

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, February 9, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Hanoi to host 2nd US-N. Korea summit

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump announced Friday that his upcoming summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un will take place in Hanoi, ending weeks of speculation over the venue for the two leaders' second meeting.

Trump revealed the decision in an evening tweet.

"My representatives have just left North Korea after a very productive meeting and an agreed upon time and date for the second Summit with Kim Jong Un," Trump said in the tweet. "It will take place in Hanoi, Vietnam, on February 27 & 28. I look forward to seeing Chairman Kim & advancing the cause of peace!"

Trump announced in his State of the Union address on Tuesday night that he would meet with Kim on Feb. 27 and 28 in Vietnam. But the exact location remained uncertain.

U.S. officials had set their sights on the coastal resort city Danang, which Trump visited for a regional economic summit two years ago. The North Koreans, meanwhile, had been pushing for Hanoi. The bustling capital could afford Kim an opportunity to

hold a separate bilateral meeting with Vietnamese leadership, further bolstering his international standing.

In a second tweet Friday night, Trump predicted that North Korea "will become a different kind of Rocket — an Economic one!"

Before their first summit in Singapore last year, Trump had long mocked Kim as "Little Rocket Man."

"North Korea, under the leadership of Kim Jong Un, will become a great Economic Powerhouse," Trump said in the tweet. "He may surprise some but he won't surprise me, because I have gotten to know him & fully understand how capable he is."

Trump administration officials hope the meeting will make progress toward North Korean denuclearization efforts, though some experts remain skeptical.

Stephen E. Biegun, the State Department's special representative for North Korea, was in Pyongyang this week to finalize planning with his counterpart, Kim Hyok Chol.

Biegun departed Pyongyang on Friday after three days of talks. In a one-paragraph news release, the State Depart-

ment said Biegun and his North Korean counterpart plan to meet again ahead of the Trump-Kim summit. Their negotiations will include the agenda for the talks and potential concessions both sides could agree to when the leaders get together.

On Saturday, Biegun briefed South Korea's Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha and other officials in Seoul on the outcome of his discussions in Pyongyang. In brief statements to the media, Biegun said he had "productive" discussions in North Korea, but added: "We have some hard work to do" before the Hanoi summit.

"I would say it was a productive set of discussions over the last few days, and our team engaged on a number of areas of mutual interest, and we've agreed to meet again," Biegun said. "So I think this is a constructive place to be especially in advance of the president's second summit with Chairman Kim."

Biegun was also due to hold a trilateral meeting in Seoul with his South Korea counterpart Lee Do-hoon and Kenji Kanasugi, the Japanese foreign ministry's director general of Asia and Oceania affairs, who is visiting.

Fighters launch final push against ISIS in Syria

Associated Press

BEIRUT — U.S.-backed and Kurdish-led Syrian forces said Saturday they have launched a final push to defeat Islamic State in the last tiny pocket the extremists hold in eastern Syria.

Syrian Democratic Forces spokesman Mustafa Bali tweeted that the offensive began Saturday after more than 20,000 civilians were evacuated from the ISIS-held area in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour. An SDF statement said the offensive was focused on the village of Baghouz.

The SDF, backed by U.S. air power, has driven ISIS from large swaths of territory it once controlled in northern and eastern Syria, confining the extremists to a small pocket of land near the border with Iraq.

Scores of ISIS fighters are now besieged in a small area consisting of two villages, or less than once percent of the self-styled

caliphate that once sprawled across large parts of Syria and Iraq. In recent weeks, thousands of civilians, including families of ISIS fighters, left the area controlled by the extremists.

"The decisive battle began tonight to finish what remains of Daesh terrorists," Bali said, using an Arabic acronym to refer to ISIS.

U.S. President Donald Trump predicted Wednesday that ISIS will have lost all of its territory by this week.

"It should be formally announced sometime, probably next week, that we will have 100 percent of the caliphate," Trump told representatives of a 79-member, U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIS.

U.S. officials have said in recent weeks that ISIS has lost 99.5 percent of its territory and is holding on to fewer than 5 square kilometers in Syria, or less than 2 square miles, in the villages of the Middle

Euphrates River Valley, where the bulk of the fighters are concentrated.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that since the SDF began its offensive against ISIS in the area on Sept. 10, some 1,279 IS gunmen and 678 SDF fighters have been killed. It said 401 civilians, including 144 children and teenagers, have been killed since then.

Earlier Saturday, ISIS militants attacked SDF fighters near an oil field in the country's east, triggering airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition.

The Observatory said 12 ISIS gunmen attacked the SDF and clashed with them for several hours until most of the attackers were killed early Saturday. It said 10 attackers were killed, while two managed to flee.

Other activist collectives, including the Step news agency, reported the attack, saying some of the attackers used motorcycles rigged with explosives.

