

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## Shanahan calls for 'stronger' ISIS fight

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

MUNICH — Acting Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan said Friday he wants coalition members in the fight against Islamic State to step up their support even as the U.S. prepares to pull out of northern Syria.

"While the time for U.S. troops on the ground in northeast Syria winds down, the U.S. remains committed to our coalition's cause — the permanent defeat of ISIS," Shanahan said at the start of the Munich Security Conference. "I, for one, envision an even bigger and stronger coalition going forward."

In Munich, scores of world leaders have assembled for three days of discussions on a range of threats to the international order. The theme of this year's conference — "Who will pick up the pieces?" — highlights concerns that long-standing institutions like NATO are struggling to stay united.

"The whole liberal world order appears to be falling apart — nothing is as it once was," said the conference's chairman, Wolfgang Ischinger, on the eve of the Munich talks.

Much of the focus is expected to revolve around the U.S. and its commitments to alliances it has long championed — namely NATO.

As talks got underway, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said President Donald Trump is getting results in strengthening NATO, despite European angst over Trump's commitments to old allies.

## Trump's tactic on wall funds involves military money, GIs

By CLAUDIA GRISALES  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Friday declared a national emergency along the U.S.-Mexico border, part of an overall effort that uses roughly \$6 billion in military funds and personnel to build a wall to curtail illegal immigration.

Trump plans to pull \$3.6 billion from military construction funds by evoking the National Emergencies Act and another \$2.5 billion from the Defense Department's drug interdiction program through a presidential executive order, senior White House officials said earlier Friday. These funds are part of an overall plan announced Friday to use \$8 billion — which includes \$1.375 billion in a new government appropriations package that he is scheduled to sign — to build a southern border wall. The targeted funds also include another \$600 million from Treasury Department forfeiture funds.

"One of the things we have to do and I said we would do is border security," Trump said in his opening remarks from the White House Rose Garden. "I'm going to be signing a national emergency."

The president said Congress "skimped" by approving only \$1.375 billion in wall funding, so he was forced to utilize other options. Trump also claimed military generals told him the wall was a greater priority than other military construction projects.

"I was speaking to a couple of them. They think this is far more important than what they were going to use it for. I said what were you going to use it

for, and I won't go into details, but didn't sound too important to me," he said.

Trump also alluded to the lawsuits that will follow Friday's declaration.

"We will have a national emergency and then we will be sued," he said. "We will probably get a bad ruling and then another bad ruling and then we'll end up in the Supreme Court."

The political and legal fights to come could delay any funds from being used for a border wall for months or years, leaving uncertainty about when or if the military will be involved in the wall's construction, some experts contend.

"It's not like a wall is going to go up tomorrow. It's going to take months or years to see the kinds of barriers" the Trump administration has proposed, said Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Washington think tank Center for Strategic and International Studies. "This is long term, this is not a short-term thing."

In late January, military planners had met daily at the Pentagon about the border situation and drew up plans in case the president issued a national emergency declaration as he has threatened, according to a defense official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning.

Trump had publicly threatened a national emergency for weeks after repeated talks with congressional Democrats failed to produce a deal for \$5.7 billion that the president wanted to fund a border wall. Most recently, the political standstill deteriorated into the longest federal government shutdown in history that left 25 percent of

the government virtually closed and 800,000 federal workers and servicemembers — including 42,000 active-duty Coast Guard members and more than 150,000 veterans in civilian posts — furloughed or working without pay for 35 days. The shutdown ended with Trump signing a three-week temporary funding measure to reopen the government that was slated to expire Friday.

On Thursday, Congress approved the overall funding deal that would direct the \$1.375 billion toward the wall, short of Trump's demanded amount. In the 2018 fiscal year budget, Congress also allocated \$1.3 billion for border security efforts.

Now provisions of federal law used to declare the national emergency will be scrutinized.

A provision of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, Section 2808, states a presidential declaration under the National Emergencies Act of 1976 empowers the undertaking and funding of military construction projects "that are necessary to support such use of the armed forces." The act has been used 58 times since its inception. Today, 31 national emergencies are active.

On Friday, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, of New York, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, of California, issued a joint statement rejecting Trump's claims of a national emergency.

"The president's unlawful declaration over a crisis that does not exist does great violence to our Constitution and makes America less safe, stealing from urgently needed defense funds for the security of our military and our nation," they said in the prepared statement.

# CID agent facing 'stolen valor' charges

*The Washington Post*

A special agent with U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command faces criminal charges after allegedly lying about his military service, Army officials said Thursday, complicating a case he was assigned in which a former Green Beret officer has been charged with murder.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Mark Delacruz, who is assigned to the Army CID office at Fort Bragg, N.C., was charged with the unauthorized wearing of a Purple Heart, Air Assault Badge, Pathfinder Badge and Combat Action Badge and is accused of submitting a package to an Army promotion board that stated he earned a Purple Heart when he did not, said Jeffrey Castro, an Army spokesman. The Purple Heart is awarded to U.S. servicemem-

bers who have been wounded or killed in combat.

