

STARS AND STRIPES®

Thursday, February 6, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Trump unleashes fury in wake of acquittal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Exulting in his impeachment acquittal, President Donald Trump took a victory lap Thursday, unleashing his fury against those who tried to remove him from office while looking ahead to his reelection campaign.

Trump, speaking to a room full of supporters at the White House, declared the impeachment proceedings a “disgrace” and complained anew that it was “a very unfair situation,” echoing his broadsides hours earlier that stunned the crowd at an annual prayer breakfast.

“It was evil, it was corrupt,” Trump declared at the White House. “This should never ever happen to another president, ever.”

“We went through hell, unfairly. We did nothing wrong,” he continued.

As Trump spoke, nearly

every inch of the East Room was packed with supporters. Among them: Republican senators who cast some of the votes to acquit him, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Rep. Chuck Grassley, several Cabinet members, including Attorney General William Barr and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, and staunch House allies including Reps. Jim Jordan, Devin Nunes and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy.

Earlier, speaking from a stage where he was joined by congressional leaders, including Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who led the impeachment charge against him, Trump shattered the usual veneer of bipartisanship at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington.

“As everybody knows, my family, our great country and your president have been put

through a terrible ordeal by some very dishonest and corrupt people,” Trump said at the annual event. His airing of grievances came hours before his East Room address.

“They have done everything possible to destroy us and by so doing very badly hurt our nation,” said Trump, who triumphantly held up copies of two newspapers with banner “ACQUITTED” headlines as he took the stage.

His remarks were especially jarring and whiplash-inducing coming after a series of Scripture-quoting speeches, including a keynote address by Arthur Brooks, a Harvard professor and president of a conservative think tank, who had bemoaned a “crisis of contempt and polarization” in the nation and urged those gathered to “love your enemies.”

“I don’t know if I agree with

you,” Trump said as he took the microphone, and then he proceeded to demonstrate it.

“I don’t like people who use their faith as justification for doing what they know is wrong,” he said in an apparent reference to Utah Sen. Mitt Romney, a longtime Trump critic who cited his faith in becoming the only Republican to vote for Trump’s removal.

“Nor do I like people who say, ‘I pray for you’ when you know that is not so,” he said, in a reference to Pelosi, who has offered that message for the president when the two leaders have sparred publicly.

Pelosi said later that Trump’s remarks were “so completely inappropriate, especially at a prayer breakfast.” She took particular issue with his swipe at Romney’s faith and said that, yes, she does pray for the president.

Esper sets focus for 2021 budget request

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars And Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon’s proposed budget for fiscal year 2021 is meant to ensure that the Defense Department can compete militarily with its great-power competitors, China and Russia, Defense Secretary Mark Esper told senior leaders in a memorandum.

The budget request “supports irreversible implementation of the [2018] National Defense Strategy” by building a path to a more modern, combat-ready force, Esper wrote in the Jan. 27 memo. The memo was sent to the civilian secretaries of the Pentagon’s three military departments and their

top deputies, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the four-star commanders of the 11 combatant commands.

Esper singled out four primary areas for those individuals to focus on during congressional testimony to defend the forthcoming budget request:

- It would invest heavily in increasing military combat readiness and modern weaponry needed against a near-peer adversary.

- It would strengthen and build military partnerships and alliances around the world.

- It would reform the Pentagon for “greater performance and accountability.”

- It would support troops and their families.

“Each component should ensure that [those] themes are incorporated into oral and written statements to our oversight committees,” Esper wrote in the memo, which was obtained by Stars and Stripes on Wednesday.

Esper wrote that the forthcoming budget request would prioritize new spending to modernize the U.S. nuclear forces, seen as the country’s No. 1 deterrent.

The request includes funding for the expected build-out of the Space Force, which was established in late 2019 with plans to grow to more than 10,000 troops through the next five years. It also funds efforts to create a “Joint Warfight-

ing Concept,” meant to allow the military services and their weapons systems to work better together on the battlefield.

The request would divert funding from older “legacy” weapons systems that the U.S. military has used for decades in order to better fund emerging technology, including hypersonic and directed energy weapons, artificial intelligence and autonomous platforms.

In the memo, Esper calls for growing American partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, considered critical to counter China’s growing economic and military influence around the globe. He also commits to “forming an enduring Middle East coalition.”

US-Iraqi bond not broken, but straining

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — A new watchtower rose over an American military base in northern Iraq, and cranes lifted hefty slabs of concrete to reinforce the barricades in beefed-up protections. The danger, soldiers there said, came not from the constellation of militant sleeper cells embedded in the landscape but further afield in Iran.

U.S. forces in Iraq have been on guard for retaliation by Iran or its Shiite militia allies since the U.S. killed Iran's top general in Iraq with an airstrike in Baghdad last month. The Jan. 3 strike also fueled a wave of outrage among Iraq's Shiite leadership and intensified demands that American troops leave the country.

Since then, Iraqi leaders have scaled back the saber-rattling rhetoric. But behind closed doors, the bitterness has poisoned the partnership. The government told the Iraqi military not to seek U.S. help in operations fighting Islamic State, two senior Iraqi military officials told The Associated Press — a sign that authorities are serious about rethinking the strategic relationship.

At stake are vital U.S.-provided weapons, military tech-

nologies and aircraft that have been key in countering the threat of ISIS militants trying to make a comeback in northern and western Iraq. The prospect of losing that help is one reason why Iraqi politicians have cooled their demands for American forces to go immediately. Senior Iraqi military officials oppose a withdrawal.

