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US, China drive the rise in global defense spending

BY JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — Annual military spending climbed worldwide in 2019 by the largest amount in a decade, with the U.S. far outpacing second-place China, a new study has found.

Global defense spending rose by 4% in 2019 compared to the previous year, a report released last week by the International Institute for Strategic Studies said.

Washington and Beijing both increased their military spending by 6.6%, the study said, but while the pace of growth in China “is decelerating, in line with Beijing’s relative economic slowdown,” the U.S. has seen military spending increases each year since Donald Trump took office in 2017.

“The US spends almost three times as much as China,” the report says. “This meant that in 2019 U.S. defense investments alone were larger than China’s total defense budget.”

Saudi Arabia, Russia and India rounded out the top five in military spending.

In Europe, defense spending increased by 4.2% last year compared with 2018, reaching levels not seen since before the 2008 financial crisis, IISS said. Leading the way in European spending was Germany, which has faced criticism from the U.S. for falling short of NATO guidelines that call for 2% of gross domestic product to be dedicated to military spending.

“U.S. exhortations to spend more have combined with changing threat perceptions in European states to bring about larger defense budgets,” the report said.

But although German military spending increased by 9.7% between 2018 and 2019, accounting for a third of military spending growth in Europe, it still spent only around 1.3% of GDP on defense, the report said.

Defense spending also soared in Asia, climbing by more than 50% in the last decade, the report said. “This figure is a result of Asian countries’ economic success in recent years,” IISS said.

On a per capita basis, countries in the Middle East and North Africa were in five of the top 10 military spending positions, with Oman spending more than \$2,500 per person and Saudi Arabia more than \$2,300 per person on defense, the report said.

Boy Scouts’ future unclear amid suits, bankruptcy filing

Associated Press

Barraged by hundreds of sex abuse lawsuits, the Boy Scouts of America filed for bankruptcy protection Tuesday in hopes of working out a potentially mammoth victim compensation plan that will allow the 110-year-old organization to carry on.

The Chapter 11 filing in federal bankruptcy court in Wilmington, Del., set in motion what could be one of the biggest, most complex bankruptcies ever seen. Scores of lawyers are seeking settlements on behalf of several thousand men who say they were molested as scouts by scoutmasters or other leaders decades ago but are only now eligible to sue because of recent changes in their states’ statute-of-limitations laws.

By going to bankruptcy court, the Scouts can put those lawsuits on hold. Ultimately they could be forced to sell off some of their vast property holdings, including campgrounds and hiking trails, to raise money for a compensation trust fund that could surpass a billion dollars.

The bankruptcy petition listed the Boy Scouts’ assets as between \$1 billion and \$10 billion, and its liabilities at \$500 million to \$1 billion.

“Scouting programs will continue throughout this process and for many years to come,” the Boy Scouts said in a statement. “Local councils are not filing for bankruptcy because they are legally separate and distinct organizations.”

The Boy Scouts are the latest major American institution to face a heavy price over sexual abuse. Roman Catholic dioceses across the country and schools such as Penn State and Michigan State have paid out hundreds of millions of dollars in recent years.

The bankruptcy represents a painful turn for an organization that has been a pillar of American civic life for generations and a training ground for future leaders. Achieving the rank of Eagle Scout has long been a proud accomplishment that politicians, business leaders, astronauts and others put on their résumés and in their official biographies.

The Boy Scouts’ finances have been strained in recent years by declining mem-

bership and sex-abuse settlements.

The number of youths taking part in scouting has dropped below 2 million, down from more than 4 million in peak years of the 1970s. The organization has tried to counter the decline by admitting girls, but its membership rolls took a big hit Jan. 1 when The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints — for decades a major sponsor of Boy Scout units — cut ties and withdrew more than 400,000 scouts in favor of programs of its own.

The financial outlook worsened last year after New York, Arizona, New Jersey and California passed laws making it easier for victims of long-ago abuse to file claims. Teams of lawyers across the U.S. have been signing up clients by the hundreds to sue the Boy Scouts.

Most of the newly surfacing cases date to the 1960s, ’70s and ’80s; the organization says there were only five known abuse victims in 2018. The Boy Scouts credit the change to an array of prevention policies adopted since the mid-1980s, including mandatory criminal background checks and abuse-prevention training for all staff and volunteers, and a rule that two or more adult leaders be present during all activities.

In many ways, the crisis parallels the one facing the Catholic Church in the U.S. Both institutions boast of major progress over recent decades in combating abuse, whether by priests or scout leaders, but both face many lawsuits alleging negligence and cover-ups, mostly decades ago.

“We are outraged that there have been times when individuals took advantage of our programs to harm innocent children,” said Roger Mosby, the BSA’s president and CEO. “While we know nothing can undo the tragic abuse that victims suffered, we believe the Chapter 11 process, with the proposed trust structure, will provide equitable compensation to all victims while maintaining the BSA’s important mission.”

The BSA said it is encouraging all victims to come forward to file a claim in the case. A deadline for filing claims has not yet been set by the bankruptcy court, but the BSA said that would likely happen later this year.