The charges, if proven, amount to what U.S. troops refer to as "stolen valor," when servicemembers claim details about their military service that are not true in ways that benefit them. Delacruz has been suspended from his duties since the allegations came to light in late 2018, Castro said.

The accusations, first reported by NBC News on Thursday, complicate the case of Army Maj. Mathew Golsteyn, who is accused of premeditated murder in connection with the death of a man in Afghanistan in 2010. Golsteyn, 38, was charged in December following an on-and-off investigation that dates back to 2011, when the former Green Beret officer acknowledged killing an unarmed man that he believed

to be a Taliban bomb maker during a job interview with the CIA.

Golsteyn's lawyer, Phillip Stackhouse, said in a letter Wednesday to the commander of Army Special Operations Command, Lt. Gen. Francis Beaudette, that Golsteyn was waiving his right to what is known as an Article 32 hearing, which examines evidence in the case, in part because of the charges against Delacruz.

Stackhouse wrote that since about 2016, the agent for Golsteyn's case was Delacruz.

"It has come to our attention, not from the prosecutors in this case but through anonymous sources and later verified by documentation, that Special Agent Delacruz has committed acts of 'Stolen Valor' and is currently being prosecuted for lying and wearing, of all things,

a Purple Heart Medal among other awards and devices he did not earn," the letter said.

The Army declined to address Stackhouse's allegations on Thursday, stating that "no further information" about Delacruz's case would be "released at this time."

Golsteyn, speaking in an interview last week with *The Washington Post*, accused the Army of not following its own rules in its investigation. He acknowledged killing the man, named Rasoul, but said he did so during a legal ambush after other U.S. troops had released him.

In a letter to Beaudette on Thursday obtained by *The Washington Post*, Golsteyn called for the general to dismiss the charge against him in light of how Army investigators have handled his case.

## Allegations of cover-up made in case of urine found in boots

*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES — For Staff Sgt. Jennifer Pineda, a 15-year veteran of the California Air National Guard, the military was a family calling. She followed her older sister and brother-in-law into the guard, where she now holds an administrative position at the 144th Fighter Wing in Fresno.

On a March morning four years ago, Pineda was about to dress into a uniform she had stored overnight in a stall in the women's bathroom when she made a foul discovery.

Someone had urinated in her boots.

The incident left Pineda humiliated and frightened and would trigger a series of behind-the-scenes investigations whose scope has come to extend beyond what happened that day at the Fresno base.

The defiling of Pineda's boots has led to allegations that high-ranking officers tried to bury the incident, including by destroying evidence that could

have potentially identified a suspect through DNA, and retaliated against a male pilot who supported her efforts to find the perpetrator, according to interviews and guard records obtained by the *Los Angeles Times*. Some in the wing have begun calling the ongoing saga "Pissgate."

After *The Times* began asking questions about the Pineda episode, the California Military Department, which oversees the guard, asked the U.S. Air Force Inspector General's Office to conduct an investigation.

The inspector general's inquiry is the third investigation into the Pineda affair and part of a broader probe into whether whistle-blowers at the 144th wing suffered reprisals for questioning the actions or conduct of their superiors on a range of matters. At least five guard members from the 144th wing filed formal complaints.

Two of the guard's top officers held key leadership positions at the 144th at the time of

the Pineda incident: Maj. Gen. Clay Garrison, who has since become head of the air guard, and Col. Sean Navin, now one of its five wing commanders.

Soon after she reported that someone had urinated on her boots, members of the 144th's security forces, who police the base, arrived at the location, attempted to lift fingerprints and had photos taken of the scene, according to an internal investigative record obtained by *The Times*. The security airmen collected the urine from the floor and reviewed hours of security camera footage, the document states.

The results of the investigation were inconclusive, the report says.

Soon after the first investigation was shelved, a second was opened when "new information" revealed that pilots had been drinking in a nearby break room the evening before the discovery and "may have information regarding the incident or may have possibly been involved in the incident," ac-

ording to a guard report and interviews. Navin, the commander who had shared the results of the first investigation with Pineda, had been in the break room as well that evening, the report says.

In an interview with investigators, Pineda said a couple of pilots told her they suspected Navin of urinating on her boots, the report says.

Navin denied being involved, guard records show.

The investigator who authored the report wrote that the interviews "did not lead to any new conclusions" or identify any suspects.

Maj. Dan Woodside, a retired 144th fighter pilot, said the head of base security, then-Lt. Col. Dave Johnston, told him that 144th "leadership" ordered him to shut down the investigation and destroy all the evidence after investigators zeroed in on Navin. The evidence included Pineda's boots and a vile of urine that was never tested.



# Lawmakers commend Cyber Command

BY ELLEN NAKASHIMA

*The Washington Post*

WASHINGTON — Senators from both major political parties on Thursday praised the military's cyber force for helping secure last year's midterm elections, with one suggesting it was largely due to U.S. Cyber Command that the Russians failed to affect the 2018 vote.