"To us the American presence is like the electricity network in a house," said a brigadier general stationed in western Iraq, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media. "If the light is turned off the whole place goes dark."

In the wake of the U.S. strike that killed Iran's Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and a senior Iraqi militia commander, Iraq's parliament passed a non-binding resolution demanding the government force out the Americans. Tens of thousands marched in an anti-U.S. rally inspired by a radical cleric, while Iraq's outgoing premier, Adel Abdul-Mahdi, openly stated that the troops must go.

American forces had to halt joint operations with the Iraqi military against ISIS after the strike, a pause that would last for three weeks. In the interim, the U.S. troops fortified bases

against potential retaliation by Iran or Iraqi Shiite militias — like the new tower and beefed-up barricades at a base visited recently by the AP in the northern Iraqi city of Irbil.

About 5,200 U.S. soldiers are stationed in Iraqi bases to support local troops fighting ISIS militants, part of a larger international coalition invited by the Iraqi government in 2014.

But since then, Western officials say Iraqi authorities have taken no concrete measures to hasten a withdrawal plan.

"I'd say with virtually all of the Shiite political party leaders there's been behind closed doors and in private meetings a much more thoughtful approach on how they deal with this and a desire on their part to maintain a relationship and a coalition partnership that they regard as essential for Iraq," said a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

In a Cabinet session, Abdul-Mahdi said it was up to the next government to see through Parliament's resolution. Prime Minister-designate Mohammed Allawi, a former communications minister, has not made his policy known.

Western diplomats were told that Iraq had formed a commit-

tee to study the issue of America's troop presence in Iraq, but two Iraqi officials said there was no official sign off from Abdul-Mahdi formally creating such a committee. James Jeffrey, special envoy for the global coalition to defeat ISIS, said, speaking of the committee, "there has not been any real engagement," in remarks to reporters in Washington on Jan. 23.

Washington has responded to Iraq's requests to initiate troop withdrawals with blunt refusal, even threatening sanctions that could cripple Iraq's economy.

A full-scale U.S. withdrawal would bring a major setback in Iraqi capabilities to fight ISIS that Iraqi military officers acknowledge. The U.S. withdrew from the country in 2011, only for the Iraqi military to collapse in the face of the 2014 blitz by ISIS that overran the north and west. As a result, the government invited the Americans back.

"The Iraqi forces present in western Iraq need continuous air support and logistical support," said the CTS official. "These are provided to us by coalition forces, especially the U.S. If they are taken out, we will be paralyzed."

DOD still deciding on name for Space Force members

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars And Stripes

WASHINGTON — The newly established Space Force will grow from one member to an estimated 15,000 to 16,000 troops in the coming years, but it remains unclear what Space Force members will be called.

Space Force planners are taking the naming of their troops very seriously, said Air Force Lt. Gen. David Thompson, who is assigned as the vice commander of the Space Force.

"It's something we've spent some serious time and energy on," Thompson told reporters Wednesday at the Pentagon. "There are a couple of really strong options on what we might be called and some

pretty strong opinions. What we'd like to do is ensure we've thought as broadly as we can ... and consider what that ought to be before we land on it."

Planners have sought guidance from the language department at the Air Force Academy, from the Defense Language Institute and they have conducted crowdsourcing with troops expected to transfer into the Space Force to determine what their service's equivalent will be to soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen.

They have made a few determinations on what Space Force members will not be called. Thompson ruled out naming them "spacemen" or "space cadets." He declined to identify names that officials are

considering.

It is just one aspect of many unknowns that remain in the development of the first new military service established since the Air Force's creation in 1948. The service aims to be much smaller than the others, built almost exclusively of forces focused entirely on space operations. It will rely heavily on the Air Force to provide support troops, such as medical, logistics and security troops, Thompson said.

But it will still be months before the Space Force has actual troops. Now, about 16,000 personnel — about 3,400 Air Force officers, 6,200 enlisted airmen and some 8,000 civilians — are assigned to the Space Force but remain a part of the Air Force.

Report: Heavy forces are better at deterring strife

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Ground troops based overseas with tanks and artillery are better at preventing conflict than their light infantry counterparts, a study said after examining more than 70 years of military deployments to determine what best deters adversaries.

In its report — “Understanding the Deterrent Impact of U.S. Overseas Deployments” — the research group Rand Corp. also found that when the military surges forces toward a flashpoint, it’s rare for fighting to break out.

“Despite these risks, the historical record suggests that very few crises escalate when the United States deploys forces to the crisis region. ... These effects are particularly strong for ground forces, where no crises have escalated to major confrontation or war, and for air forces, where only one crisis has escalated,” the report said.

The clearest evidence for achieving deterrence was connected to “heavy ground forces,” which included armored units and those with air defense capabilities.

“The effects of these two types of forces were almost consistently positive, strongly statistically significant, and robust to multiple model specifi-

cations,” the report said.

There was less evidence to show that mobile, rotational forces deter as effectively. A possible reason is they “represent a lesser degree of high-level or long-term U.S. commitment or possibly because measuring their effects is more difficult,” the report said.

Light ground forces, which include airborne and special operations units stationed inside the borders of the ally or partner to be defended, could be counterproductive to deterrence, Rand said. Those units were “associated with an increased likelihood of militarized disputes, including those of both lower and higher intensity, though not including war.”