Drenching rains take aim at flooded South

Associated Press

Forecasters are expecting heavy rains again in parts of the flood-ravaged South, prolonging the misery in neighborhoods surrounded by water.

Some of the hardest-hit areas in Mississippi were under a flash flood watch Tuesday.

The National Weather Service said that rainfall amounts of up to 2 inches — with higher amounts possible in some spots — were expected to fall in a short amount of time in central Mississippi on Tuesday.

Forecasters say that could cause flash flooding and worsen ongoing river flooding in the region.

The national Weather Prediction Center in College Park, Md., is projecting the greatest likelihood of heavy rains in a band from eastern Louisiana across central parts of Mississippi and Alabama and into far west Georgia.

In Mississippi's capital city of Jackson, authorities warned hundreds of residents not to return home after devastating flooding Monday until they got the all-clear. As the high water recedes, officials expect to find damaged roads and problems with water and sewage pipes.

A near-record rainy winter has forced authorities to release water from swollen res-

ervoirs, potentially worsening the flooding for those living downstream.

In the Savannah, Tenn., area, two houses slid down a muddy bluff just below the Pickwick Dam as the Tennessee Valley Authority was releasing more than 2.5 million gallons per second, adding to the anguish for owners of about 75 flooded properties downstream.

Hardin County Fire Chief and Emergency Management Director Melvin Martin said that the landslide claimed not only two houses on Saturday after their residents got out safely, but about 100 yards of the blufftop road has also

collapsed.

Meanwhile, most of the homes whose ground floors have been under water down by the river are vacation homes that were built on stilts, Martin said.

Boat captain Sam Evans said that this among the worst floods he's seen. From his vantage point navigating the Tennessee River by boat, he's watched the river banks gradually erode. He said it was only a matter of time before the bluff gave way.

"It has slowly been eroding and it finally let go," Evans told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

Ghani finally wins Afghan election, 5 months later

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Ashraf Ghani was declared the winner of Afghanistan's disputed presidential election Tuesday, nearly five months after the ballots were cast.

The incumbent Ghani received 50.64% of the vote, the country's election commission announced.

Ghani called for "unity and coordination" Tuesday, even as his chief opponent called the election illegal.

"I want to tell everyone that the day of rivalry is ended," he said.

In second place was Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah, who received 39.52% of the vote, followed by former warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar with 3.85%, the official results from the Sept. 28 election said.

Abdullah said that he would form his own government in light of the results.

"We are the winners based on clean votes, and we declare our victory," Abdullah said, according to a New York Times report.

Fariadoon Khwazoon, a spokesman for Abdullah, said Tuesday that they had "walked out of the election process" due to what he described as the illegal behavior of the election commission. The previous presidential election between Ghani and Abdullah in 2014 also ended in allegations of fraud, leading then-United States Secretary of State John Kerry to assist in negotiating a power-sharing arrangement.

The head of Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission acknowledged Tuesday that security threats and disputes in counting the votes affected the election process.

"We tried our best," said Hawa Alam Nooristani, head of the commission. "We are announcing this result with full transparency with respect to the people's vote."

U.S. officials said that Washington donated about \$29 million to support the elections. Ross Wilson, America's top diplomat in Kabul, tweeted this month that "whatever the result, the United States is committed to work with the future government of Afghanistan."

DHS to waive contracting laws for border wall

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Trump administration said Tuesday that it will waive federal contracting laws to speed construction of a wall at the United States-Mexico border.

The Department of Homeland Security said that waiving procurement regulations will allow 177 miles of wall to be built more quickly in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. The 10 waived laws include requirements for having open competition, justifying selections and receiving all bonding from a contractor before any work can begin.

The acting Homeland Security secretary, Chad Wolf, is exercising authority under a 2005 law that gives him sweeping powers to waive laws for building border barriers.

"We hope that will accelerate some of the construction that's going along the Southwest border," Wolf told Fox News Channel's "Fox & Friends" on Tuesday.

Secretaries under President Donald Trump have issued 16 waivers, and President George

W. Bush issued five, but Tuesday's announcement marks the first time that waivers have applied to federal procurement rules. They were previously used to waive environmental impact reviews.

The Trump administration said it expects the waivers will allow 94 miles of wall to be built this year, bringing Trump closer to his pledge of about 450 miles since taking office and making it one of his top domestic priorities. It said that the other 83 miles covered by the waivers may get built this year.

"Under the president's leadership, we are building more wall, faster than ever before," the department said in a statement.

The waivers, to be published in the Federal Register, apply to projects that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will award in six of nine Border Patrol sectors on the Mexican border: San Diego and El Centro in California; Yuma and Tucson in Arizona; El Paso, which spans New Mexico and west Texas, and Del Rio, Texas.

Jury deliberating in Weinstein trial

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jurors in Harvey Weinstein's rape trial started deliberating on Tuesday, weighing charges in the landmark #MeToo case that could put the once-powerful Hollywood mogul behind bars for the rest of his life.

The panel of seven men and five women heard instructions in the law from the judge before going behind closed doors to consider charges that Weinstein raped a woman in a Manhattan hotel room in 2013 and forcibly performed oral sex on another woman, TV and film production assistant Mimi Haley, in 2006.