US, Taliban talks still early on

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The top State Department official charged with negotiating with the Taliban said he hopes to see an end this year to the nearly two-decade war in Afghanistan, calling recent dialogue with the insurgent group encouraging while admitting a cease-fire remains a long-term goal.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. envoy for Afghanistan reconciliation, said Friday that he and Taliban negotiators have struck an agreement, in principle, which could pave the way for at least some American service-members to exit Afghanistan, where they've been fighting for 17 years. Taliban officials promised Khalilzad in exchange that they would guarantee that Afghanistan — where the 9/11 terrorist attacks were planned — would not harbor terrorists who could threaten Americans or their allies, he said during an appearance at the U.S. Institute of Peace think tank in Washington.

"We are in the early stages of a protracted process to end the long suffering of the Afghan

people and to protect the United States ... from terrorism from Afghanistan," Khalilzad said during his first public appearance since meeting with Taliban officials last month in Doha, Qatar. "We have a long way to go. ... What we've achieved so far is significant, but they are two or three small steps in a long journey."

The United States boasts a roughly 14,000-troop force in Afghanistan largely working to train and advise the government's security forces as they battle the Taliban for population control in a war long characterized by top U.S. military and Afghan officials as a stalemate. A small percentage of the U.S. force there is focused on targeting terrorist groups — namely al-Qaida and Islamic State forces that the Pentagon has said remain a threat.

Khalilzad called any continued threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan a "red line" in negotiations with the Taliban.

In recent months, President Donald Trump has suggested withdrawing nearly half of the American forces in Afghanistan, but U.S. officials have said

he has thus far resisted that urge, largely in an effort to back Khalilzad's negotiations.

Nonetheless, Tuesday in Trump's second State of the Union, the president suggested some American forces could leave Afghanistan soon and vowed to end the war, stating "great nations do not fight endless wars."

"We do not know whether we will achieve an agreement [with the Taliban], but we do know that, after two decades of war, the hour has come to at least try for peace," Trump said. "And the other side would like to do the same thing. It's time."

Khalilzad said Friday that he agreed with Trump's assessment, stating Taliban officials have expressed their desire to end the fighting to him, but in exchange they seek "legitimacy."

Khalilzad is seeking an agreement in which Taliban would negotiate in good faith with the Afghan government and commit to ending any terrorism threat within the country. In exchange, Khalilzad said some or all American forces would leave the country.

US declines to submit report on death of journalist

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration declined Friday to submit a report to Congress determining whether Saudi Arabia's crown prince is personally responsible for the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Senators had asked for the finding by Friday, with an eye to imposing new human rights sanctions on Saudi Arabia over the journalist's Oct. 2 killing inside the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul.

Under the Magnitsky Act, the president has 120 days to respond to a direct request from Congress about possible violations. The request, made Oct. 10 in a letter signed by 11 Democratic and 11 Republican senators, required the administration to make a determination of responsibility for the killing, particularly including involvement by the Saudi royal family, and to act on it by imposing sanctions on responsible individuals.

"The President maintains his discretion to decline to act on congressional committee requests when appropriate," a senior administration official said in a statement. "The U.S. Government will continue to consult with Congress and work to hold accountable those responsible for Jamal Khashoggi's killing."

The decision was expected, and a bipartisan Senate bill introduced Thursday would supersede the request and direct the president to impose sanctions on anyone — including Saudi officials and the royal family — he determines was "responsible, or complicit in, ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing" acts that caused or contributed to Khashoggi's death.

The new legislation relies on the authority of the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act and imposes a 30-day deadline from the date of passage for presidential findings and sanctions imposition.

Iran's leader: 'Death to America' aimed at US leaders

The Washington Post

Iran has no fight to pick with the American people, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said Friday. Well, maybe just a few of them.

In comments at a gathering of Iranian air force officers, in which he called the United States the "embodiment of evil," Khamenei also parsed the "Death to America!" chants so often heard at pro-government rallies in Iran.

"I am telling the Americans, 'Death to America' means death to [President] Trump, [national security adviser] John Bolton and [Secretary of State Mike] Pompeo," he said, according to the supreme leader's official website. (The speech was

delivered in Persian and used the Persian phrase for "Death to America." But an English translation of the speech posted on the website substituted the phrase "Down with the USA.")

The United States and Iran have had no formal diplomatic relations since 1980 after a group of students seized American hostages at the U.S. Embassy as part of Iran's Islamic revolution. There are at least four Americans — some of whom are dual nationals — currently imprisoned in Iran.

"It means down with the American politicians in charge. We have no fight to pick with the American people," Khamenei said.

But, he added: "As long as the

United States shows viciousness and savagery, the Iranian nation will never cease shouting these words."

The leader's comments were part of a longer speech on Iran's relations with the West after the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal. The pact between Iran and world powers stunted Iran's nuclear energy program in exchange for widespread sanctions relief.

Last year, President Donald Trump abandoned the accord and reimposed a near-total embargo on the Iranian economy, helping prompt shortages of goods and cutting off Iran's oil exports.

Warren launches 2020 presidential bid

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Mass. — Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren made her bid for the presidency official on Saturday in this working-class city, grounding her 2020 campaign in a populist call to fight economic inequality and build “an America that works for everyone.”

Warren delivered a sharp call for change at her presidential kickoff, decrying a “middle-class squeeze” that has left Americans crunched with “too little accountability for the rich, too little opportunity for everyone else.” She and her backers hope that message can distinguish her in a crowded Democratic field and help her move past the controversy surrounding her past claims to Native American heritage.