"Would it be fair to say that it is not a coincidence that this election went off without a hitch and the fact that you were actively involved in the protection of very important infrastructure?" Sen. Mike Rounds, R-S.D., asked Gen. Paul Nakasone, the command's leader, at a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Military officials have said new authorities, approved over the last year, enabled CyberCom to be more aggressive — and effective — in what they privately say was an apparent success. Nakasone, who also heads the National Security Agency, stopped short of saying it was CyberCom

that made the difference, telling Rounds that safeguarding the election was the agencies' "No. 1 priority."

Nakasone assumed his dual posts in May and has privately told Pentagon leaders that having the two agencies under a single director was key to the operation's outcome.

"I wished that the American people could have heard more of what you told us," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. "It was a success. Very few of the American public know about the successes."

The counter-Russia campaign marked the first operational test of a presidential order granting CyberCom more latitude to undertake offensive operations without having to seek approvals from other agencies, which can be time-consuming.

Also pivotal was a new provision included in this year's National Defense Authorization Act clearing the way for more clandestine cyber operations that don't rise to acts of war, categorizing them as "traditional military activity."

The campaign was carried out by the Russia Small Group, which Nakasone set up last year, drawing personnel from CyberCom and the NSA.

The group took action under a new strategy of "persistent engagement," or sharing threat information with the FBI and Department of Homeland Security so they can share it with the private sector to help firms secure their networks, raising the costs for an attacker.

Officials have been reluctant to disclose additional details, saying that doing so could help U.S. adversaries. Some senators seemed torn by that.

"The enemies know what they're doing," Blumenthal said. "We know what they're doing. ... They know we know what they're doing. The only ones who are in the dark, really, are the American people."

Some former senior intelligence officials argue that the operation could have been just as successful if the NSA and CyberCom had been led by separate individuals.

## Barr is sworn in for second stint as US attorney general

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — William Barr was sworn in Thursday for his second stint as the nation's attorney general, taking the helm of the Justice Department as special counsel Robert Mueller investigates Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

Earlier Thursday, the Senate voted 54-45 to confirm the veteran government official, mostly along party lines. Barr, who also served as attorney general from 1991 to 1993 during President George H.W. Bush's administration, succeeds Jeff Sessions. President Donald Trump pushed Sessions out of office last year after railing against his decision to recuse himself from the Russia investigation.

As the country's chief law enforcement officer, Barr will oversee the remaining work in Mueller's investigation into potential coordination between

the Kremlin and the Trump campaign and decide how much Congress and the public know about its conclusion. He'll also take over a department that Trump has publicly assailed.

Democrats, who largely voted against Barr, said they were concerned about his non-committal stance on making Mueller's report public. Barr promised to be as transparent as possible but said he takes seriously the Justice Department regulations that dictate Mueller's report should be treated as confidential.

Barr's opponents also pointed to a memo he wrote to Justice officials before his nomination that criticized Mueller's investigation for the way it was presumably looking into whether Trump had obstructed justice. Barr wrote that Trump could not have obstructed justice by firing former FBI Director James Comey since it was an action the president was constitutionally entitled to take.

## Trump administration sued over asylum policy

BY SUDHIN THANAWALA

*Associated Press*

SAN FRANCISCO — The Trump administration's policy of returning asylum-seekers to Mexico while their cases wind through immigration courts violates U.S. law by putting the migrants in danger and depriving them of the ability to prepare their cases, a lawsuit filed Thursday by civil liberties groups claims.

The lawsuit in federal court in San Francisco seeks a court order blocking the Department of Homeland Security from carrying out the policy.

The launch followed months of delicate talks between the U.S. and Mexico and marked a change to the U.S. asylum system that the administration and asylum experts said was unprecedented.

Mexican officials have sent mixed signals on the crucial point of whether Mexico would impose limits on accepting

families. The effort began at a San Diego crossing with Tijuana, Mexico for adults only, but U.S. officials have started to include families, which currently account for nearly half of Border Patrol arrests.

"Instead of being able to focus on preparing their cases, asylum seekers forced to return to Mexico will have to focus on trying to survive," according to the lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies. "These pressures may deter even those with the strongest asylum claims to give up, rather than endure the wait under such conditions."

Steven Stafford, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Justice, said Congress has "explicitly authorized" Homeland Security officials to return migrants to a "contiguous foreign territory" during their immigration proceedings.

# Pompeo, EU diplomat meet after Iran rebuke

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met Friday with the European Union's top diplomat in Brussels following a scathing attack from the Trump administration on the bloc and several of its main members over their approach to Iran.

Pompeo held what was expected to be a tense working breakfast with EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini just a day after Vice President Mike Pence accused Britain, France, Germany and the EU as a whole of trying to evade U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Pence also called on the EU to join the Trump administration in withdrawing from the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

Pence launched his offensive Thursday at a Middle East conference in Poland that underscored a stark, two-year trans-Atlantic divide over Iran. Mogherini did not attend the conference, and France and Germany did not send Cabinet-level officials to the meeting.

EU diplomats said before the conference in Warsaw that it appeared aimed at driving a wedge between the Europeans and Iran, as the 28-nation bloc struggles to keep alive the Iran nuclear deal after the United States reneged on it last year.

Mogherini smiled, shook her head and waved away a question about Pence's speech as she sat down with Pompeo and aides at EU headquarters. Neither spoke to reporters.