Jurors will also be examining actress Annabella Sciorra's account of a mid-1990s rape in considering charges alleging Weinstein is a sexual predator, even though the allegation is too old to be charged.

About 40 minutes into deliberations, the jury sent a note asking for the legal definition of terms like consent and forcible compulsion, and sought clarity on why Weinstein wasn't charged with other crimes stemming from Sciorra's allegation.

Prosecutors built their case around graphic, often-harrowing testimony from those women, along with three other accusers who were not part of the criminal case but were allowed to take the witness stand because they say Weinstein used the same tactics on them.

Weinstein's lawyers contend the acts were consensual. They focused on flirtatious emails some of the women sent to Weinstein and meetings some of them had with him after the alleged assaults.

A torrent of allegations against Weinstein in October 2017 spawned the #MeToo movement. His trial is seen as a watershed moment for the cause, but Judge James Burke has cautioned jurors that it is "not a referendum on the #MeToo movement."

Weinstein lawyer Donna Rotunno sent a similar message in a Newsweek essay over the weekend, drawing complaints from a prosecutor who said she appeared to be trying to influence the jury.

Rotunno wrote that Weinstein's jurors "have an obligation to themselves and their country, to base their verdict solely on the facts, testimony and evidence presented to them in the courtroom," not critical news stories, unflattering courtroom sketches or other outside influences.

Confronted in court Tuesday, Rotunno said she was writing "about the jury system as a whole" and was not speaking to the jury in Weinstein's case. Assistant District Attorney Joan Illuzzi-Orbon asked Burke to instruct the jury to ignore the piece and revoke Weinstein's bail. Burke denied the prosecution's request, but told Weinstein: "I would caution you about the tentacles of your public relations juggernaut."

Bloomberg qualifies for next presidential debate

Associated Press

Billionaire Mike Bloomberg has qualified for the upcoming Democratic presidential debate, marking the first time he'll stand alongside the rivals he has so far avoided by bypassing the early voting states and using his personal fortune to define himself through television ads.

A new NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist poll published Tuesday shows Bloomberg with 19% support nationally in the Democratic nominating contest.

The former New York City mayor, who launched his presidential campaign in November, will appear in Wednesday's debate in Las Vegas alongside former Vice President Joe Biden, Sens. Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar and former South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg. Fellow billionaire and philanthropist Tom Steyer is still hoping to qualify.

Bloomberg's campaign said that it was seeing "a groundswell of support across the country" and that qualifying for Wednesday's debate "is the latest sign that Mike's plan and ability to defeat Donald Trump is resonating with more Americans."

"Mike is looking forward to joining the other Democratic candidates on stage and making the case for why he's the best candidate to defeat Donald Trump and unite the country," Bloomberg campaign manager Kevin Sheekey said in a statement.

The Democratic National Committee recently changed its rules for how a candidate qualifies for the debate, opening the door for Bloomberg to be on stage and drawing the ire of some candidates who dropped out of the race for failing to make prior stages. The candidates were previously required to receive a certain number of campaign contributions to qualify, but Bloomberg, who is worth an estimated \$60 billion, is not taking donations.

The prime-time event will be a stark departure from Bloomberg's highly choreographed campaign. He's poured more than \$300 million into television advertising, a way to define himself for voters without facing criticism. While he's campaigned in more than two dozen states, he does not take questions from voters and delivers a standard stump speech that lasts less than 15 minutes, often reading from a teleprompter.

Bloomberg has barely crossed paths on the trail with his fellow Democrats. He decided to skip the first four voting states of Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South

Sanders calls out former NYC mayor

Los Angeles Times

RICHMOND, Calif. — Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders continued his attacks on rival Michael Bloomberg, accusing the billionaire of trying to buy the election and calling him out for past positions.

"Mr. Bloomberg, like anybody else, has a right to run for president," Sanders said at a San Francisco Bay Area rally on Monday. "He does not have a right to buy the presidency. Especially after being mayor of New York and having a racist stop and frisk policy."

Sanders' message went over well with supporters gathered in the former home of a Ford assembly plant in Richmond, a working-class city where the median household income is \$55,102 and the majority residents are black or Latino.

"I would not vote for Bloomberg," said Clarissa Katko, a student at Diablo Valley College said. "I'm tired of the Democratic Party compromising their ideals just for the sake of appearing moderate. It's not helping the climate. It's not helping students, it's not helping minorities or LGBTQ people."

The Craneway Pavilion venue, which holds 6,800 people, overflowed for the get-out-the-vote rally ahead of California's March 3 primary. California is likely to be particularly friendly territory for Sanders when the votes are counted, given its diverse and liberal electorate; he is especially popular with Latinos and young people. He urged supporters who are independents to register as Democrats or ask for a Democratic ballot.

"This is the most consequential election in our history. and on Super Tuesday, California is voting," Sanders said.

Carolina in favor of focusing on the 14 states that vote on March 3 and the contests that come afterward.

Wuhan hospital director dies from coronavirus

Associated Press

BEIJING — As a coronavirus enveloped central China's Wuhan early this year, Liu Zhiming, director of Wuhan Wuchang Hospital, mobilized all the hospital's resources to deal with the thousands of sick people arriving daily, threatening to overwhelm the local health care system.