Rand said more analysis is needed to understand why that could be the case, but one possibility is that light forces represent “a more rapidly deployable capability that provokes U.S. adversaries without representing sufficient capabilities to deter.”

The analysis also showed “little, if any, evidence for the deterrent impact of air and naval forces,” the report said.

The Rand report comes as the Pentagon is reviewing whether commands overseas are resourced to deal with the military’s top priority of countering China and Russia, even as thousands of troops remain on alert in the Middle East amid tensions with Iran.

Submarine builder to hire thousands to match orders

Associated Press

WARWICK, R.I. — Defense contractor General Dynamics Electric Boat will need to hire thousands more employees over the next decade as it ramps up submarine production, the company’s president said Monday.

Electric Boat President Kevin Graney met with elected officials in Connecticut and Rhode Island for an annual legislative update. The company’s headquarters is in Groton, Conn., and its manufacturing facility is in North Kingstown, R.I.

At the Warwick, R.I., meeting, Graney said the company currently has nearly 17,000 employees, of which 70% are based in Connecticut — a level of employment not seen since 1993. Electric Boat will need about 20,000 employees around 2030 to build two classes of submarines. That will require hiring about 18,000 people to increase the headcount and account for attrition, he added.

Electric Boat currently builds Virginia-class fast-attack submarines under a teaming agreement with Newport

News Shipbuilding in Virginia. The U.S. Navy awarded the largest shipbuilding contract in its history in December, ordering nine more attack submarines for a total of \$22.2 billion.

Electric Boat is the prime contractor for a new class of ballistic-missile submarines, the Columbia class. Construction is expected to begin on the first ship, out of 12, in October.

With both submarine classes under construction, it will be a level of submarine production not seen since the Cold War, Graney said.

As the company has grown in recent years, some attack submarines have been delivered to the Navy late and there was a welding issue in 2018 with a subcontractor.

Electric Boat is focused on the training of new employees and supervisors to emphasize the company’s culture, and reaching out to the growing supplier base to ensure quality, Graney said. It is also doing more outreach to schools to get students interested in shipbuilding, beginning in elementary school, he added.

Man charged with hiring Marines to transport immigrants

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — Federal prosecutors have filed a conspiracy charge against a man accused of recruiting and paying Marines and other United States citizens to transport unauthorized immigrants throughout California’s San Diego County shortly after they crossed from Mexico into the U.S.

The charge against Francisco Saul Rojas-Hernandez is connected with a scheme that entangled some two dozen

Camp Pendleton Marines, at least 13 of whom left the Corps in the wake of human trafficking and drug accusations. Military prosecutors dropped most of the charges in the high-profile case late last year after a judge ruled the mass arrest of 16 Marines in front of their 800-person battalion last summer was unlawful.

Rojas-Hernandez is accused of conspiring with the Marines and others to transport the unauthorized immigrants within the U.S. “for financial gain,” ac-

cording to a criminal complaint filed last month in U.S. District Court. NBC7 first reported the charge against Rojas-Hernandez on Wednesday.

An attorney for the defendant did not immediately respond Wednesday night to a message seeking comment.

According to prosecutors, investigators first became aware of the scheme involving the Camp Pendleton personnel on July 3, when U.S. Border Patrol agents arrested two Marines for allegedly picking up three

unauthorized immigrants near Jacumba Hot Springs.

During questioning, those two Marines said a man they knew as “Rojas” had paid them, “recruited them and organized the smuggling operation,” according to a probable cause statement written by Katelyn Thompson with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service.

One of the Marines identified Rojas-Hernandez when shown a photo lineup, according to the document.

DNC calls for 'recanvass' of Iowa results

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pete Buttigieg and Bernie Sanders are nearly tied in the Iowa Democratic caucuses, with nearly all results counted in a contest marred by technical issues and reporting delays.

The race remained too early to call early Thursday with 97% of precincts reporting. Party officials were scrambling to verify the remaining results three days after Iowans gathered at caucus sites across the state to begin choosing which Democrat will take on President Donald Trump in November.

A new batch of results released just after midnight narrowed the margin between Buttigieg, the former mayor of South

Bend, Ind., and Sanders, the progressive senator from Vermont. Buttigieg has a lead of three state delegate equivalents out of 2,098 counted.

The deadlocked contest gives both Buttigieg and Sanders a burst of momentum as they seek to pull away from the crowded field. The nearly complete results show them leading Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren, with former Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Amy Klobuchar trailing behind.

But the results in Iowa were muddied by the stunning breakdown of the caucus reporting process in a state that traditionally kicks off presidential nominating contests. Iowa officials initially attributed a delay

in reporting results to technical problems with an app that precinct chairs were supposed to use to record votes, then to backlogs as those volunteers tried to call the party to submit their totals.

Even as the total number of results ticked up throughout the day Wednesday, obstacles remained. Some tally sheets were making their way to party headquarters in Des Moines through the mail, which contributed to the delay.

Much of the political world has already shifted its attention to next-up New Hampshire, which holds the first primary election in the Democrats' 2020 nomination fight on Tuesday. Both Buttigieg and Sanders are leading contenders there, as well.

China opens 2nd hospital as virus deaths top 560

Associated Press

BEIJING — China on Thursday finished building a second new hospital to isolate and treat patients of a virus that has killed more than 560 people and continues to spread, disrupting travel and people's lives and fueling economic fears.

A first group of patients was expected to start testing a new antiviral drug, as China also moved people with milder symptoms into makeshift hospitals at sports centers, exhibition halls and other public spaces.