A senior EU official, who was not present but was briefed on the meeting, said the pair "did not specifically discuss Iran." The official, who is not permitted to speak publicly about the talks, said Iran did come up in the context of a discussion about the Middle East.

"Iran was in the discussion, but it was not a discussion about Iran," he said.

Pence's harsh criticism threatened to further chill U.S.-European ties, which are already badly strained on many issues, including trade and defense spending.

Britain, France and Germany, along with the rest of the EU, continue to support the nuclear deal as the best way to prevent Iran from developing atomic weapons.

# West remains at risk of flooding, mudslides

Associated Press

SAUSALITO, Calif. — Authorities warned that mudslides were still possible Friday after a damaging storm moved through California, trapping people in floodwaters, triggering a debris flow that destroyed homes and forcing residents to flee communities scorched by wildfires last year.

The powerful system swept in from the Pacific Ocean and unleashed rain, snow and wind across the U.S. West into Wyoming, Colorado and Arizona after walling Northern California and southern Oregon earlier.

The rain mostly ended Thursday night. But officials said hillsides could still loosen and collapse, bringing down mud, boulders and debris.

"The ground is still so saturated, and the water is still flowing down from the mountains," said April Newman, spokeswoman for Riverside County Fire Department.

The National Weather Service reported staggering rainfall amounts across California, including more than 9.4 inches over 48 hours at one location in the San Bernardino Mountains, east of Los Angeles.

A woman pulled from rising water in a low-lying area between those mountains and Los Angeles had a heart attack and

died at a hospital, said Capt. Ryan Rolston, with the Corona Fire Department. The unidentified woman was one of nine people and three dogs rescued in a flood-control channel where homeless people camp, Rolston said.

A second death was reported in Escondido, northeast of San Diego, where firefighters recovered the body of a man who had been seen paddleboarding in the surging waters of a concrete-lined flood-control channel.

North of San Francisco, a mudslide barreled over cars, uprooted trees and sent a home sliding down a hill and smashing into another house in Sausalito.

# Runner recounts brutal battle with mountain lion

Associated Press

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — When a young mountain lion clamped its jaws onto Travis Kauffman's wrist and clawed at his face, he screamed a "barbarian yell," jammed his foot onto the animal's neck and held it there until the cat quit thrashing and died.

After a couple of minutes, Kauffman recalled Thursday, "it finally stopped moving and then the jaws opened and I was able to kind of scramble back up the hill and get the heck out of Dodge."

Through it all, the 31-year-old trail runner said, the cat remained eerily silent.

It was the first time Kauffman publicly recounted the Feb. 4 ordeal that left him with 28 stitches and a reputation for toughness and bravery that overshadows his wiry frame.

"I will never be able to live up to the reputation," said Kauffman, who stands 5-foot-10 and weighs about 155 pounds. "The story is bigger than my puny form."

Kauffman said he was running a trail in the mountains west of Fort Collins when he heard pine needles rustle behind him. He turned to see the mountain lion about 10 feet away.

"One of my worst fears was confirmed," he said.

That cat lunged, and Kauffman raised his hands and screamed.

The animal locked its teeth onto his wrist and they tumbled off the side of the trail.

A wave of fear rolled over him, he said, and he worried that the animal's full-grown mother would join the attack to defend her offspring. But no other cat appeared.

Fear then gave way to the fighting instinct, he said.

Kauffman grabbed a rock with his free hand and beat the cat on the back of the head. He also tried stabbing it with twigs, but nothing worked.

"I knew with two pretty good blows to the back of the head (and) it didn't release, that I was probably going to have to do something a little more drastic," he said. "I was able to kind of shift my weight and get a foot on its neck" until it succumbed.

Bleeding from his face and wrist, he jogged back down the trail, where he met other runners who got him to a hospital.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officers retrieved the dead cat. They said their investigation and a necropsy confirmed Kauffman's account.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Man held for alleged food tampering

**CA** LOS ALTOS — Authorities in California have arrested a transient they say spilled bleach on grocery store food packages — something he's already accused of doing in Arizona.

Authorities Monday announced last week's arrest of David Lohr at a Los Altos bus stop after he allegedly poured hydrogen peroxide in a bus.

He's facing federal food tampering charges.

Lohr was wanted for allegedly pouring hydrogen peroxide and bleach near rotisserie chicken and on packages of ice, shrimp, beer and eggs at stores in Sunnyvale, Los Angeles, West Hollywood, Redondo Beach and Manhattan Beach in December and January.

Lohr faces similar charges in Arizona. He was arrested last October for alleged food tampering at six Target stores in Phoenix and its suburbs.

## Woman files suit over mistaken explosive

**CT** BRIDGEPORT— A Connecticut woman who lost part of her hand when she lit an explosive device she thought was a candle is suing the previous owner of her home.

The Connecticut Post reported that Karina Gutierrez's lawsuit says her injuries were "directly caused by the willful, wanton and reckless conduct" of the previous owner who knew the explosives were in the basement yet failed to remove them. The Bridgeport woman was injured in September when thunderstorms knocked out power. She found what she thought was a candle, but that fire officials said was actually a quarter-stick of dynamite.