That dedication appears to have cost him his life, with Wuhan's health bureau announcing Tuesday that he became infected and died despite "all-out" attempts to save him.

Liu is at least the seventh health worker to die of the COVID-19 disease among the more than 1,700 doctors and nurses who have become sick. His death comes as authorities are cautiously cheering a reduction in the number of new daily cases and deaths, along with the results of a study showing most people who contracted the virus experienced only mild symptoms.

China on Tuesday reported 1,886 new cases and 98 more deaths. That raised the number of deaths in mainland China to 1,868 and the total number of confirmed cases to 72,436.

"Now the prevention and control work is at a critical time," President Xi Jinping told British Prime Minister Boris Johnson in a phone call Tuesday, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

The outbreak has caused massive disruptions and China may postpone its biggest political meeting of the year to avoid having people travel to Beijing while the virus is still spreading. One of the automotive industry's biggest events, China's bi-annual auto show, also is being postponed, and many sports and entertainment events

have been delayed or canceled.

Despite strict rules on use of masks and safety suits, medical workers have been prominent among the victims, particularly in the early stage of the outbreak.

In announcing Liu's death, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission said he had taken part in the battle against the virus from the start and had made "important contributions in the work of fighting and controlling" the virus.

During that process, "unfortunately he became infected and passed away at 10:54 Tuesday morning at the age of 51 after all-out efforts to save him failed," the commission said.

Wuhan and its surrounding cities in Hubei province have accounted for the vast majority of infections and deaths, prompting the government to enforce a travel ban that has spread to other parts of the country and now includes a mandatory 14-day self-quarantine period for anyone traveling outside their home district. T

A study by the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention found more than 80% of the cases studied were mild and the number of new infections seemed to be falling since early this month. World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said it was too early to know if the reported decline would continue, however. "Every scenario is still on the table," he said at a news conference.

The study warned that while cases seem to have been declining since Feb. 1, that could change as people return to work and school after the Lunar New Year holidays, typically the biggest travel period for Chinese travelers.

American cruise ship passengers confined at US military bases

Associated Press

TRAVIS AIR FORCE BASE, Calif. — More than 300 American cruise ship passengers, including 14 who tested positive for coronavirus, were quarantined at military bases in California and Texas on Monday after arriving from Japan on charter flights overnight.

One plane carrying cruise passengers touched down at Travis Air Force Base in Northern California just before midnight Sunday, while another arrived at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas early Monday. The passengers will remain at the bases for two weeks.

Japan's Defense Minister Taro Kono tweeted earlier that Japanese troops helped transport 340 U.S. passengers on 14 buses from Yokohama port to Tokyo's Haneda airport. About 380 Americans were on the cruise ship.

The State Department announced later that 14 of the evacuees received confirmation they had the virus but were allowed to board the flight because they had no symptoms. They were kept isolated from other passengers on the flight, the U.S. State and Health and Human Services said in a joint statement.

It's unclear which base the 14 who tested positive for the virus went to.

Officials said the evacuees who arrived at Travis Air Force Base will be housed at a different location from the more than 200 other Americans who were already quarantined on the base, in a hotel. Those people have been at the base since early February, when they arrived on flights from China.

No Travis airmen will have contact with the passengers, officials said.

Saudi-led strikes killed 26 children, Yemeni rebels say

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — At least three dozen people, including 26 children and six women, were killed in airstrikes by Saudi-led forces in Yemen over the weekend, Yemen's Houthi rebels said, raising the death toll.

The Iranian-backed rebels have said that the Saudi-led coalition carried out retaliatory airstrikes early Saturday in the mountainous northern province of Jawf, after their fighters shot down a coalition warplane there the previous day.

The coalition said it was investigating "possible collateral damage" following an operation to rescue the Tornado fighter jet's two-man crew. It said that the whereabouts of the two pilots remains unknown.

The Saudi-led coalition of mostly Arab states has been fighting the rebels since early 2015, when it intervened to restore the collapsing authority of the internationally recognized government headed by Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

A statement by the Houthi-run health ministry Monday said that the airstrikes

hit civilian houses in the al-Maslub district. The attack killed at least 35 people and wounded 23 others, including 18 children and a woman.

The Saudi-led coalition has said that some of the injured have been transported to Saudi Arabia for medical treatment.

Local residents said that the coalition was targeting Houthi fighters, who had taken cover in a residential area near the crash site.

At least three houses were destroyed in the coalition airstrikes, killing all people inside, they said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bill would require lights on Amish horse-buggies

OH ASHLAND — A flashing light would be required on horse-drawn buggies typically used by the Amish under an Ohio proposal intended to help prevent collisions with motor vehicles.

In addition to a flashing light at all times on the highest rear part of the buggy, the bill introduced by Republican Reps. Scott Wiggam, of Wooster, and Darrell Kick, of Loudonville, also would require animal-drawn vehicles to use a new type of reflective tape with higher visibility.

