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Pentagon seeks \$705B for 2021 budget

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon on Monday requested its largest-ever investment in innovation and next-generation weapons as part of a \$705.4 billion budget proposal for fiscal year 2021 as the U.S. eyes increased military capabilities by its great-power competitors, China and Russia.

The Defense Department unveiled its 2021 budget request as part of the White House's \$4.8 trillion federal spending proposal for next year that would cut social programs while investing heavily in national defense. The proposal would provide a total of \$740.5 billion for defense spending, which includes the Pentagon's budget as well as nuclear programs within the Department of Energy.

The request includes funds to build up the military's newest service — the U.S. Space Force, to buy dozens of aircraft, ships and land vehicles, and a proposed 3% boost in troops' pay. It would represent a slight increase to the \$704.6 billion that Congress provided the Pentagon for fiscal year 2020. Lawmakers also provided the Pentagon an extra \$8 billion of emergency funding this year to rebuild installations hit by natural disasters in recent years, including hurricanes and major floods.

While the proposed budget largely looks to the future, it also provides funds for ongoing combat operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and training missions in Europe — all at lower levels than in fiscal year 2020. The budget predicts smaller troop presences worldwide, presuming a reduction of nearly 8,000 troops to operations around the globe.

But the underlying theme of the request is to prepare the military to fight the next war that the Pentagon's top planners anticipate, which is a major conflict against a nation-state with similar military capabilities to the United States, senior defense officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Friday. It is the second consecutive budget crafted based on the Pentagon's 2018 National Defense Strategy, which shifted the department's primary focus to great-power competition with Russia and China over the threat of international terrorist organizations that the United States has fought for nearly two decades.

That means new technology. The request includes \$106.6 billion for research, development, testing and evaluation of the modern weapons systems required to fight such a war, including \$3.2 billion meant to hasten the development of hypersonic weapons, \$1.5 billion for the development of 5G communications technology that officials said is critical to ensuring systems and troops can share information rapidly, \$1.7 billion earmarked for automation research, and another \$800 million for Pentagon organizations developing artificial intelligence capabilities.

It also means strengthening the three-legged U.S. nuclear deterrent, which the officials touted as the nation's foundation for preventing a major attack by another power. The proposal seeks a 20% boost in spending on upgrades to the Pentagon's aging nuclear triad and pouring nearly \$30 billion into ongoing projects. Those projects include \$4.4 billion for the Navy's future Columbia-class, ballistic-missile submarines, scheduled to begin construction next year, \$2.8 billion for the Air Force's future B-21 Raider bomber, scheduled to begin flying in 2022, and \$1.5 billion for the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent, the replacement for the decades old Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missiles, expected to be completed in the late 2020s. It also includes some \$110 million toward a program to make some versions of the Air Force's F-35A Lightning II fighter jets nuclear capable. That is expected to occur by fiscal year 2024.

The budget also invests heavily in space and cyber capabilities. It includes \$18 billion for space, which would grow the Space Force, improve space-based missile warning capabilities, improve GPS systems, reduce the risk of satellite communications jamming and conduct three space launches. It would also spend nearly \$10 billion on cyber programs to improve offensive and defensive capabilities and bolster cybersecurity for Defense Department networks, systems and information.

The officials said the Pentagon was forced to "make difficult choices," proposing to end investment in some aging but useful platforms, including KC-135 and KC-10 airborne tankers, B-1 bombers, F-15C fighters and cutting four Navy cruisers.

Budget officials also looked for savings

within the Pentagon's so-called Fourth Estate, the non-warfighting agencies and activities — including Stars and Stripes — that are not assigned to a military service. After a review, officials proposed moving some \$5.3 billion in funding from these organizations to areas that contribute directly to "lethality."

The Pentagon's budget proposal would allocate \$178 billion for the Army, \$161 billion for the Navy, \$46 billion for the Marine Corps, \$191.8 billion for the Air Force and \$15.4 billion for the Space Force.

The 3% pay boost proposed for troops follows the 3.1% pay raise approved by Congress for them this year. The budget proposal also includes a 3.8% boost for basic allowance for housing and a 2.8% increase for subsistence allowance.

The Pentagon aims to spend nearly \$60 billion on aircraft in 2021. That includes \$15.1 billion for fighter jets — 79 F-35 Lightning II advanced fifth-generation fighters, 24 F/A-18E/F Super Hornets and 12 F-15EX Advanced Eagles. It would also spend \$3 billion on 15 KC-46 aerial tankers and \$1.2 billion on AH-64E attack helicopters.

The budget proposal calls for \$20 billion for ship building in 2021, down about \$4 billion from 2020, even as service officials continue to support legislation directing the U.S. fleet to grow from 298 ships in 2020 to 355 by 2030. The funding would allow the Navy to reach 306 in 2021.

The 2021 proposal calls for a modest investment in ground systems. It would spend \$1.4 billion on 4,247 Joint Light Tactical Vehicles, the Army and Marine Corps' replacement for their aging Humvees. It would also spend \$521 million to purchase 72 amphibious combat vehicles for the Marines. It would spend \$1.4 billion to upgrade 89 M-1 Abrams tanks, and it would spend almost \$850 million on upgraded Stryker armored vehicles.

