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Trump order puts Space Force within USAF

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed a directive that would place the proposed Space Force within the Department of the Air Force if approved by Congress.

Trump had originally proposed an independent military service but Tuesday's directive would create a relationship similar to that of the Navy and Marine Corps.

The Pentagon will include funding for the Space Force in its fiscal year 2020 budget proposal, which is expected to be sent to Congress next month, White House officials said Tuesday, speaking on the condition of anonymity. The officials indicated startup costs for Space Force would be about \$100 million under the new proposal. That is far less than the Pentagon's initial estimate of \$13 billion for a fully independent service.

For now, the new military branch remains a policy goal of Trump's administration. Its formation would require legislation, and it is unclear how much support lawmakers have for the proposal that Trump has touted since last summer when he called for a "separate but equal" military branch focused on space.

The arrangement outlined in Trump's directive would be similar to the Marine Corps' relationship to the Navy, meaning the service would have its own top general — the Space Force chief of staff — who would sit on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while the service would fall under the portfolio of the Air Force secretary. The long-expected decision by Trump is seen as a win for the Air Force, officials said, especially after Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson initially signaled she opposed a new military service focused on space operations. She later said publicly that she supported the president's plan.

If approved, Space Force would be the first new U.S. military branch since the Air Force was split from the Army in 1947.

White House officials indicated Tuesday that the Pentagon would prepare plans to build a separate military department with its own Space Force secretary at some point in the future.

Currently, while each of the military services has some servicemembers focused on space capabilities, the Air Force is responsible for 80 to 90 percent of space operations and it runs 77 of the U.S. military's more than 100 satellites.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of

the Senate Armed Services Committee, said last week that his panel would hold hearings on the Space Force, but no date had been set.

Other prominent lawmakers have signaled they have yet to make up their minds about a Space Force. Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, told Politico this month that he was not completely opposed to the Trump plan. Smith had long said publicly he was fundamentally opposed to the formation of a new military branch.

Earlier Tuesday, Air Force Gen. David Goldfein, the service's chief of staff, signaled support for the White House plan, while also touting the U.S. Space Command as a more important step for the U.S. military's space programs.

"I think the fact we are having a national debate on space is really healthy," Goldfein said Tuesday to a crowd at the Brookings Institute in Washington. "We are the best in the world in space. Our adversaries know that, and they've been studying us, and they've been investing in ways to take away that capability in crisis or conflict. To me, that is the problem statement. We as a nation cannot let that happen ..."

USS Donald Cook returning to the Black Sea

BY SCOTT WYLAND

Stars and Stripes

The USS Donald Cook transited the Dardanelles Strait on Tuesday en route to its second Black Sea operation in a month as Russia again shadows the ship amid growing tensions between Moscow and the West.

The Arleigh Burke-class destroyer made a port stop last month in Batumi, Georgia, and conducted an exercise with two of that country's coast guard vessels while the Russian navy watched. The destroyer's last visit to the Black Sea was in late January.

Moscow's state news agency, Tass, reported Tuesday that the Russian Black Sea Fleet was "continuously tracking" the Donald Cook's movements.

This is the third time this year the Navy has sent a warship to the Black Sea following Russia's seizure of three Ukrainian vessels and arrest of 24 sailors in late November at the Kerch Strait. The U.S. and its allies have condemned the incident.

Navy officials say the ship will augment maritime security, help to ensure regional stability and boost the readiness

and capability of its Black Sea partners through a multi-national exercise.

These partners typically include Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia and Turkey.

"Each visit here affords us the unique opportunity to work with our regional maritime partners," Cmdr. Matthew Powel, commanding officer of the Donald Cook, said in a statement.

Moscow would view any U.S. warship in the region for any length of time as a provocation, said Emily Ferris, a research fellow at the Royal United Ser-

vices Institute.

"Given the recent incident in the Kerch Strait, the U.S. move to send a warship to the Black Sea will undoubtedly exacerbate tensions with Russia," she said.

Tensions have simmered in the region since Russia seized Crimea in 2014, and escalated last year when Russia captured the three Ukrainian vessels.

Russia claims the vessels trespassed in its territorial waters, while Ukraine says they were in international waters. Most of the world backs Ukraine.

Air Force updates deployment directive

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — All U.S. Air Force airmen who have had nondeployable status for more than a year will soon face a disability board or be considered for administrative separation as part of the service's implementation of the Pentagon's so-called "deploy or get out" policy.

A directive signed Tuesday by Air Force senior leaders states the service seeks to achieve a 95 percent or higher deployable rate within its units. The directive follows the October order by then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis for the Pentagon's military services to create guidelines meant to motivate servicemembers to retain their ability to deploy into combat after troops in nondeployable status ballooned to more than 11 percent in recent years.

"We expect all airmen to exercise personal accountability for their deployable status and to take the necessary steps to maintain their readiness," stated the memo, which was signed by Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson, Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein and Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Kaleth Wright. "...The defense

of our nation requires airmen and the Air Force be ready to deploy at all times."