When she lit it, it exploded.

The suit says she lost part of her left hand, suffered injury to her right eye and permanent scarring.

## 'Breeder of year' couple face cruelty charge

**NH** DURHAM — A New Hampshire couple honored as a "Breeder of the Year" by the American Kennel Club faces an animal cruelty charge.

Police in Durham said 18 cocker spaniels were seized from owners Bonnie and Wilson Pike, of Durham. Deputy Police Chief Rene Kelley told seacoastonline.com the dogs showed signs of neglect but no physical abuse.

The Pikes have been breeding cocker spaniels at their home for decades for their business, Silverhall Cocker Spaniels. The Pikes were honored as the 2018 Breeders of the Year in the Sporting Group category.

## Sediment buildup ends port's tall ship tradition

**DE** LEWES — After nearly two decades, Delaware's official tall ship, the Kalmar Nyckel, can no longer visit one of its regular ports.

Kalmar Nyckel Foundation Executive Director Cathy Parsells told The News Journal that sediment buildup in Lewes prevents the ship from docking at "one of its favorite ports."

Parsells said dredging the dock would cost nearly \$3 million, making it a project that neither the Delaware River and Bay Authority nor the foundation could afford. DRBA spokesman James Salmon said there's a chance the problem could be resolved in the future, but there's no timeline in sight.

The Kalmar Nyckel was built in Wilmington in 1997 as a replica of a Dutch-built ship that

sailed for Sweden in the 17th century.

## Fire truck bursts into flames inside firehouse

**MA** MANSFIELD — Two firefighters were brought to the hospital when a fire engine burst into flames inside a Massachusetts firehouse.

The engine caught fire in Mansfield at about 2:30 a.m. Wednesday. Four on-duty firefighters were alerted to the blaze by smoke alarms. Authorities said two firefighters required treatment for smoke inhalation but are expected to be OK.

Chief Neal Boldrighini said the engine was used on a call on Tuesday and no one noticed anything wrong with it.

Extensive smoke and water damage also forced the shutdown of the station, one of two in the town about 25 miles south of Boston. Fire officials said medical supplies and other gear also were damaged.

## Police: Suspect stuck in mud trying to flee theft

**LA** THIBODAUX — Police in Louisiana said a man robbed someone he met on a dating website but got stuck in the mud as he tried to flee the scene.

The Houma Courier reported that Thibodaux police said Kareem Acker, 25, was arrested Tuesday on charges including armed robbery. Police said Acker forced the victim out of his car at gunpoint and tried to drive away from responding officers, but the car got stuck. Police said he then tried to hide a loaded gun in the mud after he was ordered out of the car.

NOLA.com/The Times-Picayune reported that New Orleans police are investigating a similar case in which a suspect

stole the wallet of a woman he met on a dating app.

## Woman walking home mauled by 2 pit bulls

**FL** DAYTONA BEACH — Authorities said a woman was attacked and mauled by two pit bulls in a Florida neighborhood.

The Daytona Beach News-Journal reported that the 34-year-old woman was recovering at a hospital following the Sunday night attack.

Daytona Beach police said the woman had just gotten off a bus and was walking home when the dogs attacked her. She suffered multiple cuts and bites before bystanders used a stun gun to drive the dogs away and then called 911.

Police tracked the dogs to their nearby home. Their owner was issued a notice to appear in court on two counts of no permits for the dogs and no proof of rabies vaccinations as required. Officers seized the dogs for quarantine.

## Snowplows vandalized ahead of winter storm

**NY** MOUNT VERNON— A suburban New York City community says someone sabotaged Mount Vernon's fleet of snowplow and salting trucks.

A city spokesperson said latex gloves were found stuffed into the fuel tanks of all Department of Public Works trucks, which prompted their breakdowns when they went out early Tuesday. Police are investigating the event as an act of vandalism.

Workers had to remove the gloves and pieces of latex from the tanks of 16 garbage trucks and 13 snowplows at the DPW garage and yard while a winter storm bore down on the region.

From wire reports

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# Step-back three not a shot for everyone

Associated Press

James Harden turned to it to become the NBA's most unstoppable scorer.

Luka Dončić has ridden it to stardom on both sides of the Atlantic.

The step-back three-pointer is the perfect weapon for the modern NBA, practically a necessity in a game where the ability to find space to shoot from behind the arc is more valued than ever before.

"Things have changed and the game is so spread out," Dallas coach Rick Carlisle said. "All over the NBA and all over the world really, everybody's stretching the range out a few feet more. The three-point line is being covered much better than it has in the past so guys are moving back, and guys that can create space to shoot threes unassisted have a special skill. It's going to be a necessary skill more as the game continues to evolve."

But before guys who belong in the paint start hoisting them up from the perimeter, or taking balls off the rack and shooting step-backs during this weekend's All-Star three-point contest, there are a few things to consider.

Even Stephen Curry said it's a tough shot to make. It's fundamentally flawed and sometimes looks like a violation.

"You mean when they jump backwards and travel and shoot a three?" Spurs coach Gregg Popovich quipped. "I guess it has been made legal. I don't know. It's very difficult to guard."