The senior defense officials declined to discuss their criteria for determining how much funding would be provided for ongoing military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and in Europe, where the U.S. troops partner with European allies to train in an effort to deter Russian aggression on the continent. But the budget proposal documents show cuts to spending on these operations.

Renovated USO gives Yokosuka troops updated kitchen, theater

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — A 1½-year-old renovation project concluded recently with the grand reopening of Yokosuka's USO, which now features a fancy kitchen, gaming areas and an 85-inch television with theater-style seating.

"There're USOs all over the world, which serve sailors and their families just like this, but what you've done with this renovation, when you walk through this door, it feels just like home," base commander Capt. Rich Jarrett said during Friday's event. The nonprofit USO renovates its centers every seven to 10 years, according to USO area operations manager Danielle Haley. The Yokosuka branch closed its doors in late 2018 and reopened Friday with newly installed, dark-brown hardwood floors, banks of televisions with gaming chairs, two new bathrooms for a total of four and a full-size kitchen with accompanying island.

"I wanted to make sure we had the capability to give the service members what they wanted, which was food," said USO Center manager Lou Braxton. "For some reason, the service members are always hungry, so I wanted to have a full-size kitchen and have it feel like home."

Three new arcade machines scattered around the center offer Pac-Man, Mortal Kombat 2 and Atari classics such as Asteroids and Caterpillar. Around the corner from the gaming area is a home theater with an 85-inch television.

"Having the new theater, we may now look into the option to hold sporting events or movie nights to add on to the current variety of programs and events we host," Braxton said.

Braxton declined to say how much the USO spent on the remodel. According to the nonprofit's IRS filing for 2018.

Midshipman dies during physical readiness test

Associated Press

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A Navy midshipman died Saturday while taking a physical readiness test at the U.S. Naval Academy.

The academy identified the midshipman Sunday as Duke Carrillo, 21, of Flower Mound, Texas. Officials said in a news release that Carrillo collapsed during the 1.5-mile run portion of the Navy's semi-annual physical readiness test.

Officials said initial responders provided exhaustive resuscitation efforts, then Carrillo was rushed to Anne Arundel Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead at 12:23 p.m. Saturday.

The academy said the circumstances surrounding the cause of his death are under review.

Vice Adm. Sean Buck, 63rd superinten-

dent of the Naval Academy, called Carrillo's death a "sudden and tragic loss."

"Our most heartfelt sympathies and condolences go out to the entire Carrillo family, and our extended Naval Academy family, during this extremely difficult time," Buck said.

Officials said Carrillo, and his twin brother, Dylan, reported to Annapolis in June 2018 after completing a year at the Naval Academy Preparatory School in Newport, R.I.

Duke Carrillo was a member of the 24th Company, an intramural athlete, and a member of the Naval Academy's Flight Training Squadron. Naval Academy officials said he had aspirations of being a naval aviator.

Another Carrillo brother, Jake, is also a Naval Academy midshipman.

Veterans groups urge president to intervene on Agent Orange decision

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — On Monday, eight of the country's largest veterans organizations urged President Donald Trump to fast-track benefits, after years of delays, for thousands of Vietnam War veterans suffering from four medical conditions thought to be caused by Agent Orange.

The groups asked Trump to add bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, hypertension and Parkinson's-like symptoms to the list of conditions presumed to be caused by chemical herbicides used in the Vietnam War. Being on the presumptive list lowers the amount of proof veterans need to pro-

vide in order to receive VA benefits.

Veterans have been waiting years for the Department of Veterans Affairs to add the conditions. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie recently indicated that a decision wasn't likely to come until the end of 2020, when the results of two more scientific studies on the issue are expected to be published.

In a seven-page letter, the organizations — Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, The American Legion, Vietnam Veterans of America, Military Officers Association of America, the Fleet Reserve Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America and AMVETS — criticized the VA for dragging its feet and undercutting scientific data that already exists.

Fewer acres planted, yet Afghan opium yield likely rose

BY PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghanistan could see one of the highest yields of opium in nearly a decade, even though 146,000

fewer acres were planted to poppies last year, White House estimates show.

While land used to grow poppies in Afghanistan declined between 2018 and 2019, the amount of opium extracted from the flowers' seed pods likely increased by over

20%, the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy said Friday. Despite the U.S. spending billions to combat the drug trade, Afghanistan continues to be the world's largest grower of the poppy from which opium and heroin are produced.

Survey: NATO allies reluctant to aid others, sure US would

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

STUTT GART, Germany — Most NATO countries trust the United States to come to their defense if attacked by Russia, but few would be willing to return the favor, a new survey has found.

Majorities in 16 member states surveyed by the Pew Research Center said they believe the U.S. military would defend them if they were attacked, but only in five of the countries polled — the U.S., Netherlands, Canada, United Kingdom and Lithuania — did majorities say their country should use force to defend an ally, the survey said.

“There is widespread reluctance to fulfill the collective defense commitment outlined in Article 5 of NATO’s founding treaty,” the report said.