Mattis' "deploy or get out" policy, which was rolled out one year ago and went into effect in October, was meant to motivate those thousands of troops who have remained in uniform despite being considered unable to deploy to support combat operations. Troops can be placed on nondeployable status for a variety of reasons including medical conditions, fitness problems and administrative issues.

In the Air Force, about 34,000 airmen were in nondeployable status in December, said Capt. Carrie Volpe, a service spokeswoman. However, the vast majority were in that status temporarily. Volpe estimated the new directive would affect only about 1,000 airmen, or about 0.5 percent of the force, who have been considered nondeployable for at least 12 months. Those individuals face separation.

The Air Force directive listed four requirements for its airmen to remain in deployable status. They must:

- Meet individual medical readiness standards, to include medical, dental and physical components.

- Be able to execute the wartime mission

requirements of their respective career fields, to include technical, educational and physical proficiency.

- Be current on the Air Force Fitness Assessment.

- Be considered a satisfactory participant in Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard duties, if applicable.

It also provided exemptions from facing separation for those who are unable to deploy due to a variety of reasons.

Those include airmen who are pregnant or postpartum, who are training or in a transient state, who are deployable with certain limitations, and those who are serving in positions exempted from deploying by the secretary of defense.

The Air Force policy also provides exemptions for those who have recently adopted a child, who are on a humanitarian assignment, who face pending legal actions, airmen who are sole survivor/surviving family members, or those who are deferred from hostile force zone service. Conscientious objectors, airmen considered absent without leave and those facing pending administrative separation are also exempt from the policy, the directive states.

Nearly 100 aircraft deploy to Guam for Cope North exercise

BY SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

Nearly 100 U.S., Japanese and Australian aircraft are training over the western Pacific Ocean as part of Cope North, an annual exercise that runs until March 8 out of Andersen Air Force Base, Guam.

Pacific Air Forces' largest multilateral exercise, which kicked off Monday, is designed to enhance air operations among the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps as well as the Japan Air Self-Defense Force and Royal Australian Air Force, according to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

More than 2,000 U.S. airmen, Marines and sailors are training alongside 850 Japanese and Australian counterparts, the

command said in a statement.

"Additionally, nearly 100 U.S., Japanese and Australian aircraft from 21 flying units will participate," the command said.

This week the troops are conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief training involving large-force employment, the command said.

"The exercise's focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief provides critical training to U.S. and allied forces that has a direct impact on the militaries' ability to support the region, including Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia," the command said.

Australia has deployed 16 aircraft and more than 450 personnel to participate in

Cope North, the RAAF said in a statement Tuesday.

"Twelve F/A-18A Hornets, an E-7A Wedgetail Airborne Early Warning and Control aircraft, two C-27J Spartans, a KC-30A Multi-Role Tanker Transport, a Combat Support Element and an Aeromedical Evacuation Team have deployed to the exercise," the statement said.

Group Capt. Nicholas Hogan, Australian commander for the exercise, said Cope North is an effective way to strengthen military alliances.

"The exercise will ... conclude with air combat and large force employment training, to refine our procedures and operate more effectively alongside our military partners in the region," he said in the statement.

USS Tulsa is newest US warship

Associated Press

TULSA, Okla. — A vessel that bears the name of Oklahoma's second-largest city has been commissioned as the newest warship in the U.S. Navy's fleet.

The USS Tulsa was commissioned on Saturday at a pier in San Francisco. The warship is an Independence-class littoral combat ship designed to patrol coastlines, the eighth ship of its kind in the Navy's fleet.

U.S. Sen. James Lankford, of Oklahoma, said the ship is one of the most advanced in the world. Lankford said the vessel does not have a traditional rudder or propeller and operates more like a catamaran and a jet ski with a high draft.

Report: Flynn pushed nuke project with Saudis

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senior White House officials pushed a project to share nuclear power technology with Saudi Arabia despite the objections of ethics and national security officials, according to a new congressional report citing whistleblowers within the Trump administration.

Lawmakers from both parties have expressed concerns that Saudi Arabia could develop nuclear weapons if the U.S. technology were transferred without proper safeguards.

The Democratic-led House oversight committee opened an investigation Tuesday into the claims by several unnamed whistleblowers who said they witnessed “abnormal acts” in the White House regarding the proposal to build dozens of nuclear reactors across the Middle Eastern kingdom.

The report raises concerns about whether some in a White House marked by

“chaos, dysfunction and backbiting” sought to circumvent national security procedures to push a Saudi deal that could financially benefit close supporters of the president.

The report comes at a time when lawmakers are increasingly uneasy with the close relationship between the Trump administration and Saudi Arabia, which has raised alarms even among members of the president’s party in Congress. President Donald Trump has made the kingdom a centerpiece of his foreign policy in the Middle East as he tries to further isolate Iran. In the process, he has brushed off criticism over the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and the Saudis’ role in the war in Yemen.

At the same time, Trump son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner is developing a Middle East peace plan that could include economic proposals for Saudi Arabia.

The White House did not immediately

respond to a request for comment.