Weaving specific policy prescriptions into her remarks, from Medicare for All to the elimination of Washington “lobbying as we know it,” Warren avoided taking direct jabs at President Donald Trump. She aimed for a broader institutional shift instead, urging supporters to choose “a government that makes different choices, choices that reflect our values.”

Warren announced her campaign in her home state of Massachusetts at a mill site where largely immigrant factory workers went on strike about 100 years ago, a fitting forum for the longtime consumer advocate to advance her platform.

She was scheduled to travel later in the day to New Hampshire, home to the nation’s first primary, where Warren could have an advantage as a neighboring-state

resident with high name recognition. She intended to spend Sunday in Iowa, where the leadoff caucuses will be the first test of candidates’ viability.

Warren was the first high-profile Democrat to signal interest in running for the White House, forming an exploratory committee on New Year’s Eve.

She was introduced Saturday by Rep. Joe Kennedy III, D-Mass., who has endorsed her in the primary. The backing could prove valuable for Warren, given his status as a rising young Democratic star and his friendship with one of her potential 2020 rivals, former Rep. Beto O’Rourke, D-Texas.

Warren enters the race as one of the party’s most recognizable figures.

2nd woman accuses Virginia official of sexual assault

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A second woman accused Virginia Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax of sexual assault Friday, saying the Democrat raped her 19 years ago while they were both students at Duke University.

Calls for his resignation grew steadily as the day wore on.

A lawyer for Meredith Watson, 39, said in a statement that Fairfax had attacked Watson in 2000. The statement described the assault as “premeditated and aggressive,” and noted that while Watson and Fairfax had been social friends, they were never involved romantically.

The lawyer, Nancy E. Smith, said her team had statements from former classmates who said Watson had “immediately” told friends that Fairfax had raped her. A New Jersey public relations firm representing Watson provided The Associated

Press with a 2016 email exchange with a female friend and 2017 text exchanges in which Watson said Fairfax had raped her. She also expressed dismay about his run for political office.

Watson’s representatives declined to provide further documentation and said their client would not be talking to journalists.

Fairfax shot back at his accusers quickly: he said in a statement that he would not resign from office, and vowed to clear his name against what he described as a “vicious and coordinated smear campaign” being orchestrated against him.

“I deny this latest unsubstantiated allegation,” the embattled Democrat said. “It is demonstrably false. I have never forced myself on anyone ever. I demand a full investigation into these unsubstantiated and false allegations. Such an investigation will confirm my account because I am telling the truth.”

Duke spokesman Michael Schoenfeld said the university’s police department has no criminal reports naming or involving Fairfax. Any accusation made through the student disciplinary process would be protected by student privacy laws, and Schoenfeld said the university couldn’t comment or release further information.

Police officials in Durham, N.C., where Duke is located, said they had no records of an accusation against Fairfax in 2000.

This is not the first time Watson has accused someone of assault. Following inquiries from AP and other media, Watson’s lawyer confirmed that while in college she accused another man, a basketball player at Duke, of raping her when she was a sophomore. Smith said Watson reported it to a top-level university administrator but received no help and was discouraged from taking the claim any further.

After physical, doctor says Trump’s in ‘very good health’

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is “in very good health” and expected to remain healthy for “the duration of his Presidency, and beyond,” the president’s doctor reported Friday following a physical exam that lasted nearly four hours and included 11 specialists.

The White House did not release details of the exam at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and did not say whether more details would be released later.

Trump was seen by a “panel of 11 different board-certified specialists,” Dr. Sean Conley wrote in a brief memo released by the White House.

The memo did not include the disciplines of any of the specialists. Typically, a physical exam includes checks of height, weight, blood pressure and other standard measures. Trump said last year he takes a statin drug to lower his cholesterol.

Trump did not undergo any procedures requiring sedation or anesthesia, Conley reported.

Trump, 72, has visibly gained weight in recent years. He makes no secret of preferring a diet of red meat, fast food and sweets. He is not known to exercise beyond his beloved rounds of golf. He does not smoke or drink.

Trump’s former physician, Dr. Ronny Jackson, became an Internet sensation last year for his public pronouncement that Trump has “incredibly good genes.”

Jackson reported that Trump, at 6-foot-3, was slightly overweight at 239 pounds last year.

Cuomo: NY critics could hurt Amazon deal

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Gov. Andrew Cuomo warned Friday about what he called “political pandering” to critics of Amazon’s proposed secondary headquarters amid a report that the company is reconsidering its planned New York City headquarters.

But opponents said they’d keep fighting a project they consider corporate welfare.

The back-and-forth came after The Washington Post reported that Amazon is reconsidering its planned New York City headquarters because of some local politicians’ opposition to the nearly \$3 billion incentive package. The report cited two unnamed people familiar with the company’s thinking.

In response, Amazon would

say only that it’s engaging with small business owners, community leaders and educators, pointing to its pledges to fund high school computer science classes and contribute to job training.

“We are working hard to demonstrate what kind of neighbor we will be,” the Seattle-based company said in a statement.