NATO’s Article 5, which states that an attack on one member requires a response from all, is the linchpin of the alliance that was formed 75

years ago as a collective bulwark against the Soviet Union.

Overall, member states continue to view NATO favorably, the poll found. A median of 53% in the 16 allies polled held positive views toward NATO while 27% had an unfavorable opinion.

But even in the country with the highest support for the alliance — Poland, where 82% approve — only 40% said their military should come to the defense of another if attacked by Russia. Only a minority of Poles, 47%, also believed the U.S. would use force to defend them if they were attacked by Russia, the poll found.

In the U.S., 60% said America should use force to defend an ally under attack by Russia. Only the Netherlands, at 64%, was more willing to defend an ally in a similar situation.

Two other important NATO countries — Germany and France — were opposed to using military force to defend another member. In Germany, 60% said the country should

not defend an ally under attack. In France, 53% held the same view.

“The belief that their country should respond to a hypothetical Russian attack on a NATO ally has become less common over time in a handful of countries,” Pew said.

Majorities in both France and Germany however, said they believed the U.S. would defend an ally under attack, the poll found.

While Germans still have a favorable view of the alliance — 57% in 2019 — that is down from 67% in 2017. Support for NATO in France dropped from 60% in 2017 to 49% in 2019.

In the U.S., attitudes toward NATO differ by political party affiliation, with Democrats more likely than Republicans to have a favorable opinion, the survey said. In 2019, 61% of Democrats had a positive view of the alliance, compared with 45% of Republicans.

Iran: Death of Soleimani weakens the fight on ISIS

Associated Press

VIENNA — The head of Iran’s nuclear program said Monday the U.S. killing of a high-ranking Iranian general has weakened the fight against Islamic State in the region.

Ali Akbar Salehi told a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna that last month’s drone strike that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani showed “the U.S. administration has not yet come to its senses in recognizing the realities on the ground.”

Washington targeted Soleimani, who headed Iran’s expeditionary Quds Force, saying that he was planning attacks on Americans.

In his role, Soleimani was also critical to efforts to mobilize militias in Iraq to fight the ISIS, and Salehi called him “the most instrumental element in combating ISIS.”

Tehran retaliated for the killing of Soleimani by launching a barrage of missiles on two Iraqi military bases hosting American troops.

There were no fatalities. Salehi reiterated, however, that Iran was prepared to do more.

“Be it known as my country strongly retaliated once, it will never hesitate to strike back when necessary,” he said.

The U.S. last month added new sanctions on Salehi’s Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and on Salehi himself, freezing any assets the director had within U.S. jurisdiction.

In Vienna, U.S. Energy Secretary Dan Brouillette focused his remarks on Iran’s nuclear program, saying Tehran was still not providing the IAEA with answers about the discovery of uranium particles in a warehouse near the Iranian capital.

“We call on Iran to cooperate fully with IAEA in monitoring and inspecting Iran’s facilities, and in addressing all of the agency’s questions,” he said.

Irish election shocks, Sinn Fein tops poll

Associated Press

DUBLIN — Ireland’s political parties were scrambling to adjust to a new reality Monday, after an earth-shaking election that saw the left-wing nationalist party Sinn Fein win the biggest share of votes.

Sinn Fein, the party historically linked to the Irish Republican Army and its violent struggle for a united Ireland, received 24.5% of the first-preference votes in Saturday’s election. That bested Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, the two centrist parties that have governed Ireland since it won independence from Britain.

Fianna Fail received 22.2% of the votes and Fine Gael, the party of incumbent Prime Minister Leo Varadkar, got 20.9%.

Sinn Fein’s left-wing proposals for tackling Ireland’s housing crisis and creaking health care system proved a powerful draw for young voters in a country that is still dealing with aftershocks of the 2008 global financial crisis.

Vote counting was resuming Monday to fill all the seats in the 160-Dail, the lower house of Ireland’s parliament. Ireland uses a proportional-representation system in which voters rank candidates from first to last, with the lower preferences of elected or defeated candidates redistributed among their rivals.

It’s highly unlikely that any party will get the 80 seats needed for a majority in parliament. That makes some form of coalition inevitable, but forming a stable alliance looks tough.

Both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael said before the election that they would not go into a coalition with Sinn Fein because of its links to past violence.

Varadkar said Fine Gael’s stance was unchanged.

But as the scale of Sinn Fein’s surge became clear, Fianna Fail leader Micheal Martin said: “I’m a democrat.”

“I listen to the people. I respect the decision of the people,” he told Irish broadcaster RTE.

First foreign-language film takes best picture at Oscars

Los Angeles Times

In a surprise upset and a historic milestone, director Bong Joon Ho's "Parasite" — a darkly comic class satire about two families, one rich and one poor, whose lives become entangled — won best picture Sunday night at the 92nd Academy Awards, becoming the first foreign-language film ever to win the film academy's top prize.

Throughout awards season, "Parasite" was seen by many as the underdog in a field that ranged from the gangster drama "The Irishman" to the 1960s fantasia "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood" to the World War I movie "1917." But over time, the South Korean film worked its way into the hearts of Oscar voters, whose ranks have grown increasingly international and diverse in recent years.