According to the report, the nuclear effort was pushed by former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, who was fired in early 2017. Derek Harvey, a National Security Council official brought in by Flynn, continued work on the proposal, which has remained under consideration by the Trump administration.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, of Maryland, the chairman of the House Oversight and Reform Committee, announced the investigation Tuesday.

Relying on the whistleblower accounts, email communications and other documents, the committee’s report details how NSC and ethics officials repeatedly warned that the actions of Flynn and a senior aide could run afoul of federal conflicts of interest law and statutes governing the transfer of nuclear technology to foreign powers.

Trump confident he’ll prevail over lawsuit

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump declared Tuesday that he would prevail over a multistate lawsuit challenging his emergency declaration to pay for a U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Speaking to reporters at the White House, Trump said he expected to do “very well” against the suit, adding that he had an “absolute right” to make the declaration.

“I think in the end we’re going to be very successful with the lawsuit,” Trump said. “I actually think we might do very well, even in the 9th Circuit, because it’s an open

and closed case.”

A group of 16 states, including California, New York and Colorado, filed a lawsuit Monday against Trump’s emergency declaration. The lawsuit, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, alleges Trump’s declaration is unconstitutional.

All the states involved in the lawsuit have Democratic attorneys general.

Using a broad interpretation of his executive powers, Trump declared an emergency last week to obtain wall funding beyond the \$1.4 billion Congress approved for border security. The move allows the

president to bypass Congress to use money from the Pentagon and other budgets.

Trump’s use of the emergency declaration has drawn bipartisan criticism and is already facing a number of legal challenges.

Democrats are also planning to introduce a resolution disapproving of the declaration once Congress returns to session and it is likely to pass both chambers.

Several Republican senators are already indicating they would vote against Trump — though there do not yet appear to be enough votes to override a veto by the president.

Citizens ordered to mark drones with identification

Bloomberg

Responding to concerns from law enforcement and security agencies about the potential for concealed explosives, the U.S. government is ordering all civilian drones to add external markings so the owner can be more easily identified.

The regulation, which was posted Tuesday on a preview website for the Federal Register and takes effect Feb. 23, is part of an effort to bring more oversight to the rapidly growing hobby and commercial drone industry. With more than 1 million registered drone users and those numbers expanding rapidly, the Federal Aviation

Administration is trying to accommodate calls for expanded uses while also preserving safety and security.

On Jan. 14, the FAA announced a proposed framework for allowing expanded flights over crowds and populated areas. It’s also working on regulations that would mandate that drones broadcast a radio beacon identifying their owners and location, a condition insisted on by security agencies.

The regulation would require drone owners to place their registration number on the outside of their devices. When the FAA first required drone owners to register their aircraft in 2015, it said the number could be placed within the battery

compartment.

The FAA took the action because agencies such as the FBI and the Homeland Security Department raised concerns “regarding the risk a concealed explosive device poses to first responders who must open a compartment to find the small unmanned aircraft’s registration number,” the agency said in the rule.

Drone safety and security have been exacerbated by incidents like a disruption to flights into Liberty International Airport in Newark, N.J., on Jan. 22 after pilots on two flights spotted a suspected drone on their final approach path to the runway.

'Apex Legends' smashing 'Fortnite' download record

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For the first time since its meteoric rise, "Fortnite" is no longer a no-doubt victory royale atop the video game industry.

"Apex Legends" — a battle royale from Electronic Arts — has charged into the market and smashed "Fortnite" records for downloads and viewership since its release three weeks ago.

Tyler "Ninja" Blevins and other streaming stars have powered that surge, as has the emergence of an 18-year-old "Apex" superstar. Esports teams are already scrambling to sign talented players and invest long-term, while others are raising concerns about overcommitting to the suddenly volatile battle royale genre.

Developed by Respawn Entertainment and published by EA, "Apex" has shaken the industry by building on many of its shining successes. It has pulled popular elements from other battle royales — a type of video game where players are dropped into a map and fight in a last-man-standing format against up to 100 other gamers — while making a few key changes.

Like "Fortnite" and "PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds," "Apex" is free to download and play, making its money by selling outfits and other upgrades for use in the game. Among its key differences is that "Apex" players compete exclusively in teams of three and can choose characters with varying abilities.

The game also went hard after the existing battle royale audience. EA recruited Blevins, Richard "KingRichard" Nelson and other famous gamers, asking them to put down "Fortnite" and stream "Apex" following its release Feb. 4. Blevins alone has more than 13 million subscribers on Twitch.

"Apex" had 25 million downloads in its first week, crushing the "Fortnite" mark of 10 million over its first two weeks after launching in 2017.

Six days after the game launched, NRG Esports, which rosters teams across various video game titles, announced it was recruiting "Apex" players.

Coby "Dizzy" Meadows is an 18-year-old from Florida, and he is believed to be the best "Apex" player in the world. NRG signed him Feb. 12, and later that day, Meadows made major waves by killing 33 of his 59 opponents in one match — a viral moment that generated nearly 500,000 views on YouTube.