Noting the report, Cuomo accused the state Senate — whose leader recently tapped an Amazon critic for a board that might have sway over the project’s subsidies — of “governmental malpractice” and siding with those who are “pandering to the local politics.”

“And that’s what could stop Amazon,” he said at an unrelated event on Long Island. “I’ve never seen a more absurd situation where political pan-

dering and obvious pandering so defeats a bona fide economic development project.”

Cuomo and the Senate leadership are Democrats, as are many of the deal’s critics.

Cuomo and Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio say Amazon will transform Queens’ Long Island City area into a high-tech hub and spur economic growth that will pay for the \$2.8 billion in state and city incentives many times over.

Critics see the project as an extravagant giveaway to one of the world’s biggest companies and argue it won’t provide much direct benefit to most New Yorkers.

“We rose up and held the line. ... It’s not over, but I’m proud of the values we fought for,” Democratic City Councilman Jimmy Van Bramer, who

represents Long Island City, said in a statement.

State Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins nominated Gianaris earlier this week to a little-known state panel that could ultimately be asked to approve the subsidies. Cuomo has the final say over appointments.

After Cuomo’s remarks Friday, a spokesman for Stewart-Cousins said it was “unfortunate that the governor is trying to divide the Democratic Party at this crucial and historic time.”

A Quinnipiac University poll released in December found New York City voters favor bringing Amazon’s campus to the city, by 57-26 percent. But they were divided on the incentives, with 46 percent supporting the package while 44 percent opposed it.

Pilot in deadly crash had been previously disciplined

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The pilot whose plane broke apart and crashed into a Southern California home, killing five people, was disciplined for dangerous flying years earlier, it was reported Friday.

Antonio Pastini, 75, of Gardnerville, Nev., was flying home

after visiting his daughter and granddaughter Feb. 3 when his Cessna began coming apart and debris slammed into a Yorba Linda home, which caught fire. Four people inside the house died. The cause of the crash is under investigation.

Years earlier, Pastini, then using the name Jordan Albert

Isaacson, had his license twice suspended by the Federal Aviation Administration, the Los Angeles Times reported Friday, citing records kept by the Library of Congress.

In 1977, Pastini had his pilot’s license suspended for 120 days after he flew from Las Vegas to Long Beach, Calif., in cloudy

and icy weather and falsely told an air traffic controller that he had “IFR clearance” that indicated he was capable of flying the route with instruments.

Pastini disregarded airspace rules and posed “a potential threat to himself, his passenger and other users of the system,” wrote an administrative law judge, Jerrell R. Davis.

Delta apologies for their ‘unintentionally creepy’ napkins

The Washington Post.

Falling in love on an airplane is the kind of story you only ever hear in a bar or see in a Lifetime movie. But for a brief time this winter, Delta Air Lines wanted to help passengers make it a reality — by gently nudging them to hit on other passengers.

With cocktail napkins.

“Be a little old school,” said the small print on the napkin, advertising Diet Coke. “Write down your number & give it to your plane crush. You never know ...”

There was a little space on

the napkin where flirtatious passengers could write down their name and another space for their number. The larger print said, “because you’re on a plane full of interesting people and hey,” again, “... you never know.”

But while some found the napkins clever and charming, others thought they were creepy. In fact, evidently enough complained that Delta and Coca-Cola apologized for the marketing stunt Wednesday, saying the napkins have since been removed from flights.

“We rotate Coke products regularly as part of our brand partnership, but missed the mark with this one,” Delta said in a statement to The Washington Post and other news outlets. “We are sorry for that and began removing the napkins from our aircraft in January.”

Coca-Cola also said in a statement to The Post, “We sincerely apologize to anyone we may have offended,” adding that the napkins are being replaced with other designs.

Delta passengers began complaining about the napkins on social media in January, though

it’s unclear when exactly the flights began using them. One passenger wrote Jan. 21: “Pretty sure no one appreciated unsolicited phone numbers in the ‘good old days’ and they sure as heck don’t want the number of someone who has been gawking at them on a plane for hours today. Not a good look.” Others argued the napkins “encourage affairs” or were “unintentionally creepy.”

But some passengers came to Delta’s defense, with many arguing that Delta’s apology represented the latest political correctness battle over a company’s attempt at humor.

US aid still stuck at Venezuelan border

The Washington Post

CUCUTA, Colombia — Millions of dollars worth of food and medical supplies remained stuck at the border of Venezuela on Friday in a high-stakes showdown between the U.S.-backed Venezuelan opposition and President Nicolás Maduro.

Despite the socialist leader's refusal to allow in the humanitarian aid, Venezuelan opposition leaders are making increasingly ambitious promises about the delivery of U.S. assistance with no clear plan for making it happen.

"This aid is going to be arriving in Venezuela, in the hospitals, for the Venezuelans and into the hands of the most vulnerable, have no doubt," said Lester Toledo, a representative of Juan Guaidó, the self-declared interim president of Venezuela who has secured the backing of more than 40 countries.

At a news conference on the border between Colombia and Venezuela, Toledo stood beside a vast warehouse filled with white plastic sacks of rice, beans and sugar labeled "from the American people."