The road to the Oscar for "Parasite" kicked off last May when the film claimed the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival. Despite Bong's idiosyncratic, genre-scrambling vision — or perhaps because of it — "Parasite" went on to become a mainstream box office success like few foreign-language films in memory, earning the Screen Actors Guild's ensemble award along with a slew of critics' group prizes.

"Parasite" claimed four Oscars, with Bong winning the directing prize along with best international feature film and original screenplay, the first time a South Korean filmmaker had

claimed those prizes.

In recent years, the academy has brought in hundreds of new members from overseas as part of its continuing effort to diversify its historically white-male-dominated membership. In naming "Parasite" best picture and best international feature — the first time a South Korean film has earned that prize — the organization seemed to be embracing the chance to show it has become less parochial and more open-minded than it might have been in decades past.

Joaquin Phoenix, who swept virtually every major acting prize leading up to the Oscars, won the lead actor award for his physically transformative turn as a troubled would-be comedian turned supervillain in the dark comic-book film "Joker."

As expected, Renee Zellweger won the lead actress award for her turn as Hollywood icon Judy Garland near the end of her turbulent life in "Judy," telling the starry crowd in the Dolby Theatre that when we celebrate heroes like Garland, "we're reminded of who we are as one people — united."

In the supporting categories, academy voters spread their love to two veterans who, despite being veritable industry royalty, had never won acting Oscars. Laura Dern won for her performance as a fierce divorce lawyer in "Marriage Story," while Brad Pitt won for his turn as a grizzled stunt man in Tarantino's "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood."

NY-London flight beats record with a jet stream

The Washington Post

Four hours and 56 minutes. That's all the time that it took for British Airways Flight 112 to fly from New York's JFK International Airport to London Heathrow early Sunday. According to the flight tracking service Flightradar24, the flight broke the previous transatlantic record of 5 hours and 13 minutes between New York and London.

A jet stream at more than 260 mph turbo-charged the transatlantic British Airways flight, which departed New York at 6:20 p.m. and landed in London at 4:43 a.m. Sunday, nearly two hours ahead of schedule.

The jet stream is the zone of strong winds around 30,000 feet high in the atmosphere, along which storms track. Many commercial aircraft hitch a ride along the jet stream to give themselves a speed boost.

Man arrested near WH for Trump threat

A Florida man with a knife in a sheath on his hip was arrested about a block from the White House on Saturday for threatening to kill the president, authorities said Sunday.

"I am here to assassinate President Donald Trump," Roger Hedgpeth, 25, told a Secret Service officer, according to a report from D.C. police. "I have a knife to do it with."

Hedgpeth, from Brandon, Fla., was described in the report as a "critically missing/endangered person as well as a mental health consumer."

The Secret Service took him into custody for making threats to do bodily harm and possession of a prohibited weapon. The sheathed knife on his left hip had a 3½-inch blade, authorities said. Hedgpeth also wore an empty pistol holster on his right hip, police said.

From The Washington Post

Fla. man charged with driving into Republican voter registration tent

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — A man in Florida is under arrest after he deliberately drove a van into a tent where voters were being registered by local Republicans, authorities in Jacksonville said Sunday.

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office said via social media that 27-year-old Gregory William Loel Timm has been charged with two counts of aggravated assault on a person 65 years old or older, one count of criminal mischief and driving with a suspended license. The Republican party of Duval County

said that it had set up the tent Saturday to register voters.

The county GOP said via Twitter that six volunteers for President Donald Trump's campaign "were intentionally targeted while registering voters."

Local media said that there were no injuries.

"Kind of out of the blue, a man approached us in a van, was waving at us, kind of a friendly demeanor, thought he was coming up to talk to us, instead he accelerated his vehicle and plowed right into our tent, our tables," volunteer Mark Alfieri told television station

WJAX.

Afterward, he backed up, recorded the damaged tent and scattered signs on his cellphone and made obscene gestures before leaving, Alfieri said.

In a tweet, GOP chairwoman Ronna McDaniel said, "These unprovoked, senseless attacks on @realDonaldTrump's supporters need to end."

President Donald Trump retweeted that message and added, "Be careful tough guys who you play with!"

In a statement, the Duval County Democratic Party condemned what it called "this cowardly act of violence."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Coronavirus prompts delay in statue trial

PA PHILADELPHIA — The retrial of a Delaware man who acknowledged having broken a thumb off a \$4.5 million statue at a Philadelphia museum was indefinitely postponed due to the coronavirus outbreak in the home country of the relic.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that federal prosecutors said in a court filing that several Chinese witnesses essential to their case against Michael Rohana, 26, would be unable to travel to Philadelphia for the Feb. 18 retrial.

The Bear resident was attending a Christmas-themed ugly sweater party at the Franklin Institute in 2017 when authorities said he entered a closed exhibit of ancient Chinese terracotta warrior statues, snapped the thumb of a statute called “The Cavalryman” and left with it. The incident was captured by surveillance cameras.

Parallel parking removed from driving exams

NV LAS VEGAS — The Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles eliminated the parallel parking portion of the driving skills test.