"Apex" smashed another "Fortnite" record that day: 8.28 million hours of "Apex" were streamed on Twitch, topping the "Fortnite" mark of 6.6 million from July 20, per The Esports Observer.

Putin warns US on adding to Europe missile count

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin sternly warned the United States against deploying new missiles in Europe, saying Wednesday that Russia will retaliate by fielding new weapons that will take just as little time to reach their targets.

While the Russian leader didn't say what specific new weapons Moscow could deploy, his statement further raised the ante in tense relations with Washington.

Speaking in his state of the nation address, Putin charged that the U.S. has abandoned a key arms control pact to free up its hands to build new missiles and tried to shift the blame for the move to Russia.

"Our American partners should have honestly said it instead of making unfounded accusations against Russia to justify their withdrawal from the treaty," Putin said.

The U.S. has accused Russia of breaching the 1987 Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces treaty by deploying a cruise missile that violates its limits — the accusations Moscow has rejected.

The INF treaty banned production, testing and deployment of land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 310 to 3,410 miles.

The intermediate-range weapons were seen as particularly destabilizing as they

take shorter time to reach their targets compared with the intercontinental ballistic missiles. That would leave practically no time for decision-makers, raising the likelihood of a global nuclear conflict over a false launch warning.

Putin reaffirmed that Russia will not be the first to deploy new intermediate-range missiles but warned of a quick retaliation if the U.S. puts such weapons in Europe.

"They will only take 10-12 minutes to reach Moscow," he said. "It's a very serious threat to us, and we will have to respond."

He didn't directly mention the U.S., but noted that the Russian response will be "asymmetrical" and involve new weapons that will reach the enemy's decision-making centers just as quickly.

"Russia will be forced to create and deploy new types of weapons that could be used not only against the territories where a direct threat to us comes from, but also against the territories where decision-making centers directing the use of missile systems threatening us are located," he said. "The capability of such weapons, including the time to reach those centers, will be equivalent to the threats against Russia."

Putin also claimed that Russia still wants friendly relations with Washington and remains open to arms control talks.

Push on to move F-22 training to Va.

(Newport News, Va.) Daily Press

The Virginia congressional delegation wants to land a training squadron of F-22 Raptors at Langley Air Force Base, a move that could add up to 800 jobs to the region.

In a letter to Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson, the lawmakers cite ample space at the Hampton installation for additional stealth fighters, combined with the region's longstanding support of the military.

Other advantages include nearby mid-Atlantic training ranges and a government audit that said the Air Force should consolidate its fleet into larger groups.

The Daily Press obtained a copy of the letter, dated Feb. 14 and signed by all Republicans and Democrats that make up the state's 13-member delegation. Sen. Mark Warner reportedly led the organizing effort.

The Air Force needs a new home for its F-22 flight and maintenance training squadron — essentially the F-22 schoolhouse — that was based at Tyndall Air

Force Base in Florida.

The base sustained heavy damage from Hurricane Michael. Plans are to rebuild, but the base would host the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter rather than the F-22.

Before the storm, Tyndall had the largest concentration of F-22s in the world. The eye of the storm traveled directly over the base's two runways and several hangars.

In December, the Air Force announced it would conduct a strategic search to determine the best location for the training squadron, known as the F-22 Flight and Maintenance Formal Training Unit.

The letter notes Langley was built to accommodate three Raptor squadrons before Congress curtailed production of the stealth fighter. A third squadron could be brought in at minimal cost to taxpayers.

The base — also known as Joint Base Langley-Eustis — is currently "underutilizing the air space and Air Force investment in ramp, hangar and operations support facilities," the letter states.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Response to marriage proposal is on target

NJ WAYNE — A New Jersey couple is planning on giving marriage a shot after a man surprised his girlfriend by proposing at an indoor shooting range.

Kara Crampton was taking target practice Sunday at Re-loaderz in Wayne when a target spun around and showed the message “Will you marry me?” with the option for her to either shoot the words “YES” or “NO.” The range’s owner created the target, making sure the “YES” area was much easier to hit.

The owner’s son is a friend of Crampton’s new fiancé, Jake Woodruff.

Crampton quickly accepted his proposal, then formally made her answer official later by putting three shots in the center of the “YES” target.

Razor blades placed on store’s shopping carts

NC SILER CITY — Police in North Carolina are looking for the people responsible for placing razor blades under the handles of shopping carts at a Walmart, injuring at least one person.

Citing a Siler City police press release, news outlets reported the blades were found Sunday. Police said the blades could have been part of a plan to shoplift.

Police released images from surveillance video of two male suspects.

It’s unclear how many shopping carts were affected.

Riders on gondolas at SeaWorld rescued

CA SAN DIEGO — Police said more than a dozen people trapped on a ride

at SeaWorld in San Diego were rescued.

San Diego police told FOX5 News that around six gondolas stopped functioning Monday night after a big gust of wind tripped a circuit breaker on “Bayside Skyride.” Authorities had estimated between 15 and 30 people were trapped, some of them in gondolas suspended above water. Sixteen were actually rescued.

The riders were lowered by harnesses and rescued by life-guard boats. They were then evaluated by medical crews.