He said three more warehouses would be opening up in the region shortly and that his countrymen could count on aid arriving "as soon as they open the border gates in the next few days."

But the Venezuelan military has blocked the Tienditas International Bridge linking the two countries with two shipping containers and a tanker, which has become a symbol of Maduro's standoff with the United States and its European and South American allies.

Despite growing international political support for the opposition, the Venezuelan military has not defected en masse, and it remains unclear where the United States

and the opposition go from here.

Maduro, who enjoys the support of China and Russia, rebuffed calls to let the aid into the country on Friday in a dueling news conference in Caracas.

"The reality is there is no help. It's a message of humiliation to the people. If they really wanted to help they should lift all the economic sanctions, the financial persecution, and cancel the economic ban that robs us of billions of dollars," Maduro said.

He insisted that Venezuela is not facing a crisis, though, during the news conference, the power went out twice.

The Trump administration has meanwhile reiterated its implicit military threat against Maduro and warned him to leave U.S. diplomats and Venezuelan opposition figures unharmed. On Friday, national security adviser John Bolton reaffirmed in a tweet that "all options are on the table."

Thai royal banned from race for prime minister

Associated Press

BANGKOK — A Thai political party swore loyalty to the king Saturday, a day after its stunning decision to nominate the monarch's sister as its candidate for prime minister backfired when the king called the move inappropriate and unconstitutional.

The statement of fealty comes as the country ponders a Friday whirlwind in which Princess Ubolratana Mahidol broke with tradition proscribing the monarchy's involvement with politics to become a candidate for the Thai Raksa Chart Party, only to have her brother, King Maha Vajiralongkorn, invalidate her action with an order.

Thai Raksa Chart's statement said the party loyally accepted the king's order and expressed deep gratitude to Ubolratana for her kindness toward the party.

Ubolratana, who is active

on Instagram, did not directly mention the king's order in a Saturday message, merely thanking people for their support and encouragement and insisting on her sincere desire to see Thailand progress with rights and opportunities for all its people.

Thailand's March 24 election will be the country's first since a 2014 military coup put in place a junta determined to reshape the political system to eradicate the influence of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose allies have won every national election since 2001.

So it was not only a shock that Ubolratana was formally entering politics, but also that she was doing so in alliance with a Thaksin-backed party. Her candidacy would have pitted her against the junta leader and current Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha.

Christian woman freed by court is transferred

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — The Christian woman freed by Pakistan's Supreme Court three months after acquitting her on a blasphemy charge has been transferred from her previous location near the capital by security forces, unable to leave Pakistan to join her daughters in Canada, a friend said Saturday.

Aman Ullah, who said he spoke to Aasia Bibi by telephone Friday, said Bibi, 54, is being held in a room in southern Karachi. He said Bibi, who spent eight years on death row, is frustrated and frightened, uncertain of when she will be able to leave Pakistan.

"She has no indication of when she will leave ... they are not telling her why she cannot leave," said Ullah, who fled the country Friday after receiving threats from religious radicals

angered by his assistance to Bibi, which began while she was on death row.

Ullah has been a liaison between Bibi and European diplomats, who have sought to assist her.

Bibi's ordeal began in 2009 when two fellow farmworkers refused to drink from the same container as a Christian woman. There was a quarrel and the two Muslim women later accused Bibi of blasphemy. The Supreme Court on Oct. 31 last year, however, acquitted Bibi and last month the high court rejected an appeal by a radical religious party to review her acquittal. The Supreme Court judges charged there were widespread inconsistencies in the testimony against Bibi saying had the case not been so sensitive the accusers would face perjury charges. Bibi has steadfastly maintained her innocence.

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Boston sets its sights on repeating

Associated Press

BOSTON — The goal is the same for the Boston Red Sox in 2019: Finish the season flopping around on the pitcher's mound, celebrating another World Series title.

All that's left is for them to figure out who's at the bottom of the pile.

The defending champions head to spring training without a closer after allowing Craig Kimbrel to test the free agent market. The right-hander who saved 48 games in the 2018 regular season and postseason declined a \$17.9 million qualifying offer and is still unsigned, but the Boston brass say the budget won't allow them to spend big money on a closer, even one who is a seven-time All-Star.

Joe Kelly, who emerged as one of the team's more reliable set-up men during the team's run of three straight AL East titles, is also gone after signing

with the Los Angeles Dodgers.

"I know we lost two guys, that we don't have a proven closer," President of Baseball Operations Dave Dombrowski said. "Sometimes you have to evaluate where you're going to spend your dollars. We decided to keep back the rest of the core of the club. We like our team a great deal and we think that some of the guys internally can do the job."

Among the possibilities Dombrowski has mentioned for the ninth-inning role are Ryan Brasier, Matt Barnes and knuckleballer Steven Wright. Manager Alex Cora has also hinted that he might go without a traditional closer and play matchups.

After four championships in 15 seasons, that's the closest thing to a crisis as the Red Sox attempt to win back-to-back World Series for the first time since 1915-16.

Here are some other things to look for when pitchers and

catchers report to Fort Myers, Fla., on Wednesday:

Old look: For the second straight year, the Red Sox are essentially standing pat as they head to spring training. Don't look for a big splash like last year, when they added J.D. Martinez at the end of February. Trade deadline acquisitions — and World Series heroes — Nathan Eovaldi and Steve Pearce are back after signing new deals.