The test still meets the national standards set by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators even without the parallel parking element, department public information officer Kevin Malone said.

“Testing of the parking skills needed is met by the requirements of entering, and backing out of, a perpendicular parking space and by other vehicle control requirements,” Malone said.

Police: Trooper bitten by woman after traffic stop

IN TERRE HAUTE — A western Indiana woman was accused of biting a state trooper’s arm following a traffic stop in Vigo County.

The 38-year-old Terre Haute woman was a front-seat passenger in an SUV stopped for running a stop sign, state police said. The 51-year-old male driver was arrested on drunken driving and other charges.

Police said that the woman initially refused to identify herself to the trooper and had to be removed from the SUV and arrested. Three children in the rear of the SUV were released to the woman’s grandmother.

Numerous fox attacks push city to try trapping

ME BATH — Maine has been the site of more than a half dozen attacks on people by foxes in the last few months, prompting one city to try trapping the animals.

Foxes are common in Maine and are typically skittish around humans, but the state’s midcoast region has been the site of numerous attacks in the past six months.

The Bath City Council voted unanimously Feb. 5 to spend \$26,000 to lay out traps to catch foxes. The city is partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture on the effort, WGME-TV reported.

Bill would get slow drivers out of left lane

SC COLUMBIA — Some South Carolina lawmakers are backing a proposal to allow officers to pull over people who drive too slowly in the left lane of major roads.

Many lawmakers find their way to Columbia on interstates that only have two lanes in each

direction, and supporters of the bill said that something needs to be done to encourage anyone not passing another vehicle to get out of the left lane.

The House version of the bill would have a fine of \$200 and add two points to an offender’s driver’s licence. The Senate version would only have a fine of \$100.

Board agrees to bid to allow psychedelics

DC WASHINGTON — Supporters of a proposal to decriminalize the use of certain psychedelic plants and fungi are one step closer to putting the measure on the ballot in the District of Columbia.

The DC Board of Elections agreed to allow the proposal to be put up for a citywide vote in November, news outlets reported.

The initiative aims to place the use of psychedelic plants, often referred to as magic mushrooms, among the lowest priorities for law enforcement.

The proposal now moves to a challenge period in which proponents must gather 25,000 signatures to officially place the measure on the ballot.

Deputies take man, dog into custody in theft

FL BRANDON — A Florida man and his furry “accomplice” were taken into custody by authorities who said that the man shoplifted from a store.

Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office said that Logan Wilson was charged with petit theft and possession of meth, WTSP-TV reported.

Wilson admitted to stealing \$259 worth of items from Bass Pro Shops, deputies said.

Deputies also took Wilson’s four-legged friend into custody. A sheriff’s office Facebook post

showing an officer holding a puppy said that deputies took care of the “cutest accomplice” before handing him over to Hillsborough County Animal Services.

One-eyed hawk found safe after windstorm

MT KALISPELL — A one-eyed hawk that went missing after a weekend windstorm knocked over its enclosure at a rehabilitation facility in western Montana was found safe.

Bird rehabilitator Kari Gabriel climbed the ladder of a Kalispell Fire Department bucket truck with a firefighter who used a net to capture the bird in a tree, NBC Montana reported. Gabriel realized that Hawkeye was missing when she found her cage overturned Feb. 1.

Man sent photos of hanged cat to children

NY BUFFALO — A man was charged with aggravated cruelty to animals and endangering the welfare of a child after police said he hanged his children’s cat and sent them photos of the dead pet.

Antonio Martin, of Buffalo, was arraigned Friday before state Supreme Court Justice Deborah Haendiges on an indictment charging him with felony animal cruelty and two misdemeanor charges of endangering the welfare of a child.

Buffalo police said that Martin hanged the cat from the children’s bunk bed in early September and texted pictures of it to them. No motive was given for the act.

From wire reports

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Caps' Ovechkin is grinning, gap-toothed face of the NHL

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Alex Ovechkin arrived in Washington in the summer of 2005 wearing mismatched flip flops and Daisy Duke shorts. He looked like a lost tourist.

Ovechkin went No. 1 in the draft and was touted as a can't-miss prospect, but Capitals teammates wondered aloud if this guy really was supposed to be the new face of the franchise, much less an elite player.

A decade and a half later, Ovechkin is the grinning, gap-toothed face of NHL goal scoring, much to the continued bewilderment of his opponents.

The big Russian left winger is on the verge of becoming just the eighth player to score 700 career goals, thanks to a once-in-a-generation combination of physicality, power and a unique shot that has made him nearly impossible to stop.

"He just can score from anywhere," Calgary defenseman Mark Giordano said. "You sort of think teams would come up with a game plan to stop him, but you can't."

No game plan has worked. Like the cutter flustered batters knew was coming from New York Yankees closer Mariano Rivera, Ovechkin comes at goaltenders and defensemen with the same relentless, masterful approach — and the numbers keep climbing.

Ovechkin has never scored fewer than 32 goals in a season, and his 11 seasons of 40 or more trails only Wayne Gretzky for the most in league history. He has averaged 0.5 goal every playoff game, 10th-best all time, and contributed to winning the Stanley Cup and post-season MVP honors in 2018.