SeaWorld said in a statement that it will conduct a thorough inspection of the ride prior to reopening.

Man sought in crash, theft at adult shop

OK TULSA — Police in Tulsa are searching for a man who crashed his car into the glass doors of an adult novelty shop, then ran inside and stole lingerie and sex toys.

Police said the heist at Hustler Hollywood happened about 3 a.m. Monday. It was captured on video. Employees discovered the damage later Monday morning when they came to work.

Police Officer Jeanne Pierce told Tulsa TV station KOTV that authorities believe the man knew the store’s layout because he ran directly to one section to steal the items, which were valued at \$300 to \$400. Pierce said the greater cost is likely the damage to the glass doors.

Authorities have not yet identified the man.

Activist: Plaque for former justice stolen

KS TOPEKA — A civil rights activist said a plaque honoring Thurgood Marshall was stolen from a

Topeka bridge named for the former U.S. Supreme Court justice.

It is the second time in a year that a plaque honoring a civil rights icon was pried loose from a Topeka bridge. In August 2018, a commemorative plaque was stolen from a bridge named for Ken Marshall, the first black person elected to the Kansas Legislature from Topeka.

Topeka police said the latest theft was reported Saturday but it isn’t clear when the plaque was taken.

Activist Sonny Scroggins said he will ask Topeka leaders to replace the stolen plaques, and is considering filing a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Justice Department.

Rescuers save hiker stuck in quicksand

UT SPRINGDALE — Authorities rescued a hiker who got stranded in a creek during winter weather at Zion National Park in Utah after his leg got stuck in quicksand.

Zion National Park said the man from Arizona and his companion were unable to free him after his leg got buried in quicksand Saturday afternoon.

The man’s friend left him with gear to keep warm and called 911 about three hours later once she reached an area with cell service. Both suffered from hypothermia.

Rescuers worked for two hours to free the hiker, then had to spend the night with him as 4 inches of snow fell overnight.

Eventually, a helicopter was used to take the hiker out of the area.

Big animal suspected in killing of 6 llamas

KY LOUISVILLE — Authorities believe a “large animal” is responsible

for an attack that killed six llamas on a farm near a zoo in Kentucky.

Louisville Llama Farm owner Caroline Willette told the Courier Journal she awoke Monday morning to blood and tufts of wool spread around her property. Five llamas were found dead with bite marks behind their ears and by their flanks, while a sixth was put down because of injuries.

At least two other llamas were injured. Willette said the attack caused at least \$10,000 in damage.

Willette doesn’t believe coyotes were responsible for the attack, as llamas are good at defending themselves and one of the animals killed weighed 500 pounds.

Rattlesnake winds up inside police vehicle

FL JACKSONVILLE BEACH — A rattlesnake in Florida ended up in the back of a police car.

The snake was being carried by a homeless man walking around Jacksonville Beach on Monday morning. Sgt. Larry Smith told local news stations the snake was 6 to 8 feet long.

When police stopped the man, they told him to throw the reptile into the back of their vehicle for safety.

In a WTLV-TV report, video shows a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission officer pulling the snake from the patrol car’s back seat. The rattles at the end of the snake’s tail can be heard shaking as the officer drops the snake into a plastic container.

The snake was relocated to a wooded area.

From wire reports

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Griffin enjoying career year in Detroit

Associated Press

DETROIT — Blake Griffin doesn't need to jump over any cars to be a hit in the Motor City.

A year after arriving in Detroit with his career at a crossroads, a more earthbound Griffin is doing all he can to shake the Pistons out of their decade-long malaise.

"He does a little bit of everything for us. Probably one of our better pick-and-roll players, passers, scorers, leader by example, just so many things," Detroit coach Dwane Casey said. "His basketball intellect, for me, is one that's been the most impressive of our players. I didn't know that about Blake, because when you think about him, you think about the high-flying dunker and the muscular guy in the post, but there's a lot more to that than just his dunking and athleticism."

A month shy of his 30th birthday, there are fewer above-the-rim highlights but Griffin's first full season with Detroit has been one of his best. He's

averaging a career-high 26.3 points per game while making strides as a perimeter shooter, and he earned his first All-Star selection since 2015.

Most importantly, he's been able to stay healthy, and although the Pistons still have a losing record, they're in the playoff race, largely because of Griffin.

"As a player, you always believe in yourself," Griffin said. "I knew I had another level to go to, and being healthy was part of that. ... But the beginning of the year, my goal isn't to only make the All-Star team. It's much more than that."

In July 2017, Griffin agreed to a \$171 million, five-year deal with the Clippers, the team that drafted him with the first overall pick in 2009. Less than a year later, he was abruptly traded — from glitzy Los Angeles to a Detroit franchise that hasn't won a playoff game since 2008. It was a risky move for the Pistons, given Griffin's high salary and the fact that he has only three seasons with more than

67 games played. They gave up a first-round draft pick in the trade, and when they missed the playoffs anyway, that was the end of Stan Van Gundy's tenure as coach and president of basketball operations.