That's because the defender has to be prepared that the player with the ball is going to drive to the basket. But instead of continuing forward, the offensive player suddenly gathers his feet and steps backward to shoot, taking advantage of the extra space he has created.

Curry is one of the most prolific three-point shooters in history, but he's also a wizard with his dribble. So whoever is defending him can never quite be sure which way he is going.

"Obviously you respect the athletic guys that can drive and use their first step and explosiveness and all that type of stuff," Curry said. "It's a tough shot to make consistently, but the guys that do, it's obviously a shot and a look that you can always kind of count on to create space and knock it down."

There will be more than a few hoisted up during the All-Star festivities.

But nobody shoots it more — or arguably better — than Harden, whose 151 step-back three-pointers coming into this week represented 15 percent of the 1,006 makes thus far, according to the NBA's statistics. He dribbles patiently until he sees an opening, then either drives for a layup or foul, or steps back for the three, sometimes from a few steps beyond the arc.

Harden, a seven-time All-Star, league MVP and scoring champion last season, has scored 30 or more points in 30 straight games, third-longest streak ever. Averaging 36.5 points, he's poised to easily win another scoring title. He said he turned to the step-back three as a way to evolve with a game that has seen more than 2,500 step-back threes taken already this season, after there were only 584 for all of 2014-15, according to NBA.com.

"I mean, every single year you have to come back better than you were the year before, and for me I had a pretty good year last year. But you've got to come back better and come up with a new move or a new package to keep defenders on their heels," Harden said. "So whether it's a step-back or a slide step, just to create separation to

be able to get my shot off."

Harden has the green light in Houston, though that doesn't make it a good shot — at least not for everyone else.

Because of the degree of difficulty, the step-back three may only be for a handful of players.

Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni compares it to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's sky hook, a shot that everyone might try, but few could master.

"Certain guys have certain talents but it's a hard shot," D'Antoni said. "I don't know what the stats are, but it's a low 20-percent kind of shot for most people and he's at about 40."

Actually, Harden's 41.5 percent on step-back threes was only a little higher than the league average of 39.5 percent, though that could be misleading because so few players attempt them — and the ones who do are often already good shooters.

D'Antoni figures someone will come along and shoot it well, and that player may have already arrived. Dončić is far ahead of everyone but Harden in attempts and makes, and the Mavericks rookie's good-bye highlight in Europe was a one-legged, step-back three that helped Real Madrid put away Game 4 of the ACB Championship series.

Dončić smiled when asked about the step-back three, saying: "A lot of guys have special moves. That's my kind of move."

And even Popovich, no big fan of the three-point-happy game the NBA has become, gives credit to the step-back shooters.

"They are great at it, that's for sure," he said. "Take nothing away from them. It's been developed, it's used and no one is better at it than they are. It's virtually impossible to guard."

## NBA roundup

### Pelicans lose All-Star F Davis, knock off Thunder

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Anthony Davis grimaced and didn't move his left arm as he walked off the court at halftime.

Whether those were Davis' final moments in a Pelicans uniform — or whether he even plays in this weekend's All-Star Game — remains to be seen.

Julius Randle capped a 33-point, 11-rebound performance with three clutch baskets in the

final three minutes, Jrue Holiday scored 32 points and effectively defended Paul George, and New Orleans beat Oklahoma City 131-122 on Thursday night despite losing Davis to a shoulder injury.

Davis, who has asked to be traded, left the Smoothie King Center with his agent, Rich Paul, during the second half to get an MRI exam, the results of which were expected sometime Friday.

**Knicks 106, Hawks 91:** Dennis Smith Jr. scored 19 points and New York snapped a franchise-worst, 18-game losing streak with a victory over host Atlanta.

The Knicks ended their longest single-season skid with their first victory since Jan. 4 at the Los Angeles Lakers. New York, with the Eastern Conference's worst record and second-worst overall, had dropped 26 of 27.

**Magic 127, Hornets 89:** Orlando ended a 13-game losing streak to visiting Charlotte behind 21 points from reserve Terrence Ross.

The Magic have won five straight for the first time in more than three years. Nikola Vucevic had his fifth straight double-double with 17 points and 11 rebounds, while Aaron Gordon added 10 points and 10 rebounds.



## Top 25 roundup

# Gonzaga wins 15th straight

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Third-ranked Gonzaga was trailing midway through the second half and the nation's highest-scoring team was being slowed.

The Bulldogs came up with a late burst to extend their winning streak to 15 games.

Gonzaga closed the game with a 20-6 run to beat Loyola Marymount 73-60 on Thursday night. It was only the second West Coast Conference game that the Bulldogs (24-2, 11-0) have not led by at least 20 at some point.

"They were a tough out tonight. They would have been a tough out for a lot of teams tonight," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said.

Rui Hachimura led Gonzaga with 22 points and Brandon Clarke added 17 points and 12 rebounds for his eighth double-double of the season.

The game was close until late in the second half. Loyola Marymount took a 54-53 lead with 8:45 remaining on Joe Quintana's three-pointer, before the Bulldogs took control.