A dozen goaltenders and defenders who have tried to contain Ovechkin described the task to The Associated Press as his milestone approached.

Opportunity knocks: "Whatever small inch you give him, he's going to find a way to

throw it through your legs from the blue line top cheese and you're like, 'What the heck just happened?'" said Colorado forward Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, who faced Ovechkin in the 2018 final with Vegas. "Maybe you're thinking your goalie should have it and you look at the replay like, 'OK, that was a heck of a shot.' ... It's just that at any time in a game he can have an off night and out of nowhere, boom, he can have a hat trick."

Bellemare made that observation just days before Ovechkin had no shots with six minutes left against Los Angeles. He then scored once to tie it, a second time to give Washington the lead and a third into an empty net to seal another win. Those were goal Nos. 696, 697 and 698.

Prolific sniper: Ovechkin's job from day one has been to shoot the puck as much as possible. He has an NHL-best 5,483 shots since 2005-06. No other player has 4,000. Ovechkin's stick — an open blade with a big curve at the toe — and how he releases a shot also puts him in a class of his own.

"His puck flies not straight," said Tampa Bay Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy, who has allowed nine goals to Ovechkin. "It's kind of changing direction every time, so it's pretty hard to stop for a goalie. It's like (a) knuckleball."

A knucklepuck with a 6-foot-3, 235-pound linebacker's strength behind it. It's not just Ovechkin's release but how the puck feels when it gets on net.

"His shot is absolutely a rocket or missile," said Toronto Maple Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen, who has given up six of Ovechkin's goals. "He shoots from anywhere and he shoots it hard and heavy."

Lethal speed: Ovechkin has made a living — roughly \$113 million so far with another contract expected to start in 2021-22 — by not only making

goalies but the league's best defensive defenseman miss. Norris Trophy winner Drew Doughty believes the only way to slow Ovechkin down is to get in his face in the neutral zone before he can pick up steam.

Problem is, even at 34 and past the prime of most scorers, Ovechkin still has the lower-body strength and footspeed to glide around opponents like they're pylons.

"He still has that ability from when he was younger to beat you one-on-one, so you can't just play the shot or you can't just back off," said Avalanche defenseman Ian Cole, who battled Ovechkin for years as a member of the Pittsburgh Penguins. "You're in a bit of a quagmire when you're playing against him just because there's so many ways that he can beat you and he is so good, he's so good at cutting to the middle, too, on his off side and letting these pucks go through traffic."

Location, location, location: There is no safe area when it comes to defending Ovechkin.

"He can make moves and shoot from anywhere and it can go in," Kings forward Trevor Lewis said. "Most guys, if you keep them to the outside and they're shooting, they're not going to bury it every time. But it seems like every shot he takes, it's got a chance to go in."

Connor Hellebuyck vividly remembers his first encounter with Ovechkin as a rookie. The Winnipeg goaltender felt like the scene played out in slow motion before the puck barely stayed out, but he allowed two goals to Ovechkin in a game a couple of years later.

"He came down and ripped what looked like a little snap shot from the top of the circle," Hellebuyck recalled. "It came off so heavy and I got such a good beat on it, but I was able to watch it completely pass me and I missed it."

Red Sox, Dodgers complete Betts deal

Associated Press

BOSTON — Two days before the start of spring training, the Boston Red Sox have again agreed to send 2018 AL MVP Mookie Betts and pitcher David Price to the Los Angeles Dodgers in a reworked deal, a person with knowledge of the negotiations told The Associated Press on Sunday.

The Red Sox will receive Dodgers outfielder Alex Verdugo and prospects Jeter Downs and Connor Wong, the person told the AP on the condition of anonymity because the deal still needed the approval of Major League Baseball. Boston was to send cash to the Dodgers to offset Price's salary, reportedly half of the \$96 million still owed to the 2012 AL Cy Young Award winner.

A three-team deal that would have sent Dodgers pitcher Kenta Maeda to the Twins for pitcher Brusdar Graterol and then flipped Graterol to the Red Sox fell apart last week when Boston balked at Graterol's medical records. Los Angeles and Minnesota agreed Sunday to swap Graterol for Maeda, according to a person with knowledge of the deal, five days after the initial trade with the Red Sox was held up.

Meanwhile the Red Sox and Dodgers spent the weekend finding another way to complete the deal that put Betts in Dodgers blue while allowing Boston to get under the collective bargaining tax threshold in 2020. The 2018 champions will save tens of millions of dollars this season in salary and penalties, but at the expense of one of the best players in baseball.

Los Angeles has won seven straight NL West titles, averaging more than 100 wins over the past three seasons, but has only a pair of NL pennants to show for it, twice losing in the World Series to teams that were later accused of cheating.

Taylor holds on for win at Pebble Beach

Associated Press

PEBBLE BEACH, Calif. — Nick Taylor knew the odds were not in his favor Sunday at Pebble Beach.

Already nervous about facing Phil Mickelson for the first time with only a one-shot lead, Taylor found himself watching Lefty's short-game highlight show on the eve of their final-round pairing at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am.