For Griffin, it was an inauspicious start to the Detroit portion of his career, and there's been frustration this season, as well. The Pistons are 26-30, tied for the final postseason spot in the Eastern Conference. Even if they do make the playoffs, they don't look like a team ready to make a run.

But for Griffin individually, the season has been a significant step forward. The man who once pulled off a two-handed dunk while jumping over the front of a car is a bit less of an athletic sensation in Detroit, but the blue-collar elements of his game are still plenty effective. The 6-foot-10, 250-pound Griffin can muscle his way to the basket and draw fouls, and he gives the Pistons another tough rebounder alongside Andre Drummond.

Griffin is also leading the team in assists.

"I think for me, my job is to make his game as easy as possible on the offensive end. When I get him open, he usually makes the right plays," Drummond said. "It's a nightmare for teams. You've got to really pick your poison, who you really want to get going, and it's scary when we both get it going."

Griffin has expanded his offensive repertoire to include the three-point shot in recent years. He has already made a career-high 134 threes this season, shooting a credible 37 percent from long distance.

"It helps a lot, especially in today's NBA, with everybody spacing the floor a little bit more, and playing with a guy like Dre, who's so effective inside," Griffin said. "To be able to give him a little bit more space is a good thing. I always see guys working to expand their range, and when you do, you see them add years to their career."

Heisman winner Murray faces questions about height

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas — Now that Kyler Murray has decided to play in the NFL instead of reporting to spring training as a first-round draft pick by baseball's Oakland Athletics, the questions can shift to the Heisman Trophy winner's height.

The former Oklahoma star says everyone will get their answer at the NFL combine next week. And that was after Murray listed himself at 5-foot-10 Monday before accepting the Davey O'Brien Award as the nation's top college quarterback.

"I've been a 5-10 projected in the first (round), I mean, that's crazy to me, the fact that I'm already projected that high," Murray said. "I'm not over 6-foot. I haven't seen that since I've been alive."

The 21-year-old who won

three state championships and didn't lose a game as a high school quarterback in the Dallas area said football became a factor in his decision simply because he finally had a chance to play again.

After signing a contract for a \$4.66 million signing bonus as the ninth overall pick in June by Oakland, Murray led Oklahoma to the College Football Playoff in his only season as the starter while posting the second-best passer efficiency rating in Bowl Subdivision history.

Before throwing for 4,361 yards and 42 touchdowns and running for 1,001 yards and 12 scores, Murray's only extensive college experience was a rough freshman season at Texas A&M in 2015. After transferring to Oklahoma, he was the backup to 2017 Heisman winner Baker

Mayfield, the top pick in last year's draft.

"Obviously my career as far as the early stages of my college career, it wasn't looking too hot," said Murray, who like Mayfield lost in the CFP semifinals. "And then after this past season, it was to go in and kind of put myself in the best possible situation. I think I did pretty well."

Murray said he hasn't decided the specifics of his participation in the NFL combine, but Oklahoma coach Lincoln Riley believes his time in the 40-yard dash could be an eye-opener. Murray said it's been "two, three years" since he ran a 40, at 4.3 seconds.

Most of the attention will be on his height, however. Reminded before the O'Brien ceremony that the 1938 Heisman winner from TCU was 5-7,

Murray said he knew that and added, "So me and him have got something in common."

Given the obvious chance to clarify, he still declined to offer anything more specific than the already-mentioned 5-10.

"I don't wake up in the morning and measure myself so I don't know that," he said. "It's definitely not 5-7."

In the same setting a year earlier, Mayfield shot back at a question about whether he could go in the top 10 of the draft by saying his goal was to be the No. 1 overall choice.

After the Browns made that happen, Mayfield won the job early in the season and led Cleveland to seven wins in 2018 after the Browns were coming off a two-year record of 1-31. Now Murray will try to move up the draft board the same way Mayfield did, with a different set of issues to address.

Manfred confident market will pick up

Associated Press

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred predicts top free agents will all get deals and the second slow free-agent market won't have lasting significance.

"In some ways I feel like it's a little much ado about nothing if in fact those players all sign at the end of the day," he said Tuesday. "The season's going to go on. We're going to have the right players out there playing on the field, and it's kind of no harm, no foul."

Manny Machado agreed hours earlier to a \$300 million, 10-year deal with San Diego, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the deal was subject to a successful physical.

Machado's deal is a record for a free agent and the second-largest in baseball history behind Giancarlo Stanton's \$325 million, 13-year contract.

Machado can opt out after five years and become a free agent again, the person said.

Without confirming the deal, general partner Peter Seidler — a nephew of former Los Angeles Dodgers owner Peter O'Malley — spoke of what his ownership group wants to bring to San Diego, where the Padres play in a gem of a ballpark just off the bay.

"Ron and I, we love the city of San Diego, we love sports in San Diego, but we're also well aware of the history. There's

never been a championship from a major sports franchise in San Diego. ... We as an organization want to completely change that. We want our franchise to win year after year after year. And we're going to do whatever we can rationally do to help make that happen."