The health care system in the central city of Wuhan, where the outbreak was first detected in December, has been overwhelmed with the thousands of ill patients. A new, 1,500-bed hospital specially built for

virus patients opened days after a 1,000-bed hospital with prefabricated wards and isolation rooms began taking patients.

Other treatment centers had tight rows of simple cots lining cavernous rooms. And Wuhan had another 132 quarantine sites with more than 12,500 beds, according to the official Xinhua News Agency.

Chinese health authorities reported 563 deaths and another sharp jump in the number of confirmed cases to 28,018. Outside mainland China, at least 260 cases have been confirmed, including two deaths in Hong Kong and the Philippines.

Hospital workers in Hong Kong demanding a shutdown of the border with the mainland were on strike for a fourth day. Hong Kong's leader Carrie Lam announced a

14-day quarantine of all travelers entering Hong Kong from the mainland starting Saturday, but the government has refused to seal the border entirely.

A Hong Kong medical union warned that its 20,000 members could resign en masse if the city's Hospital Authority refuses to speak with them over their demands. It estimated 7,000 were on strike and said those who were working were worried about their safety.

Xinhua said clinical trials for the antiviral drug Remdesivir have been approved and the first group of patients is expected to start taking the drug on Thursday. Word of the trials had boosted the stock price of the drug's maker, American biotechnology company Gilead Sciences Inc.

Prosecutors rest case after Weinstein accuser returns

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Prosecutors in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial rested their case Thursday after more than two weeks of testimony punctuated by harrowing accounts from six women who say he ignored pleas of "no, no, no" and excused his behavior as a Hollywood norm.

"The people rest, judge," Assistant District Attorney Joan Illuzzi-Orbon said, moving the closely watched celebrity trial one step closer to a verdict.

Now Weinstein's lawyers will start calling witnesses of their own. They haven't said whether Weinstein himself will testify. Doing so could bring big risks because prosecutors would be able to grill him about each of the allegations that jurors

have already heard about in vivid detail.

Among the witnesses the defense is expected to call is a psychologist who specializes in human memory. The defense is looking to raise doubts about the women's recollections of encounters that in some cases are more than a decade or two old.

Weinstein, 67, maintains that any sexual encounters were consensual.

The criminal charges at the trial in New York City are based on two allegations: that Weinstein raped a woman in March 2013 and that he forced oral sex on another woman in 2006.

The allegations against Weinstein helped fuel the #MeToo movement. If convicted, he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

Prosecutors ended their case after the last of the other accusers allowed to testify finished telling jurors about an encounter with the disgraced movie mogul in 2013.

Lauren Marie Young, a model from suburban Philadelphia, testified that Weinstein invited her to his Beverly Hills hotel room, lured her to the bathroom, stripped off his clothes, pulled down her dress and groped her breast.

Additional women, including Young, have been allowed to testify as prosecutors attempt to show there was a practiced method to Weinstein's attacks, including inviting women to his hotel room to discuss business, then disrobing and demanding sexual favors.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Bag Full of Drugs' label leads to arrests

FL MIAMI — Two men charged with drug trafficking could have done a better job hiding their wares than using a package labeled "Bag Full of Drugs," Florida authorities said.

Ian Simmons and Joshua Reinhardt, both 34, were pulled over in Santa Rosa County after a trooper clocked them going 95 mph, according to a Florida Highway Patrol arrest report.

The trooper determined that Reinhardt was the subject of an active felony warrant for violation of probation in Orange County. He requested backup.

A Santa Rosa County Sheriff's deputy arrived to assist, and a K-9 alerted to the presence of contraband in the vehicle, the arrest report said. Authorities found approximately 75 grams of methamphetamine, 1.36 kilograms of the date-rape drug GHB, 1 gram of cocaine, 3.6 grams of fentanyl, 15 MDMA tablets and drug paraphernalia.

School removes dolls of black figures from racks

MI EAST LANSING — A performing arts center at Michigan State University removed a gift shop display featuring dolls depicting prominent black figures that were hanging from a tree-like rack, said school officials, who added that they will provide racial bias training for workers and volunteers.

University spokeswoman Emily Gerkin Guerrant apologized in a statement, adding that "people were hurt and offended" regardless of the intent of the display at the Wharton Center for Performing Arts.

The felt ornaments hung from the tree-shaped rack depicted figures such as former Presi-

dent Barack Obama, first lady Michelle Obama and Prince. Graduate student Krystal Rose Davis-Dunn, who came to the center for a jazz concert after a day of meetings with university leaders to discuss boosting equality and diversity on campus, asked employees if they saw anything wrong with the displays, but they did not.

Man accused of stealing from scholarship fund

MI BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP — A man was charged with stealing \$697,000 from a scholarship fund for caddies at one of Michigan's most exclusive golf clubs, authorities said.

Problems were discovered last summer during a review of the Oakland Hills Caddie Scholarship Trust, the Oakland County sheriff's office said.

Craig Maass, 60, was president of the trust. He was charged last week with six counts of embezzlement and remains in jail on a \$700,000 bond.

Police: Man stole \$17K in goods on solo shift

CT HAMDEN — Police in Connecticut are trying to identify a man they say got a job at a gas station and proceeded to steal \$17,000 worth of merchandise and cash on his first, and only, solo overnight shift before disappearing.