"I was just curious, to be honest. And he hit some amazing shots," Taylor said. "I'm like, 'Well, I don't know if he can keep that up. If he can, great.' But if I keep doing

what I'm doing, plugging along ... then try to make the guys behind me try to beat me."

Taylor created his own short-game highlights for a victory.

He holed a bunker shot for eagle that carried him to a five-shot lead at the turn. And when that lead shrunk to two shots in 40 mph gusts, Taylor chipped in for a birdie on the 15th hole that all but sealed it.

Taylor had more trouble with the wind than Mickelson. But he never lost the lead and closed with a 2-under 70 for a four-shot victory over Kevin Streelman.

Mickelson, going for a record sixth win

at the Pebble Beach Pro-Am, faded to third with a 74.

"It's disappointing certainly to have not won, but I got outplayed," Mickelson said. "I mean, Nick played better than I did. He holed a couple of great shots. That eagle on 6, the putts he made on 4, 5 and 7 ... he just really played some great golf."

Taylor's last win was as a PGA Tour rookie at the 2015 Sanderson Farms Championship in Mississippi.

"I believed I could do it because I've done it before," Taylor said. "But to do it in that fashion, playing with Phil, gives me a lot of confidence going forward."

US women take final in Olympic qualifier

Associated Press

CARSON, Calif. — Lynn Williams and the rest of the U.S. women sensed it was just a matter of time before they wore down Canada.

Williams broke open a scoreless stalemate with a goal in the 61st minute and the United States beat Canada 3-0 on Sunday in the title match of the CONCACAF Women's Olympic qualifying tournament.

"We have a great front line, we have a great midfield. The defenders were doing their job in the first half, so now it was our turn to get the job done in the second half," Williams

said.

Lindsey Horan and Megan Rapinoe also scored for the United States, which extended its undefeated streak to 28 games. The U.S. did not concede a goal in five qualifying matches, and scored 25 times.

The U.S. and Canada had both already secured the region's two spots in the Tokyo Games with victories in the semifinals. The United States, ranked No. 1 in the world, beat Mexico 4-0 in one semifinal and eighth-ranked Canada edged Costa Rica 1-0 in the other game on Friday.

The U.S. has been to every Olympics since women's soccer

was first included in 1996, and has won four gold medals. But the Americans were knocked out in the quarterfinals by Sweden four years ago in Brazil, the team's earliest Olympic exit.

Canada has made the field in the past three Olympics, winning the bronze medal in the last two.

It was the fourth time the teams have met in the final of the region's qualifying tournament, with the United States winning all four.

"In the first half, throughout the whole game, they were very organized, very disciplined. They're one of the best teams in the world, top 10 in the world,

so it's not going to be easy, if you sit back it will be really hard," U.S. coach Vlatko Andonovski said. "I think in the first half we weren't patient enough and not sharp enough. But I think in the second half we came out with a little bit more energy, we moved the ball a little faster, which ultimately resulted in a goal."

Andonovski started Williams and Jessica McDonald, giving Tobin Heath the day off. Rapinoe came in as a substitute. Other veterans on the bench for the match included defenders Becky Sauerbrunn and Kelley O'Hara.

Stenhouse wins Daytona pole with new team

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Ricky Stenhouse Jr. needed just two days to get his new team to the top.

Stenhouse won the pole Sunday for the season-opening Daytona 500 next weekend, putting JTG-Daugherty Racing in the NASCAR spotlight for a week. Stenhouse's third pole in 257 Cup Series starts and first at Daytona International Speedway came on his second day in the new Chevrolet Camaro.

His first day behind the wheel came during practice Saturday.

"It's the best driving Camaro I've ever

driven," Stenhouse quipped.

Stenhouse turned a fast lap at 194.582 mph to claim the pole, edging Alex Bowman for the top spot. Bowman reached 194.363 mph around the 2½-mile superspeedway to lock down a front-row spot for the third consecutive year. Bowman finished 17th and 11th, respectively, in the last two openers.

"As a race car driver, there's not much you can do to make them go faster," Bowman said. "But you can sure screw them up, so at least I didn't do that."

Only the top two spots were determined in single-car qualifying. The starting order for the rest of the 40-car field will be set

by a pair of qualifying races Thursday at Daytona.

Even so, the Hendrick Motorsports entries clearly have speed: Stenhouse's engines are built by Hendrick, and Hendrick drivers Bowman, Chase Elliott and Jimmie Johnson were second through fourth on the speed chart.

Defending race winner Denny Hamlin was fifth fastest.

Winning the pole means little, if anything, at NASCAR's premier race. No pole winner has gone on to win "the Great American Race" since Hall of Famer Dale Jarrett in 2000.

NBA roundup

Celtics nip Thunder for 7th straight win

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Their lead mostly gone, the Boston Celtics needed someone to make a stop in the final seconds.

As usual, Marcus Smart took it upon himself.

Smart stole the ball from Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander with 5.8 seconds left, helping the Celtics hold on for a 112-111 victory over the Thunder on Sunday.

"I didn't even want to give them an attempt to even get a shot up and a chance to tie the game or come close to it," Smart said.