Bryce Harper, Dallas Keuchel and Craig Kimbrel remain on the market just ahead of the start of spring training games this week. Throughout the major leagues, players have criticized teams for not spending to land top available stars and started to push for significant changes in the collective bargaining agreement, which runs through the 2021 season.

"I do think are a little overblown right now," Manfred said. "I do think it would be helpful if we tried to not sensationalize the back and forth on the individual issues. I think that the dialogue is best conducted in a room between the bargaining parties."

Management has proposed on-field changes, such as a pitch clock and limits on relief pitchers. Union head Tony Clark and his members would like the designated hitter to expand to the National League and changes to the amateur draft to make rebuilding through the draft less attractive. They have criticized teams for failing to try to win now, and Clark on Monday questioned whether some teams justify the cost of their tickets.

"I would urge Tony and the players to save what they had

to say for the bargaining table, where we can hear it directly and we can address it and hopefully reach a positive solution for the industry," Manfred said. "I don't think it really helps to subject our fans to all this back and forth."

Manfred said there had been a split of opinion on whether rules changes are needed to counter offense-suffocating defensive shifts.

"I think there is substantial sentiment within the game for the idea that eliminating the shifts, or limiting the amount of shifting that could be done, might be a positive for the game," he said. "There is another group, however, who believes that the game will self-adjust in response to the shift and that we're better off leaving it alone. We're in the process of trying to get a consensus between ourselves and the players' association as to how to best handle that issue."

Management made the unilateral decision to experiment with pitch clocks during spring training and has the right to order them for the regular season but prefers to reach an agreement with the union.

Asked what he would like to see in five years, Manfred mentioned expansion.

"I would like baseball to be in the midst of exploring whether we could get to 32 teams either by adding additional teams in the United States but also open to the idea of Canada, Mexico as possibilities," he said. "I think

32 opens up the opportunity for a substantial rethinking of our format and postseason format, meaning realignment, as well as reconstruction of divisions. Maybe even geographical realignment."

He said management and the union continue to discuss how to handle service time for young players. There remains a pending grievance over the Chicago Cubs' Kris Bryant, who was brought up in 2015 on the day his free-agent eligibility was pushed back from after the 2020 season to after 2021. There has been speculation Toronto will act similarly this year with Vladimir Guerrero Jr.

"Clubs have always — and it should be this way — had the right to decide who's going to be on their roster at a particular point in time," Manfred said. "It's hard to figure out a mechanism that you can impose on top of that really fundamental right that gets you to the result that you may want to achieve."

He praised the use of relief pitchers as openers by Tampa Bay and Oakland last year but said lesser prominence for starting pitchers, often used by teams for marketing, is a concern.

"They're thinking outside the box, they're innovating and in most businesses, innovation is seen as a good thing," he said. "It is an example of smaller-market clubs trying to put themselves in a position to be as competitive as possible."

Former Dodgers great Newcombe dies at 92

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Don Newcombe, the hard-throwing Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher who was one of the first black players in the major leagues and who went on to win the Rookie of the Year, Most Valuable Player and Cy Young awards, has died. He was 92.

The team confirmed that Newcombe died Tuesday morning after a lengthy illness.

"Don Newcombe's presence and life established him as a role model for Major Leaguers across the country," Dodgers

President Stan Kasten said. "He was a constant presence at Dodger Stadium, and players always gravitated to him for his endless advice and leadership. The Dodgers meant everything to him, and we are all fortunate he was a part of our lives."

Newcombe, like Dodgers teammate Jackie Robinson, was signed by Branch Rickey from the Negro Leagues and went on to make a huge mark in the major leagues.

"Newk" was a fierce presence on the mound, a 6-foot-4 and 225-pound bear of a man who stared down hitters and backed up anyone foolish enough to crowd the plate.

He was a four-time All-Star and won 20 games three different times.

"Don Newcombe had a ton of talent and he was a great competitor," former Dodgers manager Tommy Lasorda, who was a teammate of Newcombe's, said in a statement. "He was a helluva pitcher and he was one of the best hitting pitchers I have ever seen."

His greatest year was 1956 when he went 27-7 and won both the Cy Young Award, then only given to one pitcher for both leagues, and the National League MVP award.

College basketball roundup

Baylor knocks off No. 19 Iowa State

Associated Press

AMES, Iowa — Iowa State might have blown its shot at the Big 12 title because it suddenly and somewhat inexplicably can't win in Ames.

Jared Butler scored 17 points, Freddie Gillespie had 14 and Baylor upset No. 19 Iowa State 73-69 on Tuesday night.

Makia Mason scored 14 points on 18 shots in his return from a toe injury for the Bears (17-9, 8-5 Big 12). They outrebounded Iowa State 44-28 and grabbed 18 offensive boards over the smaller Cyclones, who've dropped back-to-back games at Hilton Coliseum — dubbed

"Hilton Magic" because of how well the Cyclones typically play there.

"They came in here and kicked our butts," Iowa State coach Steve Prohm said. "We've got to find a way to be tougher. That's the bottom line."