The man also stole his employment folder, which contained his personal information, so the store's owner does not even know the worker's name, Hamden police said in a statement.

The owner told investigators he used an app to view the store security cameras and noticed that the new employee had left.

The owner went to the store and determined that the work-

er had stolen lottery tickets, 89 boxes of cigarettes and money worth a total of more than \$17,000.

Thieves target property in self-storage units

AK FAIRBANKS — Thieves targeting self-storage units in Fairbanks stole more than a half-million dollars in property in the last three months, according to Alaska State Troopers.

Ten to 15 units were hit at multiple storage facilities, KTVF-TV reported. In one case, thieves took precious metals valued at more than \$300,000.

At one storage business, thieves broke into one storage unit and knocked down walls to access other units, said trooper Sgt. Brian Zeisel.

Police arrest man they say set woman on fire

NC KINSTON — Police in North Carolina arrested a man accused of dousing a woman in flammable liquid and lighting her on fire while she drove alone in her car.

Venice Taylor, 41, was taken into custody hours later, during a traffic stop in Kinston, news outlets reported.

Khloe McNeal, 24, of Kinston was found on a sidewalk with severe burns on her upper body after a bystander flagged down a police officer, interim Kinston Police Chief Tim Dilday said.

McNeal was able to tell police that she was driving and came to a stop when a man approached her car, threw a flammable liquid on her and set her on fire. Investigators said they don't think Taylor knew the victim.

Prison guards find liquor ahead of Super Bowl

CA DUBLIN — Deputies at a San Francisco Bay Area jail confiscated 200 gallons of prison-made liquor that inmates were making for a Super Bowl party, a sheriff's official said.

Deputies found the liquor Saturday at the Santa Rita Jail in Dublin before Super Bowl Sunday when the San Francisco 49ers lost 31-20 to the Kansas City Chiefs, Sgt. Ray Kelly, spokesman for the Alameda County Sheriff's Office said.

Known as "pruno," the illicit alcoholic beverage is fermented from leftover fruit, sugar and juice with a little bread to provide the yeast and made in sealed plastic bags.

"It smells horrible and can be toxic and pose serious health risks," Kelly said.

Man sues police, city for forced urinal licking

HI HONOLULU — A homeless man is suing the Honolulu Police Department and the city after he said officers forced him to lick a urinal in a public restroom.

Samuel Ingall was seeking shelter in the restroom in January 2018 when one of the officers told him in an "aggressive tone" that the "only way he could avoid arrest was by licking the urinal in the bathroom," the lawsuit said.

Another officer stood in the doorway, propping open the door, then closed it so they wouldn't be caught on video, according to the lawsuit.

From wire reports

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NASCAR heading into season of change

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — The sky isn't falling — or at least it doesn't feel that way — as NASCAR heads into the first of two seasons full of change.

In the three months since Kyle Busch won his second championship, NASCAR took its awards ceremony to Nashville, Tenn., and was eagerly embraced. The Hall of Fame ceremony last month focused on Joe Gibbs and his elite organization, which won a record 19 of 36 races last season as Busch earned Joe Gibbs Racing its fifth Cup Series title.

Drivers will return to the track at Daytona International Speedway on Saturday and the season-opening Daytona 500 is Feb. 16.

"We're coming off of a very good year, I felt like last year, where we're really getting some momentum back," NASCAR Chairman Jim France said. "It's exciting now, going into this coming year."

Since replacing his nephew as head of the family business in August 2018, Jim France has been a steady guide for a series trying to stop a slide in every important metric. Attendance and television ratings may have finally bottomed out, but sponsorship dollars are as hard to find as ever and cost cutting is a major priority across the entire industry.

So the last full season for seven-time NASCAR champion Jimmie Johnson is also the last year for the current race car. The "Next Gen" car is on schedule to race in 2021, and the project is expected to trim millions from team budgets because its parts and pieces will require a smaller workforce.

Even before that, NASCAR for 2020 made long overdue tweaks to the schedule with a few seismic shifts: Phoenix will host the championship-deciding finale in No-

vember, Martinsville Speedway got both a night race and the penultimate playoff race, Daytona gave up its traditional July Fourth weekend to Indianapolis Motor Speedway (and will now host the final regular season race) and Pocono Raceway is going to host two Cup Series races in one weekend.

NASCAR was able to make those changes despite five-year contracts that had given track owners stability. But fans have complained about the stale schedule and 2020 was NASCAR's first chance to make even small changes.

The contracts expire this year, and NASCAR will essentially have the ability to reconfigure the entire schedule for 2021. NASCAR, a private company owned by the France family, last year swallowed International Speedway Corp., giving Jim and his niece, Lesa France Kennedy, the power to do just about anything they want.

"It makes a big difference," Jim France said of the merger. "It gives us an opportunity to respond quicker to the changing environment out here with the economy and all the things that are going on that impact motorsports. It was a major big step that we needed to make probably for quite a while."

NASCAR this year will debut a new sponsorship model in which the elite Cup Series will not have a single entitlement partner. The Winston Cup/Nextel Cup/Sprint Cup/Monster Energy Cup will be just the Cup Series going forward, with "premier partners" Busch Beer, Coca-Cola, GEICO and Xfinity taking on large roles.

Adapting to it all will be Johnson, who said this year will be his last as a full-time NASCAR driver. His 19th season will be his last attempt to win a record eighth Cup championship, but Johnson said he has shaken off the pressure of chasing Rich-

ard Petty and Dale Earnhardt and plans to enjoy his time in the No. 48 Chevrolet.