Rookies to watch: The organization's top prospect is third baseman Michael Chavis, who missed 80 games in the minors last year for violating the ban on performance-enhancing drugs. But Rafael Devers is solidly entrenched at third for the big-league club, and Chavis could remain in Triple-A another season to work on his fielding and focus on striking out less.

They're set: The Red Sox will roll out essentially the same lineup as last year — and why

tinker with a team that won a franchise-record 108 games in the regular season and then 11 more in October? One change: Starters Chris Sale and David Price won't be answering questions about whether they can deliver in the postseason.

They're not: Second base is the team's biggest issue, with Dustin Pedroia trying to come back from a knee injury that limited him to just three games in 2018. Eduardo Nunez and Brock Holt filled in, with help from Ian Kinsler after the trade deadline. Pedroia says he'll be ready, but after returning too early last year the team will be careful not to rush him again.

On deck: The Red Sox open the regular season on the West Coast, starting at Seattle on March 28 and then heading to Oakland and Arizona before returning to Boston to raise their championship flag at Fenway Park on April 9 against the Toronto Blue Jays.

For first time in years, Luck goes into offseason healthy

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Andrew Luck spent three offseasons fighting his way back from injuries. Now he can reap the reward.

After returning to the field, making it back to the playoffs, regaining his Pro Bowl form and collecting The Associated Press NFL Comeback Player of the Year Award, a healthy Luck now intends to take a rare and well-deserved break from football.

"I'll be honest, I probably won't throw for a while," he said before cleaning out his locker. "There will be tweaks, there will be changes to what I do (this offseason) but all of it is geared to one, make me as happy as possible and two, set me up to improve as a quarterback and improve as a person."

How Luck will spend his downtime is unclear.

Peyton Manning broke

the monotony with hunting trips. Brett Favre worked on his ranch. Tom Brady won a Super Bowl after changing last year's offseason routine to spend more time with his family and less on football. They all learned throwing more balls doesn't necessarily make a better quarterback.

Matt Hasselbeck, a three-time Pro Bowler who backed up Favre and Luck during his 17-year career, became a believer. So after hearing a story about Manning meeting a former U.S. president one offseason, Hasselbeck accepted an offer from assistant coach Clyde Christensen to spend time with a Navy admiral.

"He talked to us in our quarterback meeting one day about protecting the football because we'd had some issues and he used this analogy of what they tell Top Gun pilots," Hasselbeck said. "It was basically that you have this great plane you

get to fly and it does not belong to you. It belongs to the government, it belongs to the people. Clyde said we should take the admiral up on spending some time with him. So I did that one offseason.

"That's an example of something that's not necessarily X's and O's but it's a form of leadership training or just working on you and if you're working on you, you're improving everything about you."

It was a message Hasselbeck relayed to Luck after joining the Colts in 2013. But it was a hard sell to a young workout warrior with the pressure and expectations of a No. 1 draft pick.

While Luck enjoyed vacationing in Europe, where he spent part of his childhood reading books, following soccer and riding bikes, the desire to improve drove him to work out.

"When we were first teammates, I told him there are going to be some years that are

fun and they're easy and you're healthy the whole year," said Hasselbeck, who now works for ESPN. "There's going to be other years when it's miserable and you're dealing with something the whole year and you're in the training room all the time. You're there early and you're there late and you're in pain and you're on drugs."

"That conversation came up when I was talking about how long I wanted to play. This year we were talking and Andrew said 'I remember you saying it and it didn't make sense then.' He said now it totally makes sense."

Luck's good year came with 16 starts for the first time since 2014, producing career highs in completions, attempts and completion percentage. He finished second to Patrick Mahomes in touchdown passes, helped the Colts end a three-year playoff drought and found a better balance between life and football.

NCAA clears Fields to play

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Quarterback Justin Fields has been granted a waiver that will allow him to play immediately for Ohio State after transferring from Georgia.

The former five-star recruit transferred to the Buckeyes after he got stuck behind Jake Fromm on Georgia's depth chart.

Ohio State announced Friday that the NCAA has approved Fields' request for a waiver of the rule requiring transfers to sit out a year. Fields is expected to compete for the starting quarterback spot after Dwayne Haskins Jr. left early to enter the NFL Draft.

Fields was the target of a racial slur from a Georgia baseball player during a football game in September, and there was speculation the incident would become part of his appeal for a waiver. The NCAA can grant immediate eligibility to a transferring player who has "documented mitigating circumstances that are outside the student-athlete's control and directly impact the health, safety and well-being of the student-athlete."

In a statement issued by Ohio State on Friday, Fields said speculation about his transfer "took on a life of its own."

"I have no regrets about my time at UGA and have no hard feelings for the school or football program," Fields said. "My overall experience at UGA was fully consistent with UGA's commitment to diversity and inclusion."

He said he would not make any further comments about his transfer and looks forward to preparing for the season.