Iowa State's 6-3 road record is the best in the Big 12.

But for the third time this season, the Cyclones lost a home game they were favored to win.

After trailing by 10 points midway through the first half, Iowa State went ahead 52-50 on Marial Shayok's three-point play with 11:45 left.

No. 4 Kentucky 66, Missouri 58: PJ Washington and Tyler Herro scored 18 points each as the visiting Wildcats slogged past the Tigers.

No. 5 Tennessee 58, Vanderbilt 46: Grant Williams had 14 points and 11 rebounds, and the host Volunteers beat the Commodores in their first game since losing the No. 1 ranking.

No. 15 Purdue 48, Indiana 46: Matt Haarms tipped in a basket with 3.2 seconds remaining to lift the Boilermakers over the host Hoosiers.

No. 16 Florida State 77, Clemson 64: Mfiondu Ka-

bengele had 19 points and 11 rebounds, and the visiting Seminoles set a program record with their eighth consecutive Atlantic Coast Conference victory in a win over the Tigers.

No. 24 Maryland 66, No. 21 Iowa 65: Bruno Fernando scored 11 points, including the last two on a putback with 7.8 seconds left, to lift the Terrapins to a win over the host Hawkeyes.

No. 25 Buffalo 114, Ohio 67: Jayvon Graves scored a career-high 26 points and the Bulls used a record-setting shooting performance to cruise to a win over the Bobcats for their 23rd straight home win.

NHL roundup

Miller, Lightning extend winning streak to 7 games

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — J.T. Miller had a goal and an assist, and the Tampa Bay Lightning used a fast start to win their seventh straight, beating the Philadelphia Flyers 5-2 on Tuesday night.

Alex Killorn, Mikhail Sergachev and Yanni Gourde also scored, and Ryan McDonagh added an empty-netter for Tampa Bay (46-11-4, 96 points), which entered 15 points ahead of Calgary for the most in the league.

Louis Domingue made 28 saves in place of Andrei Vasilevskiy, who rested after making 39 stops in the Lightning's 5-1 win at Columbus on Monday night. Domingue improved to 19-4.

"Any coach will tell you it's great to have good goaltending and it's great to have depth, and we have them both," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

Oskar Lindblom and Travis Konecny scored for Philadelphia, which lost for just the third time in the last 15 contests.

Blues 3, Maple Leafs 2: Ryan O'Reilly scored 34 seconds into overtime and host St. Louis beat Toronto for its franchise-record 11th straight win.

Jaden Schwartz and Colton Parayko also scored and Tyler Bozak had two assists for the Blues. Jordan Binnington made 29 saves to win his ninth straight, extending the longest winning streak in franchise history for a rookie goaltender.

Predators 5, Stars 3: Roman Josi scored the go-ahead goal with 12:25 to play and added an empty-netter to lift visiting Nashville over Dallas.

Josi skated from behind the net into the slot, and his wrist shot hit defenseman Esa Lindell's skate and popped over goalie Anton Khudobin. Nashville won for the second time in six games to move within a point of Central Division leader Winnipeg.

Penguins 4, Devils 3: Bryan Rust scored a tiebreaking goal midway through the second period and visiting Pittsburgh continued its playoff push and avoided the embarrassment

of being swept by lowly New Jersey.

Defenseman Chad Ruhwedel, Nick Bjugstad and Zach Aston-Reese also scored for Pittsburgh, which has won four of its last five in its bid to make the playoffs for the 13th straight year. The streak is the longest active playoff run in the NHL.

Ducks 4, Wild 0: Ryan Miller made 31 saves for his 44th career shutout as visiting Anaheim beat Minnesota.

Jakob Silfverberg, Corey Perry, Ryan Kesler and Hampus Lindholm scored to help Anaheim get its third win in four games.

Rangers 2, Hurricanes 1: Vladislav Namestikov scored the tiebreaking goal early in the third period, giving visiting New York a win over Carolina.

Connor Brickley also scored for the Rangers, who earned a split of a four-game road trip and handed the Hurricanes just their third loss this month. Henrik Lundqvist stopped 43 shots to get his 17th win of the season.

Canadiens 3, Blue Jackets 2: Tomas Tatar scored in the third period to lift host Montreal over Columbus.

The victory was Montreal's first since Feb. 4 and ended a four-game skid. Paul Byron and Max Domi also scored, and Carey Price made 31 saves.

Panthers 4, Sabres 2: Jonathan Huberdeau had two goals and an assist to lead host Florida over Buffalo.

Aleksander Barkov had a goal and two assists, Jayce Hawryluk also scored and Frank Vatrano had two assists for the Panthers. James Reimer made 32 saves in his third straight start. The Panthers are 9-4-0 in their past 13 games.

Coyotes 3, Oilers 2 (SO): Vinnie Hinostroza scored in regulation and got the winner in the fourth round of the shootout to lift visiting Arizona over short-handed Edmonton.

Josh Archibald also scored for the Coyotes, who have won four of their last six. Darcy Kuemper stopped 35 shots through overtime and then three of the four attempts in the tiebreaker.