"I've been able to have some clarity and to really understand it on a deeper level," said Johnson, now 44. "One thing that I've come to grips with and I'm enjoying letting go of is: I feel like I've been a bit out of character and a bit focused on a number, a statistic — and I've never in my life been that way. I've never raced that way."

"I'm out there one final time," he added. "This is just one final time, and it feels so good to be able to let go of that chasing part."

It's a full house at Joe Gibbs Racing, which put three Toyotas in the final four last season and returns its entire lineup, with Christopher Bell finally earning his promotion to the Cup Series in a satellite ride for Leavine Family Racing. It was the only place to put fellow Gibbs driver Kyle Larson's sprint car-loving buddy, who was ready for the big leagues but stuck in Gibbs' crowded system.

Bell will be in a race for top Cup rookie alongside two-time Xfinity Series champion Tyler Reddick and Cole Custer. The trio raced each other for the Xfinity title the last two seasons.

The race for the final four slots at Phoenix is wide open, assuming teams figure out how to match Gibbs on the track. Busch hasn't missed a beat and spent a decent part of January in a sports car, making his debut at the prestigious Rolex 24 at Daytona in his own attempt to stay sharp.

His push for title No. 3 begins with the Daytona 500, a race he has never won. Busch was second to teammate Denny Hamlin in last year's 1-2-3 Gibbs sweep, and he very much wants to win the race himself.

Busch gets to show what he's got starting Sunday with both an exhibition race and qualifying for the Daytona 500.

Powerhouse programs sign bulk of 5-star recruits

Associated Press

McKinnley Jackson, a huge and talented defensive tackle from Mississippi, was one of the few five-star recruits whose college choice was a mystery going into signing day.

"I'll keep this short, simple and sweet," Jackson said during a news conference Wednesday at George County High School in Lucedale, Miss. "For the next three to four years, I'll

be attending Texas A&M."

The five-star prospect picked the Aggies over Alabama and LSU, allowing one more school to break into a small group that landed the majority of the top available players. Signing day is typically about the rich getting richer, and this year the best classes were especially top-heavy.

According to 247 Sports' composite rankings, there were 31 five-star prospects in this

year's class. Six schools signed 22 of those players. Clemson led the way with five as part of the highest-rated class coach Dabo Swinney has ever signed. Alabama and Georgia each landed four five-star players. National champion LSU, Ohio State and Oregon each had three.

For the second time in three seasons, 247 Sports crowned Georgia the recruiting champion, with Alabama and Clemson close behind.

Looking at the top 100 players rated by 247, again a handful of schools cleaned up. Georgia (11), Alabama (10), Clemson (10), LSU (9) and Ohio State (7) signed 47 of them.

By landing Jackson, Texas A&M became the sixth school with more than four top 100 players in its new freshman class. The Aggies came away with six, which means 53% of the top 100 players signed with just six schools.

NHL roundup

Bruins win 5th in row on OT goal by McAvoy

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Charlie McAvoy pointed to Jake DeBrusk in appreciation. DeBrusk then tackled McAvoy, sending the duo to the ice before they were mobbed by the rest of the Boston Bruins.

The Chicago Blackhawks also celebrated a big goal Wednesday night, but their party was cut short in a hurry.

McAvoy scored 1:19 into overtime, and the Bruins beat the Blackhawks 2-1 for their fifth straight victory.

“That was special,” McAvoy said.

McAvoy finished a pretty passing sequence for the defenseman’s first goal since he scored in Game 1 of the Stanley Cup Final against St. Louis. David Krejci threw the puck outside to a streaking DeBrusk, who made a perfect pass to McAvoy for the tap-in on the right side of the net.

“I would say the last six, seven games we’ve been the better team most nights,” Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said. “Our analytics back that up. I think just the eye test backs that up. The score backs it up.”

McAvoy picked up his 15th career goal, and then waited patiently for the jubilant Bruins to let him up from the winning huddle.

The Blackhawks thought they had taken a 2-1 lead with 1:05 left in regulation when it looked as if Drake Caggiula beat Jaroslav Halak for a short-handed goal. But it was waved off because one of the officials blew his whistle. Both Chicago captain Jonathan Toews and coach Jeremy Colliton said the official told them he made a mistake.

Rangers 5, Maple Leafs 3: Chris Kreider and Mika Zibanejad scored in a 6-second span late in the first period to lead host New York past Toronto.

College basketball roundup

No. 19 Butler tops No. 10 Villanova

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Kamar Baldwin made a buzzer-beating three-pointer and scored 17 points, lifting No. 19 Butler over No. 10 Villanova 79-76 on Wednesday night.

The Bulldogs (18-5, 6-4 Big East) snapped a five-game losing streak in the series as Sean McDermott scored 21 points and Bryce Golden added a career high 18 points. The game was delayed for nearly 15 minutes in the first half when the roof of 92-year-old Hinkle Fieldhouse sprung a leak.

Maintenance workers got the water stopped and the floor dried.

Villanova (17-5, 7-3) rallied from a 10-point deficit in the final six minutes, tying the score on Saddiq Bey’s three-pointer with 24 seconds to go. Bey had 29 points and six rebounds.

The Bulldogs did not call timeout and let Baldwin nearly dribble out the clock before taking the three just before time expired, connecting on a shot from the right wing beyond the arc.