Kemba Walker scored 27 points and Jayson Tatum had 26 for the Celtics, who won their seventh straight.

"Good, tough teams," Celtics coach Brad Stevens said. "A lot of smart basketball and then we almost gave it away at the end. But, you know, up to that point I think we played really hard and really well."

Jaylen Brown finished with 17 points for the Celtics, who made 16 three-pointers.

One of them, by Smart with 8:19 remaining, gave Boston the lead for good.

Jazz 114, Rockets 113: Bojan Bogdanovic made a three-pointer as time expired to give Utah the win at Houston.

Jordan Clarkson scored 30 points and Donovan Mitchell finished with 24 points, six assists and five rebounds for the Jazz, who won their second straight after a five-game losing streak.

Clippers 133, Cavaliers 92: Lou Williams scored 25 points and Los Angeles handed the Cavaliers their worst home loss in franchise history.

The Cavaliers' previous worst was a 39-point loss to Chicago in 2012.

76ers 118, Bulls 111: Furkan Korkmaz scored 31 points, Joel Embiid had 28 points and 12 rebounds and host Philadelphia beat Chicago to improve its NBA-best home record to 24-2.

Ben Simmons added 19 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds for the 76ers.

Grizzlies 106, Wizards 99: Ja Morant had 27 points, 10 assists and 10 rebounds

for his first career triple-double to help Memphis overcome poor three-point shooting and win at Washington.

Morant scored 10 points in the fourth quarter for the Grizzlies, who closed the game on a 22-8 run after trailing for most of the second half.

Hawks 140, Knicks 135 (2OT): Trae Young had 48 points and 13 assists, John Collins added 32 points and 16 rebounds, and host Atlanta beat New York in two overtimes.

It was the ninth time Young has scored at least 40, second-most in the NBA this season. The first-time All-Star hit all 16 of his free-throw attempts and knocked down a game-high six three-pointers.

Trail Blazers 115, Heat 109: Damian Lillard had 33 points and eight assists, Gary Trent Jr. scored 22 points and host Portland beat Miami in Andre Iguodala's debut with the Heat.

Iguodala had two points in his first game since the NBA Finals.

NHL roundup

NHL-worst Wings top Bruins again

Associated Press

DETROIT — The NHL's worst team beat the best.

Again.

Andreas Athanasiou snapped a tie midway through the third period and scored an empty-net goal in the final minute, lifting the Detroit Red Wings to a 3-1 win over the Boston Bruins on Sunday.

"When we're playing good hockey and we get good goaltending, we're going to give anybody a hard challenge," Detroit coach Jeff Blashill said. "That's just the way the NHL is. The parity's at an all-time high."

The Red Wings (14-39-4) are looking up at the rest of the NHL in the standings, but the rebuilding team has defeated the league-leading Bruins (34-11-12) in both of their games this season.

"It seems like they get excited to play us," said Torey Krug, who scored Boston's only goal. "For whatever reason, it's a tough matchup for us."

Rangers 4, Kings 1: Artemi Panarin, Kaapo Kakko and Greg McKegg scored, powering host New York to its fourth win in its past six games.

Igor Shesterkin made 42 saves for his fifth win in six starts.

Ducks 3, Sabres 2: Ryan Miller stopped 31 shots, including all 15 he faced in the third period, and visiting Anaheim held off Buffalo.

Jakob Silfverberg, Ryan Getzlaf and Nick Ritchie scored in a 5:45 span in the first period to stake the Ducks to a 3-0 lead, and they closed out a 3-0-2 road trip.

Jets 5, Blackhawks 2: Andrew Copp had the go-ahead score in host Winnipeg's four-goal third period, and the Jets rallied to beat Chicago for their third straight win.

Kyle Connor had a pair of goals, and Blake Wheeler and Patrick Laine also scored for Winnipeg, which trailed 2-0 after 20 minutes.

Avalanche 3, Wild 2: Nathan MacKinnon scored his 32nd goal of the season, Pavel Francouz made 34 saves and Colorado ended its road trip with four wins in five games.

Pierre-Edouard Bellemare and Gabriel Landeskog also scored for the Avs, who have won seven of the past eight games and are second in the league.

Top 25 roundup

Marquette routs No. 19 Butler

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — No. 19 Butler contained Markus Howard, the nation's leading scorer, but Marquette's supporting cast answered the challenge.

Howard, who entered averaging 27.9 points, scored 17 and Brendan Bailey and Koby McEwen added 16 apiece to lead the Golden Eagles to a 76-57 victory over the Bulldogs on Sunday.

"They're a tough assignment in general," Butler coach LaVall Jordan said. "Obviously you start with Markus Howard, so how much attention do you want to give him in terms of helping, allow him to just play and keep the other guys contained? I thought we did a job on him. Recoveries to some of the shooters were slow."

No. 25 Houston 76, Wichita State 43: Quentin Grimes had 14 points and six rebounds, DeJon Jarreau added 12 points and seven rebounds and the host Cougars beat the Shockers.

Marcus Sasser and Caleb Mills each scored 11 points for Houston (19-5, 9-2).