at all. Dallas put five-time All-Star point guard Deron Williams on waivers, and a person briefed on the situation told The Associated

Press that when Williams clears he plans to sign with the Cleveland Cavaliers, which would give LeBron James the extra playmaker he covets for the looming title defense.

"Obviously we have a great deal of interest, and we've said it for a long time, in a playmaker," Cavaliers general manager David Griffin said. "I won't speak to specific names just because nobody's free currently that's out there for us to talk about. But, obviously the need for a playmaker still exists ... and we feel that we'll be competitive in that market for sure."

Another notable player who may get to choose his next spot is Andrew Bogut, who was traded by Dallas to Philadelphia — and figures to be a buy-out candidate. Bogut's injury in last season's NBA Finals coincided with the start of Golden State's wasting of a 3-1 series lead against Cleveland, and he's still considered an elite rim protector.

No. 1 Gonzaga clinches West Coast title

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Josh Perkins and Jordan Mathews scored 15 points apiece, and Johnathan Williams had 14 points and 19 rebounds for No. 1 Gonzaga, which overwhelmed San Diego 96-38 on Thursday night to improve to 29-0 and clinch the West Coast Conference title.

The 58-point victory margin was the biggest of the season for Gonzaga, which also has won games by 47, 46 and 39 points.

And it was merely the latest laughter for Gonzaga (17-0 WCC), the only unbeaten team in Division I. It has won all 17 conference games by double digits.

Nigel Williams-Goss scored 14 points and Zach Collins had

12 for Gonzaga.

Olin Carter III scored 15 for USD (12-17, 5-12), which has lost six straight and 39 of its last 42 games to Gonzaga.

No. 4 Arizona 90, USC 77: Allonzo Trier scored a season-high 25 points, including four three-pointers, and the host Wildcats remained alone atop the Pac-12 standings.

Rawle Alkins added 12 points and Lauri Markkanen had 11 for Arizona (26-3, 15-1) in its 21st consecutive home win.

No. 4 UCLA 87, Arizona St. 75: T.J. Leaf scored 25 points for the visiting Bruins.

UCLA (25-3, 12-3 Pac-12) won its sixth straight game. Aaron Holiday added 17 points and Thomas Welsh had eight points and 11 rebounds in 18 minutes.

No. 15 Cincinnati 87, Memphis 74: Jacob Evans III scored 12 of his 15 points during his team's dominant first half and the host Bearcats held on for their 25th straight home victory.

Cincinnati (25-3, 14-1 American Athletic) led by as many as 24 points during its highest-scoring opening half in conference play this season, pulling ahead 51-32 at the break. The Tigers cut the lead to six points before fading.

Ohio St. 83, No. 16 Wisconsin 73: C.J. Jackson scored 18 points on 4-for-4 shooting from three-point range for the host Buckeyes.

JaQuan Lyle had 17 points and Jae'Sean Tate added 15 points and 12 rebounds for Ohio State (16-13, 6-10 Big

Ten), which snapped a three-game losing streak and beat a ranked team for the first time in nearly a year.

Bronson Koenig had 27 points for Wisconsin (22-6, 11-4), which lost the lead in the game's first minute and could never get any traction. The Badgers have lost three of four.

No. 20 Saint Mary's 78, Pepperdine 49: Jock Landale had 23 points and 14 rebounds to lead the visiting Gaels.

Saint Mary's (25-3, 15-2 West Coast) continued to roll in winning 10 of its last 11 games. Its only loss in that stretch was to No. 1 Gonzaga.

Lamond Murray Jr. had 17 points for Pepperdine (9-20, 5-12), which lost its third consecutive game.

Greiss stops 24 shots to help Isles blank Canadiens

Associated Press

MONTREAL — It was a big night for rookie Anthony Beauvillier and the New York Islanders.

Beauvillier scored in the first period, Thomas Greiss had stopped 24 shots for his third shutout of the season, and the Islanders beat the slumping Montreal Canadiens 3-0 Thursday night.

The 19-year-old Beauvillier, who grew up in nearby Sorel-Tracy, had a large group of family and friends on hand for his first game in Montreal.

"It's really special," he said. "I couldn't ask for a better night than getting the two points in Montreal with family and friends around, and for the ovation at the end."

Beauvillier said he bought 19 tickets for the game and several other of his supporters got their own to give the rookie a sizeable cheering section among the sellout crowd.

His parents' emotional reaction to his goal was shown on the scoreboard.

"They're the reason I'm here," he said. "They support-

ed me since I'm young. They paid for everything. It means everything for me to have them here. It was a little gift for them to score a goal and get the win here."

Anders Lee scored in the second period and John Tavares added an empty-netter in the final minute to seal the Islanders' third straight win. New York has won the first two games on a crucial nine-game road swing and improved to 12-4-2 since interim coach Doug Weight replaced the fired Jack Capuano.

"Pretty good from the drop of the puck," Tavares said. "We didn't give them a lot.

"And a big goal by Bo. It was nice to see him score in his hometown. We knew how pumped up he was. I remember my first game in my hometown (Toronto). It's really exciting with lots of friends and family. We really wanted him to soak it in. He stepped up and it was great to see him get rewarded."

Josh Bailey and Brock Nelson each had two assists, and Greiss got his third shutout of the season.

Carey Price finished with 21 saves as the Canadiens lost coach Claude Julien's 1,000th NHL game. Montreal is 1-2-0 since Julien replaced Michel Therrien last week and has totaled just 14 goals while going 2-7-1 in the last 10 games, including four shutouts.

Rangers 2, Maple Leafs 1 (SO): Mika Zibanejad scored the shootout winner and visiting New York continued a strong February.

Henrik Lundqvist made 32 saves and J.T. Miller scored the tying goal in the third period for the Rangers, who improved to 8-1-1 this month.

Bruins 4, Kings 1: Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak scored their 26th goals of the season, and visiting Boston improved to 5-1-0 under interim coach Bruce Cassidy.

Anton Khudobin made 27 saves in his second start since Christmas for the Bruins, who nursed an early lead to their first win in Los Angeles since March 24, 2012.

Flames 3, Lightning 2: Sean Monahan scored his 100th NHL goal, Brian Elliott made 23 saves, and visiting Calgary

kept up its strong play.

Dougie Hamilton had a goal and two assists, and Mikael Backlund also scored to help the Flames improve to 7-2-1 over their last 10 games.

Predators 4, Avalanche 2: Filip Forsberg scored his second straight hat trick, and host Nashville completed a sweep of the five-game season series with Central Division-rival Colorado.

Forsberg, who now has a team-high 22 goals, has five goals combined in his last two second periods. Forsberg, who scored three times in the second period of Tuesday night's overtime loss to Calgary, got the hat trick with an empty-net goal with 36.5 seconds left.

Blackhawks 6, Coyotes 3: Patrick Kane scored three goals for his third career hat trick to lead host Chicago to its third straight win and eighth in nine games.

Kane has 23 goals to lead the Blackhawks, who closed three points behind first-place Minnesota in the Central Division and Western Conference.