No. 5 Louisville 86, Wake Forest 76: Jordan Nwora had 21 points and scored the go-ahead basket during an 18-5 second-half run that rallied the host Cardinals to their ninth consecutive victory.

The Demon Deacons led 46-34 at the break behind 60% shooting before Louisville (20-3, 11-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) picked things up and mounted the pivotal run over the first five minutes of the half. Nwora followed Ryan McMahan’s four-point play with a breakaway dunk for the Cardinals’ first lead at 52-51, and they stretched it to 67-60.

Louisville made a season-high 14 of 28 three-pointers, including 6 of 12 in the second half, to finish 48% from the field after shooting 41% in the first half.

The Cardinals also held the Demon Deacons (10-12, 3-9) to 9 of 30 from the field in the final 20 minutes and extend

their longest winning streak in ACC play.

No. 12 Seton Hall 78, Georgetown 71: Myles Powell scored 34 points, Romaro Gill tied a career high with eight blocks and the visiting Pirates raced out to a big lead to beat the Hoyas.

Seton Hall (17-5, 9-1 Big East) jumped to a 16-0 lead, going 4-for-4 on three-pointers. Powell, the second leading scorer in the Big East, hit his scoring average of 21 points by halftime.

No. 13 West Virginia 76, Iowa State 61: Oscar Tshiebwe had 16 points and 10 rebounds, and Chase Harler added 14 points for the host Mountaineers.

Emmitt Matthews Jr. and Derek Culver scored 12 points apiece, and Jermaine Haley scored 11 points for West Virginia (18-4, 6-3 Big 12), which never trailed.

Purdue 104, No. 17 Iowa 68: Evan Boudreaux scored a season-high 18 points to lead five Boilermakers in double figures, hitting 7 of 9 shots and contributing a team-high eight rebounds

Jahaad Proctor, Matt Haarms and Sasha Stefanovic each scored 15 points for host Purdue (13-10, 6-6 Big Ten). Proctor made all six of his shots. Eric Hunter Jr. added 13 points and a team-high seven assists.

Vanderbilt 99, No. 18 LSU 90: Saben Lee scored a career-high 33 points and the host Commodores upset the Tigers to end the Southeastern Conference’s longest regular-season losing streak at 26 and give first-year coach Jerry Stackhouse his first league victory.

Vanderbilt (9-13, 1-8 SEC) hadn’t beaten a conference opponent since downing Mississippi on March 3, 2018 — a span of 28 league games counting tournament losses. The Commodores have been playing without the SEC’s leading scorer, Aaron Nesmith, since the second game of league play this season.

Providence 73, No. 21 Creighton 56: A.J. Reeves set season highs with 22 points and six three-pointers, and the host Friars pulled away from the Bluejays.

Providence (13-10, 6-4 Big East) defeated a ranked foe for a second straight game after topping then-No. 16 Butler on the road Saturday. Alpha Diallo, limited to bench duty against the Bulldogs amid a two-game slump, bounced back with 14 points and six rebounds.

Boston University 80, Army 66: Javante McCoy had 20 points as the visiting Terriers topped the Black Knights.

Max Mahoney had 13 points and seven rebounds for Boston University (14-10, 8-3 Patriot League), which earned its fourth straight win. Walter Whyte added 12 points.

Army (11-11, 6-5) totaled 23 first-half points, a season low.

Tommy Funk had 24 points and six assists for the Black Knights, whose six-game win streak was broken. Matt Wilson added 24 points and 10 rebounds. Lonnie Grayson had seven rebounds.

The Terriers improved to 2-0 against the Black Knights on the season. Boston University defeated Army 81-59 on Jan. 11. Boston University takes on Holy Cross at home on Saturday. Army plays American on the road on Saturday.

American 62, Navy 54: Jamir Harris scored 19 points and the visiting Eagles closed the game on a 17-3 run over the final five minutes to defeat the Midshipmen.

Stacy Beckton Jr. added 15 points and three blocks and Sa’eed Nelson had 13 points and eight assists for American (11-11, 7-4 Patriot League), which made 5 of 6 shots down the stretch and 4-for-4 from the line in the last 30 seconds after Navy fouled five straight times to reach the limit.

Cam Davis had 13 points for Navy (12-10, 6-5), which missed its final eight shots. Evan Wieck added 12 points and three assists.

Grizzlies trade Iguodala to Heat

Associated Press

MIAMI — A person familiar with the negotiations says Andre Iguodala is headed to Miami after the Heat and Memphis Grizzlies agreed Wednesday night on his long-awaited trade.

As part of the deal, Iguodala agreed to a two-year extension, with the second of those years being a team option, according to the person who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the trade has not been finalized.

The person also said Miami and Memphis were still working to complete terms of what the Heat are giving up in the deal, and that a third team — Oklahoma City, in a package that would include Danilo Gallinari potentially headed to the Heat — was still in play. Oft-injured forward Justise Winslow said he was part of the deal and was headed to Memphis, the former Heat starter reaching out to fellow former Duke players Tyus Jones and Grayson Allen with a message.

Jones and Allen are both members of the Grizzlies. Winslow has missed much of this season with a bone bruise in his back.

In other NBA news:

■ A person familiar with the trade says the Philadelphia 76ers have acquired Glenn Robinson III and Alec Burks from the Golden State Warriors for draft picks.

Expected to contend for an Eastern Conference championship, the Sixers have slumped and are in sixth place in the standings entering Thursday's games. The Sixers hope to strengthen their bench with the move. The Sixers will send Golden State a 2020 second-round pick via Dallas, a 2021 second-round pick via Denver and a 2022 second-round pick via Toronto.