"I am happy for Justin and his family," Ohio State coach

Carolina shuts out Rangers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Petr Mrazek and the Carolina Hurricanes had a reason to enjoy themselves, too, on Friday night.

Mrazek made 27 saves and the Hurricanes spoiled a celebration at Madison Square Garden that honored the last Rangers team to win the Stanley Cup, blanking New York 3-0.

Warren Foegele scored the go-ahead goal early in the third period as the Hurricanes ended a 16-game losing streak at the Garden. He took a pass from Saku Maenalanen in the slot and wristed a shot past Henrik Lundqvist at 6:43.

"It was nice to get rewarded there," Foegele said. "It was a great play by Kegger (Greg McKegg) to enter the zone with speed and then a beautiful pass by Saku."

Rookie Andrei Svechnikov and Brock McGinn added empty-net goals as Carolina won its third in a row. It was Carolina's first win at MSG since a 4-3 victory on Oct. 29, 2010.

In a 45-minute pregame ceremony, Mark Messier, Brian Leetch and the players and coaches from the Rangers' 1994 Stanley Cup team were introduced. They were seated at center ice as a sellout crowd cheered the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of that championship.

To honor that club, Lundqvist wore a goaltender's mask similar to Mike Richter's with the Statue of Liberty prominently displayed on the front. Lundqvist's mask also has "1994" painted on the right side with a picture of Richter, his name and number.

"Unbelievable. It's a humbling thing. What a great statement by him," Richter said before the game.

"(He) didn't have to do it. It's very classy. I was shocked. ... Coming from him, look at the career the man has put together. He's been nothing but

consistent from the day he arrived. He's had just a remarkable career, so it means a lot coming from him."

Rangers coach David Quinn was disappointed in his team's effort in the game.

"There was definitely a lack of urgency which was surprising," he said. "It certainly was set up to be a special night. We just didn't capitalize on it."

Carolina, which is 13-4-1 in its past 18 games, climbed within a point of the Pittsburgh Penguins for the final playoff position in the Eastern Conference.

"I think we know where we are in the standings and how important each game is," Foegele said. "We need wins and it's important we got two points there."

These Rangers are near the bottom of the Eastern Conference.

After a tightly played opening period, both teams had better scoring chances in the second.

Kevin Hayes took a pass from Jimmy Vesey and faked Mrazek and attempted to stuff the puck into the net, but Hurricanes defenseman Jacob Slavin swept it out from the crease.

"That was a big save by him," Mrazek said. "Hayes did a nice job holding the puck for a little bit, I get out and a great save by Slavin."

Mrazek closed the second period by making a stellar stick-side save on Mika Zibanejad with the Rangers on the power play.

Lundqvist kept the game scoreless late in the opening period as he stopped Nino Niederreiter on a breakaway. He finished with 30 saves.

"We definitely had our looks, especially in the second period," Lundqvist said. "It came down to one play. Unfortunately we were on the wrong end. We had our opportunities. But they defended really well the whole game."

Svindal comes up short in final race

Associated Press

ARE, Sweden — If anyone had to beat Aksel Lund Svindal in his final race, he seemed just fine with it being Norwegian teammate Kjetil Jansrud.

After an emotional moment when he leaned back, stretched his arms out and looked to the sky, Svindal was all smiles despite finishing a close second in the downhill at the world championships on Saturday.

Amid a crowd of thousands of flag-waving Norwegian fans, Svindal playfully pointed at Jansrud after finishing 0.02 seconds behind in a race that was characterized by thick

fog and heavy snowfall, which caused an hour's delay.

Jansrud had come down three racers earlier.

"Getting the roar from all the Norwegian fans is one of the most amazing feelings in my career," Jansrud said. "It's a very emotional day and I'm going to enjoy it."

Svindal then bowed to the crowd during the flower ceremony.

"I've been sharing the podium quite a few times with Aksel in my career, so doing this on his last race and world championships is an honor, so this is a perfect day," Jansrud

said.

Vincent Kriechmayr of Austria came in third, 0.33 behind, to add to his silver medal from the super-G earlier in the week.

The 36-year-old Svindal, the two-time Olympic champion and five-time world champion, announced last month that he would retire after this race.

Jansrud was racing with a broken left hand following a fall in training in Kitzbuehel, Austria, 2½ weeks ago. Doctors had told Jansrud to sit out for six weeks but he couldn't pass up the chance of racing at a world so close to home.

Pelicans walking a fine line with Davis

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Even with one foot out the door, Anthony Davis is showing he can still produce prolific statistics for the New Orleans Pelicans.

He only needed 25 minutes to score 32 points in his first game for New Orleans since requesting a trade nearly two weeks ago. Davis also had nine rebounds and three blocks in a 122-117 win over the Minnesota Timberwolves on Friday night.

Whether his presence in the lineup is sustainable for a club that is trying to move on without him — and protect his trade value by keeping him healthy — remains to be seen. But for now, coach Alvin Gentry and other Pelicans veterans sound inclined to try to make it work.

“He’s obviously made it known that he won’t sign back, but he still loves the game of basketball. I know that he loves us as players, and he’s going to go out there and play as hard as he can,” Pelicans point guard Jrue Holiday said. “If Anthony’s out there, that’s the best chance of us winning.”