James Bateman's jumper brought Loyola Marymount (17-9, 5-7) within 60-58 with 4:59 remaining but Gonzaga scored 13 of the game's last 15 points. The game was similar to Gonzaga's Jan. 12 victory at San Francisco, where it trailed late before going on a 17-2 run in the final four minutes.

"They did a good job taking us out of our normal pace of offense," said Zach Norvell Jr., who had 13 points, including a pair of three-pointers late in the second half. "Once we settled down and found holes, we were able to pick them apart."

Gonzaga finished 21-for-22 from the foul line.

The Bulldogs came in leading the nation with 91.4 points per game but had their lowest-scoring half of the season, as they led 32-31 at halftime. It was only the fourth time this season they have been held under 80 points in a game.

"We just stayed poised and not get caught up in the moment. We did a good job of having a mature approach and getting stops on our end," Clarke said.

**No. 9 Houston 71, UConn 63:** DeJon Jarreau had 18 points and seven assists to help the Cougars beat the visiting Huskies for their ninth straight victory.

Armoni Brooks added 12 points for Houston (24-1, 11-1 American Athletic). The Cougars opened the second half with a 17-4 run.

Christian Vital had 15 points for UConn (13-12, 4-8).

# Stamkos, Lightning rip Stars

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — When Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov are piling up points, the Tampa Bay Lightning are tough to stop.

Stamkos had two goals and an assist, Kucherov added a goal and three assists and the Lightning beat the Dallas Stars 6-0 Thursday night.

Tampa Bay scored at least six goals for the 14th time this season against a Dallas team that had allowed the second-fewest goals in the league.

"We just came out hard and want to play our way and stick to our structure," said Kucherov, who has 11 points in his past three games. "Good things happen when we play the right way and it paid off."

Tyler Johnson, Mikhail Sergachev and Alex Killorn also scored to help the Lightning improve to 6-0-2 in the last eight games and reach 90 points in 58 games this season. Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped

32 shots for his fifth shutout of the season — the second against Dallas — and 17th of his career to tie Ben Bishop for the most in team history.

"Every time we made a mistake or a bounce went their way they made us pay," Dallas coach Jim Montgomery said. "You've got to tip your hat, that's a really good hockey team. Anytime we did break through they've got a brick wall back there."

Dallas goalie Anton Khudobin was pulled from the game twice, allowing five goals on 21 shots. Landon Bow finished with four saves in 27:07 of ice time for the Stars, who fell to 1-2-1 in the past four games to drop to the top wild card spot in the Western Conference behind St. Louis.

"I liked our effort, I didn't love our puck management but we'll get better from this," Montgomery said.

Tampa Bay had four goals on the board in a span of 7:21 in the opening period and never looked back.

## NHL roundup

# Ovechkin, Caps pummel Sharks

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Alex Ovechkin scored his NHL-leading 39th goal, T.J. Oshie had two goals and an assist, and the Washington Capitals beat the San Jose Sharks 5-1 on Thursday night.

Jakub Vrana and Tom Wilson each had a goal and an assist, and Nicklas Backstrom had two assists for Washington. Braden Holtby stopped 24 shots, and Ovechkin added an assist as the Capitals won for the fifth time in seven games after dropping seven straight.

San Jose ended a six-game winning streak, which began with a 7-6 overtime win at Washington on Jan. 22. Sharks goalie Martin Jones turned back 18 shots.

The Sharks took an early lead on Kevin Labanc's 11th goal at 2:06 of the first period, but it was all Washington after that.

Oshie tied it on a power play less than two minutes later, and Vrana scored midway through the first period to give Washington a 2-1 lead.

**Maple Leafs 6, Golden Knights 3:** Auston Matthews scored two goals, including the 100th of his career, to lead visiting Toronto over Vegas.

**Blues 4, Coyotes 0:** Jordan Binnington matched a franchise rookie record with his seventh straight victory, Vladimir Tarasenko scored twice and visiting St.

Louis stretched its longest winning streak in 18 years to eight games.

**Islanders 3, Blue Jackets 0:** Thomas Greiss stopped 31 shots for his fourth shutout of the season and visiting New York beat Columbus.

**Blackhawks 5, Devils 2:** Patrick Kane scored his 34th goal and added two assists to lead host Chicago over New Jersey for its eighth victory in nine games.

**Canucks 4, Kings 3 (SO):** Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser scored in a shootout after Adam Gaudette tied it with 1:38 remaining in the third period to lift visiting Vancouver over Los Angeles.

**Panthers 3, Flames 2 (SO):** Vincent Trocheck scored in the third round of the shootout to lift host Florida over Calgary.

**Avalanche 4, Jets 1:** Gabriel Landeskog scored his team-leading 30th goal of the season as visiting Colorado beat Winnipeg to snap its season-high eight-game losing streak.

**Predators 3, Canadiens 1:** Pekka Rinne made 34 saves, Viktor Arvidsson scored and host Nashville beat Montreal.

**Red Wings 3, Senators 2:** Andreas Athanasiou scored twice, including a penalty shot, and Jimmy Howard made 40 saves in his 500th game to lead host Detroit over Ottawa.