Robinson, in his second stint with the Sixers, averaged 12.9 points and shot 40% from three-point range. Burks averages 16.1 points and shoots 37.5% from three-point range. The move puts the Sixers roster at 15, meaning two players will have to go before the trade deadline to fit in Robinson and Burks.

■ A person familiar with the negotiations says center Dewayne Dedmon is returning to the Atlanta Hawks in a trade that sends center Alex Len and forward Jabari Parker to the Sacramento Kings. The Kings also are giving the Hawks two second-round picks.

Dedmon is returning to Atlanta, where he enjoyed his two most productive seasons, from 2017-19. Dedmon has averaged 5.1 points and 4.9 rebounds while starting in only 10 games for the Kings this season. He averaged a career-best 10.8 points with 7.5 rebounds for Atlanta in 2018-19.

NBA roundup

Jokic powers Nuggets past Jazz

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — The Denver Nuggets had seven healthy players to face the Utah Jazz and believed they had nothing to lose.

Thanks to a noteworthy performance by Nikola Jokic, the tired Nuggets overcame significant obstacles and recorded an improbable 98-95 victory over the Utah Jazz on Wednesday night.

"We were believing and we didn't want to let this game go. We have excuses. We have seven guys ... but we wanted to give ourselves a chance and give 100% of ourselves," said Jokic, who finished with 31 points, 21 rebounds and 10 assists.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, Jokic is the 10th player with a 30-point, 20-rebound, 10-assist triple-double in NBA history and just the second in 35 years (joining DeMarcus Cousins) to achieve the statistical feat in a win.

Jokic made 13 of his 14 field-goal attempts with Rudy Gobert as his primary defender.

"Joker was amazing. He was playing cat-and-mouse with Gobert all game," Jamal Murray said.

The Nuggets had such a short bench due to their part in a four-team, 12-player deal a day before the trade deadline and a cascade of injuries.

"This was our best win of the year," Denver coach Mike Malone said.

That showed as the players, including all the injured Nuggets, celebrated on the court after the final buzzer.

Murray scored 31 points and the Nuggets held the Jazz to just one field goal over the final 7:08.

Raptors 119, Pacers 118: Serge Ibaka hit a go-ahead three-pointer with 30 seconds remaining and host Toronto rallied from 19 down to beat Indiana on Wednesday night, setting a franchise record with their 12th consecutive victory.

Kyle Lowry had 32 points, 10 assists and eight rebounds, and Ibaka scored a season-high 30 as Toronto fought back after trailing by 11 with less than four minutes to play.

Pascal Siakam scored 25 points, Terence Davis had 11 and Fred VanVleet added 10 to help the Raptors earn their 12th straight home win over Indiana.

Indiana guard Victor Oladipo started for the first time since returning from injury last week and scored a season-high 13 points in 25 minutes.

Clippers 128, Heat 111: Paul George and Landry Shamet each scored 23 points to lead eight Clippers in double figures as host Los Angeles beat Miami for its third

consecutive win.

Shamet's points were a season high and he scored 14 off the bench in the fourth quarter, pouring in 10 straight for Los Angeles. Kawhi Leonard added 14 points, nine assists and seven rebounds for the Clippers.

Derrick Jones Jr. paced six Heat players in double figures with a career-high 25 points and nine rebounds. Bam Adebayo added 22 points and 11 boards. The two of them combined to score all but six of Miami's 31 points in the fourth.

Celtics 116, Magic 100: Jayson Tatum scored 16 of his 33 points in the second half and host Boston held off Orlando.

Gordon Hayward added 23 points and Jaylen Brown finished with 18 to help the Celtics win their fifth straight.

The Magic pulled within 105-98 with less than three minutes to play on a basket by Nik Vucevic. Boston responded with back-to-back three-pointers by Hayward and Tatum that made it 111-98 with 1:46 left.

Nets 129, Warriors 88: Caris LeVert scored 23 points and host Brooklyn gave D'Angelo Russell a bruising welcome back with a rout of Golden State.

On the eve of the NBA's trade deadline, the Warriors held out Glenn Robinson III and Alec Burks, who had been two of their most productive players lately.

Those who did play were run off the floor, falling behind 20-4, missing 20 of their 22 three-point attempts in the first half and trailing by as many as 44 points.

Pistons 116, Suns 108: Andre Drummond had 31 points and 19 rebounds, and host Detroit handed Phoenix its fourth straight loss.

Reggie Jackson added 25 points for the Pistons and Christian Wood had 21. Kelly Oubre Jr. led the Suns with 30.

Hawks 127, Timberwolves 120: Trae Young had 38 points and 11 assists and John Collins added 27 points and 12 rebounds to lead Atlanta to a win at Minnesota, as the teams braced for major roster shifts.

Collins had his fifth straight double-double for the Hawks.

Thunder 109, Cavaliers 103: Dennis Schroder scored 30 points to help host Oklahoma City beat Cleveland.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander had 23 points and Danilo Gallinari added 15 for the Thunder, who have won eight of nine.

Grizzlies 121, Mavericks 107: Ja Morant scored 21 points, Jaren Jackson Jr. and Tyus Jones added 19 apiece, and short-handed Memphis won at Dallas.

Dillon Brooks had 18 points for the Grizzlies, who played without forwards Jae Crowder and Solomon Hill.