Woman wrongly arrested after honeymoon trip

LA BATON ROUGE — A case of mistaken identity caused a Louisiana woman to leave her honeymoon in handcuffs and spend 36 hours in a New Orleans jail before it was sorted out.

Sara Saucier, of Ponchatoula, was on a cruise ship returning from a trip to Cozumel, Mexico, with her new husband when U.S. customs agents pounded on her door, accusing her of not returning a leased vehicle in November 2017, according to a report from WVLA-TV.

But officials had the wrong person. The East Baton Rouge Parish Sheriff's Office detective who filed the warrant logged the birth date of the wrong Sara Saucier.

Orangutan granted 'personhood' turns 34

FL WAUCHULA — An orangutan named Sandra, who was granted legal personhood by a judge in Argentina and later found a new home in Florida, celebrated her

34th birthday on Valentine's Day with a special new primate friend.

Patti Ragan, director of the Center for Great Apes in Wauchula, said Sandra "has adjusted beautifully to her life at the sanctuary" and has befriended Jethro, a 31-year-old male orangutan.

Prior to coming to Florida, Sandra had lived alone in a Buenos Aires zoo.

Police probe theft of sculptures from park

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Police are seeking the public's help in their investigation into the theft of two metal sculptures from White River State Park in downtown Indianapolis.

The two basketball-sized sculptures were stolen from their posts on the park's Environmental Trail, Indiana State Capitol Police Detective Charles Meneely said in a news release.

The black cold-rolled-steel sculptures depict a monarch butterfly and a bird and nest.

Juvenile arrested after fleeing from attack

CA LOS ANGELES — A juvenile who fled to Armenia after he allegedly punched a man during a road rage incident, leaving the victim in a coma, was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder, Los Angeles police said.

The juvenile was wearing brass knuckles when he struck the man on New Year's Day, police said.

The victim has been hospitalized since the alleged attack, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Witness video shows the juvenile exiting a Jeep and striking the driver of another

vehicle. The man collapses to the ground as the Jeep's occupants flee.

Man: Scammer copied license, racked up fees

NC RALEIGH — A North Carolina man said a scammer obtained a copy of his custom license plate, causing him to receive toll bills from Virginia that totaled close to \$500.

At first, Ronnie Dickerson thought the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles had given someone else his custom plate. But, the NCDMV confirmed it had not given anyone else the personalized tag.

Dickerson was able to prove to officials that the vehicle wasn't his and the toll fees were waived.

Inmate gripe about no toilet paper dismissed

DE WILMINGTON — A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by a Delaware prison inmate who complained about running out of toilet paper.

The judge ruled that the lawsuit by Isaac Pierce was frivolous.

The ruling contains references to several other court decisions regarding toilet paper, or the lack of it, in prisons. Those rulings generally concluded that, while a temporary lack of toilet paper might be unpleasant, it does not violate an inmate's rights.

Police: ATV driver kills dog then leaves scene

CT DANBURY — Police in Connecticut are looking for the operator of an all-terrain vehicle they said struck and killed a dog before

driving from the scene.

The dog was killed in the yard of its Danbury home when the operator of the quad-style vehicle apparently lost control.

The dog was a 4-year-old husky-Labrador retriever mix.

There are several trails in the area used by ATVs and dirt bikes and police think the operator lives in the area.

Trooper saves man from being trampled by a bull

AZ BENSON — An off-duty Arizona Department of Public Safety trooper is being credited with saving the life of a man who was being trampled by a bull.

DPS officials said Trooper Brandon Jacquez was driving home to the town of Benson, southeast of Tucson, when a bull attack was called out.

Jacquez and a neighbor distracted the bull before the trooper fatally shot it.

Roach problem closes college's student center

GA SAVANNAH — Student complaints of being served moldy bread and finding bugs in mac and cheese at a campus food court led Savannah State University to close its student center, where health inspectors later reported finding "many dead roaches" in the kitchen.

The university said in a statement to news outlets that its student union, "is in the final stages of cleaning and maintenance" and could reopen within the week.

"There were many dead roaches throughout the kitchen on floors near drains, behind equipment and on some food prep surfaces," the report on the food court inspection said.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Hamlin wins fiery finish at Daytona 500

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — In a single thrilling lap around NASCAR's most storied track, Denny Hamlin and Ryan Newman displayed the risks and rewards of the dangerous sport they both love.

Hamlin won his second consecutive Daytona 500 and third in five years on Monday night as he surged past Newman on the final lap of a second overtime shootout. The win came as Newman's car was turned hard into the wall, then flipped onto its roof, where he was helpless as he was hit in the driver's side by another car.

His car continued to skid upside down along the speedway and it crossed the finish line in flames as safety crews hurried to snuff out the fire and pry Newman loose. It took several minutes for his car to be rolled back onto its wheels, and medical personnel used solid black barriers to block the view as the 2008 Daytona 500 winner

was placed in a waiting ambulance and taken to a hospital.

All the while, a sense of dread settled over Daytona and its showcase race, already pushed back a day by rain that dampened a raucous visit by President Donald Trump. There has not been a fatality in NASCAR's elite Cup Series since 2001, but Newman's crash had everyone worried.