# Logano, Harvick win Daytona 500 duels

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Kevin Harvick and Joey Logano won the Daytona 500 qualifying races in a pair of Ford sweeps that have the new Mustang positioned for a strong showing in “The Great American Race.”

Harvick won the first of the 150-mile qualifying races Thursday night that set the field for NASCAR’s showcase event. Logano used a last-lap pass for the lead in the second one.

Both Harvick and Logano led podium sweeps for Ford, which this year is racing the Mustang in NASCAR’s top series. The qualifying races set the starting lineup for Sunday’s season-opening Daytona 500, and Ford drivers locked down the second through fourth rows.

William Byron and Alex Bowman, in Chevrolets for Hendrick Motorsports, swept the top two spots in time trials last week and represent the youngest starting row in Day-

tona 500 history. Byron is 21 and Bowman is 25.

Harvick’s victory was uneventful beyond Jimmie Johnson’s involvement in his second wreck of Speedweeks.

Logano, meanwhile, was fourth on the final lap when he pulled out of line to try for the win. The reigning NASCAR champion got a solid push from Team Penske teammate Ryan Blaney to move to the front and earn his spot alongside Harvick in Sunday’s race.

“Cool to see a couple of Mustangs in victory lane already,” Logano said. “The big one’s still Sunday. It’s a confidence builder for everyone.”

Logano was followed by Clint Bowyer and Aric Almirola as Mustang drivers went 1-2-3 in both races. Harvick led Ricky Stenhouse Jr. and Paul Menard in the first race for the initial Ford sweep.

The tally represents four different teams, with Stewart-Haas Racing flexing its power to put Harvick, Bowyer and

Almirola up front in the Daytona 500. Stenhouse represents Roush Fenway Racing, Logano drives for Roger Penske and Menard for the Wood Brothers.

All have been ordered by Ford leaders to work together and win the Daytona 500.

“Everybody at Ford Performance always makes it well known that they expect us to work together, do everything we can to get a blue oval in victory lane, especially the Mustang now that we’re running it,” Stenhouse said. “We’re getting, I would say, pretty good at it. This is a race that they’re all circling every year for us to win.”

Toyota has so far been shut out of Speedweeks as Johnson won last weekend’s exhibition race in a Hendrick Chevrolet.

The highest-starting Toyota drivers will be Denny Hamlin and Matt DiBenedetto in the fifth row.

Parker Kligerman earned the transfer spot into the 500 during the first qualifying

race, while Brendan Gaughan earned the final slot in the 40-car field.

Joey Gase and Ryan Truex both missed qualifying for their first Daytona 500.

Harvick, meanwhile, wrecked in the first practice of the season at Daytona International Speedway. He was collected the next day in a 16-car crash triggered by Jimmie Johnson in the first race of Speedweeks.

Johnson ended Thursday night’s event facing criticism for another on-track incident.

The seven-time champion went three-wide 25 laps into the race, causing Kyle Busch to spin and bringing out a caution. Johnson sent an apology through his team, but Busch was unforgiving.

“Tell him I don’t want to hear it. Tell him to use his eyeballs. That’s twice in two races he’s done the same thing,” Busch said.

## Briefly

# Pelicans fire GM Demps amid fallout over Davis

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A person familiar with the situation says the Pelicans have fired general manager Dell Demps.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the club has not announced it.

Demps’ firing comes amid the fallout after All-Star Anthony Davis said in late January that he would not sign an extension with New Orleans and wants to be traded to a contending team.

The decision means a new general manager will be able to oversee whatever trade terms the Pelicans decided to accept in exchange for Davis, who was the first pick in the 2012 NBA draft out of Kentucky and has been named an All-Star six

times in his first seven seasons.

Demps has been with the club since the summer of 2010 and the Pelicans have made the playoffs three times during his tenure, advancing to the second-round once. The Pelicans enter this season’s All-Star break at 26-33 and unlikely to make the Western Conference playoff field this season.

## Missouri appeals NCAA sanctions

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Missouri filed a notice of appeal with the NCAA’s committee on infractions Thursday as it begins to fight what it considers overly harsh sanctions for academic misconduct involving a former tutor.

The NCAA banned the football, baseball and softball pro-

grams from the postseason for a year and placed the entire athletic department on probation late last month. Missouri also was docked scholarships and given recruiting restrictions among other punishments.

Missouri athletic director Jim Sterk said in a statement the NCAA “abused its discretion” in applying the penalties, which received widespread condemnation beyond the school’s campus in Columbia.

The notice of appeal begins a back-and-forth between the school and the NCAA that is expected to take at least six months. Generally speaking, any penalties would be put on hold while the case is winding toward a conclusion, meaning all three programs in question retain their postseason eligibility.

## N. Korea to ‘remedy’ anti-doping issue

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — The IOC received commitments from North Korea that it will work to “remedy” its anti-doping controls that led to the country’s testing agency being suspended this week.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach met with sports and government officials from North and South Korea on Friday, and they talked about creating combined teams in four sports to try to qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Bach hosted Korean officials one day after the World Anti-Doping Agency announced North Korea’s testing program was noncompliant for failing to meet international standards.