The Pelicans entered their game at Memphis on Saturday night at 25-31, five games behind the Los Angeles Clippers for the Western Conference’s final playoff spot with 26 games left.

When Davis initially made his trade request public through his agent, Rich Paul, Davis’ image was largely removed from the Pelicans’ website and promotional material. Gentry also started providing more playing time to younger players the club wants to develop.

But after Thursday’s trade deadline passed without a deal to move Davis, the Pelicans had to decide if they were willing to defy NBA rules by shelving their healthy six-time All-Star. For now, they’ve put him back in the starting lineup, albeit on reduced playing time as

he works his way back from a sprained left index finger that had sidelined him since Jan. 18.

On Friday night, Davis was kept on the bench in a tense fourth quarter despite the teams being separated by as little as one basket several times in the waning minutes.

Gentry said he limited Davis’ minutes because it had been weeks since he played.

“I was not going to have him — first game back — play 38, 40 minutes,” Gentry said. “I thought he played well the minutes that he was in there and did a great job. He was typical Anthony.”

Gentry is hoping to find a balance that allows Davis to play — and hopefully stay healthy — while allowing other front-court players like the resurgent Jahlil Okafor and third-year pro Cheick Diallo to get meaningful minutes.

“We talked about that a lot. Some kind of way, we have to keep those guys in the rotation and keep them available,” Gentry said. “Obviously, they may not play the amount of minutes that they’ve been playing ... but I do think that we have to keep them in the rotation and put them in situations where we can see how their development is going and see how they are against the better players in the league and playing with our better players.”

The Pelicans have made Holiday the face of the franchise since Davis’ trade demand. The veteran guard, who is in the second year of a five-year, \$126 million contract, said he understands the inherent conflict between focusing on players who are committed to the franchise long-term and playing Davis. But he added, “I think we’re still trying to win. Having Anthony on our team and Anthony on the court, in my opinion, is our best chance of winning.”

Roundup

New-look Sixers get past Nuggets

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — JJ Redick scored a season-high 34 points, Jimmy Butler had 22 and the new-look Philadelphia 76ers beat the Denver Nuggets 117-110 on Friday night.

Tobias Harris had 14 points and eight rebounds in his first game for Philadelphia and Joel Embiid added 15 points and 12 rebounds despite playing with stomach flu.

Nikola Jokic led Denver with 27 points and Jamal Murray had 23. The Nuggets were missing Gary Harris and Paul Millsap.

The Sixers made a flurry of moves before Thursday’s trade deadline, acquiring Harris, Boban Marjanovic and Mike Scott from the Clippers, James Ennis from Houston and Jonathan Simmons from Orlando.

Bucks 122, Mavericks 107: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points and 17 rebounds and visiting Milwaukee rolled to its sixth straight victory, beating retooling Dallas.

Antetokounmpo was 13-for-19 from the field and got the upper hand again in his second meeting with fellow Euro star Luka Doncic, the Dallas rookie sensation who scored 20 points. He’s the only original starter remaining because of two trades that were more about the future than the present.

Brook Lopez added 20 points for the Bucks. Trey Burke, one of four players to join Dallas from New York in a deal that also brought Kristaps Porzingis and sent three Dallas starters to the Knicks, scored 18 points.

Kings 102, Heat 96: Buddy Hield scored 23 points and made a pair of free throws with 17 seconds left, and host Sacramento rallied from 11 down in the fourth quarter to beat Miami.

Bogdan Bogdanovic added 16 points, and Harrison Barnes

had 12 in his Kings debut after being acquired from Dallas as part of a three-team trade.

Warriors 117, Suns 107: Stephen Curry shook off a poor shooting performance by scoring 10 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter to help Golden State beat host Phoenix for the 18th consecutive time.

Klay Thompson scored 25 points for the Warriors, Kevin Durant added 21 points and DeMarcus Cousins 18.

Pelicans 122, Timberwolves 117: Anthony Davis, playing for first time since asking to be traded, had 32 points, nine rebounds and three blocks in 25 minutes, and New Orleans beat visiting Minnesota.

Pistons 120, Knicks 103: Andre Drummond had 29 points and 20 rebounds and Detroit handed visiting New York its 15th straight loss.

Blake Griffin scored 26 points for the Pistons, who traded Reggie Bullock and Stanley Johnson in deadline deals but kept enough of their top players to make a postseason berth still plausible.

Dennis Smith Jr. scored 31 points for the Knicks. They have lost 28 of their last 30.

Wizards 119, Cavaliers 106: Bobby Portis scored 30 points in his debut with his new team, Bradley Beal added 25 points and 12 assists, and host Washington beat Cleveland.

Collin Sexton led Cleveland with 27 points. Kevin Love returned after missing 50 games following left foot surgery. He started and played the first six minutes, scoring four points. Cleveland has lost 21 of 24.

Bulls 125, Nets 106: Lauri Markkanen had 31 points and 18 rebounds to lead visiting Chicago past Brooklyn.

Markkanen scored at least 30 points in his third straight game. Zach LaVine added 23 points, and Otto Porter Jr. had 18 in his first game with the Bulls.