The damage to his Mustang was extensive — it appeared the entire roll cage designed to protect his head had caved — and officials didn't allow his team near the accident site. Two agonizing hours after the crash, NASCAR read a statement from Roush Fenway Racing that said Newman was in "serious condition, but doctors have indicated his injuries are not life threatening."

Hamlin, meanwhile, was trying to find the delicate balance of celebrating a milestone victory while showing proper respect to an injured driver. Initially unaware of Newman's

situation, Hamlin did victory burnouts and celebrated with his team.

Not until Fox Sports said it would not interview him did Hamlin learn the severity of the situation. Team owner Joe Gibbs was apologetic for the No. 11 team's initial reaction.

"I was focusing on our car, and everybody started celebrating around us," Gibbs said. "So I say to everybody out there, some people may have saw us and said, 'Well, these guys are celebrating when there's a serious issue going on.' I apologize to everybody, but we really didn't know."

The crash was a stark reminder of both the dangers of auto racing and the improvements NASCAR has made since 2001, when Dale Earnhardt was killed on the final lap of the Daytona 500. Earnhardt was the last Cup driver killed in a race and NASCAR has made massive safety improvements in the nearly 20 years since.

"I think we take for granted

sometimes how safe the cars are," Hamlin said. "But number one, we are praying for Ryan."

During the long wait for an update, Trump took to Twitter to express his concern. A day earlier, he attended the race as the grand marshal, gave the command for drivers to start their engines and made a ceremonial pace lap around Daytona International Speedway before rain washed out the race.

"Praying for Ryan Newman, a great and brave @NASCAR driver! #PrayingForRyan," Trump tweeted. Newman was one of several NASCAR drivers who attended a 2016 rally for then-candidate Trump in Georgia.

Mark Rushbrook, global director of Ford Performance Motorsports, acknowledged the delay for information on Newman.

"To hear some positive news tonight is a relief," Rushbrook said.

Johnson wrecks, finishes 35th in first race of final season

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Jimmie Johnson tugged at his baseball cap, walked to a golf cart and sat backward on the dash for a ride out of the Daytona garage. After a Speedweeks where Johnson was hailed by many of his peers as the greatest NASCAR driver of all time, Johnson's expected final Daytona 500 ended with the seven-time champion looking at a scoring pylon that ticked off laps without him.

Johnson was collected in a late-race wreck at the Daytona 500, and his #OneFinalTime kickoff in the final full season of his NASCAR career ended with a 35th-place finish.

"It's been really a cool race to be a part of," Johnson said. "You only dream of racing in races like this as a kid."

Johnson, tied with Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt with

seven Cup Series titles, was trying to win for the first time in 96 races and had a strong No. 48 Chevrolet down the stretch.

His Chevy was parked on pit road following the multi-car wreck, and his crew furiously tried to repair it and at least have Johnson finish the race in the car. The time allotted to make the necessary repairs expired, and so did Johnson's chance of salvaging a better finish.

He finished well behind winner Denny Hamlin in a race marred by the fiery last-lap wreck that sent Ryan Newman to the hospital.

Johnson was long gone by the end, content that he knew he could still be competitive in the 48.

"It helps to always run good," Johnson said. "That competitive spirit still is very intense inside of me."

Johnson, the El Cajon, Calif.,

native, was celebrated throughout Speedweeks, and he tried his best to savor NASCAR's biggest race. Johnson walked to a meet-and-greet Sunday when his golf cart ride was scrapped because of tightened security spurred by President Donald Trump's arrival. Johnson paused when he saw the 22-foot high flagstand, where twice the checkered flag waved to declare him the Daytona 500 champion, and decided to climb up. Dressed in khakis and a black polo shirt, Johnson surveyed the empty track, where hours later he made his expected final Daytona 500 start. He even left behind a keepsake: He autographed a white square and added an "LG" for Let's Go on the checkered start/finish line.

"In the car, that's my space," Johnson said. "I'm perfectly happy and content with the decision I made. Maybe inside

the car isn't highly emotional yet because it's still early in the year. It's just the first race of 38. I can tell you, there's been weight on my shoulders outside the car. Just in the car, you're trying to win."

Johnson was waved to the front of the field during Sunday's pace laps to raucous applause from a sold-out Daytona International Speedway. He was mobbed as he made his way through the garage by autograph seekers who wanted one more keepsake. He signed a woman's shirt, the bill of baseball caps and other memorabilia.

Johnson won five straight championships from 2006 through 2010, and his 83 career victories are tied with Cale Yarborough for sixth all time. But he's mired in a losing streak spanning more than two years, and he had two crew chief changes last season.

Sounds of spring not so sweet for Astros

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — These are the new sounds of spring for the Houston Astros: a fan banging on a trash can, another calling Jose Altuve a cheater.

That's what greeted the Astros during their first full-squad workout at camp Monday. And with so many around baseball not ready to forgive or forget their sign stealing, this won't be the last time they hear it.

Meanwhile, the two-time AL champions say they are focused on ignoring the noise, and hope the official start of spring training can signal a step forward for their scandal-ridden team.

"I understand the severity of the situation, I truly do," outfielder George Springer said. "But I think ... the best thing for our game to try to do and especially for us is to try to put this behind us, however that's possible."

The Astros have been bombarded with questions about the sign-stealing scam since

arriving in Florida. A news conference last week with owner Jim Crane, Altuve and third baseman Alex Bregman featuring poorly worded apologies was roundly criticized and did little to quiet the furor around the league in the wake of the scandal.

The barbs continued Monday when fans were allowed to view Houston's workout. A man banged on a trash can while a group including Bregman, Altuve and shortstop Carlos Correa took batting practice.

Altuve, considered one of baseball's most popular players before the scandal was revealed, quickly discovered the new norm. As he walked past a group of fans, a man yelled out, "Cheater!"

The Astros were found by Commissioner Rob Manfred to have cheated during their run to the 2017 World Series and again in the 2018 season. The investigation found that Houston used the video feed from a center field camera to see and

decode the opposing catcher's signs. Players banged on a trash can to signal to batters what was coming, believing it would improve the batter's chances of getting a hit.

Manager AJ Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow were suspended for a year by MLB and subsequently fired by Crane last month. But many around the league said they feel that Houston's players should have faced punishment, too and have been quick to express those feelings.

Bregman refused to respond directly to any comments about his team from players across the league.

"Everybody has the right to say whatever they want to say, and we put ourselves in that position," Bregman said. "I think what we can do moving forward is learn and work extremely hard to regain the trust of baseball fans. We know that won't be easy, but we feel the responsibility to do that."

Veteran Dusty Baker was

hired just before spring training to take Hinch's place. And though he wasn't part of the team during the scandal, the 70-year-old is front and center while the Astros try to put it behind them.

"The players know the formula on how to get there and they just need me to help direct them and navigate them through this course we're about to take," he said.

The Astros know they've become perhaps the most despised team in baseball, but are trying to stay positive and focus on their loyal fans who are still with them.

"You get different opinions," Correa said. "When I walk around Houston, people are behind us, they love us. So, it just depends what you ask."

Houston hitters might also be concerned about getting beamed after several pitchers said they'd intentionally throw at the players they consider cheaters.

Grizzlies, Thunder among teams doing surprisingly well

Associated Press

The oddsmakers in Las Vegas usually know what they're talking about.

But even they get things wrong from time to time, and this season in the NBA there have been a few notable misses from all those preseason prognostications — specifically, ones made in relation to the Memphis Grizzlies and Oklahoma City Thunder.

The Grizzlies have already topped most preseason projections for their win total. The sports books had them around 27 wins, and the Ja Morant-led club already has 28 wins and is holding down the Western Conference's No. 8 playoff spot with 28 games left.

"We are just young, very athletic and just get out and run," said Morant, a clear Rookie of the Year front-runner and probably the favorite at this point. "I feel like we all have something to prove. We just go out with this chip on our shoulder. We keep proving people wrong. But we go out every night and play together."

And the Thunder, who were expected to

freefall after losing Paul George, were slotted by most books as a 32-win team or so. They're at 33-22, firmly in the West playoff race, led by a resurgent All-Star in Chris Paul.

It's clear that many thought the Thunder — the supposedly rebuilding Thunder — wouldn't be a postseason team. Then again, many of those same people probably thought Paul wasn't still capable of leading the way he has this season.

"For me, it's always about the journey," Paul said. "It's about working hard, and it's the analytics and the statistics that say at this age you can do this or you can do that. ... I think it's more about competing with yourself and not worry about what everybody else is saying."

There have been a couple of other very notable surprises in Miami and Toronto.

The Heat didn't make the playoffs last year, lost Dwyane Wade to retirement and brought in Jimmy Butler to lead a largely very young, very unproven core this season. And it has worked: The Heat are in the mix for home-court in the first round, and are thinking even bigger than that.

"It started in the summer," said first-time All-Star Bam Adebayo, this year's NBA Skills Competition winner. "It's building habits. Jimmy is one of those guys. He wants to hold people to a higher standard. Our organization wants to hold people to a higher standard. So it just made it all synch together. Everybody doesn't take anything personal when somebody gets on them. It's all love at the end of the day."

And then there's the Raptors.

They lost NBA Finals MVP Kawhi Leonard, the MVP of this year's All-Star Game. They lost Danny Green. They've been walloped this year by injuries. Despite it all, they're No. 2 in the East right now and aren't just on pace to win more regular-season games than they did in their championship season a year ago — they're on pace to set a franchise record.

"The journey is the best part about it," Raptors All-Star guard Kyle Lowry said. "You've got to enjoy and have fun with the journey every single day. ... The thing that matters to me is that we're continuing to be a better team every single night."

NHL roundup

Golden Knights stymie Ovechkin, Caps

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Max Pacioretty scored his team-high 27th goal and the Vegas Golden Knights beat the Washington Capitals 3-2 on Monday.

Nick Holden and Reilly Smith also scored for the Golden Knights, and Marc-Andre Fleury made 24 saves.

Alex Ovechkin remained stuck on 698 career goals after being held without a point for the fifth consecutive game, his longest drought of the season.

"I'm sure he'll get it soon," said Fleury, who earned his 462nd win to move three victories ahead of the New York Rangers' Henrik Lundqvist for fifth on the career list. "I'm just happy I'm not gonna be the goalie on SportsCenter, 48 times showing that goal."

It was Vegas' third straight victory, and it improved to 7-3-2 since coach Pete DeBoer took

over for Gerard Gallant, who was fired on Jan. 15.

"I like how we're defending. I think we're going to be able to score goals. I don't think that's going to be an issue," DeBoer said. If we can defend well and Flower plays the way he's played we got a chance to win every night."

The Capitals have lost four of five and are on the brink of dropping to fourth place in the Eastern Conference, while Vegas moved into a first-place Pacific Division tie with Edmonton.

T.J. Oshie scored both goals for the Capitals in the third period. Braden Holtby made 26 saves.

Flames 6, Ducks 4: Andrew Mangiapane had three goals and an assist, and host Calgary rallied past Anaheim.

Matthew Tkachuk had a goal and an assist for the Flames, who trailed 3-1 early in the third period. Sam Bennett and Sean

Monahan also scored. Cam Talbot made 26 stops for Calgary.

Coyotes 2, Islanders 1: Antti Raanta stopped 25 shots, Conor Garland scored his team-leading 20th goal and host Arizona beat New York.

Raanta was sharp for the second straight game after a shaky performance against Ottawa. Clayton Keller scored his first goal in nine games in the first period, and Garland became the Coyotes' first 20-goal scorer of the season with a one-timer in the third.

Panthers 5, Sharks 3: Evgenii Dadonov and Mike Hoffman scored, Aaron Ekblad had two assists and slumping Florida won at San Jose.

Colton Sceviour, Anton Stralman and Vincent Trocheck also scored for the Panthers, who had lost six of seven. Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 29 shots, and Florida moved within two points of idle Toronto for third

place in the Atlantic Division.

Dylan Gambrell, Kevin Labanc and Timo Meier each scored for the Sharks.

Lightning 4, Avalanche 3 (OT): Nikita Kucherov stole the puck from Nathan MacKinnon and scored 3:03 into overtime, sending visiting Tampa Bay to a franchise-record 11th straight win.

Cameron Gaunce and Alex Killorn scored 16 seconds apart during the Bolts' three-goal second period before Colorado came back to force overtime.

Steven Stamkos also had a goal for Tampa Bay in the second period that erased a 1-0 deficit, and Bolts goaltender Curtis McElhinney stopped 24 shots despite getting bowled over by Colorado's J.T. Compher midway through the third period, sparking the first of two brawls in a tense ending.

College basketball roundup

Dotson's 3-point barrage helps Kansas rip Iowa State

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Devon Dotson had watched Iowa State torch the nets in Allen Fieldhouse long enough, so the do-everything Kansas guard began raining down three-pointers and getting to the rim in what started out as a one-man scoring showcase.

The rest of the third-ranked Jayhawks eventually followed his lead.

Dotson finished with six three-pointers and 29 points, but he wound up being just one of five Kansas players in double-figures scoring, helping the Jayhawks to a 91-71 victory over the Cyclones on Monday night to keep pace in the Big 12 race.

"When they're hitting shots like they did, I mean, yeah, we've got to respond," Dotson

said. "I think every game we try to knock down our shots, but this game, people were rolling."

Ochai Agbaji finished with 14 points, Udoka Azubuike and Christian Braun scored 13 apiece, and David McCormack had 10 points to send Kansas (23-3, 12-1 Big 12) into a pivotal rematch with No. 1 Baylor.

"We have a couple days to get rested for obviously the biggest game of the year," Jayhawks coach Bill Self said.

Prentiss Nixon scored 20 points, Matt Jacobson had 13 and Rasir Bolton 12 for slumping Iowa State (11-15, 4-9), which has lost 14 of its last 15 games at the Phog and still has not won a road game this season.

The Cyclones' frustrating season was summed up by the

first half, when they did just about everything right and still trailed 50-40.

Iowa State was 9-for-12 from beyond the arc in a torrid display of shooting, and at one point connected on three-pointers on three consecutive trips down the floor. The Cyclones committed nine turnovers but generally held onto the ball well, and they also hung tough on the glass against a team with a massive advantage in both size and depth.

Maybe a little better defense would have helped.

As good as Iowa State was on offense, the Jayhawks were even better. They kept pounding the ball inside to the 7-foot Azubuike, who dunked his way toward 10 first-half points, and that opened things up outside. Dotson had 15 points by the break, and Braun came off

the bench to hit a trio of three-pointers and score 13 points in just 12 minutes.

"The first half I thought offensively we gave ourselves a chance to be in the game," Cyclones coach Steve Prohm said. "You get 40 in a half at this place, you'd think you're in pretty good shape."

Xavier 77, St. John's 74: In a game they couldn't afford to lose, the visiting Musketeers rallied just in time and got the biggest shot of the night from a freshman.

Zach Freemantle made the go-ahead basket with 10.4 seconds left and added two late free throws as Xavier scored the final eight points.

"We're very fortunate," Musketeers coach Travis Steele said. "We did not play well tonight and St. John's had a lot to do with that."